

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

English and Communication

Qualification area

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

**English
Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2**

Statistical information: update

◆ Intermediate 1

Number of entries in 2003	4,514
Number of entries in 2004	4,933

◆ Intermediate 2

Number of entries in 2003	13,750
Number of entries in 2004	15,191

General comments re entry numbers

The significant increase in entries for both Intermediate levels may be accounted for by:

- ◆ an increased 5th year take-up from existing and new presenting centres
- ◆ a reported number of 4th year candidates being presented at Intermediate level(s) as an alternative to Standard Grade.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

Intermediate 1

Award	%
A	9.6
B	17.9
C	25.7
D	12.5
No Award	34.3

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

In these early years of a new examination some variation in the pass rate is, perhaps, not unexpected. The following factors can also be taken into account:

- ◆ the increased presentation of over 400 candidates
- ◆ the significant number of candidates presented at the wrong level.

Intermediate 2

Award	%
A	10.6
B	27.2
C	33.0
D	11.3
No Award	17.9

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

The pass rate and percentage distribution of awards have remained at approximately the same levels as in 2003 in spite of an increase in the numbers presented to over 15,000.

There is evidence that some candidates are being presented at the wrong level. A new feature is the presentation of 4th year candidates who would have achieved Credit level in the Standard Grade examination.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	9.6	9.6	476	63
B	17.9	27.5	881	53
C	25.7	53.2	1,267	43
D	12.5	65.7	617	38
No award	34.3	100.0	1,692	0

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Adjustment was made to the grade boundaries to take account of some of the difficulties experienced by candidates, particularly in the Close Reading paper where, with the benefit of hindsight, it was evident that some of the questions (see below) could have been worded so as to have been made more accessible. The proportional adjustment for each grade takes account of the fact that the questioning would have had a greater adverse effect on the scores of candidates close to the borderline of an Intermediate 1 pass.

Comments already made above on the candidates presented at Intermediate 1 also go some way towards explaining the arguably high percentage of candidates who received no award.

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	10.6	10.6	1,606	67
B	27.2	37.8	4,131	55
C	33.0	70.8	5,017	44
D	11.3	82.1	1,711	38
No award	17.9	100.0	2,726	0

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Adjustment was made to the grade boundaries to take account of some of the Close Reading questioning which proved too challenging for many candidates. (See below.)

As commented on above, many candidates were presented at the wrong level, having failed to make the necessary progress from 4th year.

As mentioned above, the presentation policies of some centres go some way towards explaining the rather high percentage of candidates receiving no award.

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 candidate performance

General comments

Intermediate 1

Close Reading

There was much positive comment on the accessibility and appropriate nature of the passage; many candidates, however, missed or misunderstood some basic elements of the narrative (the humorous song, the fancy dress, the comparison with children, etc).

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Candidates were commended for their efforts to answer all questions.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ in expressing their understanding in their own words, particularly where clearly required to do so (Questions 1, 2, 3(a) and (b), 8(a), (b) and (c))
- ◆ in answering questions requiring analysis, particularly Questions 4, 5 and 6
- ◆ in reading questions carefully enough, eg in not answering **both** parts of Question 4 when clearly required to do so, yet, in some cases, paradoxically, attempting to answer **both** parts of Question 9 when only **one** point required to be dealt with
- ◆ in writing unnecessarily long answers, often repeating the question

Critical Essay

Markers' response to candidates' essays was mixed, although it was felt, in general, that most candidates demonstrated that they had been well prepared for the paper in that their knowledge of the texts was commendable. Their ability to write relevantly on the question selected was often less evident, although the level of engagement and technical competence at this level was, on the whole, acceptable.

The paper was felt to have offered candidates a sufficiently wide range of options.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Most candidates attempted relevance to the question.
- ◆ Most candidates satisfied the basic demands of the criterion of "mainly accurate".

◆ Most candidates seemed well prepared for, and aware of, the requirements in writing a critical essay. There were many good responses, particularly to poetry questions, where personal engagement was clear.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ failure to “fit” prepared material into relevant responses
- ◆ personal engagement often unconvincing
- ◆ answers often lacking balance due to over-reliance on content at the expense of other critical features of the genre chosen

Intermediate 2

Close Reading

The majority of Markers felt that the passage was appropriate, accessible and reasonably interesting; and that the questions were fair and balanced in respect of the range appropriate at this level.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ in answering questions on understanding although not always aware of the need to answer in “own words” as stated on the front cover of the question paper
- ◆ in commitment to completing the paper and leaving few questions unattempted
- ◆ in identifying features of technique in analysis questions

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ in answering **fully** questions requiring analysis, despite evidence of sound teaching, eg
 - Question 2(a) — punctuation feature merely identified (sometimes wrongly) with no elaboration related to writer’s craft
 - Question 2(c) — “contrasting” not understood and wrong focus on incorrect examples of word choice (ie “attempt” and “lead”)
 - Question 3 — failure to identify specific parts of the given sentence which refer backwards/forwards
 - Question 5 — difficulty in identifying sentence structure and/or providing explanation
 - Question 11 — lack of understanding of the specific meaning of “image”
 - Question 12 — difficulty in explaining the “impact”
- ◆ in answering evaluation questions, particularly 9(a), where candidates could identify the techniques but found it difficult to make valid comment on their effectiveness in conveying the writer’s stupidity
- ◆ in answering Question 13, achieving only one mark through dealing with only one aspect of the title (ignoring the plural “ways” in the question) or basing their answers only on a literal interpretation of the title
- ◆ in wasting effort (and time) writing unnecessarily long, wordy answers

Critical Essay

The paper was generally regarded as fair and, as expected, produced a range of performance.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Most had reasonable success in establishing some relevance in their answers.
- ◆ Personal engagement was evident, particularly in poetry answers, but not always well expressed or validated.
- ◆ Technical competence was, for the most part, adequate in satisfying the criterion of “sufficiently accurate” and the clarity and sophistication of expression in some essays was impressive.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- ◆ where prepared texts, even when relevantly chosen, were not used to answer the question
- ◆ where the final part of each question (ie features to be dealt with) was ignored or covered inadequately
- ◆ where many candidates did not appear to know the meaning of “optimistic” or chose unwisely to “bend” their poem to satisfy the demands of the question
- ◆ where technical accuracy was poor, causing essays to be failed by this criterion alone
- ◆ where the question being addressed was not numbered and not identifiable from the content
- ◆ where answers were based on the wrong choice of genre
- ◆ where most of the admittedly few answers from Sections D (Media) and E (Language) were relatively poorly handled

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Intermediate 1

Close Reading

Candidates presented at this level should be aware of the following.

- ◆ the need for careful and thorough reading of **both** passage **and** questions
- ◆ the need for, and benefits of, answering briefly and concisely
- ◆ the requirement to use “own words” when the question clearly states it
- ◆ the requirement to be able to identify and, where appropriate, explain the effect or effectiveness of a writer’s techniques
- ◆ the correspondence between the number of marks available and the number of points requiring to be covered in an answer

Critical Essay

While the majority of candidates coped with the demands of this paper, performance could be improved through attention to the following.

- ◆ more careful reading of the rubrics so that all three clearly distinguishable areas of each one chosen are addressed thoughtfully and thoroughly
- ◆ increased attention to correct spelling, sentence construction and paragraphing etc, since “mainly accurate” technically is one of the criteria required for a pass and, although **a few** errors may be present, meaning should be conveyed at first reading
- ◆ careful planning so that answers are seen to have a structure or discernible line of thought relevant to the chosen question

Intermediate 2

Close Reading

Candidates should be reminded of the need to demonstrate competence in the following areas.

- ◆ to answer fully questions requiring identification of a feature of technique and to explain its effect or effectiveness
- ◆ to answer clearly and concisely, using “own words as far as possible” as indicated on the front cover of the examination paper
- ◆ to read questions carefully so that obvious errors (eg not reading the plural “ways” in Question 13) can be avoided
- ◆ to recognise and handle questions on time, structure, word choice and imagery
- ◆ to grasp the main ideas in an extract (which requires a wide vocabulary developed through regular and sufficiently challenging and interesting reading)

Critical Essay

While the following are probably self-evident, it is worth re-stating the following points.

- ◆ The three parts, particularly the central one, should be clearly recognised and considered in relation to the candidate’s prepared knowledge of texts.
- ◆ Essay-writing skills should be carefully exercised since the examination requires that “expression” should be “sufficiently accurate” in developing a line of thought.
- ◆ Care should be taken to answer on the correct genre.
- ◆ Relevance to the question is essential.
- ◆ Choice of essay questions should be clearly numbered.