

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

**Social Sciences**

**Qualification area**

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

**Economics Advanced Higher**

### **Statistical information: update**

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	66
<b>Pre appeal</b>	66

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	62
<b>Pre appeal</b>	62

### **General comments re entry numbers**

No obvious trend given relatively small subject entry
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## **Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report**

50, 59, 68 and 83 for a top A award
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### **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**

2003 examination slightly more difficult than previous two years as evidenced by the performance of the candidates, especially the more able. Grade boundaries therefore set below standardised 'a priori' for Upper A, A and B Grade Boundaries.
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## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

A significant increase in the number of candidates receiving a C band and rather fewer attaining a B band, but no change in the number of no awards. Might be caused by a number of new centres entering small numbers of students (one or two only) in which teaching arrangements were limited or by candidates easing off because of the receipt of unconditional offers from universities.

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Dissertations generally of a high standard, but the best candidates would benefit from a higher word limit – at present range is from a minimum of 2000 to a maximum of 3000. Many excellent answers in section B of the written paper, which consists of essay type questions (but see below).

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Many answers to Section A of the written paper were disappointing. Some candidates unaware of the nature of the canons of taxation and some of the definitions offered in question 1 were unsatisfactory. Candidates appeared to find the topic covered challenging although environmental economic issues and Government efforts to deal with them were discussed widely in the period before the examination.

In Section B the following were noted amongst a significant minority of candidates:-

- Inability to distinguish between a Budget deficit and a balance of payments deficit! (Question 1)
- Poor diagrams in question 6, which covered a topic central to the internal assessment units of the course; many were inaccurate and others poorly labelled.
- Weak understanding of economic efficiency and the role of the Competition Commission (also question 6)
- Few candidates attempted a specifically Scottish based question on the fishing industry (question 5)

## **Recommendations**

### **Feedback to centres**

Candidates are reminded that the AH course presupposes that what has been learnt at Standard grade and Higher may still be tested in some contexts in the examination.

Including relevant and accurate diagrams will enhance many answers, especially when this is recommended in a question.

Up to date knowledge and information is expected, for example some candidates were still referring to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, although this was superseded in 1999 by the Competition Commission.