

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

English and Communication

Qualification area:

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

**English
Intermediate 1
Intermediate 2**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	Intermediate 1
Pre appeal	4,432

Number of entries in 2003	Intermediate 1
Pre appeal	4,514

Number of entries in 2002	Intermediate 2
Pre appeal	13,605

Number of entries in 2003	Intermediate 2
Pre appeal	13,750

General comments re entry numbers

The numbers presented for both Intermediate 1 and 2 have increased only marginally.

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

Intermediate 1

Grade	Minimum Mark
A	70%
B	60%
C	50%

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

Grade boundaries were maintained at *a priori* levels.

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

Intermediate 2

Grade	Minimum Mark
A	70%
B	58%
C	46%

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The revised structure of the external assessment was recognised as being more demanding for many candidates. In recognition of this and some more difficult questions in the Close Reading paper, allowance was made in setting the pass mark.

Comments on candidate performance

Intermediate 1

Close Reading

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Engagement with the text (despite occasional failure to understand Bryson's wry humour and lack of success at the end)
- ◆ Answering of 'Understanding' questions
- ◆ 'Analysis' questions which required reference only (especially Qs 3, 8 and 10)
- ◆ Completion of scripts (few left gaps or failed to finish)

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ 'Analysis' questions requiring explanation and 'Evaluation' questions in general
 - Q4(a) - lack of conciseness in quotation
difficulty in explaining **how** 'power' was conveyed by word choice
 - Q4(b) - few able to do more than identify technique of 'listing'
notion of perspective proved too difficult
 - Q7 - 'technique' not successfully identified
 - Q11 - 'humour' understood but comment on effectiveness proved too difficult
 - Q13 - few candidates responded in terms of the whole passage and tended to refer only to the final paragraph
- also difficulty in explaining effectiveness
- ◆ Q9, an 'Understanding' question, proved difficult as candidates failed to locate the earlier context (line 35) to assist in answering.
- ◆ There was a tendency to write overlong answers which lacked focus and often reiterated much of the question.

Critical Essay

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Most candidates were aware of the requirements of the critical essay.
- ◆ Most candidates seemed well prepared on suitable texts at this level.
- ◆ Personal engagement with texts was a notably strong feature.
- ◆ Technical accuracy was felt, on balance, to be acceptable, given examination conditions.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ Failure in many cases to give relevant answers to questions which markers felt were clear and gave candidates ample opportunity to respond
- ◆ Room for improvement in technical accuracy of expression
- ◆ Failure to identify which question was being addressed

Intermediate 2

Close Reading

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Engagement with the text (despite its being relatively sophisticated and not, perhaps, of universal interest)
- ◆ Answering of 'Understanding' questions
- ◆ 'Analysis' questions requiring reference/quotation only (especially Qs 3, 4, 6 and 8)
- ◆ Completion of scripts

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ 'Analysis' questions requiring explanation/comment, and 'Evaluation' questions in general
 - Q5 - difficulty in describing 'effect'
 - Q6(b) - many could describe the 'list' aspect of structure, but very few could comment on other aspects.
 - Q7 - very few attempted to deal with sentence structure (imagery was better handled).
 - Q9/10 - comments on effectiveness seemed beyond many candidates; most could locate/identify a 'feature' in Q9, but 'features of style' in Q10 proved difficult.
- ◆ There was a tendency to write at length, sometimes without focus, particularly when asked to quote an expression.

Critical Essay

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Engagement with texts was generally good.
- ◆ Most at least attempted to answer relevantly.
- ◆ Technical accuracy was felt, in the main, to satisfy the basic requirement for this level.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ A significant minority of markers felt that completing two essays in 90 minutes was beyond the capabilities of some candidates.
- ◆ There was evidence of prepared answers which failed to address the demands of the questions.
- ◆ Some candidates failed to meet the requirement for technical accuracy of expression at this level.
- ◆ There was some evidence that candidates using material from their Personal Study were less successful.
- ◆ Very few candidates answered from the Media section of the paper.
- ◆ A small number of candidates wrote answers based on the wrong choice of genre.
- ◆ A small number of candidates failed to indicate which question(s) they had selected.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Intermediate 1

There was an overall improvement in the achievement of candidates this year.

Close Reading

- ◆ Most candidates coped well and seemed well prepared for the examination.
- ◆ Care should continue to be taken to ensure that candidates pay particular attention to the following:
 - **careful** and **thorough** reading of the questions
 - the significance of allocation of marks
 - the importance of using ‘own words’ when instructed
 - the difference between analysis and evaluation
 - the need to answer concisely
 - the need to improve ability to answer questions on structure.

Critical Essay

While this year’s performance was, on the whole, commendable, improvement should be sought in the following areas:

- ◆ recognition of the key requirements of questions and using thoroughly prepared knowledge of texts to answer relevantly
- ◆ care in the checking of spelling, sentence construction, paragraphing, etc since ‘mainly accurate’ technically is one of the requirements for passing, and, although a few errors may be present, the candidate’s meaning should be conveyed at first reading
- ◆ care in planning answers so that a structure or line of thought relevant to the question is evident.

Intermediate 2

Close Reading

Candidates should be reminded or made aware of the importance of the following:

- ◆ using their ‘own words as far as possible’ (as indicated on the front cover of the examination paper)
- ◆ the significance of allocation of marks
- ◆ the need for careful and thorough reading of the questions
- ◆ the need to understand what is required when asked to comment on ‘effect’ or ‘effectiveness’
- ◆ the need to answer concisely (particularly when asked to quote an expression)
- ◆ the need to acquire the knowledge and ability to answer questions on structure.

Critical Essay

- ◆ Candidates should be made aware of the need to select questions carefully and to use their prepared knowledge of texts to write relevantly so that their line of thought in answering the question is clear.

Candidates should pay due attention to developing/improving their essay writing skills since the examination requires that ‘expression’ should be ‘sufficiently accurate’ in order to communicate meaning clearly.