

SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION OF GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS

Background to recent media reports:

Immediately after the exam May 2016 there were many comments being made online about the Higher exam and we received a few emails. At SAGT committee in August there was much discussion around the table about this year's exams. In the past there have been numerous discussions between members and at committee about the new qualifications and complaints about communication from the SQA. There was also a fair bit of talk, from some teachers, about marking procedures etc and the content of the higher.

At the same time, the education committee of RSGS had been discussing the loss of Geography in the curriculum, poor communication between the teachers and the SQA and the changes in Geography. There was also an RSGS/ SAGT task group which had been set up to discuss such issues. It was felt by the committee that it would be best to continue with the dialogue between SQA and also with the government as 'going to the press' was not a good idea and would not serve any of our members or our subject.

At this point we would like to say that complaints have always been about the SQA as a body/excessive paperwork / lack of clarity / the new qualifications etc and not individuals involved in the process.

As a result of these discussions it was decided that a survey about the Higher would be sent out to all members. We were led to believe, from the SQA, that we could not feedback our thoughts on the Higher individually as in the past, as this system was being stopped i.e. there appeared to be no teacher/learner survey available.

In online discussions, it was clear that members were getting very heated about SAGT not 'doing anything'. We tried to let people know, via minutes and ESGNs that discussion with the SQA was taking place.

This survey was put out and analysed by 3 members of committee and returns were received from 350 Geography teachers (members and non-members). This was presented at conference to the members who were present. It was decided to bring it up in the afternoon session so that there were no pupils present. The feedback was also started off with a statement that this was not a comment on the work of markers or setters but a reflection of how many members felt about the exam. Quotes were taken from the members who took part.

It was decided the results of this survey would be sent to the SQA and to the RSGS. It was also decided that we would send this to the government's review of SQA. The date for these responses was only a few days after the SAGT conference so it was copied and pasted from the power point results of the survey. In hindsight perhaps more care could have been taken over it as we subsequently found out that it had been published online by the government.

It was our intention to share the results of the survey with all SAGT members after the SQA had a chance to respond. However, the BBC's reporter had read the submission that was made to the government's review. It was decided that we would not respond to requests for an interview from the BBC as we felt that a report may upset markers and setters, as well as our pupils. We can only apologise if this was the case as the news report only really focussed on 1 or 2 lines from that survey.

Attached are the results of the survey undertaken in September.

SQA response

On the 18th of November Liz Crisp (past president) and I met with Angela Baird (Qualification manager), Lesley Joyce (Head of service) and Joan Highton. (Geography Subject Implementation manager). This was a very cordial and productive meeting.

The following points were made:

1. SQA were very surprised to hear our submission as they had only heard from one network group about concerns. We stated that this was partly because the usual feedback form was no longer available.
2. There was a problem with the reduction of the number of marks available having been reduced to 60 from the previous 200. It was agreed that this was not enough to adequately assess the course. **They were looking at increasing the total number of marks for the written exam in the current review from 2018.**
3. There was a great deal of difficulty getting people to mark the exams and it was only at the last minute that they managed to do so. It was agreed that this was partly due to the system of marking online. **As a result, next year's Higher marking will be done on paper.** The point was made that "marking from image" does give SQA more data re breakdown of marks for each question across whole cohort etc.
4. In response to criticism that pupils had performed lower than expected, we were told that statistics showed that the number of A passes matched perfectly the estimates that teachers sent. A – C passes were only 3 % less than estimates.
5. It was agreed that there was a problem with the physical geography being under-assessed in the exam. This will be looked at for the review of the Higher, which was already due to take place, before our complaints. The Higher review planned to take place next session will now occur the following year once National 5 amendments are in place. This is due to the government decision re removal of unit assessments in their current format.
6. There is a very rigorous checking of markers' work and the SQA were satisfied that there were no inconsistencies.
7. All questions and marking schemes were put through a rigorous checking procedure and all questions followed SQA guidelines.
8. 18 people had been involved in the standardisation process to make it rigorous.
9. Changes had already been planned after a review of both the National and Higher qualifications. John Swinney had set that deadline as **June 2019.**
10. There will be **a high level statement made in January about the National exam and documents will be available in April. The plan is for the new information to be contained in one single document under different headings rather than in many different documents**
11. The national rating for Geography is low and shows that pupils are performing as expected.
12. The difficulty of accessing the webinars was discussed. Angela was unaware of those problems and said that teachers should email her to let her know of problems. As a result of one email the number of people on the webinar was increased. Please continue to email if there are problems/ queries.
13. **The importance of teachers reading the Principal Verifier's report and the Subject report was emphasised.**

14. Unfortunately, SQA IT does not enable them to just mail info directly to geographers – updates, webinar dates etc. are highlighted in SQA Centre news sent to SQA co-ordinators weekly. **It is possible for individual teachers to subscribe too and therefore get the information directly. SAGT try to highlight any new updates etc. on twitter, Facebook and on our webpage as well**

It would be appreciated that anyone who is having problems accessing information ,who has concerns or questions regarding the qualifications should email either Angela Baird (qualifications manager) : angela.baird@sqa.org.uk or Joan Highton (subject implementation manager) : joan.highton@sqa.org.uk. Or perhaps to email me, see below.

Elaine Batty , SAGT President 2015 – 17. (sagtpresident@gmail.com)

30th November, 2016.