

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

History

Qualification area

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

History Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)	2,011
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Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)	2,650
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General comments re entry numbers

The increase of 639 candidates seems to be mainly due to S4 pupils who have undertaken Intermediate instead of Standard Grade.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

A	21.3%
B	19.0%
C	27.6%
D	10.4%
No award	21.7%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

The general pattern of awards was very much in line with 2003, albeit the number of entries had increased significantly. There is a slight increase in the number of A passes awarded this year. The drop at B and slight increase in C passes may indicate candidates who would previously been entered at Intermediate 1 and expected to obtain an A pass have instead been entered for Intermediate 2.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	21.3	21.3	564	48
B	19.0	40.3	504	40
C	27.6	67.9	731	36
D	10.4	78.3	276	28
No award	21.7	100	575	-

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 syllabuses evolve and change

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The grade boundaries remained the same at A but B and C were increased by 1 mark to reflect a more accessible examination overall than the previous year.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

As regards the **Extended Response**, markers commented that the vast majority of candidates were well prepared and produced essays with a clear structure. There were fewer really good essays and many more at C level. A few centres showed lack of preparation/ research and candidates' essays seemed little more than a rewording of notes.

In the **External Examination** candidates were generally well prepared. In particular, S4 candidates produced good answers. Very few failed to complete the paper. Some candidates did well in two of the learning outcomes but showed weakness in the third.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

As regards the **Extended Response**, markers commented that the best essays had clear questions which could be argued coherently and led to a well substantiated conclusion. Where centres had similar titles this year, there was generally greater diversity of evidence and approaches, indicating good teaching practice which supported pupils but allowed them to research and complete their own essays.

In the **External Examination** candidates did well in the 8 mark essay. Many did this as their final question and could therefore write more because they knew what time they had available. Questions asking for an explanation continue to be done well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In the **Extended Response** many candidates did not use the 150 word entitlement for their plan. Others wrote very short essays which were little more than the plan. A single page answer is not likely to achieve a pass.

- Several candidates wrote their plan in text language. When counted, they had used well over 150 words. These candidates had marks deducted. Plans should use proper words (and dates).
- Poor essay titles led to essays which were mainly narrative and this meant candidates limited themselves to a C pass at best. Examples of poor titles are: "The Poorhouse Experience", "Nicholas Romanov's Role in the Russian Revolution", "How Blacks Won Their Rights" and "What was the Montgomery Bus Boycott?"
- Other questions were too complicated, eg. "What was the problem of poverty, how did the Liberals 1906-14 tackle it and were they successful?" Multiple questions within one title ought to be avoided.
- In poorer essays the conclusion was little more than a repetition of the introduction and does not use the evidence in the development.
- In essays on Bismarck's contribution to German unification candidates rarely mentioned other factors.

In the **External Examination** some candidates failed to tackle a third context.

- There was some misreading of questions eg. short essays - In the ‘Wallace and Bruce’ context candidates wrote about why Edward wanted to interfere in Scotland rather than why the Scots asked him to help; in the ‘Cradle to Grave’ context, some candidates wrote about the reaction to poverty in 1900 rather than attitudes to it
- In “describe” questions some candidates are still leaving questions blank, showing they do not have adequate knowledge of the content.
- Lack of knowledge was sometimes shown by confusing content eg. Liberals 1906-14 with Labour 1945-51, or the events of the 1905 Revolution with the conditions of Russian peasants.
- Some candidates in “explain” questions copied parts of the source rather than explaining in their own words. A few wrote sentences in quotes without explanation. A handful went as far as giving an opening quotation, writing two or three words inserting the last word, closing the quotation and expected the marker to do the work. They did not gain marks.
- In **source comparison** items some candidates did not make direct comparison of points but wrote “Source A says ...”, “Source B says...” and expected markers to find the comparisons. They likewise penalised themselves.
- In **source evaluation** items some candidates did not seem to recognise key figures, eg. Cavour, Churchill or Krushchev, making it difficult to complete their evaluation.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

In the **Extended Response** teachers/lecturers should encourage candidates to choose clear issues which can lead to a conclusion. :

- Choose single questions, eg. Why did the Liberals 1906-14 tackle the problem of poverty? How successful were the Liberals 1906-14 in helping children? Similarly, double-barrelled questions should be avoided.
- Many candidates might find it easier to devise an argument and/or a conclusion if the question offers a hint eg “How far was public opinion in the USA the main reason for American defeat in the Vietnam War?” rather than “Why did America lose the Vietnam War?”
- Where essays are not stapled together pages should be numbered as candidates sometimes misplace the order when checking over their answer.
- Plans may be in the form of a diagram but plain English must be used – not text or pictures,(eg. No drawings of the layout of Stirling Bridge or Bannockburn)
- Borderline candidates starting the Higher course should be steered away from topics not in the Intermediate syllabus. If a candidate has dropped from Higher to Intermediate late on (after the work for the Extended Response has begun), teachers should indicate this on the flyleaf under teacher comments. This is particularly helpful if the Extended Response question is on content which is in the Higher course but not in one of the Intermediate contexts, and it may be possible to find some points to credit.

In the **External Examination** :

- Many candidates benefit from leaving the Short Essay to the end of the paper, giving themselves their best chance to score highly without the danger of failing to complete all three contexts.
- Candidates must know the content of the course so they can write five well developed points from recall for the “describe” questions.
- In “explain” questions candidates must write the source-based points in their own words as well as adding points from recall. The points are more likely to score well if each point is well-developed and in a separate sentence.
- In **source comparison** questions which ask how far sources agree/disagree candidates should make their judgement and back it up by matching discrete points of content from the sources. Where they are asked to “compare the views of” they are also able to gain marks by comparing the origin of the sources.
- In **source evaluation** questions, candidates will not gain marks by copying the rubric. When commenting on origin it is necessary to indicate the source’s value by saying such things as “a primary source shortly after the Munich Agreement / memoirs written after the Cuban Crisis/ at the height of the slave trade “ etc . Similarly comments should be made about authorship “ By Churchill, a leading appeaser whose view was in the minority/ by Krushchev, the Russian leader at the time of the crisis/ by a merchant who is defending the slave trade because he was likely to be involved in it.”