

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Art and Design

Qualification area:

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

Art and Design – Higher Level

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	7240
Pre appeal	6889

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	6817

General comments re entry numbers

Entry numbers were down by 72 candidates in 2003 at pass mark stage. This can be accounted for by the increase in numbers at Intermediate 2 where many last year were wrongly entered at Higher.

This is not a significant decrease and it appears the subject is retaining its appeal to a wide range of candidate ability across the levels.

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

Grade boundaries out of a total of 330 marks were:

C – 163 marks, representing 35.7% of candidates

B – 195 marks, representing 29.2% of candidates

A – 227 marks, representing 14.6% of candidates

20.4% of candidates received no award.

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 pass mark was reduced by two marks this year in response to a more challenging written paper in which one question in particular (tackled by a large percentage of cohort) was misinterpreted visually leading to a diminution of marks.

In general terms, however, performance overall was noticeably down on last year with all components seeing a reduction in the mean mark achieved and very few exceptional performances at the top end.

In setting an appropriate pass mark and A cut-off score an accommodation had to be found to reconcile these two significant but contrary forces identified in the marking.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate performance was down in all components this year. However, this was not directly attributable to the reduction from five to three sheet maximum folios. Markers found the marking more straight forward with the 3 sheets and felt it focussed the creative process more clearly. Excess 'padding' was not evident this year and made the assessment criteria more readily applicable.

Apart from some outstanding performances each component had consistent weaknesses, summed up as follows:

- Expressive – the development stage generally and many not drawing from firsthand sources
- Design – poor design briefs, lacking in focus and many weak investigation and research sheets
- Art and Design Studies – Part (b) reduced to no more than two critical analyses – little historical understanding, though all questions require it
- Practical Assignment – poor development and "sketchbook" skills.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed best in the final outcome of the Expressive Activity. It seems that centres put a greater emphasis on this aspect of the folio in recognition of its superior weighting in the external assessment.

Still life, portraiture and figure composition mainly featured in good folios.

In Design Activity the process was seemingly well understood by most candidates and very few marks were lost through deduction for errors of process and presentation. There was much to admire in the many 3D design folios, with product jewellery and fashion design showing up very well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

As always, candidates had difficulty with the Practical Assignment in both major activities, though the majority were in the Expressive component. The weakness here has its roots in the other problem area – the development sheet. Strong developmental skills would shine through in the Practical Assignment but it seems the development process is not understood by candidates and not well taught by many centres. Perhaps teachers provide too much support in the folio development and expect too little from the candidate. Left to their own devices in the 3 hour examination many candidates flounder through lack of understanding and lack of preparation. In many cases it is very often the weakest stage of the process and this is unfortunate because it should be the creative force which underpins the Practical Assignment.

There is often a large discrepancy in standards between the candidate's folio and their practical assignment. Are they over supported in classwork or under prepared for the examination?

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

The perennial problem of over-optimistic centre estimates was again in evidence. It is important that centres assess their candidates on all components out of the total marks allocated to each in the external assessment process. It seems that many centres adopt an "impressionistic" approach to assessing their candidates, based on specific strengths in one or two components of the course. This is at odds with the more "mechanistic" approach adopted by the central marking teams where all components are carefully marked against the assessment criteria.

The best advice to centres is to mark each component arithmetically (preferably involving all members of staff) then aggregate the score for each candidate – including a score for the Practical Assignment. This total should then be checked against the pass mark and cut-off scores from the past year's examination (available on the SQA website) giving it a C, B or A grading accordingly.

The Design process is better understood now but there is a pressing need for staff development in:

- the construction of design briefs
- the elements of good investigation and research. NB: Annotation here can be very helpful to markers
- skills in the selection and manipulation of appropriate materials for 3D prototypes. Some 3D solutions were little short of pathetic in the light of promising process sheets which preceded them.

In Expressive Activity the final outcome is generally well done, but too many centres expose the shortcomings of their weaker candidates by encouraging/allowing them to work in very demanding areas such as portraiture or figure composition. The big weakness in Expressive Activity, however, is the development, where skills are seemingly not adequately imparted to many candidates. Thereby the effort put into the final outcome is undone in terms of folio marks. Too many candidates still do not draw from first hand sources and this severely compromises the potential for development work.

In both practical folios the development should consist of two distinct ideas, one of which is taken through a process of refinement towards the solution/outcome. In this regard it is not acceptable for the second idea to be more than eg a rearrangement of objects in still-life. There must be two different potential directions shown on the development sheet, one of which is taken further than the other. It would be entirely appropriate for the other idea to be similarly refined in the practical assignment.

The use of computers in the folio should be restricted to where it is most appropriate. Presentations which are completely dominated by computer-generated imagery often obscure the candidate's true ability and make assessment very difficult.

The Practical Assignment must be adequately prepared for and the candidate must practise the necessary skills. The Assignment must relate to the original design brief or expressive theme, showing ability to develop further, refine it or re-direct it. This is a natural element in the creative process and candidates need to understand this. A number of centres had used computers in the Practical Assignment. This is not permitted in the examination and results in a deduction of marks.

In Art and Design Studies the main weakness is the trend, in part (b), towards the rehearsed answer using only two artists or designers in little more than separate critical analysis of a piece of work from each.

In part (a) many candidates are still unable to effectively transfer their critical skills to new/unfamiliar imagery or design artefacts.

In Design Studies it is often design issues that are asked about, not merely the form or aesthetics of the piece.

Excessive layering of work in practical folios is counter-productive since it inhibits the marking process. The reduction from 5 to 3 sheet folios requires a rigorous selection of work which directly responds to the assessment requirements.

It is clear that still too many Intermediate 2 (and occasionally Intermediate 1) candidates are being presented for Higher.