

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

History

Qualification area:

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

History Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002 (pre appeal)	1,661
Final	1,777

Number of entries in 2003 (pass marks)	1,974
Pre appeal	2,011

General comments re entry numbers

The majority of this year's increase seem to have come from pupils in S4 who have entered Intermediate instead of Standard Grade.

Grade boundaries

A	49
B	41
C	33

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 have remained the equivalent to those in 2002, taking into account the fact the total number of marks for the exam has changed and the extended response is no longer weighted.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

As regards the **Extended Response**, markers commented that the vast majority of candidates were well prepared, producing an essay with a good clear structure. This structure had an introduction which set the essay into context and indicated the factors to be discussed in the body of the essay. The body of the essays contained accurate evidence and an attempt at analysis. The conclusion of the essay drew the points together and was logical. There were very few poor essays this year, but there were also fewer essays gaining full or very high marks.

In the **external examination** candidates generally answered well. There were signs of good preparation by centres and this resulted in candidates showing improved examination technique. Most contexts were attempted and very few candidates failed to complete the paper.

A very small number of candidates (single figures) attempted their 8 mark essay on a fourth context. These may well have been candidates who dropped down from Higher and had therefore studied a wider content area.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

As regards the **Extended Response**, markers commented on an increasing diversity in plain formats with a greater use of linear or spider diagrams, mind maps etc. Many candidates had clear issues which led to good analysis. These essays covered topics such as the Crusades, Wallace Bruce and the Slave Trade, the Liberal Reforms, Civil Rights and Appeasement. A small number of candidates made effective use of quotations.

In the **external examination** candidates performed very well in the 8 mark essay. Markers commented favourably on the structure and the quality of evidence used. There was an improvement in source comparison questions. Candidates made their judgement on both the content of the sources and their provenance.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

A small number of candidates produced brief plans (100 words or less) for the **Extended Response**. They then tended to produce a short essay and did not give themselves an opportunity to score highly. Some weak candidates tended to begin "In this essay I am going to...".

Some candidates had been allowed to select inappropriate titles.

- (a) Some of these were likely to lead to narrative eg “How Bruce was able to win at Bannockburn” or “Were Scots towns and castles ever besieged?” or “The Irish suffered discrimination when they moved to Scotland”
- (b) Other titles were too narrow in focus eg “How successful were sit-ins and freedom rides?” “The re-occupation of the Rhineland was important.” The plan indicated the response only dealt with 1936, with nothing on subsequent events.
- (c) Double barrelled questions caused difficulties eg “Why was there a civil war in Russia from 1918-20 and why did the Bolsheviks eventually win it?” “Explain why the Labour government 1945-51 established the welfare state and how successful were they?”
- (d) In a small number of centres there were concerns that responses were not the work of individual pupils because issues were the same/almost the same; plans followed exactly the same pattern; the same evidence was used etc. In these instances candidates were disadvantaged, particularly the more able.

In the **external examination** a considerable number of candidates left blank the O1 questions (describe — no source) in one or more contexts. This indicated a lack of knowledge of major content areas.

A significant number of candidates continue to comment only on content in O3, “how useful” questions.

A small number of candidates performed poorly in source comparison questions. Their errors fell into the following areas:

- ◆ some paraphrased the first source, then paraphrased the second and left the marker to find the comparison
- ◆ others selected a short phrase of 3 or 4 words and tried to make it match a phrase in the second source — often one of the phrases showed misunderstanding of the meaning eg Question 2 in the Road to War — “the sources agree, Source B says Austria is one the states that makes up Germany and Source C says Austria is in German hands” this response ignores the word “significance” in the question and the fact the two sources really disagree about the Anschluss
- ◆ in one or two centres candidate made their comparison by boxing and matching evidence. Since this is not acceptable way of answering, such cases were marked out of half marks.

Questions which caused some difficulty were:

Part 2

- 6 Immigrants and Exiles: there was some misunderstanding of the phrase “had settled into Scottish life” with candidates commenting on the Irish being reconciled rather than being assimilated into Scottish society
- 7(a) Cradle to the Grave: Question 2 — some candidates merely listed the “five giants”
- 7(b) Campaigning for Change: there was difficulty in interpreting the content of the cartoon (Question 1)

Part 3

- 9 Bismarck: Question 3 — little knowledge of the events of the Franco-Prussian War
- 10 The Red Flag: Question 2 — candidates wrote about 1905 Revolution and/or the November Revolution instead of the March Revolution
- 11 Free at Last: Question 3 — little knowledge of problems after the 1964 Civil Rights Act
- 12 Road to War: Question 3 — some candidates ignored the date 1939 and wrote about 1935-38

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

For the Extended Response

- ◆ centres should have a variety of suitable issues they can offer to poorer candidates
- ◆ teachers/lecturers should ensure candidates have an issue suitable to their ability
- ◆ teachers/lecturers should ensure candidates use the 150 word allocation for the plan

For the external examination

- ◆ candidates need more practice in 5 mark O1 questions: “describe” questions
- ◆ in source evaluation questions candidates should comment on the origin/purpose of the source using the guidelines published in 2001
- ◆ in source comparison questions candidates should make their judgement on the agreement/disagreement of the source and then exemplify it with direction comparisons. If the question is “compare the evidence” then reference can be made to origin as well as content of the sources; if the wording is “How far/to what extent do the sources agree then it is content only which is needed for comparison
- ◆ all questions must be answered in sentences — tables are not acceptable