

NEWSLETTER

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COMMON ENTRANCE MATTERS

A STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIRMAN

'We are committed to providing examinations with the right balance of knowledge and analysis for a wide range of abilities. All examinations are regularly reviewed and revised to that end and feedback from preparatory and senior schools is actively sought.'

Stephen Spurr

COMMON ENTRANCE REVIEW

The cross-Association working party, set up to identify a curriculum on which Common Entrance should be based, has reported back. Its conclusion is that Common Entrance should continue to be based on the national curriculum programmes of study for key stages 2 and 3. In the absence, therefore, of any forthcoming agreement about the Years 7-8 curriculum, ISEB will continue to respond to the needs of both prep and senior schools. It is strongly dependent on and guided by the views of all schools, so please engage in productive dialogue with ISEB by writing to the General Secretary. Indeed, if you have any comments on any aspect of ISEB's work, do please contact the General Secretary in the first instance.

It seems timely to remind everyone of ISEB's aim to provide first-class examinations and to encourage first-class learning. Below is a statement of what ISEB sets out to achieve.

ISEB'S COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING HIGH STANDARDS

The Independent Schools Examinations Board is committed to producing 11+ and 13+ transfer examinations of the highest quality for the whole independent school sector. Encapsulated in this commitment is the desire to make a positive impact on the learning experience of pupils before they move to senior school.

In addition to providing examinations in the compulsory core subjects of English, mathematics and science, ISEB offers optional papers in a wide range of subjects in order to reflect and encourage a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum. Common Entrance and Common Academic Scholarship Examination papers are based on the National Curriculum.

ISEB caters for the whole ability range. There are tiered papers for weaker candidates as well as for the most able. Scholarship papers test the high flyers. In addition, there are certificates of achievement in ICT and modern languages which are also at different levels.

Both knowledge and skills are tested. Knowledge is considered an essential base for learning, making sense of experience and for displaying skills. The examinations test many skills: analytical, critical, evaluative, investigative, problem-solving, reasoning, thinking. They also promote polished oral and written communication, as well as cross-curricular connections and independent learning. One of the ultimate benefits of the examinations is an increased awareness of self and of one's own abilities.

Although ISEB's modus vivendi is to provide transfer examinations for senior schools, it is the servant of both senior and junior schools. It is reactive to the needs of both, wherever possible, and is continually evaluating the worth of its Common Entrance and other examinations. From its inception, GSA, HMC and IAPS Heads have served on the Board, with equal representation from each Association. Each Board member has the responsibility of assuring the quality of a particular examination subject. The examinations themselves are set by teams of highly-qualified practising teachers in GSA, HMC and IAPS schools; again, there is equal representation from each Association. Papers are produced for examinations in January (11+ and 13+) and June (13+), as well as for mock examinations in November.

In order to ensure best practice, syllabuses, papers and examination format are under constant review (by Board members, examination setters, working parties, specialist consultants and every classroom teacher!). In this way ISEB strives to provide an evolutionary examination in tune with the demands of schools and the needs of candidates.

SYLLABUSES

Syllabuses can be downloaded from the ISEB website. Recent changes are outlined below. Subject news is also added to the news section of the website throughout the year. In addition, ISEB holds Continuing Professional Development days in various subjects each year when syllabuses are discussed. These days are advertised on the website.

ENGLISH *(see the syllabus section on this website)*

The 13+ Paper 1 (Reading) now comprises two tiers: Level 1 and Level 2. Level 1 is more accessible to weaker candidates. Questions will be simple and more structured, with focus on finding evidence and explaining choices rather than on detailed analysis or inference. The same non-fiction text and poem will be set for Level 1 and Level 2, although sometimes the prose passage will be shortened in Level 1. All candidates do a common Paper 2 (Writing).

MATHEMATICS *(see the syllabus section on this website)*

At 13+, there is now a lower-level examination called Level 1. The previous Papers 1 and 3 have become Level 2 and the old Papers 2 and 4 have become Level 3. At each level there is a non-calculator and a calculator paper. All candidates are expected to do the common mental arithmetic test. The revised syllabus indicates which topics and levels are required for Level 1 candidates. From spring 2010, a formula sheet will be provided with the Level 1 examination papers.

SCIENCE *(see the syllabus section on this website)*

The introduction of new papers to cater for weaker candidates has been postponed pending a more thorough review of the way in which science is assessed.

CLASSICS (see the syllabus section on this website)

The syllabus published in 2006 for first examination in 2008 is still current. Please note that Latin Level 3 is significantly more demanding than Level 2.

GEOGRAPHY (see the syllabus section on this website)

In response to feedback from schools, the allocation of marks for the fieldwork enquiry remains at 20. Candidates are encouraged to submit their coursework electronically, using the pro forma available on this website as either a pdf or Word version. The paper will carry 80 marks. The marks on the specimen paper are therefore outdated, but the format of the paper and the style of questions demonstrate what the paper will be like from spring 2011.

HISTORY (see the syllabus section on this website)

The following syllabus changes are now effective:

1. *Medieval Realms* covers the period 1066-1485 and includes the Wars of the Roses up to Bosworth.
2. *The Making of the United Kingdom* covers the period 1485-1750 and includes the end of the Wars of the Roses (Bosworth and Stoke).
3. Topics for the *Britain 1750-c1900* period no longer include religion. The *Creation of Unions and Union Leaders* topic has been replaced by *Social Reforms and Reformers*.

Requests for further changes to the format of the examination are under consideration and schools will be consulted about possible new question types.

MODERN LANGUAGES (see the syllabus section on this website)

All rubrics and all test-types in the Listening paper are now in English. From 2010-2011, all questions on the target language texts in the Reading paper will be in English.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (see the syllabus section on this website)

There has been a slight amendment to Section 3 of Syllabus B. This section will now contain twelve questions, rather than fifteen.

The Common Academic Scholarship Examination now consists of two sections with six questions in Section 1: *Contemporary Issues* and nine questions in Section 2: *Old Testament, New Testament and World Religions*. Candidates are expected to answer one question from Section 1 and one question from Section 2.

DYSLEXIC CANDIDATES

Schools with dyslexic candidates sometimes buy buff-coloured overlays to help candidates to read the questions. Alternatively, it is permissible to photocopy examination papers on to buff-coloured paper.

COPYRIGHT

Schools are reminded that they are in breach of copyright regulations if they photocopy Common Entrance examination papers. Schools can, however, now purchase, via the advance order process, a CD containing all the papers from the most recent examination session. These papers can be photocopied endlessly, provided that they are for their own internal school use. The CD comes in a package with 20 copies of the relevant Ordnance Survey map, together with copies of the mental arithmetic and foreign language CDs, all of which are subject to copyright laws.

PAST PAPERS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Past papers are obtainable from Galore Park Publishing Ltd. Galore Park has published more support materials in recent months. Schools are advised to keep checking the Galore Park website at www.galorepark.co.uk.

OTHER ISEB EXAMINATIONS

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN ICT

Following the success of the ICT assessment and a careful review of all feedback, a further modification has been made. The graphics module (3) is now assessed by coursework only. The external test therefore covers modules 1(a), 2 and 6(b).

The revised specification is on the website. Specimen (no charge) and practice (chargeable) tests are available in addition to the assessments themselves. See also the on-line assessments section of this website for more details.

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN MODERN LANGUAGES

Tests at two levels are available in French, German, Mandarin and Spanish (see the syllabus section on this website). Schools are reminded that these assessments can be taken at any age (teachers and parents take note!) and whenever a candidate is ready. Specimen (no charge) and practice (chargeable) tests are available in addition to the assessments themselves. See the on-line assessments section of this website for more details.

Arabic will soon be added to the list of languages available (see the modern languages specification on this website). If you are interested in taking part in a pilot scheme, please contact the ISEB office. Resources to accompany the Arabic course are in preparation.

If you are thinking about introducing Mandarin, and would like some advice, or wish to purchase excellent text books which prepare candidates for the Certificate of Achievement in Mandarin, contact Marcus Reoch at marcus@dragonsineurope.com
