Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:	**Computing**

Qualification area

Subject(s) and Level(s) Included in this report	**Computing Studies Standard Grade Foundation General and Credit**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	22177
Pre appeal	

Number of entries in 2003	21133
Pre appeal	

General comments re entry numbers

Slight fall from last years - which was at an all time maximum. This may have resulted from a number of schools switching to Intermediate courses, but still constitutes a very healthy uptake.

Grade boundaries at Credit, General and Foundation for each subject area included in the report

Knowledge and Understanding
Credit 27, 20
General 19, 14
Foundation 16, 11

Problem Solving
Credit 25, 18
General 25, 17
Foundation 25, 16

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The cut-off grades where set to differentiate candidate performance, maintain standards year on year and remove any anomalies which may occur. Candidates found the Credit paper quite accessible particularly in KU. Despite adjustment to the cut-off level , percentage achievement showed this to be the best cohort to date. General proved again to be difficult for many. The cut-off was lower than desired in KU.
It is possible that many teachers are pushing the more able pupils toward the Credit style of question and hence some candidates are less prepared for the General paper, hence performing relatively less efficiently at General level.
Adjustment at Foundation level resulted from pupils performing less well in KU. This is perhaps a problem inherent in the cohort finding the retention of facts a difficulty.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

At Credit level the candidates performed well in both strands. The candidates where generally well prepared. In particular the KU results where high. This proved to be the best cohort to date with a greater percentage achieving Credit than in any previous year.
The General paper proved difficult for some candidates particularly in KU. This paper is aimed at the central ability range but is sat by most candidates doing Standard Grade; consequently, there is naturally a wide range of responses

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Credit
As in previous years General Purpose Packages Questions where well attempted.
Question 1 was based around Word Processing, Q2 about Databases and Question 4 covering Spreadsheets.
The areas of Systems which have been examined before. 3eii "What is a footer" ,and 3f referring to CD-ROMS and re-writeable optical disks were well answered.

Question 4a(ii) Was extremely well answered with many candidates giving excellent explanations of the use of the relatively difficult concepts of absolute and relative referencing.

Virtual reality seemed to be better understood than in previous years Question 5a. It was felt that the concepts of robot safety 5d and increased efficiency as a result of automation Question 5f had been well covered as candidates offered an extremely wide range of perfectly acceptable answers.

General
Again the first three questions dealing with GPP where the one's best attempted. Regarding Databases Question 3, it was noted that more candidates are now naming fields in their answers.
It was encouraging to see Question 5 also being well answered as General Question on the implication of computerisation have caused difficulties previously.

Foundation
As with the other two levels, GPP seems to shine. Question 6e The parts of a robot proved easy to most candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Credit
Q1 Too many candidates omitted the notion of, (at the same time), hence dropping valuable marks.
A surprisingly large number stated the wrong Act in 1ci as outlawing hacking.
3di Several candidates still refer to the "online" in online help as being something to do with the internet.
5dii Many found the usage of interpreters and compilers difficult.
A surprisingly large number of candidates where unable to identify a printer driver Question 3eiii

General
In Question 2f many where not selecting before changing attributes, this simple omission lost many able candidates a mark. Similarly the position of the new row was often omitted in 2e.
Candidates found it difficult to give a full description of Systems Analysts, Computer Operators, and Data Preparation Operator in Question 4f, there was a tendency just to reiterate these titles.

Few identified a Turn around Document Question 4dii
Despite the question being asked several times before many did not know the functions of an Operating System Question 6.

A surprising number of candidates mixed input and output in 6eii e.g. microphone for speakers.
6f Proved tricky, few suggested that handwriting recognition would convert the signature to text.
Many candidates suggested incorrectly that CDROMs can be written to Question 7d.

Foundation
Very few candidates identified word wrap Question 1f
Question 2c. Too many pupils still tick price as part of a bar code.
Question 4a. Many candidates mixed up backing storage and input and output devices.
Question 4bii. showed that many candidates are unsure about the terms Software and Operating System.
The term WIMP was unknown by many candidates in Question 5d; further , some candidates are mixing up the two possible definitions.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

The good results at Credit level continue to show that teachers are preparing candidates well for this examination. The stability of the course over a number of years has led to improved pupil performance, solid teacher prediction and maintained a high take up by candidates despite other courses now on offer.

Candidates seem increasingly to be presented at the correct level with fewer performing very poorly.
There is a feeling that fewer candidates are failing at Foundation Level, this may result from the increased use of scribes and special needs facilities.

In general GPPs are well taught, this is possibly as a result of them lending themselves to classroom tuition. The subjects of Automated Systems, Commercial Data Processing and the more theoretical aspects of Systems are still the challenges.

I am sure that most teachers are indeed well aware of the problem areas and already conveying the following statements, but at the risk of repletion, the these are still good pieces of practical advice that would have certainly increased the marks on several papers this year.

1 Candidates should answer all questions; particularly at Foundation level a guess is better than a blank. We never mark negatively.
2 If there is any fear of the candidates work not being read use alternatives.
3 Remind candidates to read over their work.
4 Where candidates are describing a practical task which involves selection before carrying out an action , make sure to state select.
5 Insert the term at “the same time” when describing Multi Access and Multi Tasking/Processing.
6 Always name the fields you are working with when referring to a database.