

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Computing

Qualification area

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

Computing– Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003 (Pre Appeal)	2102
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Number of entries in 2004 (Pre Appeal)	2152
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General comments re entry numbers

Increasing numbers of schools opting for Intermediate 2 Computing rather than Standard Grade. Percentage of S4 students sitting Intermediate 2 this year has increased from 5% last year to 16% this year.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

A	17.6%
B	20.4%
C	22.0%
D	10.7%
No Award	29.4%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

The increased numbers of students sitting Intermediate 2 in S4 who intend to go on to Higher Computing has led to an increase in overall pass rates.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	17.6	17.6	379	70
B	20.4	38.0	438	60
C	22.0	60.0	473	50
D	10.7	70.7	230	45
No award	29.4	100	632	

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

This years External Examination had the same level of demand as previous years therefore grade boundaries remain unaltered.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Some candidates still not presented at the correct level, but the majority were answering most of the questions and using slightly better technical vocabulary than in the past. There has been a slight improvement in the answering of Software Development questions but there are still difficulties with students applying their knowledge to problem solving scenarios.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The Computer Systems questions were usually well answered with questions about the difference between ROM and RAM, suitable peripherals, etc usually answered with reasonably good technical detail. Selection of test data, functions of operating systems and the stages of the software development process were answered much better this year.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Problem solving within software development is an area where most students seem unable to grasp the wider concepts. Very few students seem to know what pre-defined functions are.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

As in previous years more time should be spent on Software Development with students practising questions which bring together their practical coding skills with general software development structures.