



External Assessment Report 2010

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 had been the first year using the revised specification and it was felt that the clearer marker guidance and the inclusion of the new case study had supported both candidates and centre staff.

Due to the late publication of the revised specification, some centres chose to continue using the 'Jack' case study and the revised marking specification. Dual running of the old and revised case studies had been agreed by SQA but centres are no longer able to use the 'Jack' case study as it is not valid.

Overall, candidates appear to have been well prepared and given sufficient time to carry out the project, although it was noted that some candidates had been poorly advised by lecturers about the type of play to choose in relation to particular case studies, and a few indicated they had been given very little guidance or choice of case study. Candidates generally kept within the suggested word count for each section. Centres are still tending to overestimate grades and continue to mark students high. Lecturers should be familiar with the grade boundaries in the project specification and the requirements of SCQF 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 the revised marking schedule is clearer in relation to students who do not meet the required Evidence Requirement.

As in previous years, the majority of candidates chose the 'Jack' case study and provided him with an obstacle course to meet his needs. As previously stated, this case study will now be removed from the specification. A number of candidates from one centre who chose the 'Hannah' case study planned very inappropriate activities for her age (20 months) and it was clear from the projects that the candidates had little or no experience of working with this age group and showed no clear understanding of her development needs. One centre had clearly advised candidates that Hannah's need was for creative play rather than discovery/treasure basket play, and this led the candidates to suggest adult led 'art and craft' activities more appropriate to pre-school children. Candidates who selected the new case study 'Ruaridh' were able to consider his wider needs and selected a variety of types of play to meet them.

Overall, the projects were clearly presented, without the excessive use of poly pockets, and many centres allowed candidates to word process work. Some centres have encouraged students to attach appendices to evidence good practice and the students' experience which added depth to projects. The invigilated sections had been either word processed, post marking or the originals included or completed on 'locked computers' under invigilated conditions. Some centres continue to mark in red or green pen and fill in the front cover of the flyleaf or the EX 6 form.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Planning

Candidates who followed the candidate guide and set specific personal, 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. Candidates who chose a case study that directly related to their placement experience were effective.

Research based report

There were some good examples of theorists and scope of play, and generally this section was tackled well by candidates, where candidates had chosen relevant theorists and were able to relate this 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.

Case study report

Candidates who performed well in this section related the planned play activity to the research based project and identified and focused on the identifiable needs of the child in the case study. They then related all aspects of this section to these needs and the planned play experience. Successful candidates chose and developed age appropriate activities for the child in the case study and were clearly able to relate theory to practice.

Evaluation and recommendations

This section had been clarified in the revised specification and candidates were able to relate this more effectively to other aspects of this section. As in previous years, candidates who had understood and identified the needs of the child in the case study — and were clear on the role of the adult — performed well in this section. Some candidates clearly drew on their own placement experience when making recommendations.

Evaluating

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

Areas which candidates found demanding

Planning

As in previous years, the plans need to be more specific and some submissions 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. 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 and should be able to identify the needs of the child and the possible planned play experience at this stage and specific resources that could be used. Sources of information should be clearly identified. Candidates who do not meet the minimum Evidence Requirements outlined in the project specification should be marked accordingly.

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. Candidates frequently discuss 'physical play' rather than vigorous play. There is often little evidence of candidate's transferring knowledge from the Course Units. 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 are unable to relate them to the type of play chosen. Candidates often reflect that they find the section on theorists hard and are given little or no support.

In discussing the scope of the type of play chosen, candidates should cover all aspects of the type of play, particularly creative play which is often just seen as adult led arts and crafts activities which are frequently not very creative.

Case study

As discussed in the general comments, candidates should ensure that the planned play experience is age appropriate and meets needs of the child. Some candidates who chose the 'Hannah' case study planned experiences for her that would be more appropriate for an older child. Candidates were penalised for this. In some instances, not only was the experience inappropriate for such a young child but her involvement in preparing the experience would have been impossible for her to achieve, eg carrying a heavy object.

Evaluation and recommendations

As in previous years, candidates who performed well in other aspects of the developing stage found it hard to evaluate and make recommendations on the information they had gathered. This is a skill that needs to be practiced within centres prior to the candidates completing this section.

Evaluating — 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 loose marks in this section.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ The 'Jack' case study can no longer be used and centres should ensure that they are using the revised project specification (3rd Edition: December 2009).
- ◆ Candidates should have some experience 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.
- ◆ Centres should pay attention to 'the conditions of assessment' for each section, as not every section needs to be invigilated under controlled conditions.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates have the appropriate skills to complete the project, eg 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.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates have covered the appropriate Outcomes in the Course Units to ensure that have the breadth of knowledge required to meet the criteria of the project specification.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Centre staff should be familiar with the project specification (particularly the grade boundaries), the Course Units and SCQF level prior to supporting candidates and marking projects.
- ◆ Centres should use internal verification procedures to ensure consistency of marking between campuses and staff. Markers in centres should avoid using red or green ink as these are used by SQA appointees during the marking process. Centres should not fill in marks on the project flyleaf or the EX6 form.
- ◆ Centres should consider word processing 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 candidates should be penalised by centres for significantly being 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 according to the advice given in the project specification. All centres should ensure that the second page of the flyleaf is completed for all candidates.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	244
Number of resulted entries in 2010	184

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	8.7%	8.7%	16	140
B	29.9%	38.6%	55	120
C	32.1%	70.7%	59	100
D	6.5%	77.2%	12	90
No award	22.8%	100.0%	42	—

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.