Our ref: BIOL-6

27 November 2002

To:
The Person Responsible for Biology, Human Biology
and Biotechnology
SQA Co-ordinators
Directors of Education
Biology Assessment Panel Members
Schools Accounts Managers

Action by Recipient	
	Response required
	Note and pass on
✔	None – update/information only

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Dear Colleague

National Qualifications Update – Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology

The contents of this letter should be passed to the member of staff responsible for Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology.

This letter is intended to provide Centres with an update on National Qualifications.

1 **Principal Assessor Reports and Senior Moderator Reports for 2002**

Principal Assessor Reports and Senior Moderator Reports for all NQ courses in Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology are available on the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk).

The Principal Assessor Reports include details of statistical information on entries; grade boundaries at C, B and A; comments on candidate performance including areas where candidates performed well in the external assessment, where candidates had difficulty with the external assessment and areas of common misunderstanding; and feedback to centres.

Grade boundaries have been made public for the first time this year. Although there is a notional score for a grade boundary, the grade boundaries for each paper are determined on the basis of data collected from the examination. These include:

- the performance of the candidates
- the demands of the examination paper
- the statistical data available

- the judgement of the Principal Assessor based on the scrutiny of examination scripts by the Examination Team in addition to the detailed comments of the marking team.

Setting cut-off scores for grade boundaries is used to help maintain standards from one year to another.

Particular care is taken in the determination of the cut-off score for grade 3 at Standard Grade. Decisions on cut-off scores for this grade are made to ensure that grade 3 is not more difficult to achieve than grade 2. This is done by an analysis of the distribution of candidate scores in the Credit and General papers.

When developing assessments used to provide estimates of candidate performance, Centres should use this information on grade boundaries with caution together with the information provided on concordancy and on the success of appeals to help inform the determination of their own grade boundaries.

The Senior Moderator Reports include general comments on central moderation and specific issues identified.

2 Appeals Feedback

As with last year, SQA has provided Centres with feedback on unsuccessful appeals for 2002. The feedback form contained more information this year and SQA will continue to develop the approach to feedback to hopefully make it more constructive and helpful to Centres. Providing feedback to Centres adds considerable time to processing the appeals and SQA is very grateful for the continuing support of the practising teachers/lecturers who make up the Examination Teams.

Biology: Appeals Feedback to Centres 2002 gives common reasons for unsuccessful appeals and is given as an appendix to this letter.

3 Update on NQ Review

(a) Arrangements Documents

The revised Arrangements documents for Biology, Human Biology and Biotechnology were posted on the website by the end of June 2002. Hard copies of the documents have also now been sent to Centres.

(b) NABs

Revised information relating to Access 3, Int. 1, Int. 2 and Higher and AH Biology NABs was produced and distributed to Centres over the summer break. This updated guidance should be used in conjunction with the original NAB tests as tests at these levels were not amended and therefore not reissued.

The revised NAB tests for Int. 2 Biotechnology Unit 3 will be issued in due course.

(c) Advanced Higher Biology Investigation

A couple of minor errors appeared in the Teacher/Lecturer Information distributed with the previous NQ update letter circulated in June 2002. These were:

- The date on the footer of the front page read June 2003 instead of 2002
- On page 1, the first paragraph referred to the chemical nature of the investigation instead of the biological nature
- On page 6 the marks for Results read as 6 instead of 5.

A corrected version is given as an appendix to the letter. The Candidate Information did not contain any errors.

The submission date for the Investigation Report is 30 April 2003.

Some centres have asked if an appeal can be put in for the mark given for the Investigation Report. An appeal should be made for any candidate that the Centre has strong evidence for a change in the grade awarded. The Investigation Report will be marked by external markers and the mark given for this component will be subject to SQA's marker check and finalisation procedures. If a candidate is appealed for, the report is made available to the appeals team of examiners and the marking will be reviewed.

We have also been asked to clarify the nature of evidence required for the internally assessed component of the Investigation unit. It is expected that the lab notebook/record of the Investigation will be a live work-book with annotations, records of discussions, rough working, raw data etc recorded in an on-going basis throughout the Investigation. This will be internally assessed against the PCs for the two outcomes for the unit as detailed in the NAB which was revised and reissued October 2002.

(d) Moderation

Moderation Guidance for Centres is given in appendix of this letter.

4 Appointments

SQA continually relies on the support of practising teachers/lectures to undertake a range of work. Since release of staff from teaching duties can sometimes be difficult we need to have a pool of reserves who would be willing to become markers and moderators. If you are interested in applying, application forms for markers and moderators are available on the SQA website.

Anyone who is interested in becoming a setter or examiner for the National examinations or being involved in writing NAB tests or multiple choice items in Biology or Biotechnology should express their interest by contacting me at mary.hoey@sqa.org.uk.

I hope the contents of this letter are helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further clarification.

Yours faithfully

Mary Hoey

Mary Hoey
Qualifications Manager

Encs: Biology: Appeals Feedback to Centres 2002
Advanced Higher Biology Investigation – Teacher/Lecturer Information
Biology: Moderation Guidance for Centres