

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Computing

Qualification area:

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

Computing Studies — Intermediate 1

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	770
Pre appeal	

Number of entries in 2003	930
Pre appeal	

General comments re entry numbers

Some schools have opted to change from Standard Grade to Intermediate 1 & 2 with all pupils sitting the Intermediate 1 exam at the end of third year. This could be the reason why the numbers sitting Intermediate 1 has increased this year.

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

C pass — 54%
B pass — 64%
A Pass — 75%

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

Paper was thought to be straight-forward and pass marks were set at the same levels as two years ago.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The majority of students are attempting all the questions with good responses to the questions. There is still a need for the students to use more technical language in their responses.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The computer Applications questions were answered well as were the Internet and Software Development sections of the paper. Students seem to have a firm grasp of the usage of applications and the Internet, which presumably comes from the experience of using the applications.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Students still have difficulty in answering computer systems questions with the appropriate technical language. Many of the more technical aspects of the course such as definition of an operating system; distinction between low and high level languages; data representation of graphics, etc were not well answered. Students need to take time to ensure that these concepts are clearly understood and that they can answer questions on these areas clearly and with the correct technical vocabulary.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

More time should be given to the Computer Systems part of the course with emphasis on students answering with appropriate technical vocabulary.