



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Play in Early Education and Childcare
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidates were generally well prepared to complete the project this year, and they have clearly been set realistic timescales and support to complete the task. A variety of case studies were used this year, reflecting a variety of placements offered to candidates. The selection of case study and the selection of type of play and planned experience were on the whole appropriate and met the requirements of the project specification.

The majority of portfolios are now word-processed and well presented. The inclusion of placement observations, children's work and photographs (with appropriate permissions) enhances the project.

A number of centres allowed candidates to use appendices to significantly increase their word-count by continuing the body of the text. This should be discouraged — appendices should only be used for additional material that cannot be referenced, such as leaflets or observations.

Areas in which candidates performed well

As in previous years, candidates perform well in the Research Report and the Case Report, particularly when they can relate it to their own placement experience. Many candidates can identify areas of good practice observed and can describe their own involvement in the type of play chosen. Where candidates have produced a realistic plan, the evaluation is more robust.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As in previous years, candidates continue to find the Planning Stage demanding. This stage is often very general, with candidates re-writing the candidate brief rather than making it specific to the case study chosen. Candidates have lost significant marks due to this, and marks can vary considerably from those allocated by centres as an estimate. Centres should ensure that there is standardisation within the centre where there is more than one lecturer supporting candidates. They should also ensure that candidates have the appropriate skills to support the planning process. This plan should be specific in relation to what the candidate plans to do across the whole of the project. It should show evidence of prior reading and research, and should be related to placement experience.

Candidates find the 'theorist' element of the research report demanding. They should discuss two theorists in relation to the type of play chosen, and at Higher level they are expected to relate the theorist to the type of play to gain high marks. In their Conclusion, candidates often identify this aspect of the project as the most demanding and centres should consider giving additional support or a specific reading list to support this aspect of the Project.

Some candidates struggle to write within the suggested word-count and many were over the limit, or as already stated, used 'appendices' to continue the text. Candidates should be supported to develop skills in conciseness as appropriate at Higher level.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Please refer to previous External Assessment reports for general advice.

- ◆ Centres should ensure that they are using the most current Project Specification and Marking Scheme, Where a lecturer is supporting the project for the first time, they should have full access to previous External Assessment Reports and SQA material, and internal verification procedures should be followed to ensure standardisation.
- ◆ Candidates should avoid excessive use of inappropriate clipart and other illustrations that detract from the project. There are no additional marks for this, and the time spent on it could be spent on research and writing up the project.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates have the appropriate skills to complete a Project at Higher level, eg planning skills, research skills, report writing skills, analytical skills and the ability to draw conclusions and make recommendations and to evaluate complex information.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates have access to a wide range of research material in a variety of formats, and consideration could be given issuing candidates with a list of appropriate resources to focus their research, particularly in relation to the 'Play theorists'.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates are given sufficient time to complete all aspects of the Project. Time should be allocated prior to the submission of the Planning Stage to allow candidates to carry out preliminary research.
- ◆ Steps should be taken to avoid plagiarism and academic dishonesty, and candidates should use a clear system of referencing (eg Harvard) to ensure they acknowledge the work of others.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that work carried out 'under supervision' is the candidate's own work.
- ◆ Centres should not fill in marks on the project fly sheet or the EX6 register form.
- ◆ Candidates should give a clear indication of 'word-count' at the end of each section, and should be guided by centres for significantly being above or below the suggested word-count. Candidates should not use appendices as a means of increasing the word-count.
- ◆ Centres should not submit incomplete work or work that clearly does not meet the requirements of the Project Specification.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	167
Number of resulted entries in 2013	119

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	10.9%	10.9%	13	140
B	40.3%	51.3%	48	120
C	27.7%	79.0%	33	100
D	5.9%	84.9%	7	90
No award	15.1%	100.0%	18	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.