Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:	**Geology**

Qualification area

Subject(s) and Level(s) Included in this report	**Geology Intermediate 1**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003	54

Number of entries in 2004	55

General comments re entry numbers

Almost identical numbers to last year.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

See table overleaf.

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

Attempts were made in this year's paper to stretch the most able candidates at this level by slightly increasing the difficulty level of the most demanding questions. This has had no impact on the number of candidates passing. The only area of impact has been to reduce the number of lower 'A' passes and increase the number of upper 'B' passes. The distribution curve is now more balanced.
The continuing policy of simplifying the wording of questions has assisted in making the exam more accessible to poorer candidates and has ensured that the exam focuses only on testing the geological abilities of candidates.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards				
	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	43.6	43.6	24	56
B	32.7	76.3	18	48
C	12.7	89.0	7	40
D	3.6	92.6	2	36
No award	7.3	100	4	0

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

Boundaries were set at exactly the same levels as previous years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate performance was good to very good overall. The trend over the last few years for improved exam performance by candidates has continued, and all presenting centres should be congratulated for the thoroughness with which they have taught the subject.
As with previous years, many candidates would appear to be capable of attempting the subject at a more demanding level. This may not be possible due to timetabling restrictions within presenting centres.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Q1 testing knowledge of the solar system
Q2 testing the structure of the earth.
Q4 Interpretation of rainfall and evaporation graph, and use of groundwater.
Q6(b) calculations of ore deposits
Q10 many candidates performed better here than I would have anticipated, as this as a demanding question.
Q13 candidates demonstrated good understanding of isostatic uplift and were able to apply the theory to this situation. Some candidates were even able to allow for the possible future impact of global warming. This clearly demonstrates that exam centres are informing candidates of current scientific theories and their likely impact on the environment.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Q5 different grades of coal.
Q9 some candidates describe a push moraine rather than a terminal moraine.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

- More focus on teaching grades of coal.