

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.

We are educating our pupils both at junior and senior school in a time of unprecedented change. Some of that change is visible in the recent diversification of public examinations, whether GCSE or IGCSE or A-level (with the new A* grade), Cambridge Pre-U (with the top grade even higher than A*) and the IB. Entrance to university in an increasingly global context, where the best students are selected world-wide, is becoming even more competitive.

To help to meet these challenges, to provide the right mix of knowledge, approach to learning and analytical skills for success in whichever examination route followed in senior schools, and to ensure a fulfilling conclusion to courses of study in junior schools, we must continue together to develop and promote the strengths and advantages of CE.

It takes a long time to build up excellence. CE was begun in 1904, which probably makes it the longest-standing examination in the country. The setters, drawn in each subject from IAPS, HMC and GSA, are determined to build on this tradition for excellence. The examinations are constantly reviewed and revised, feedback from those who teach the syllabuses and mark the exams is actively sought, and all are encouraged to attend the regular subject-based CPD conferences. These conferences provide the opportunity for teachers to come together to talk about the Common Entrance examinations. The next one will be for History in the summer term and we shall be in touch about dates shortly. In addition, we would like to hold a more general conference in the autumn at Westminster School. Team leaders will be there to talk about their subjects, both in the light of the most recent papers and in terms of future plans. At the same time, ISEB will be there to listen carefully to delegates' views.

In the meantime, please let us have your views by writing to the General Secretary (jennie.williams@iseb.co.uk) or to me as Chairman (stephen.spurr@westminster.org.uk) and your comments will be passed on to the appropriate team of setters. One of the greatest traditional strengths of CE is that it is generated by teachers for teachers, who know just what balance of knowledge and skills each subject-syllabus needs in order to be stimulating for pupils to learn and teachers to teach.

We have a great tradition in this country of curriculum-based examinations as pupils move from one stage of their education to another. That tradition derives from the tried and tested view that pupils need to master knowledge with which to develop the skills of synthesis and analysis to increase their understanding and apply it to new situations. Within this tradition, CE is determined to continue both to offer examinations in *all* subjects, which regularly appear on junior school and senior school curricula, and to maximize flexibility through tiered exams. In so doing, CE aims to reinforce two core values which we all share: a broad and balanced curriculum and one which is accessible to pupils of all abilities.

Stephen Spurr
Westminster School

REVIEW OF COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

In its mission to produce gold-standard examinations, ISEB constantly reviews all subjects. It depends on its users to say what they would like examined, so please continue to communicate with ISEB about suggestions for improvement. Comments should be sent to the General Secretary who will pass them on to the relevant academic committees and setting teams. All schools have been told about the latest amendments to syllabuses and/or papers, and these amendments are highlighted under subject headings below. Syllabuses can be downloaded from the ISEB website.

In a previous newsletter, it was announced that ISEB certificates would be awarded for Common Entrance. Subsequent feedback has asked for reconsideration of this idea. More soundings will be taken during the next few months.

LEVEL 1 PAPERS

With the introduction of Level 1 science papers in November 2011, Level 1 papers will now be offered in the three core subjects as well as in Classical Greek and Latin. They are intended to be an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate what they can do. Candidates should be entered for Level 1 if schools consider it preferable that they achieve a higher mark on a lower-level paper. If there is any doubt about the level for which a candidate should be entered, junior schools are asked to discuss the matter with the relevant senior school. Such communication between senior and junior schools is very important; it eliminates misunderstandings and ensures that every candidate is given positive consideration.

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

At 13+, Level 1 and Level 2 (Reading) papers are now printed in separate booklets. It is important, therefore, that candidates are registered for the right level in order to ensure that they receive the correct paper.

Schools are reminded that the same non-fiction text and poem will be set for both levels, although sometimes the prose passage will be shortened in Level 1. All candidates do a common Paper 2.

Some schools are not happy with the poetry section; they criticise both the difficulty of the poem (even though the poems are taken from anthologies for the age group) and the difficulty of the questions. One constructive proposal is that rather than being a comprehension, the poetry question should be one 25-mark question asking candidates to write a commentary on an unseen poem. Comments on this idea are welcome. Initial responses from senior schools canvassed in several meetings were not supportive, but a reduction in the number of questions with a commentary element included was made as a counterproposal. Comments on these ideas are welcome.

MATHEMATICS (see the syllabus section on the ISEB website)

In order to ensure that 13+ candidates receive the correct papers, they must be registered for the right level. All candidates are expected to do the common mental arithmetic test, no matter which level they are taking.

The Level 2 mark scheme suggests grades which are an indication of how well candidates will do at GCSE. A candidate attaining 70% might expect a grade A, both at Common Entrance and at GCSE. Although Level 1 candidates are likely to be borderline grade C candidates at GCSE, a really good Level 1 candidate, who achieves 75%, might expect a grade B.

SCIENCE (see the syllabus section on the ISEB website)

The syllabus has been revised in order to clarify which elements of the current syllabus will be examined in the new Level 1 and Level 2 papers (to be introduced in 2011-2012).

The new Level 1 paper will contain approximately equal numbers of questions on the core parts of the 13+ biology, 13+ chemistry and 13+ physics syllabuses. It will consist of a mixture of closed items and some open questions with several parts, some of which will require answers of one or two sentences. Up to 10% of the marks will be allocated for plotting graphs or making simple calculations. There will be 80 marks available for the paper which will be 60 minutes in length. It is envisaged that candidates who are expected to achieve less than an average of 40% on the three Common Entrance science papers will take this new paper. A specimen paper is available via the link on the syllabuses section of the ISEB website.

The current biology, chemistry and physics papers will be for Level 2 candidates. On the whole, the format of the Level 2 syllabus and the breadth and depth of the topics taught remain unchanged. Each topic has been reviewed in order to clarify and, occasionally, simplify the syllabus. Teachers are recommended to study the new syllabus carefully. Material which will only be examined on the Level 2 papers is printed in the syllabus in **bold**. There will be continuity between the existing 13+ science papers and the new Level 2 papers.

CLASSICS (see the syllabus section on the ISEB 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 the ISEB website)

The revised syllabus and paper became effective at the start of the current academic year. If schools have not already done so, they can order the November 2010 paper as a model for future examinations.

Candidates are encouraged to submit their coursework electronically, using the pro forma available on the ISEB website as either a pdf or Word version. Please note that in the last section of the form the geographical explanation is required before the conclusion and evaluation.

Common Academic Scholarship Examination candidates are also expected to carry out a fieldwork investigation. Their enquiries should be submitted in the same way as the coursework for Common Entrance candidates.

HISTORY (see the syllabus section on the ISEB website)

Requests for further changes to the format of the examination are under consideration and schools will be consulted about possible new question types. In the meantime, any suggestions will be gladly received.

There are no plans to change the syllabus. The topics listed for the mini-essay section are intended to be a guide for preparing candidates for Common Entrance and should not be seen as prescriptive. It has never been the intention to limit the topics taught. As long as candidates have studied a few topics in depth, and understand the necessary concepts and techniques, they will be more than adequately prepared.

Some schools think that too many marks are allocated to the 'describe' part of the essay questions. Mark schemes are only a guide, however. If senior schools wish to put more emphasis on evaluation and analysis than on knowledge, they should simply adjust the marks.

MODERN LANGUAGES (see the syllabus section on the ISEB website)

The revised syllabus is now effective. All questions on the target language texts in the Listening and Reading papers are now in English.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (see the syllabus section on the ISEB website)

Syllabus A has been revised for 2011-2012. Some texts have been removed from Sections 1 and 2 and others have been added (*please check the syllabus on the website for an amendment to the Isaiah 1 reference which should say verses 10-20*). The overall number of texts has been reduced. Evaluation answers in Sections 1 and 2 may test theological as well as contemporary issues. Section 3 now includes a specific part on contemporary issues, and coursework can also cover contemporary issues. A specimen paper is available via the link on the syllabuses section of the ISEB website. The second edition of the ISEB Revision Guide, which reflects Syllabus A changes, will be published by Galore Park shortly.

From autumn 2010, there has been a slight amendment to Section 3 of Syllabus B. This section now contains twelve questions, rather than fifteen. From autumn 2011, the scheme of assessment will be as set out in the amended syllabus on the website.

SPECIAL NEEDS CANDIDATES

All queries relating to SEN candidates' needs and senior-school requirements should be discussed with senior schools. It is usually in the candidates' best interests to restrict the number of papers they sit.

Schools with SEN 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.

EXAMINATION DATES

From May 2011, listening examinations are to be taken on a prescribed date rather than at any time during the listening and speaking examination week. The Mental Arithmetic test will be on the Monday morning, French Listening on the Tuesday morning, Spanish Listening on the Wednesday morning and German Listening on the Thursday morning.

The June 2012 examination, previously advertised as taking place between 4-7 June, has been moved to 11-14 June in order to avoid a clash with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. All examination dates can be found on the ISEB website.

COMMON ENTRANCE RESULTS

Senior schools are asked to assess scripts by grades and to give an indication of the percentages which the grades represent. Results should be available to junior schools by the Thursday (13+) and Friday (11+) of the week after the examination, and before parents are informed on the Friday (13+) and Saturday (11+). Heads of junior schools appreciate it if heads of senior schools contact them about failures early in results' week.

OTHER ISEB EXAMINATIONS

COMMON ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP EXAMINATION

The Common Academic Scholarship Examination is under review. Senior school comments on the papers are welcome. If departments within schools are divided over whether they should use the common scholarship papers or their own, they might consider assessing potential scholars by using a mixture of their own and CASE papers. Some schools do, in fact, use CASE for only one subject. This is another example of the flexibility associated with ISEB examinations!

COMMON PRE-TESTS

Progress is being made on the introduction of common pre-tests in autumn 2011. These standardised, on-line tests will assess verbal, non-verbal, numeracy and comprehension skills. They will link to transfer at 13+. It is expected that some senior schools will test Year 6 candidates and others Year 7.

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN ICT

(see the Certificate of Achievement section of the ISEB website)

The technology relating to the on-line ICT assessment has been developed further so that the whole process of delivery, administration and marking is more teacher-friendly. Teachers can now mark modules 1(a) and 2 themselves, using a supplied marking engine. Results and feedback are available immediately. Practice tests and a marking engine are now available as a package containing four past tests. The package is licensed for a full academic year. A specimen test is available free of charge.

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN MODERN LANGUAGES

In future, tests will be available in Arabic, Mandarin and Spanish. They will be paper-based and will be offered at three levels: Foundation, Level 1 and Level 2. Work on new specifications is in progress and schools will be invited to a meeting to discuss the new format of the tests in the summer term.

Sample Arabic papers can be found in a course book called *Preparatory Arabic*, by Fred Pragnell. Contact the author at efprag@aol.com.

If you are thinking about introducing Mandarin, and would like some advice, please contact the ISEB office. You might also be interested in materials produced by Dragons in Europe: marcus@dragonsineurope.com.

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 schools' own internal 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's excellent catalogue of support materials is constantly expanding and schools are advised to keep checking its website at www.galorepark.co.uk.

CONTACT DETAILS

Good communication is very important to ISEB. Schools often miss new, sometimes vital, information because they fail to ensure that the ISEB office has up-to-date contact details. Email addresses can be updated by logging on to www.iseb.co.uk/benson_web and following the Your Account link. All schools are asked to provide two email addresses; normally, one would be the Head's address and the other either that of the Director of Studies or the Registrar. Finally, some schools, including their accounts department, might need reminding that the ISEB office is now located at:

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16 Queen's Avenue
Christchurch
BH23 1BZ

Telephone: 01202 487538

Email: enquiries@iseb.co.uk