

## Principal Assessor Report 2004

**Assessment Panel:**

**Social Science**

**Qualification area**

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

**PHILOSOPHY - Advanced Higher**

## Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003 (pre appeal)	6
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Number of entries in 2004 (pre appeal)	17
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### General comments re entry numbers

Very gratifying increase in presentations.

There remains a strange pattern of different Centres presenting each year: 11 Centres have presented candidates at any time in the four years of the Course, but of these only three have done so twice, and of these only one in successive years. It would be interesting (and perhaps useful) to know why this is the case.

There does now seem to be an upward trend, and I am aware from my work as DO in Philosophy that more teachers would like to present for AH, but are prevented from doing so by school policies. In the light of SQA low uptake policy, it would be helpful to have measure of real demand.

There is also evidence that the majority of schools only offer Philosophy, if at all, at Higher in S6, so there is little opportunity to progress to AH. The Course should be marketed as challenging in its own right for brighter S6 pupils even without a Higher.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards and grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	17.6	17.6	3	63
B	35.3	53.0	6	54
C	35.3	88.3	6	45
D	0.0	88.3	0	40
No award	11.8	100	2	

### Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

Previously numbers have been too small to make such comparisons. With rather larger numbers an approximate normal distribution seems to be emerging, which is encouraging. The number of fails is disappointing, but appears to reflect candidates who should not have been entered at this level.

### 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 arrangements evolve and change.

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Having marked each question separately, the markers considered whether the resulting band was appropriate for the overall standard of work in the script, and were satisfied that this was so.

## **Comments on candidate performance**

### **General comments**

After a year in which we awarded no As, it was gratifying to see a better spread of marks, but we were disappointed that two candidates obtained no award. Overall, however, we again felt that the better candidates were of good undergraduate standard.

We were pleased to note a much wider range of marks for the Logic section than hitherto.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well**

Marks were significantly higher for section A (21/30, compared with 18/30 and 18.5/30 for the other essay sections of the paper).

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty**

Although there was a wider range of marks in the Logic section, the average mark was still a disappointing 16.2/30, but this reflected one very poor mark.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

Last year we had evidence of students producing remembered answers rather than thinking about the question asked. This did not seem to be a problem to the same extent this year. This was particularly gratifying as we attempted to set slightly more oblique questions to compensate for the predictability of some parts of the syllabus.

Teachers, however, should be reminded that it is important that candidates are aware that this is a subject whose essence is thinking rather than remembering, and that they should receive tuition in appropriate examination techniques.

To reiterate from previous reports:

Candidates must be given clear guidance on what constitutes a philosophical problem, and how to begin to discuss such questions. This is NOT a paper on history of ideas, and it should perhaps be made more explicit that even the most accurate reportage of the views of the ancients will not achieve more than a bare pass in the absence of evidence that the candidate is engaging with the argument.

Ditto coaching in standard answers when almost no effort is made to relate them to question asked.

We are quite clear that some of these deficiencies are attributable to the fact that some teachers of the Course do not have sufficient knowledge and expertise in the subject. Centres might well be advised to ensure that Philosophy is taught only by teachers who have appropriate levels of knowledge.