PRE BUDGET SCRUTINY
Autumn 2016

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

Anonymous Submission

Course Support Notes

Huge documents full of unnecessary, verbose information that teacher have to trawl through in order to find pertinent information. They are also, at time very condescending e.g. “When developing your Chemistry Course there should be opportunities for learners to take responsibility for their learning. Learning and teaching should build on learners’ prior knowledge, skills and experiences.”

The mandatory course key areas are often vague and unhelpful e.g. “In higher chemistry – “The factors influencing industrial process design” – unclear and unhelpful.

SQA Secure

Much of the information contained in this area are vital for teachers to deliver courses. However, only SQA coordinators have ready access to this site. The fact that practising teachers are not given access implies that they cannot be trusted as professionals.

National 5 and Higher Assignments in the Sciences

1 Equality

Concerned about the lack of equality for pupils.

Many pupils will have considerable support at home in terms of supportive parents, access to text books, access to technology etc. Many may have parents or siblings with a qualification to help with the subject being researched. Indeed, many may have a parent who is a teacher in the subject for which the research is being carried out. These pupils will have a considerable advantage over pupils who do not have similar support. Many pupils do not have supportive parents or access to necessary research materials out with school.

2 Stress

Pupils are extremely stressed about writing up assignments. These pupils want to get it right and are concerned about losing marks. They are worried about the fact that teachers cannot give them valuable feedback (although not sure is this is the case in all subjects).

3 Professionalism

SQA have already alluded to the fact that, in some centres, there is evidence that pupils have had feedback on their assignments. Are some colleagues being put under pressure to get good marks? Regardless of the reason, this cannot be a fair
system of assessment while some pupils are (wrongly) being given feedback while others are not.

4 What are we assessing?

The marks for these assignments do not reflect a pupil’s ability in the subject – they are more of a reflection on the support that pupils get and their motivation to do the necessary research. A pupil could do very well in an assignment but perform poorly in the exam because of a basic lack of knowledge – or, indeed, vice versa. The fact that SQA has indicate that it will investigate centres where there is a lack of correlation does not make any sense.

In N5, 6 marks of the assignment (in the sciences) are for ‘knowledge & understanding’ – surely KU is being assessed through the external exam.

In N5, 14 marks are for skills. For pupils doing 2 or more sciences, they are having to demonstrate these skills multiple times throughout the session.

Also having demonstrated theses skills at N5, why are we reassessing these at higher – only the KU is higher order?

5 Attendance

Teachers set aside time for pupils to write up their assignment using their research notes. If a pupil is absent at the time set aside for writing this up, how should they be supervised? If this was part of the SQA examination diet and a pupil was absent, they would require a medical certificate and the exceptions circumstances route would be followed. Given that this is not part of the diet, if the pupil is removed from class to write up the assignment at another time they will miss the learning and teaching taking place in the class during that time.

Quality of Assessments

The quality of the assessments on the secure area are dreadful. There is a lack of consistency in the way papers are produce with some questions having spaces for ‘write-on’ answers, while others do not. The wording of the questions in many cases is poor. Different fonts and styles suggest that various individuals have written questions which have then been put together without any quality assurance.

National 5 Biology

At a meeting told not to use the term anaerobic any more, but this is given as an answer in the official SQA test for this area; also told at a meeting students do not need to know parts of a flower from a diagram but there is a question about this in the official SQA test for this area
For unit 1, two answers are wrong in marking scheme in SQA assessment
Cilia moving mucus away from the lungs and if candidates use the words out off they will be marked wrong
How are we supposed to know how many marks are being allocated for each question in the unit assessments when these are not given - only informed at the meeting that a question could be worth more than one mark. Guidelines on this are non-existent and teachers have probably not assessed these tests correctly.

**My Experience**

Having been an SQA marker for 25 years, a senior moderator, a setter for SG exams and a principal assessor, I was always proud of the work coming from SQA. As part of the system I was impressed by the quality control procedures in place before assessments reached our pupils. This is no longer evident and, given our experiences, I am now glad that I made the decision not to continue with SQA work for the National Qualifications. I would not wish to be associated with the current system.