

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Computing

Qualification area

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

**Computing Studies Standard Grade
Foundation, General and Credit**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003 (Pre Appeal)	21723
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Number of entries in 2004 (Pre Appeal)	18849
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General comments re entry numbers

A drop in numbers of around 13% reflects a migration of some schools from Standard Grade to Intermediate courses in S3 and S4.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

Grade	% of Candidates	Cumulative %
1	21.3	21.3
2	24.6	45.9
3	19.3	65.2
4	18.5	83.7
5	11.6	95.3
6	2.4	97.7
7	0.2	97.9

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

Rise from 18.5 to 21.3% achieving grade1. Slight rise 23.4 to 24.6 achieving Grade 2. Drop in Grade 7 from 0.3 to 0.2%. This illustrates more candidates performing well at Credit and less failing to achieve a result at Foundation.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Standard Grade			
Assessable Element –	Knowledge & Understanding		
Grade	Maximum Mark	Minimum Mark for Grade	% Mark
1	36	27	75
2	36	21	58
3	36	19	53
4	36	14	39
5	36	23	64
6	36	19	53

Standard Grade			
Assessable Element –	Problem Solving		
Grade	Maximum Mark	Minimum Mark for Grade	% Mark
1	36	25	69
2	36	18	50
3	36	23	64
4	36	16	44
5	36	23	64
6	36	15	42

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

As in previous years, the cut-off grades were set to differentiate candidate performance, maintain standards year on year, and remove any anomalies, which may occur. Candidates found the Credit paper quite accessible particularly in KU. Despite high grade boundaries, a slight improvement on the high rate of achievement recorded last year was noted.

Credit

Grade boundaries almost identical to last year both KU marks being high at 27 and 21.

General

Candidates continue to find KU more difficult at this level similar to last year.

Foundation

This year the KU questions in the Foundation level paper were more accessible and less difficult thus setting the grade boundaries as indicated.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

At Credit level, candidates again performed well in both strands. The candidates were generally well prepared. In Particular KU results were again high. This proved to be the best cohort to date with a greater percentage achieving Credit than in any previous year. The examining team are conscious of a general increase in computer awareness amongst the general public and the fact that teachers are successfully pushing students towards the Credit style examination rather than General examination. This may make pupils perform better at Credit relative to General, a factor that is difficult to eliminate, but it is raising standards. It was also pleasing to see candidates performing better at Foundation level with fewer failing to achieve Grade 6.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Credit

As in previous years GPP was well attempted.

Question 1 was answered well with a couple of difficulties outlined below. Most candidates are now familiar with printer drivers.

Question 2 fairly well answered, ROM chips were well understood.

Question 3 Most knew what replicated means, Multi Access was well answered with most candidates inserting the phrase "at the same time" for a second mark.

Question 6 Most knew the ALU carried out calculations and decision making

Most knew Rom held programmes that never change

Stating a function of the Operating System in connection with CD Rom usage was better answered.

General Level

Question 1

Quite well done. Most knew how to input a photograph and the notion of running costs.

Question 2

Well answered particularly the idea of 'search and replace' and fitting a document to a page.

Question 3

This simple search was better answered than in previous years.

Question 6 c ii

Most candidates were aware of the idea of reprogramming the sweeper for a new situation.

Foundation Level

The paper seemed more accessible this year with improved responses in PS particularly.

Question 1

Parts d and e were very well done. Practical General Purpose Packages where selection and short answers were involved proved easy.

Question 2

Identifying computer parts and input and output devices were well known.

Question 6

Bar codes were well known and advantages of email was well attempted.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Credit

At this level attention to detail is important.

Question 1b

Part 1 Many candidates did not insert the unit bytes and lost the mark.

Part 2 Many did not round down the number of records that could be fit on a floppy to a whole number and lost a mark.

Question 2

Many candidates are still unsure of what a control language is used for.

A surprising number of candidates guessed open loop as opposed to closed this was not expected at this level.

Question 3

The relationship $B_{14} \leq B_{15}$ proved difficult for many.

Many suggested wrongly that ISP was software

A large number gave a piece of hardware as an example of internet software.

Question 4

Some candidates still find it difficult to accurately clarify a search

Several still mix up portable software with the idea of physical portability and ease of mobility.

Many candidates still mix up compilers and interpreters

Question 6

Few named the Control Unit as being responsible for running a program correctly.

Resource allocation was poorly answered.

General

Question 1d

Still some candidates offered answers like quicker and better when giving advantages of a laser printer more detail is needed.

Many candidates are still unsure of the difference between a data and a program file.

In general Commercial Data Processing was found difficult. Question 3, hand writing recognition proved difficult.

Question 4 Candidates still use the sum function incorrectly. The markers would not allow $SUM(f_2+f_3+f_4)$.

Question 5 Check digit preparation proved hard.

Few knew about transaction files

Terminal was poorly described.

Question 6

Operating Systems were described too generally by many e.g. (runs the computer)

Many did not know High Level Languages or Real-Time Processing.

Foundation Level

Question 1b

Many candidates wrongly used clip art as an example of a graphics tool.

1c Some candidates still use quicker and easier as advantages.

2d ii Many found it difficult at this level to give a task of the CPU.

3di Several still do not know charting.

4 Few could deduce that the database had 55 records.

5 Many found it difficult to name a situation where a simulation is used

6 Few knew what pre-printed stationary is.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

The rising standard at Credit Level continues to show that teachers are preparing candidates well for this examination. The reduction in numbers failing to achieve Grade 6 or above is indeed another positive indicator.

The stability of the course over a number of years has increased confidence, leading to accurate teacher prediction, higher standards, and the maintenance of good candidate take up, despite the impact of Intermediate Level alternatives.

For a number of years we have seen that GPP is well taught and the challenge is to improve those areas of the curriculum which cannot be addressed in the classroom from a practical angle.

I offer the following general advice, knowing that I am repeating myself. I am sure that most teachers relate these same points time and time again to their candidates each year, but we still see the same familiar faults.

Encourage your candidates to answer all questions. We never mark negatively for a guess.

If a candidate has difficulty in writing, use alternatives.

Remind candidates to read over their work.

Look carefully at the number of marks available and structure your response accordingly.

Always name fields when describing searching or sorting in a database

Insert the term “at the same time” when describing Multi-Access and Multi-Processing.

Specific points regarding this years paper

Always name the unit when talking about memory. E.g. 150(Bytes)

The number of records that can fit on a disk is always a whole number remember to round down.

The function SUM on a spreadsheet is used specifically for adding over a range. Do not use it elsewhere.

Note Clip-Art is NOT a graphics tool

Avoid general answers like better, faster etc. when describing why something is an advantage. We need more detail.

Absent Candidates

We were unable to award a small number of absent candidates the predicted grade of the centre.

Please ensure that evidence of candidates achieving the predicted grade is enclosed as would be expected for the appeals process.