



External Assessment Report 2011

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| Subject | Play In Early Education and Childcare |
| Level | 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

This is the first full year following the revision of the project specification and the introduction of the 'Ruaridh' case study. The majority of candidates appear to have been well prepared and had sufficient time to carry out the project. Most are now clearly linking the case study to their own practice and experience. Candidates generally kept within the suggested word count for each section.

Centres are still tending to overestimate grades and continuing to mark candidates highly. Lecturers should be familiar with the grade descriptions in the project specification and the requirements of SCQF level 6 prior to marking the project. There continues to be inconsistencies in marking within centres where there is more than one Marker or campus, and there is little evidence of internal verification or standardisation. Centres generally use the marking guidelines provided and there is evidence of positive feedback given to candidates.

The majority of candidates chose the new 'Ruaridh' case study and provided him with a variety of activities to meet his needs — either related to his needs as a 'new big brother' or extended his interest in pirates. Both responses were acceptable given that the candidate had identified his needs correctly. The activities planned across all case studies this year were largely age appropriate and this was a marked difference from previous years, particularly those candidates selecting the 'Hannah' case study.

Overall, the projects were clearly presented with many centres allowing candidates to wordprocess work. Centres should ensure that when work is printed out that it is legible and that all sections are in the project prior to delivery to SQA. Some centres continue to mark in red or green pen and to fill in the front cover of the flyleaf or the EX 6 form.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Planning stage

Candidates who followed the Candidate Guide and set specific personal aims, research report and case study report aims and objectives, and who had spent time carrying out some initial research, produced high quality plans. This then provided a sound basis for the rest of the project. Some candidates referred to the plan in all sections of the project. Candidates who chose a case study that directly related to their placement experience were effective.

Research-based report

Generally, this section is tackled well by candidates. There were some good examples where candidates had chosen relevant theorists and were able to relate them clearly to the type of play chosen. There were some excellent examples of good practice from placement and candidates' own experience, some including observations and photographs; others making reference to placement tasks carried out for the Course Units.

Case study report

The 'Ruaridh' case study appears to have more breadth than its predecessor. The candidates who chose this case study planned a variety of experiences to meet Ruaridh's needs. Those who related all aspects of this report to the case study scored highly, particularly when they related the role of the adult in the final section.

Conclusions and recommendations

Candidates achieved better than in previous years with the revised specification. The section looking at the impact of play in general on the needs of the child gave renewed focus to this section.

Evaluations

As in previous years, candidates who performed well related this section directly to their plan and identified the skills and knowledge across all aspects of the project.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Planning stage

In general, the plans need to be more specific. Some of those submitted were just a re-working of the project brief. The plan should relate specifically to the case study chosen and the needs of the child identified, as well as the candidate's own workplace experience. In some cases, candidates related the case study to personal experience rather than work experience and were penalised. It is clear from the Project Brief what needs to be included in each section of the plan. The plan should indicate that the candidate has already carried out some preliminary research. It should identify the needs of the child and the possible planned play experience at this stage and indicate specific resources that could be used. Sources of information should be clearly identified and timescales should be specific.

Research-based report

Candidates should clearly indicate the type of play chosen from the list in the Appendix to the Statement of Standards in the Course Unit specifications. The lecturer supporting the project should be familiar with these Units and best practice would suggest that they deliver them to candidates. Candidates often chose inappropriate theorists and were unable to relate them to the type of play chosen. More than one theorist should be chosen and must be related, by the candidate, to the type of play chosen. Centres should ensure that candidates are supported and have access to research material on this subject. Candidates should discuss both their own experience and examples of good practice of the type of play chosen. Through the Course Units, candidates should be made aware of best practice in all types of play.

Case study

'The role of the adult' was often generalised by the candidate and no reference made to the planned play experience or the needs of the child in the case study. Candidates lost marks if this was generalised. Candidates could refer to the child by name and to the planned experience to ensure that this is explicit.

Conclusion and recommendations

Candidates should be clear about the future role of the adult in extending play and ensure that all aspects of the brief are covered.

Evaluation

Candidates should relate this section clearly to the planning stage and reflect on the aims that they set for themselves. Candidates should be developing the evaluative and self-reflective skills required at Higher level. Candidates frequently just summarised their project rather than evaluating each section in relation to the knowledge and skills they had developed during the process. Generally, candidates do not reflect well on the type and content of their research and frequently lose marks in this section.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

The revised Higher Play in Early Education and Childcare External Assessment document is now available and should be used by all centres delivering this qualification in session 2011–12.

Centre staff should be familiar with the project specification and, in particular, the grade descriptions, the Course Units and SCQF level prior to supporting candidates and marking projects.

Centres should ensure that candidates have the appropriate skills to complete the project, eg planning skills, research skills, report writing skills, analytical skills, and the ability to draw conclusions, to make recommendations and to evaluate complex information. These skills are covered in the delivery and assessment of the Course Units.

Candidates should have some experience in working with the age of the child in the chosen case study, and centres should ensure that candidates are aware of appropriate activities for the age group through delivery of the Course Units.

Remediation is not permitted in any section of the project; the work that candidates submit should be considered their best work. Candidates who fail any stage can proceed to the next.

Lecturers should not use green or red pen to mark and should not write marks on the flyleaf or the EX 6 form. A Marking Scheme is provided for this purpose.

Centres should ensure that candidates have access to a wide range of research material in a variety of formats and consideration could be given to issuing candidates with a list of appropriate resources to focus their research.

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 use internal verification procedures to ensure consistency of marking across campuses and staff.

Centres should consider wordprocessing all sections of the project and should continue to discourage the use of project folders and poly-pockets. Candidates should give a clear indication of 'word count' at the end of each section and centres should highlight to candidates where they are significantly above or below the suggested word count.

Candidates who are given extra support at the planning stage, as indicated on the SQA flyleaf, should have their marks adjusted accordingly. Centres should ensure that the second page of the flyleaf is completed for all candidates.

Centres should not submit incomplete work or work that clearly does not meet the required standard.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2010 | 184 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2011 | 205 |
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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 | 11.7% | 11.7% | 24 | 140 |
| B | 30.2% | 42.0% | 62 | 120 |
| C | 33.7% | 75.6% | 69 | 100 |
| D | 3.4% | 79.0% | 7 | 90 |
| No award | 21.0% | 100.0% | 43 | - |

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.