

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Biology

Qualification area

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

Higher Human Biology

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	3107
Post appeal	3107

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	3294

General comments re entry numbers

Human Biology continues to show an increase in popularity since its inception in 1993.

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

Maximum mark = 130

Grade boundaries expressed as a percentage of mark in brackets

Year	Upper A	A	B	C
2002	108 (81.3%)	98 (75.4%)	81 (62.3%)	65 (50%)
2003	108 (83%)	97 (74.6%)	82 (63.1%)	67 (51.5%)

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

These are very similar to those fixed for 2002.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate performance was good and up to the same standard as last year, which was the best year to date.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Section A - the average mark was 18 out of 30 (facility value of 0.61 - 61%)

Section B - the following questions had an average facility value of greater than 0.70 (70%):

- Q1 on blood
- Q3 on genetics
- Q7 on urea investigation.

Candidates are very competent at taking information from graphs and processing it, and in the construction of graphs from data.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Section B - the following questions had an average facility value of less than 0.50 (50%) Q4 on enzymes and Q11 on the nitrogen cycle

Section C - the facility values for each question were:

- 1A - 0.58 (58%)
- 1B - 0.34 (34%)
- 2A - 0.33 (33%)
- 2B - 0.33 (33%)

Questions 1A and 2B were the more popular of each with two thirds of candidates choosing each.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

In general candidates were well prepared for this examination. This is borne out by the low number of appeals. However, every year, at the appeals stage, there is still ample evidence that a number of centres over-estimate the ability of candidates. Prelims covering two thirds of the course in January or even February, with cut-off scores of 50%, 60% and 70%, result in inflated grades. Centres should adjust pass marks for 'A' and 'B' passes upwards to make estimates more reliable.