

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Physical Education

Qualification area

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

X068 Higher Level Physical Education

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	3696

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	3970

General comments re entry numbers

The 2003 total represents an increase in entries of 274. It is likely that final numbers will be slightly higher but this was the total at the pass mark stage. During the year a substantially higher total was being predicted but there were many late changes to entry levels.

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

Physical Education Higher 2003

Grade	Band	Minimum Mark
A	1	153
A	2	126
B	3	119
B	4	113
C	5	106
C	6	100
Compensatory	7	93
No Award	8	87
No Award	9	0

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 relative imbalance between candidates' achievements in Performance and in Analysis and Investigation of Performance makes the setting of pass marks a difficult exercise for those involved. Candidates, who have a very high Performance mark, must also have demonstrated a reasonable level of competence in Analysis and Investigation of Performance if their overall performance is to match the grade descriptions of course awards at grades A, B and C. However, the pass mark cannot be set as high as to penalise candidates who have passed in Performance but who have, relative to the mean performance mark, a modest mark for this element. The recent increase in weighting for Performance from 40% to 50% has made this relative imbalance even more pronounced.

The Grade boundaries listed above are considered to fairly address the current circumstances and have been the same for the last 4 years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Although a high proportion of candidates performed well and an even spread of awards were achieved, there was again evidence this year of candidates being inappropriately presented for a Higher level course award. It appears that some candidates continue to be presented for Higher on the basis of high performance marks even though they have relatively modest abilities in the Analysis and Investigation of Performance.

Markers were again asked to refer to the Principal Assessor instances where candidates achieved only a very low mark in either their Investigation Report or their Analysis examination. A substantial number were referred from each of the assessments. This situation has implications for the moderation of unit assessment and the centre information has again been passed to the relevant SQA staff.

The number of centres working in the area of Performance Appreciation does not seem to be increasing and only a very small number of candidates attempted questions from this area.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Investigation of Performance

- ◆ Most candidates had chosen a relevant and appropriate aspect of performance as the focus of their Investigation.
- ◆ The structure and organisation of reports was also mainly sound. Many candidates scored well in Outcome 1 of the mark scheme.
- ◆ Many candidates had gathered relevant and significant data about their chosen topic. For some though a lack of depth and detail in data was a limiting factor in that it allowed for only a modest level of interpretation and discussion of issues arising.
- ◆ From many candidates the quality of the work was good or excellent. In these cases the ability to interpret primary and secondary data accurately and discuss issues arising in a sophisticated way was clearly demonstrated.

Analysis of Performance

- ◆ The 3 questions available in each section seemed to equally attract a proportion of the candidates.
- ◆ Although in general the quality of candidate response was modest there were a significant number of answers that were good or excellent. Markers reports suggest the number of strong responses has increased.
- ◆ There was a general pattern of candidates being relatively successful at answering the parts of questions that assessed Competency 1 in describing and explaining performance and then having difficulty with Competencies 2 and 3 where the demonstration of a level of critical thinking was required.
- ◆ Knowledge of data gathering methods and descriptions of what had been learned about the strengths and weaknesses of performances was generally good in all areas of Analysis.
- ◆ Although a question from the Performance Appreciation section was not attempted by many candidates, those who did answer in this area mainly did well.
- ◆ When describing the specific fitness demands of activities many candidates were able to draw on knowledge of physical, skill related and mental aspects of fitness.
- ◆ Depth and detail of knowledge about methods of practice and the principles of effective practice was generally good.
- ◆ For many candidates Structures, Strategies and Composition was their strongest section. Descriptions of chosen Structures, Strategies and Composition were generally sound or detailed and most were able to outline advantages, weaknesses and variations of their chosen item.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Investigation of Performance

- ◆ The ability to interpret and discuss significant performance issues arising from the data gathered and the sources reviewed, remains the most common weakness. It is in this section that the candidate explains the significance of their key findings and how they have helped inform the design of their training programme and the development of the central focus of the inquiry.
- ◆ Weaknesses in this area often led to a situation where the conclusions drawn on completion of the investigation were based on what the candidate would have wished rather than what could validly be concluded from the interpretation and discussion of the Primary and Secondary sources reviewed.
- ◆ Another weakness that markers frequently commented on was that the candidate's work tended to lose its initial performance focus. For example some investigations on aspects of Preparation of the Body and Skills and Technique went into great detail explaining the training programmes followed for the chosen features of performance, but only gave limited consideration to the potential effects of the proposed training and development for their whole performance.
- ◆ Some centres are using a standardised approach to completing the Investigation of Performance Report. In this model candidates use a standard framework and insert information relevant to their own topic in each section. Some centres have gone a stage further and require all candidates to complete the investigation in the same activity and topic. Markers feel that although these strategies may help less able students to manage the stages of an investigation, they actually constrain more able candidates and limit their potential to score high marks.
- ◆ Many of the investigations were over the 1500 word limit and it is clear that many candidates have difficulty in completing the task even within the permitted tolerance of 2000 words. This was often due to poor editing and a failure to use appendices correctly. The exam team would support SQA's proposal to introduce a scale of penalties for excessive wordage.

Analysis of Performance

- ◆ Many candidates are able to give satisfactory descriptions and explanations of analysis methods and processes and what they had been able to find out about their own performances.
- ◆ Many candidates had difficulty when asked to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant key concepts. This was particularly the case when they were asked to show how they would apply relevant concepts and knowledge to the development of their own performance.
- ◆ This resulted in a pattern where the initial section of a question could be answered but thereafter the candidate could not continue to develop their answer from their initial description and explanation.
- ◆ There appears to be an increase in instances where candidates are attempting to apply pre-planned answer to Analysis of Performance questions. When attempting this approach candidates frequently do not relate their response closely enough to the key words of the question and score low marks.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Investigation of Performance

- ◆ Candidates' reports are generally strong when describing and explaining the series of steps followed during the Investigation process. Many candidates gain good marks for identifying and justifying an appropriate topic, gathering some relevant data, and then outlining a course of action.
- ◆ The quality of the data gathered by the candidate in relation to the specific aspect of performance being investigated is crucial. Unless it has a level of depth, detail and significance, students find it difficult to draw interpretations that will progress the enquiry and inform the needs of a training programme. This is a limiting factor for many candidates at present.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that their candidate's work retains a performance and activity focus at all times. Some candidates get so involved in particular conditioning or technique development programmes that they forget that they must explain how this work is benefiting their whole performance in the chosen activity.
- ◆ The discussion of emerging issues gives the student the opportunity to make reference to the significance of the primary data gathered and the relevance of secondary sources reviewed. Being able to show clarity of thought and a level of critical thinking in this discussion is a key indicator of Higher level work. At present the work of many candidates tends to focus too much on descriptions of stages of the investigation and contain only a limited amount of substantive discussion. This is a limiting factor for many candidates at present.
- ◆ When evaluating the effectiveness of the Investigation process candidates should take care to explain the specific effects it has had on their Performance. Conclusions drawn should be based on what can validly be claimed from an evaluation of the work undertaken rather than on what the candidate would have wished.

Analysis of Performance

- ◆ Candidates are generally strong when answering the parts of questions that draw mainly on their knowledge of the analysis processes taught and that ask them to describe and explain what they have been able to find out about their performance. Specifically:
 - the methods used during class for collecting information
 - the detail and significance of the data gathered
 - the detail and effectiveness of a development programme undertaken
- ◆ Candidates tend to have difficulty when they are asked to show detailed knowledge and understanding of key concepts. This is particularly the case when they are asked to show how they could apply relevant concepts and knowledge to the development of their performance. They need to be able to critically discuss relevant concepts and suggest courses of action for the development of their performance. This is a limiting factor for many students at present.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to take time to read, and to try to understand fully, all that is being asked in examination questions.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to relate their responses closely to what is asked in the question. Frequently candidates write down everything they know about a particular area, some of which is not relevant to the question asked. Although candidates often display knowledge they fail to apply their knowledge to the key points of the question.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates are able to offer the level of depth and breadth of knowledge of key concepts that is appropriate to Higher level. The work of some candidates presented is well below that of the standards illustrated in National Exemplification of Higher level answers.