

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Steering Group for Contemporary Social Studies

Qualification area

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

Contemporary Social Studies, Standard Grade

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002 (final)	292
Pre appeal	267

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	212

General comments re entry numbers

Following last year's slight increase, the shrinkage in presentations continues at a similar level to the fall in previous years (20% drop between 2002 and 2003). The probable factors involved have been outlined in previous years. An assumed increase in presentations at Access level from the discrete Social Subjects may also be an additional factor contributing to the trend, even though presentation at Access level in CSS is also possible. Centres should be aware of this.

Grade boundaries

Knowledge and Understanding

Credit	1:	20	2:	14
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General	3:	26	4:	19
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Foundation	5:	21	6:	15
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Evaluating

Credit	1:	21	2:	14
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General	3:	25	4:	17
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Foundation	5:	24	6:	17
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Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Cut-offs were in line with the average for recent years and close to teachers' estimates. In view of the attempts made to make the paper more accessible, particularly at Foundation level, it was disappointing that we were not able to move closer to the *a priori* cut-offs.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

As in previous years, the presentation seemed to be composed of mainly Foundation level candidates, with few mainstream General level candidates in evidence. As last year, however, most made an honest attempt at General, even if they were unable to raise the level of response to that demanded by the higher level of paper. It may be worthwhile highlighting to centres that a Credit paper does exist and that presentations are made at this level. (This year, as last year, there were two candidates, both appropriately presented). Centres may wish to see past papers, before deciding to present at this level, in view of the difference in the style of the paper from the other two.

As indicated above, the examining team continues to try to find ways of making the Foundation paper more accessible. The use of cloze passages in 'summarising' questions and the inclusion of multiple-choice questions will continue at Foundation level. The overall subject difficulty rating has eased in recent years, but the Knowledge and Understanding element continues to be significantly negative (-0.64). Whilst the emphasis remains on 'Knowledge', there is a limited degree of progress that might be expected to be made here, as the typical Foundation candidate does not 'learn things up'. There is no doubt, however, that effective teaching can narrow the gap and some good responses were found from candidates who had been given summary sheets as part of their classroom revision.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

In the Foundation paper, the following questions elicited generally good responses:

- Q3 — Hilltop Quarry
- Q5(a) — Growth of the electronics industry
- Q6 — Categories of employment
- Q7 — Skillseekers
- Q8(a) — Technology in the home
- Q9(a) — Migration to Scotland
- Q11 — Religion in Scotland

In the General paper, the following questions elicited generally good responses :-

- Q1 — Renewable energy
- Q3 — Recycling
- Q4 — Tourism in Scotland

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Foundation paper

- Q4(b) — Pesticides: many candidates ignored the bold type in the question and answered on disadvantages to the *consumer*.
- Q5(b) — The film industry as a growth industry: many candidates found it difficult to find the appropriate answers in the source. It was accepted that there were unanticipated problems attached to the question and the marking instructions were eased.

- Q6 — Some candidates used all three of the characters from the source in their answer. This was not the intention of the setters, but it was accepted that this could have been a reasonable interpretation of the instructions. The marking instructions were amended to take account of this.
- Q9(b) — Migration to Scotland: knowledge was simply lacking. The marking instructions were amended to allow the pairing of 'religious persecution' with 'Ireland'.
- Q10 — Multiculturalism: many candidates had no idea what this implied and many made reference to the prices quoted in the menu shown in the source. The examiners are still trying to work this one out.
- Q12(b) — The impact of the EU: knowledge was simply lacking.

General paper

- Q2(b) — The Public Enquiry: a few very good answers were greatly outnumbered by those which showed no Knowledge or Understanding about this regularly-asked question.
- Q5 — Trade unions and incentive schemes: this is another regular area of weakness. Both these topics belong to an amended area in the conditions and arrangements. Presenting centres should perhaps check that their courses have taken account of the amendments.
- Q9 — The Legal System: weaknesses in the answers to this question stemmed from a failure to make explicit the *differences* being asked for. This is similar to the shortcomings highlighted last year in the context of 'change'. The way to deal with questions such as these need to be made explicit to candidates during exam practice.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

The areas of strength and weakness remain the same as in recent years, with only ‘incentive schemes’ and ‘multicultural society’ showing up this year as new problem areas. There is no doubt that the whole ‘culture’ concept is bound to be difficult to impart at Foundation level, but it is a fundamental concept of the course. Likewise, there is no doubt that the concept of revision remains an elusive idea for many candidates. Experience indicates that this problem is best addressed when schools leave sufficient time for revision that is directed at exam-format questions, backed up with topic check lists.

The course content areas that provide regular difficulties are the Public Enquiry, Trade Unions, and the impact of the European Union. The responsibilities of the different levels of Scottish Government is often answered on a rather hit or miss basis. Although the Environment section is usually relatively well answered, many candidates are surprisingly unknowing when it comes to nuclear power (which still remains a very live issue in the energy debate) and organic farming, which has to be assumed to be covered under ‘Modern farming and the issue of pesticides’.

Schools which operate a rotation of responsibility for CSS between the Social Subjects should ensure that all those involved are aware of amendments to the Conditions and Arrangements and that all involved are privy to the various papers of advice and best practice that SQA issues from time to time. Anyone coming new to the subject would be well advised to access these. (The investigation log, issued this year, is a particularly useful example of best practice — it can be found on the subject page for CSS on the SQA website.)

The comments made last year on ‘describing’ a graph or changes shown on maps or sketches still hold good. It has to be remembered that this is a skill that has to be taught and that, just because the information is in front of the candidate, it cannot be assumed that the candidate will find it easy to garner all the available marks. Likewise, ‘summarising’ is not the same as ‘describing’. It is a higher order skill which has to be explicitly taught to the candidate. Even at Foundation level, it demands some synthesis of the information presented. At Foundation level, this is appropriately demanded in the form of a cloze passage, but, at General Level, candidates should make an attempt to go beyond simple description. For example, in this year’s General Paper, Question 8, candidates were asked to ‘summarise the changes’ that had taken place in the way in which people travel to work. An answer which comments on the increased use of private transport and the drop in the use of public transport has satisfactorily taken the answer beyond description and properly into the realms of ‘summary’.

Candidates should be coached to pay attention to the emboldened words in questions. This is done for the guidance of candidates and is designed to draw candidates’ attention to key parts of the question, eg Foundation Q4(b) **‘to the environment’** should have prevented, (but did not), answers on the disadvantages **to the consumer**. As ever, the instructions, ‘From the source’ and ‘From your own knowledge’ must be strictly adhered to.