

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Modern Studies

Qualification area:

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

Advanced Higher Modern Studies

Statistical information: update

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|----------------------------------|-----|
| Number of entries in 2002 | |
| Pre appeal | 632 |

| | |
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| Number of entries in 2003 | |
| Pre appeal | 641 |

General comments re entry numbers

A small increase, but welcome.

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

Mark/135

A 96

B 82

C 69

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 pre-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 increase above the *a priori* at each grade boundary was largely due to markers being more willing to use the full range of the marks. The increase in awards took account of the overall increase in performance.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

There has been an overall improvement in the Advanced Higher Modern Studies results. There was more evidence of depth and analysis in candidate responses.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Dissertations

Most candidates kept within the 5,000 word limit.

English, in general, was of a good standard.

Most candidates were integrating a variety of research evidence into dissertations and showing evidence of clear planning and analysis. Many of the dissertations also had a clear structure.

There was good evidence of teacher direction and training in research methods from a number of schools.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Dissertations

A disappointing minority of dissertations were too long and marks were lost as a result.

Some dissertations were too descriptive. Candidates need to spend more time on the planning to ensure that they have a clear and realistic hypothesis that can be tested. Aims should also relate to the hypothesis and should be structured in a way which allows analysis of the information collected.

Candidates often research information but do not integrate it into the dissertation. Information collected should be used to test the hypothesis.

When carrying out primary research, candidates should provide basic information such as sample size, date and location.

Bibliographies are sometimes short of academic sources. Ideally, candidates should use primary and secondary methods and relate this information to different academic theories.

Evidence of research methods used should be included in the dissertation, either in the report itself or in the appendices.

Some dissertations contain hints of plagiarism. All sources of evidence should be cited in the dissertation.

Some conclusions were not based on the evidence collected or related to the hypothesis of the dissertation.

Some candidates do not explain the research methods which they used or the advantages or disadvantages of these methods during the research process.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Dissertations marks will improve if centres:

- ◆ ensure that all reports are within the 4,000 – 5,000 word limit. If they are longer they will face a flat rate penalty of 10% of the 45 marks. These should be an accurate indication of the number of words on the front of the dissertation. **C 5,000 is not acceptable.** The word limit applies to the body of the text (introduction, chapters and conclusion). This does not include titles, headings, bibliography, diagrams, maps, tables of figures, charts, footnotes or the explanation of research methods used
- ◆ spend more time on planning to ensure that research has a clear focus and that all aims can be covered within the word limit. Too many dissertations are descriptive and this usually derives from poor planning
- ◆ discourage pupils from doing the same hypothesis and using exactly the same research methods

Essay marks will improve if centres:

- ◆ encourage candidates to structure their answers clearly and focus on all aspects of the question. Each essay should have a clear introduction, a balanced set of coherent arguments which relate to the question and a clear and detailed conclusion

Research methods marks will improve if centres:

- ◆ encourage candidates to develop all points that are made. Some candidates merely list points
- ◆ encourage candidates to answer all aspects of the question