

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Politics

Qualification area

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

Politics, Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	27
Pre appeal	

Number of entries in 2003	56
Pre appeal	

General comments re entry numbers

Once again a substantial percentage rise in entries from 2002 which was also saw a rise from 6 (2001) to 27. Numbers still relatively small but growing. The number of centres is also rising - now 11 centres; 5 colleges and 6 schools.

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

C = 45/90; B = 54/90; A = 63/90

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

Grade boundaries are a priori as per previous years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Generally there was a good spread of responses across the two papers at Higher. There was some slight confusion because we did not list the political ideas / principles etc in particular questions. No candidates were disadvantaged in the marking process because of this, but it is important at this level that the candidates are aware of the political ideas/principles and are able to correctly identify what is being looked for in such questions.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

A good number of candidates did very well in the theory questions in particular – this is gratifying to see, since this is what makes the Politics paper very different from other similar subjects like Modern Studies.

Several candidates did very well across all three sections of the paper – the standard of their essays was excellent. Well structured essays with good introductions, evidence to support points well made and most importantly good conclusions based on the points raised.

Overall performance in Paper 1 was better than previous years. FE College candidates' performance in skill-based questions was slightly improved over past years.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Difficulty may not be the right word here but it is clear that some candidates need to understand that they should be providing more explanation/information for a 15 mark question in Paper 1 than a 7 mark question. A small number of candidates wrote more or less the same for both.

Several candidates did have difficulty in distinguishing between concepts/ideas/principles – Teachers/Lecturers should refer to the Subject Guide and ensure such differences are covered during their teaching.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Several candidates did have difficulty in distinguishing between concepts/ideas/principles – Teachers/Lecturers should refer to the Subject Guide and ensure such differences are covered during their teaching.

It is important that candidates appreciate that if there are 15 marks for a section it is anticipated they will write more than they do for a 7 mark question. A minority of candidates wrote about the same for each.

Essay techniques are still lacking in some candidates eg not referring to the words in the question when answering it; no conclusions drawn or a conclusion not based on the points raised in the answer; implicit rather than explicit references – remind candidates that it is up to them to be very explicit about what they are writing and not for the examiner to guess or read between the lines.