

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Modern Studies

Qualification area

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

Modern Studies: Intermediate 1 and 2

Statistical information: update

Intermediate 1

Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)	220
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Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)	347
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General comments re entry numbers

The number of entries in 2004 shows a marked increase over 2003. A significant proportion of the entries, in 2004, come from candidates presented at the end of S4, 28.5% of the total as against only 2.8% in 2003. In addition to the major increase in S4 presentations there has been a continuing increase in the numbers presented at the end of S5 and S6.

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)	1,344
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Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)	1,624
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General comments re entry numbers

The number of entries in 2004 shows an increase over 2003. 13.8% of the entries this year come from candidates presented at the end of S4, as against only 3.1% who were presented either at the end of S3 or S4 in 2003. In addition to the increase in S4 presentations there has been a continuing increase in the numbers presented at the end of S5 and S6.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards

A	14.7%
B	23.6%
C	23.3%
D	8.1%
No Award	30.3%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

There has been a slight fall in the percentage of candidates passing at each grade resulting in a decrease in the pass rate (A–C).

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards

A	18.8%
B	21.3%
C	24.1%
D	9.0%
No Award	26.8%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

There has been an increase in the percentage of candidates achieving A and B grades. The reduction in the number achieving C grade has also resulted in a slight decrease in the pass rate (A–C). This is in line with awards in 2001 and 2002.

Intermediate 1

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	14.7	14.7	51	40
B	23.6	38.3	82	33
C	23.3	61.6	81	27
D	8.1	69.7	28	
No award	30.3	100.0	105	

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Grade boundaries were reduced by 2 marks at all grades. This is a reflection of the greater demands placed on all candidates in this year's exam by a highly focussed LO1 question in Section A. It is hoped that grade boundaries will return closer to the a priori scores next year.

Intermediate 2

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	18.8	18.8	306	49
B	21.3	40.1	346	41
C	24.1	64.2	392	34
D	9	73.2	145	
No award	26.8	100.0	435	

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Following last year's reduction in the pass mark for a grade C, the grade boundary has been increased by one mark. Grade boundaries at B and A remained unchanged at the a priori score. It is hoped that grade boundaries will be returned to the a priori level for all grades next year.

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 candidate performance

Intermediate 1

General comments

Wide range of marks with some candidates scoring very highly and a few making little of the paper. Generally, there is a marked difference between the quality of answer produced by most candidates for LO1 type questions and LO2 type questions. In the case of LO1 questions knowledge is often limited, answers do not produce detailed descriptions or explanations and candidates often omit questions entirely. LO2 questions, on the other hand, are generally well done indicating that candidates have had plenty of practice in these types of questions and are skilled in answering them using the sources provided.

Those candidates who complete the paper and attempt all questions generally pass. Those who do not pass generally do so because of gaps in their knowledge in one or more areas of the course and in these cases even strong performance in LO2 questions is not enough to generate enough marks to pass.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

LO2 questions are generally well done with candidates producing full answers making good use of the sources provided.

LO1(a) questions requiring description are generally better done than LO1(b) questions which require explanation of reasons.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

LO1 questions often produce brief answers with no explanation or exemplification. In some cases candidates missed out LO1 questions entirely indicating a lack of knowledge of their chosen Study Themes. In some questions, which asked about specific aspects of the Study Theme, candidates often found considerable difficulty in answering.

Intermediate 2

General comments

In the main, candidates seem to have been presented at the correct level. A small number achieved very few marks and would have been better presented at a lower level, while a few candidates only may have been able to cope with Higher.

In Section A, most candidates attempted Study Theme 2. In Section B, all Study Themes were attempted by significant numbers. In Section C, South Africa remains the most popular choice although it seems to be declining in popularity. Both China and Brazil are popular topics. Europe is the least popular.

Overall, LO2 questions continue to be better done than LO1 questions. The knowledge and understanding candidates have is often limited leading to answers which lack detail in explanation or exemplification. Candidates often find it difficult to deal with the specific nature of some of the LO1 questions in the paper. Candidates often fail to address the question being asked. In some parts of the Social Issues section of the paper, answers can be vague and stereotyped, while in the International Issues section, knowledge is generally poorer than in the UK sections. The knowledge demonstrated by candidates is generally better in Section B (Social Issues).

LO1(b) questions which required candidates to give explanations seem more demanding than LO1(a) questions which require descriptions. Many candidates were unable to distinguish between the two types of questions and therefore did not answer this type of question in the way intended.

LO2 questions requiring candidates to give arguments for and against a point of view and to provide evidence of selective use of facts were generally better done than those requiring conclusions to be drawn. There has been some improvement in 'conclusions' type questions as centres become more familiar with the format of this type of question. In general, candidates could improve their answers by making greater use of the sources with more detail in their answers. In particular they should explain the relevance and significance of evidence being used, rather than merely expecting the evidence to speak for itself. The introduction of bullet points and the instruction to draw conclusions from within and between sources does seem to have improved responses to this type of question. More candidates were using the bullet points as a means to organise the evidence and draw higher level conclusions. It is important that centres train their candidates to use the bullet points to provide structure to their answer and encourage the candidates to attempt to synthesise by comparing information across the sources.

In the LO2 questions requiring evidence of selectivity in the use of facts, a growing number of candidates gave answers which both gave evidence to refute and support the view.

A number of candidates failed to complete the paper. This was not evenly spread across centres with some centres having a significantly higher number of candidates who failed to answer all questions while in other centres almost all candidates completed the paper. In most cases this was due to running out of time, however, other candidates displayed lack of knowledge with gaps throughout the paper. There was less evidence of rubric violations, with fewer candidates attempting more than one question from each section.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

LO2 questions are generally well done with candidates producing full answers making good use of the sources provided. Decision Making questions in the Social Issues section are generally well done.

Excellent knowledge was displayed in the Crime and the Law section.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

LO1(b) questions which require explanations tend to be less well done than LO1(a) questions which require descriptions.

In some questions, which asked about specific aspects of the Study Theme, many candidates found difficulty in answering.

Many candidates find it difficult to score full marks in 8 mark LO1 questions.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Time management remains a major problem for a significant number of candidates. Centres should brief candidates about the importance of time management and ensure that there is a balance between the time spent answering LO2 questions and LO1 questions. Candidates who fail to complete questions will be seriously disadvantaged compared to those who attempt all the required questions.

Centres should encourage candidates to read questions carefully and distinguish between LO1(a) questions which require description and LO1(b) questions where explanation is required. It should also be noted that the knowledge required in Intermediate questions may be quite specific. Answers which are vague and stereotyped will receive few marks. Historical answers in South Africa and to a lesser extent China are still found and should be discouraged. Candidates who show recent and contemporary knowledge will be credited highly.

There is much good performance in LO2 questions, however candidates should be encouraged to explain the significance of the information from the sources that is being used. Statistical evidence is often included in an answer with no explanation of its relevance or significance. Some candidates write the decision making activity in Section B, Social Issues, in the form of a report. This can be useful to help candidates organise the information; it should be noted, however, that candidates can waste a considerable amount of time by including sections in the report which are not required at Intermediate level eg arguments against the recommendation. Aspects of a report which would gain marks in a Higher DME do not necessarily gain marks at Intermediate. In conclusions-type questions, it is important that candidates use the bullet points to organise their answers and attempt to draw conclusions by synthesising information from across the sources as well as drawing conclusions and making comparisons from within the sources. In questions which require candidates to show selectivity in the use of facts, candidates should be encouraged to draw a conclusion to show what extent the view is being selective and give evidence that both supports and refutes the view.