

## Principal Assessor Report 2002

**Assessment Panel:**

**ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION**

**Qualification area**

**Subject(s) and Level(s)  
included in this report**

**ENGLISH: CSYS  
ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION: AH**

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of entries in 2001</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	
<b>Post appeal</b>	CSYS - 1,012 AH - 461

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	CSYS - 423 AH - 1,205
<b>Post appeal</b>	

## General comments re entry numbers

The overall increase in the number of entries in 2002 is in line with year-on-year variations in the number of candidates in sixth year electing to pursue advanced study in English.

In this the final year of concurrent CSYS/AH provision, many more candidates were entered for Advanced Higher, with a reversal of the 2001 CSYS/AH entry ratio.

Encouragingly, entries for Advanced Higher included for the very first time candidates from the FE sector.

## General comments

Candidates presented for CSYS performed marginally better than in 2001.

Candidates presented for AH performed marginally less well than in 2001.

It is difficult to account for such marginal variations in performance. The CSYS results may well be attributed to the security of centres working within longstanding and familiar curricular and assessment requirements. The AH results may have been slightly influenced by the large number of centres entering the new framework for the very first time.

### **Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report**

	CSYS	AH
A	67%	70%
B	53%	60%
C	40%	50%

### **Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area**

At CSYS, the application of the same cut-off scores as has been applied to the work of candidates for many years produced an improved pass rate.

At AH, *a priori* cut-off scores were adopted to determine A, B and C awards.

## **Comments on candidate performance**

### **General comments**

At both CSYS and AH, candidates were clearly well prepared for assessment and brought to the various tasks that were set for them good evidence of having understood the materials they had studied and having enjoyed the challenges of work at this level.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well**

As always, dissertations covered a very wide and imaginative range of authors and topics. Markers reported favourably on the enthusiasm of candidates, their earnestness of purpose, the relevance and thoughtfulness of their observations and improved structuring of their arguments. The standard of written English was sound, and in several instances impressively high: the prose was smooth and pleasurable to read and critical terminology skilfully and aptly deployed.

There were, as usual, some excellent creative writing submissions in the category of prose fiction but fewer first class submissions than in previous years in the category of poetry. The requirement to submit only two pieces at Advanced Higher again appeared to strengthen the performance of candidates taking the creative writing option.

In Literature, the best essays were again produced on Shakespeare, Williams, Lochhead, Hardy and Heaney. Markers reported that candidates were well prepared, demonstrating sound understanding of texts and good levels of skill in critical analysis and evaluation.

Practical Criticism and Textual Analysis were competently done, with very few candidates unable to engage profitably with any of the texts on offer.

In Media Studies and Reading the Media, candidates were well prepared for questions on film, television and the analysis of news stories and advertisements.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty**

There was evidence that some candidates failed to take fully into account the advice offered on their proposed dissertation topics: adopting a serial as opposed to a comparative treatment, relying more on illustration than on analysis, offering a generalised review of texts rather than following a specific and detailed line of enquiry.

There were still far too many submissions in the category of the Reflective Essay that, however well written, failed to grasp the essential nature of this particular essay form.

In Advanced Higher, candidates did not always make full use of the one and a half hours available to them, offering responses that were not significantly more thoughtful or more fully developed than those produced in an hour at CSYS.

### **Areas of common misunderstanding**

The main area of misunderstanding continued to be the Reflective Essay.

## **Recommendations**

### **Feedback to centres**

#### **Specialist Study**

Candidates should be encouraged to undertake Specialist Studies that are in substance and quality commensurate with the value of this component in course assessment (40% of the overall award). The study should be specific, focused and manageable within the constraints of a relatively short dissertation. Far too often, candidates are disadvantaged by topics that are loosely worded or based on materials that offer little opportunity for penetrating analysis.

It should be emphasised to candidates that they will be penalised for failure to comply with necessary evidence requirements such as mandatory length constraints and mandatory inclusion of footnotes and bibliography.

#### **Creative Writing Folio**

Candidates should be given specific guidance about the nature of the Reflective Essay.

It should also be pointed out to them that a lengthy submission, in itself, carries no reward in terms of assessment. Although there is no specified upper limitation of length, submissions of excessive length (significantly more than 2000 words, for example, in the categories of the Reflective Essay, Fiction and Drama) are usually self-penalising. Sharp, relevant and economical writing is usually characteristic of submissions that gain the highest marks.

Frequently, a carefully chosen single submission in the category of Poetry is preferable to a group of poems. It should be pointed out to candidates that groups of poems are assessed as a single “piece of writing” and that relatively weak poems in the group will detract from the mark that could have been achieved by the best poem in the group.

#### **Literature**

The performance of a significant number of candidates in the Literature and Scottish Literature sections of the paper continues to be less convincing than it could be, through failure to make optimum use of the one and a half hours available for each question.

Some candidates continue to be disadvantaged by the apparent irresistibility to them of the more open wording of the alternative questions. It is worth emphasising that these questions are primarily intended for candidates who have studied nominated and approved alternative authors and texts. Their relevance to the specified authors and texts is usually no more than coincidental and tangential. No candidate has yet been advantaged by basing an answer to any of these questions on the texts of one of the specified authors.