

Our ref: GS/Geog/UL/2005

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To: SQA Co-ordinator
Secondary Schools and FE Colleges

Action by Recipient
Response required
✓ Note and pass on
None — update/information only

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update — Geography

This briefing note is intended to offer practical advice and support on the issues being raised by centre staff with SQA, and should be distributed to those staff responsible for Geography.

1 Appendix: Professional Development Workshop — Intermediate 1 & 2

The appendix to this letter was drafted to provide feedback to those delegates who attended the above workshop, but SQA hopes that the summary information provided will be of use to all teachers in preparing their pupils for dealing with assessments.

2 Courses at Intermediate 1 and 2

Centres are reminded that diet 2005 held the final set of examinations based on the old arrangements for Geography Courses at Intermediate levels.

You will be aware that SQA extended the life of the previous arrangements for one year (ie session 2004/05) in dual-running with the new Courses developed under the National Qualifications Review. This was to allow centre staff sufficient time to prepare for implementation of the new Courses. Now that this year has elapsed the previous Courses and their corresponding external assessments will be deleted from the catalogue.

For the sake of clarity, the Courses which will be deleted are:

C042 10 Geography Intermediate 1
C042 11 Geography Intermediate 2

The codes for the current ongoing Courses are:

C208 10 Geography Intermediate 1
C208 11 Geography Intermediate 2

Please ensure that all SQA materials (Course Arrangements, NABs etc) referred to or made use of from this point on relate to the current Course codes or those of their component Units.

3 Construction of Higher prelims

The introduction of an element of choice in Paper 1 means that centres which use prelim exams to assist in the production of estimates and evidence for appeals have a decision about the construction of such exams. This situation is not new as it has always been unlikely that candidates will have completed enough of the Course content to be tested on all eight topics which may be assessed within this part of the exam. SQA's advice in the construction of prelims is that, as far as possible, they should reflect the level of demand of the final examination. This level of demand is more likely to be reflected in a prelim Paper 1 which is either out of 50 marks or has the time allocated for its completion weighted according to the total number of marks available. It is also important that such an exam, where it is likely to be used for appeals evidence, samples as much of the curriculum as possible so that the breadth of the Course content and skills can be covered. A paper devised to reflect very closely the structure of the final exam with its optional section may not make the same demands on candidates, eg there might be a false 'choice' in Section C as candidates may not have covered all the content or a choice of two questions within the one topic, eg a question on either limestone or coasts would ease the demands on candidates and therefore be less convincing as evidence for either estimates or appeals.

Because of the different circumstances in each centre there is no one correct or acceptable approach to the construction of a Prelim. SQA advises teachers or lecturers constructing such an exam to consider the main purpose of their exam — is it aiming to replicate the structure of the final exam paper or is it seeking to provide evidence of the full scope of their candidates' abilities? Either type of prelim exam is acceptable but when it comes to setting cut-off scores for estimates the level of demand on candidates should be carefully considered. Both the Course Assessment Specification and the Course Specification provide further guidance on the construction of prelims and the gathering of evidence for estimates and appeals.

4 **Advanced Higher — Geographical Folio**

SQA would like to draw centres' attention to several important issues arising at Advanced Higher level:

i. Exceeding the page count

Although the work submitted by many centres now falls within the prescribed word and page counts for the Geographical Folio, SQA markers continue to encounter a disappointingly high number of candidates who penalise their own performance by exceeding these limits.

Of particular note was the number of candidates whose main body of work was perfectly acceptable, but was burdened by an unnecessarily lengthy appendix or appendices that took the total page count significantly over the maximum (ie 25 pages for the Geographical Study, 12 for the Geographical Issue).

Centres are reminded that the **only** exception to the page count total is the bibliography. **All** other pages are counted towards this total, including appendices, cover pages, fold-out sheets, etc. Candidates whose work exceeds these limits will, as indicated on the flyleaves provided, **lose 10% of the available marks** for that exercise.

ii. Collaboration in the Geographical Study

Whilst it is perfectly acceptable for candidates to carry out fieldwork and research for their Geographical Study as part of a group exercise, markers were concerned this year about specific pieces of work from centres in which it appeared that candidates were working too closely together in the production of their Studies.

These concerns were raised where tracts of text in different candidates' work appeared very similar, even identical in places, and where hand-drawn tables and diagrams had clearly been photocopied for use in multiple candidates' submissions.

Whilst instances such as these thankfully represent a very small minority within the overall submissions, this is nevertheless a very serious issue. We must therefore re-emphasise the point that the materials produced for the Geographical Folio **must**, as is noted in the statement signed by all candidates, consist of the candidate's own work. Whilst data may be gathered as a group, it is expected that this will then be processed, analysed and reported upon by the candidate as an individual.

iii. Timing of Geographical Issues NABs

Centres are reminded that, following concerns about the time constraints on candidates undertaking these assessments, the timing of the National Assessment Bank items for Geographical Issues has been extended from one hour to one hour and 15 minutes. These additional 15 minutes are to be considered 'reading time' at the start of the exercise, to allow candidates to read and absorb the sources with which they must work.

The full instructions on timing and other arrangements for assessment are given in the opening pages of each NAB, up-to-date copies of which can be found on SQA's secure website (access provided to SQA co-ordinators).

SQA will continue to monitor the situation with regards to the timing of these assessments, to ensure that candidates are given a fair and appropriate amount of time to complete the task at hand.

iv. Availability of Exemplification

Exemplification of the internal assessment of both the Geographical Study and Geographical Issues Units was carried out following this year's moderation activities. Copies of this exemplification were despatched all centres and should therefore already be available to staff. However, for those who do not have copies of these materials, they will shortly be available on the Understanding Standards website:

- ◆ <http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk>

5 Principal Assessors' and Senior Moderator's Reports

SQA would like to encourage all centre staff responsible for Geography to read the reports of the Principal Assessors and Senior Moderator for Session 2004/05 and the corresponding examination diet. The reports contain detailed advice and information pertaining to candidate performance, guidance for centres and specific issues relating to individual examination questions. These are available in the Geography page of the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk).

In particular, the following key points may be of use to centres:

Principal Assessor's Report: Standard Grade

- ◆ Less evidence of lifting
- ◆ Describe/explain issue less of a problem
- ◆ Explanation for choices of techniques weak
- ◆ Evidence of answers learned by rote for gathering/processing techniques — inadequate at Credit level

Principal Assessor's Report: Intermediate 1 & 2

- ◆ Careful consideration given to level at which candidates entered
- ◆ Physical environments questions weaker, particularly location of features

Principal Assessor's Report: Higher

- ◆ No indication that candidates confused by choice
- ◆ Four choice questions achieved very similar mean scores
- ◆ Urban question weakest — confusion over 'inner city' in question and 'CBD' in many responses
- ◆ Key words not identified by pupils
- ◆ Make fuller use of resources

- ◆ Use of names in 'case study' answers
- ◆ Candidates should be aware of significant factors, eg AIDS, which will affect population pyramids
- ◆ D&H question: knowledge of two contrasting countries and one country for contrast within

Principal Assessor's Report: Advanced Higher

- ◆ More attention to practical map skills
- ◆ Interpretation and analysis of statistical data
- ◆ Consider impact of mid-May submission of Folio
- ◆ Shared data sets may be used for study but presentation and analysis must be unique
- ◆ Practice skills of writing critical evaluations
- ◆ Clearly inform candidates of page and word count
- ◆ Penalty: this is applied (only bibliography excepted)

Senior Moderator's Report

- ◆ Change to revised Units and Courses gone smoothly
- ◆ No mixing of NABs at any level
- ◆ Moderators look for:
 - clear application of marking instructions
 - evidence of centres having internal moderation procedures
 - comments on candidate work helpful to candidates (and moderators)
- ◆ Exemplification of AH Issues & Study in centres and on Understanding Standards website

I hope that the notes above and the materials attached are of help to you. If you have any queries about these or any other Geography-related issues please contact Greg Storey, the Qualifications Officer in this area, at the details given on the first page of this update letter.

Yours faithfully



Qualifications Manager

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**Professional Development Workshop — Intermediate 1 & 2
26 November 2005**

During this event delegates spent some time looking at candidate answers and discussing the types of errors which frequently occur in answers. The types of errors which were discussed are listed below:

- ◆ Misreading instructions
- ◆ Irrelevant answers
- ◆ Lack of sufficient detail
- ◆ Bullet point answers
- ◆ Repetition
- ◆ Lifting directly from resources without further comment
- ◆ Confused answers

The following list identifies many of the strategies which are currently used in schools to help pupils produce better and more focussed answers to questions:

- ◆ Use highlighter to identify key words in question
- ◆ ‘Describe/ explain’ should be taught as ‘what is it like/why is it like that?’
- ◆ Explain answers must use ‘because’
- ◆ Look for term ‘from an area you have studied’ in question and give detailed examples in answer
- ◆ Where lines are given for answers use these as a guide for length of answer required
- ◆ Avoid bullet point answers, only using this style when time is limited
- ◆ Read back answer and check for key points which answer the question
- ◆ Peer marking in class
- ◆ Read out answers and teachers focuses discussion on where points are gained
- ◆ Group work — pass same and/or different answers around group for marking then encourage discussion
- ◆ Use flip charts to identify issues in questions which have been marked — pupils lead on this
- ◆ Provide lists of descriptions and explanations and ask pupils to classify each one under one of these headings
- ◆ Head & tails exercise — match answers to questions
- ◆ Pupils research an idea, make up a question, write marking scheme, get others to answer it, mark, then peer mark
- ◆ Make use of SQA markers in department for staff and pupil training
- ◆ Develop glossary of examination terms alongside subject vocabulary list
- ◆ Map ‘bingo’