

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Computing

Qualification area:

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

Computing — Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	2,038
Pre appeal	

Number of entries in 2003	1,896
Pre appeal	

General comments re entry numbers

Slightly down on last years numbers but still more than 2001.

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

C pass — 50%
B pass — 59%
A Pass — 69%

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 pre-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

Standardised 'a priori' boundary set at 'C'; but slightly lower boundaries used at 'B' and 'A' to reflect appropriate level of difficulty.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The majority of students are attempting most of the questions reasonably well but still lack the technical vocabulary that would help them to gain full marks in the questions. Most candidates have shown that their problem solving skills are good, although a thorough reading of the question would have helped some candidates give the answer required. Very few candidates seemed to have been presented at an inappropriate level.

Last year there were many candidates who seemed to have been presented at the wrong level and consequently there were a large number achieving very low marks. This year this has not been a problem and the overall marks were similar to those achieved two years ago.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The computer Systems questions were answered well especially the problem solving. Areas such as the difference between serial and random access, data representation of text and the difference between ROM and RAM were answered well by most candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

The technical language in Software Development was very poorly understood. Concepts such as features of a Software Development Language; Iteration; differences between conditional and unconditional loops, etc were not answered well by the majority of students. They did show that they could code but could not formalise structures that they had obviously used in practice.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

More time should be given to the formalisation of the structures of the software Development Language.