

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Physical Education

Qualification area

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

XO68 Higher Level Physical Education

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003	3970
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Number of entries in 2004	3901
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General comments re entry numbers

The 2004 figures represent a decrease in entries of 69. During the year a substantially higher total was being predicted but there were many late changes to entry levels. It is hoped that this pattern and the resultant increase in entry numbers at Intermediate 2 is an indication that staff at centres are becoming more conversant with the National Standards of the awards and presenting candidates at a level that more closely matches their current abilities.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

Pass Mark Stage 2002

Grade	%	Candidates
A	25.1	924
B	30.1	1114
C	25.8	954
No Award	19.0	704

Pass Mark Stage 2003

Grade	%	Candidates
A	26.1	1036
B	28.9	1148
C	25.4	1008
No Award	19.6	778

Pass Mark Stage 2004

Grade	%	Candidates
A	23.7	925
B	30.7	1196
C	27.4	1069
D	8.6	337
No Award	9.6	374

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

The statistics show that in 2004 the number of candidates achieving an A Grade has fallen slightly, and that the number achieving B and C Grades has risen slightly. Feedback from examiners and markers supported these statistics suggesting that although the number of high scoring Investigations and Analysis of Performance scripts seemed to be down, that there also seemed to be a reduction in number of scripts with very low scores. Both the statistical evidence and the judgemental evidence available from markers' reports indicated that these changes were mainly due to the relative abilities of the candidate group rather than any increase or decrease in the difficulty of the assessments.

The high Performance marks of previous years were again maintained with the mean score up by 1 mark to 76.6. Particular concerns still exist about the relatively modest achievements of candidates in Investigation of Performance and Analysis of Performance. The Investigation of Performance mean mark is a useful benchmark of candidate ability in any particular year in that the demands of the task and the mark scheme applied have been the same for a number of years. Although the Investigation of Performance mean score has shifted up slightly to 14.4 this year, which is an increase of 0.6, it still remains below half the available marks. The mean for Analysis of Performance this year has fallen to 22.7, a decrease of 1.8 marks on last year's score.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	23.7	23.7	925	126
B	30.7	54.4	1196	113
C	27.4	81.8	1069	100
D	8.6	90.4	337	93
No award	9.6	100	374	

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

There is still a relative imbalance between candidates' achievements in Performance and in Analysis and Investigation of Performance. Candidates, who have a very high Performance mark, must also have demonstrated a reasonable level of competence in Analysis and Investigation of Performance if their overall performance is to match the grade descriptions of course awards at grades A, B and C and D. However, a number of candidates who have passed in Performance gain a modest mark for Analysis and Investigation of Performance. The weighting of Performance at 50% makes this relative imbalance even more pronounced.

The Grade boundaries listed above are considered to fairly address the current circumstances and have been the same for the last 5 years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Although a high proportion of candidates performed well and an even spread of awards were achieved, there was again evidence this year of candidates being inappropriately presented for a Higher level course award. It appears that some candidates continue to be presented for Higher on the basis of high performance marks even though they have relatively modest abilities in the Analysis and Investigation of Performance.

Markers were again asked to refer to the Principal Assessor instances where candidates achieved only a very low mark in either their Investigation Report or their Analysis examination. A substantial number were referred from each of the assessments.

The number of centres working in the area of Performance Appreciation does not seem to be increasing and only a very small number of candidates attempted questions from this area.

The number of centres using a standardised approach to completing the Investigation of Performance Report seemed to have increased this year. In this model, candidates had used a standard framework and had inserted information relevant to their own topic in each section. Some centres have gone a stage further and require all candidates to complete the investigation in the same activity and topic. Markers continue to feel that although these strategies may help less able students to manage the stages of an investigation, they actually constrain more able candidates and limit their potential to score high marks.

There appears to be an increase in instances where candidates are attempting to apply pre-planned answers to Analysis of Performance questions. When attempting to apply this approach, candidates frequently do not relate their response closely enough to the key words of the question and score low marks. This seemed to be particularly the case this year due to the fact that some of the questions asked for a broad knowledge of a whole Key Concept, while others asked for detailed knowledge of a specific feature of a Key Concept. This is not so easy to predict and many candidates found that their prepared answers did not fit.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Investigation of Performance

The performance of candidates, in this final year of this assessment, was very similar in terms of strengths and weaknesses to the work of the candidate groups of recent years.

In terms of strengths, most candidates had chosen a relevant and appropriate aspect of performance as the focus of their Investigation. The structure and organisation of reports was also mainly sound. Many candidates generally scored well in Outcome 1 of the mark scheme. The majority had also gathered relevant and significant data about their chosen topic, although for some a lack of depth and detail in data was a limiting factor in that it allowed for only a modest level of interpretation and discussion of issues arising.

Analysis of Performance

Again this year there was generally a pattern of candidates being relatively successful at answering the parts of questions that assessed Competency 1 of describing and explaining performance, and then having difficulty with Competencies 2 and 3 where the demonstration of a level of critical thinking was required. Knowledge of data gathering methods, and descriptions of what had been learned about the strengths and weaknesses of performance was generally good. This was particularly the case in relation to parts a) and b) of Question 4 in the Preparation of the Body section of the paper.

Many students showed a depth and detail of knowledge in their answers relating to the methods of practice that were most likely to be effective at each of the Stages of Learning. Candidates also generally performed well when describing the importance of feedback at each of the stages of learning.

In the Structures, Strategies and Composition section, descriptions of the selected structures, strategies or compositions were generally sound or detailed. Discussions on the effect of individual strengths and weaknesses on performance was mostly good, as was knowledge of relevant programmes of work that were likely to improve whole performance.

Although a question from the Performance Appreciation section was not attempted by many candidates, those who did answer in this area mainly did well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Investigation of Performance

The ability to interpret and discuss significant performance issues arising from the data gathered and the sources reviewed was again the most common weakness. It is in this section that the candidate has the opportunity to discuss the significance of their findings and to explain how data and sources have helped inform the design of a training programme that will address performance needs.

Weaknesses in this area often led to a situation where the conclusions drawn on completion of the investigation were based on what the candidate would have wished rather than what could validly be concluded from the interpretation and discussion of the Primary and Secondary sources reviewed.

Many of the investigations were again over the 1500 word limit and it is clear that many candidates had difficulty in completing the task even within the permitted tolerance of 2000 words. This was again often due to poor editing and a failure to use appendices correctly.

Analysis of Performance

Many candidates had difficulty when asked to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of some Analysis of Performance Key Concepts. For example in the Preparation of the Body section of the paper question 5 was focused on the key concept, 'Physical, skill related and mental aspects of fitness', and asked candidates to discuss the importance of one aspect of each type of fitness. Although candidates were generally able to demonstrate sound knowledge of a physical aspect many appeared to have little knowledge of skill related and mental aspects, and so found themselves in difficulty.

Similarly, question six addressed the key concept 'Planning training in pursuit of personal goals, through phases of training, training cycles and the monitoring of training'. Responses to this question indicated that many candidates had only a limited understanding of phases of training and the types of training that would be appropriate during a particular phase. The later sections of the question addressed goal setting and the monitoring of training and in these parts candidates generally fared better.

The key message that emerges is that course work must address all the aspects of content outlined in the key concept statements.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Analysis of Performance

Care must be taken to ensure that candidates have studied all the aspects of content that are outlined in the Key Concepts of the selected areas of analysis. This will ensure that they are prepared for questions that ask for a broad knowledge from across the range of the key concept as well as more focused questions that require them to give specific information about chosen features of key concept content.

Candidates are generally strong when answering the parts of questions that draw mainly on their knowledge of the analysis processes taught and that ask them to describe and explain what they have been able to find out about their performance. Specifically:

- the methods used during class for collecting information
- the detail and significance of the data gathered
- the detail and effectiveness of a development programme undertaken.

Candidates tend to have difficulty when they are asked to show detailed knowledge and understanding of key concepts. This is particularly the case when they are asked to show how they could apply relevant concepts and knowledge to the development of their performance. At Higher level they need to be able to critically discuss relevant concepts and suggest courses of action for the development of their performance. Candidates must be given as many opportunities as possible to practise this analysis skill as for many it is a limiting factor at present.

Candidates should be encouraged to take time to read, and try to understand fully, all that is being asked in examination questions. They should also be encouraged to relate their responses closely to what is asked in the question. Frequently candidates respond by writing down either a prepared answer or simply everything they know about the topic, even if much of the information is not relevant to the particular question asked. Although candidates often display knowledge they fail to apply their knowledge to the key points of the question.

The work of some candidates presented for the Analysis of Performance examination was well below that of the standards illustrated in National Exemplification of Higher level competence. Changes in course arrangements and to the relative weighting of the Performance and Analysis and Development of Performance elements of the course come into effect for session 2004-05. These changes will address this issue by ensuring that they have genuine Higher level competence in the knowledge and understanding requirements of analysing and developing performance. Centres should ensure that candidates are able to offer the level of depth and breadth of knowledge of key concepts, that is required at Higher level.