

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Geography

Qualification area

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

Geography Intermediate 1 and 2

Statistical information: update

	Intermediate 1	Intermediate 2
Resulted entries in 2003 (final)	315	1476
Resulted entries in 2004 (pre appeal)	384	1775

General comments re entry numbers (pre appeal)

The number of candidates at Intermediate 1 and 2 has increased by 69 and 299 respectively. This continues the trend of increasing numbers from the first year of the exam in 2001.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards (pre appeal)

At Intermediate 1 the total percentage of candidates gaining an award between A and C was 27.9
At Intermediate 2 the percentage of candidates gaining an award between A and C was 65.4

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates
A	2.9	2.9	11
B	7.3	10.2	28
C	17.7	27.9	68
D	7.8	35.7	30
No award	64.3	100	247

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates
A	17.1	17.1	303
B	23.8	40.9	423
C	24.5	65.4	434
D	9.5	74.9	168
No award	25.1	100	447

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

In 2003 at Intermediate 1 at the pass mark stage 61% obtained a grade between A and C. The 2004 pass rate shows a decrease of 33.1 %. This is a significant drop and is disappointing. It is important to note that every effort was made to ensure that the examination was consistent with previous examinations at this level in terms of level of difficulty and accessibility. I am confident that this level of consistency was maintained.

Inspection of the distribution of marks between Intermediate 1 and 2 indicates that at Intermediate 2 there is a very large 'tail' of candidates who failed to achieve a grade C or above. This is mirrored by the small number of candidates at Intermediate 1 achieving a grade C or above. It is more than possible that a significant number of candidates at Intermediate 2 were presented at an inappropriate level. Had many of those candidates who failed at Intermediate 2 been presented at Intermediate 1, it is probable that the pass rate at the latter would have improved considerably.

The pass rate at Intermediate 2 was less than previous years. Again the paper was consistent with previous years in terms of standard of difficulty and accessibility.

Both papers are benchmarked against Standard Grade General and Credit and every effort is made to ensure comparability between these examinations in terms of level of difficulty, marking instructions and marking standards. This is done to ensure that it is not easier to obtain an Intermediate 1 or 2 award than a General or

Credit award.

The decrease in percentage pass rate may be due to the quality of the cohort of candidates presented in 2004. Candidates presented at this level originate from a variety of sources including those achieving a General award in Geography, a Credit award in other social subjects or perhaps candidates who have dropped down from Higher Geography classes.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	2.9	2.9	11	42
B	7.3	10.2	28	35
C	17.7	27.9	68	29
D	7.8	35.7	30	26
No award	64.3	100	247	

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	17.1	17.1	303	50
B	23.8	40.9	423	42
C	24.5	65.4	434	29
D	9.5	74.9	168	26
No award	25.1	100	447	

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

The grade boundaries for both Intermediate 1 and 2 were exactly the same as those for 2003. This was consistent with the standard of examination for both levels remaining unchanged between 2003 and 2004. It would further confirm the suggestion that the standard of candidates at both levels had changed from 2003.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Performance at Intermediate 1 was very disappointing when compared with previous years. Markers noted that the quality of written answer was generally poor. Candidates were unable to provide extended answers to achieve the marks available. Essentially it would appear that the majority of candidates consisted of pupils who had previously gained an award at Foundation level and who lacked the knowledge and skills to improve their performance to that of General level. Those candidates who might have performed well at this level seem to have been presented at Intermediate 2 which was beyond them. Centres need to examine the appropriateness of level of presentation in respect of candidates at Intermediate 1 who might well gain an A or B award at this level rather than no award at Intermediate 2.

If the majority of those presented at Intermediate 1 were candidates who had previously obtained a grade 5 or 6 at Foundation level, then a 27.9 pass rate is quite a significant improvement on their previous performance in S4. If performance is viewed in this respect, then overall performance may not be as disappointing as it first appears and therefore presentation for this examination should be encouraged.

Although the overall pass rate was lower than in previous years, those candidates who did pass performed well. Most found the questions accessible and provided good responses to the questions asked. Indeed a few were able to achieve full marks for the paper. The standard of writing was good for those achieving a pass and many showed good understanding and knowledge of the course content and made good use of the resources provided.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

At Intermediate 1 candidates performed best in the following questions:

Question 2 (Landscapes and Tourism, although much fewer candidates attempted this question than Question 1, in which performance was not as good. ; Question 4 (Population)

At Intermediate 2 the best answered questions included :

Question 2 (where the pattern was similar to that of Intermediate 1) ; Question 5 (Health and Development where candidates showed good knowledge of the disease topic)

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

The weakest responses at Intermediate 1 were to :

Question 1 (Landscapes and Land Use) ; Question 3 (Environmental Issues) ; Question 6 (Environmental Hazards)

Candidates attempting these questions lacked sufficient knowledge of the topics and lacked the ability to express themselves in extended written answers. In a significant number of cases , candidates failed to answer all three questions or left gaps in individual parts of questions.

At Intermediate 2 the weakest responses were given to

Question 3 (Environmental Issues) ; Question 4 (Population) ; Question 6 (Environmental Hazards).

However although these were comparatively weaker in response to other questions many candidates performed well in different parts of the questions. Questions involving statistical information (drawing or completing diagrams) were generally well done.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

There were much fewer instances of candidates answering more than the requisite number of questions at both Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2. This is to be commended.

The most obvious problem would seem to be that of inappropriate level of presentation.

Great efforts are made by the setting team to ensure that the standard of examinations remains the same from year to year and that these are benchmarked against Standard Grade in terms of level of difficulty.

Inappropriate presentation regardless of the reason often denies candidates the chance of gaining an upper level award. Centres might wish to examine their presentation policy in the light of performance of Intermediate candidates in the 2004 examinations.