Principal Assessor Report 2007

Assessment Panel:	**English and Communication**

Qualification area

Subject(s) and Level(s) Included in this report	**English Intermediate 1**

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The standard of the examination was maintained, and the performance was similar to that of recent years. However, some candidates were presented inappropriately at this level.

Close Reading
The passage was well received by Markers, and by candidates who approached the paper with commitment. Most candidates offered responses to all questions, but a few were unable to complete the paper.
Candidates did best in Understanding questions. Analysis questions often remain challenging for many at this level.
The practice of highlighting key aspects of the questions in bold continued to assist candidates.
The passage contained some Scots words/expressions. These did not appear to form a barrier to candidates' understanding. When given the opportunity (Q 18), many candidates offered the opinion that the Scots words added to their enjoyment of the piece.

Critical Essay
The range of questions offered was sufficient to allow candidates to answer on the texts they had studied. The accessibility of the questions was demonstrated in the increased relevance of the responses. The choice of texts was similar to recent years: most candidates wrote on Prose (novels such as 'Of Mice and Men', 'Stone Cold'; or, more frequently, Scottish short stories). A similar number of candidates chose Poetry (frequently Duffy, Morgan, MacCaig). Some candidates chose the Drama section (often 'Educating Rita', 'Macbeth', or something by Miller). Few opted for Film and TV Drama. Only a handful of candidates chose from the Language section.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Close Reading
Candidates answered most strongly in the area of Understanding.
Candidates showed some ability to use their own words when required (Q5, Q7), and were successful in retrieving an expression from the passage (Q2).
Some success was evident in attempts to analyse selected word choice (Q9, Q13).
Many candidates were able to identify contrast in word choice (Q16).

Critical Essay
Overall, candidates wrote with better technical accuracy than in previous years. Most candidates attempted to develop their essays as fully as possible. There was improved length and accuracy this year. Most candidates were able to write appropriately and accurately.
A personal response/reaction to texts was evident in most responses.
Although not chosen by many candidates, answers to the Film and TV section were better: candidates discussed the techniques of Film and TV effectively.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Close Reading
Candidates found it difficult to offer reasonably extended explanations/comments where required (in Understanding, Analysis, Evaluation). Explanations offered were often too brief or imprecise.
Question 14 proved to be too demanding for most candidates at this level (many candidates not achieving even one mark out of three). Most candidates were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the aspect of structure identified.
Candidates did not do well in evaluating the effectiveness of the conclusion to the passage.
A few candidates were unable to complete the paper in the time allocated.

Critical Essay

Analysis was not a strong feature in some candidates' responses.
There was evidence that some candidates were relying on 'learned essays'. This affected the relevance of some responses.
A number of candidates applied their knowledge of texts to questions from an inappropriate Section: relevance was again affected.
Candidates found Q2 for the Drama Section to be demanding. Responses to this question did not deal fully with the ending.
Some candidates did not indicate the number of question selected.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Close Reading
Candidates should be encouraged to read widely in preparation for this paper. (In particular, non-fiction).
While concise answers are to be welcomed in Close Reading, candidates should attempt to provide more in the way of comment/explanation where required.
Centres should ensure that candidates are presented at the appropriate level, in terms of NQ courses.
Candidates should practise time management.

Critical Essay
Candidates should be reminded of the importance of relevance. Relevance has to be sustained throughout the response.
Candidates should be familiar with the different Sections contained in the paper, in order to make an appropriate selection of question.
There should be a commitment to Analysis in all responses.
The choice of question should be indicated clearly at the beginning of the response.
The learning of full essays should be avoided as relevance and personal engagement are affected.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2006	5,785

Number of resulted entries in 2007	6,808

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100	-	-	-	-
A	10.1	10.1	690	66
B	22.5	32.6	1,529	55
C	29.5	62.1	2,011	45
D	12.0	74.2	820	40
No award	25.8	100.0	1,758	-

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 arrangements evolve and change.