

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Social Sciences

Qualification area:

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

Sociology
Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	0

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	3

General comments re entry numbers

The number of candidates for Advanced Higher remains disappointing. All candidates were from one centre.

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

Grade C = 45
Grade B = 54
Grade A = 63

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

Standard of exam unchanged and therefore a priori grade boundaries retained.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

- Good standard of performance by all candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- All candidates were strong in description of theories and studies.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- Some answers would have benefited from stronger evaluation.
- Some answers could have had stronger conclusions and have been more closely related to the question being asked.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

- Candidates need to write consistently well and fully across all three essays to gain full marks. There is still a tendency for the third essay to be shorter and less well written (often on evaluative comments) and this can reduce marks.
- To achieve a C pass, candidates need to be performing at a standard above that required by an Upper A at Higher. This is no mean task and to gain an A or a B pass, candidates have to excel at all parts of each question but particularly in terms of evaluation, conclusions and relating the answer to the question asked.