Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:	**Computing and Information Technology**

Qualification area

Subject(s) and Level(s) Included in this report	**Intermediate 2 Computing (old arrangements)**

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	2,152

Number of resulted entries in 2005	787

General comments re resulted entry numbers

The drop in numbers was to be expected as the majority of centres decided to opt for the new arrangements of this course, especially if the candidates were to be continuing on to Higher Computing as the new arrangements at Int 2 articulate much better with the New Higher course.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- **100**	-	-	-	-
A	30.2	30.2	238	70
B	23.9	54.1	188	60
C	19.9	74.1	157	50
D	6.6	80.7	52	45
No award	19.3	100.0	152	-

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 any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

There was an increase in the number of candidates who sat the examination in S4. This, and the accompanying rise in coursework marks, would suggest a reason for the increase in the number of A passes and a decrease in the number of "No awards".

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Overall the candidates showed a great improvement in the knowledge of the curriculum and an improvement in the problem solving questions. Many of the systems questions were answered extremely well but there is room for improvement in the software development questions.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Candidates have shown that the following areas are now better understood than in previous examinations – interfaces, stages of the software development process, HCI, RAM/ROM and printer types.
The explanations of the iterative process have improved greatly.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Many candidates were unable to clearly define the functions of memory and file management.
Many candidates when asked to give a **type** of application package are giving an **example** of an application package. This results in many needlessly lost marks. Examples of applications will not be accepted when a type is requested.
Candidates seem to be unsure of what constitutes a data type.
Aspects of software development have always been difficult concepts for a large amount of candidates and this year was no exception with poor explanations of "Modularity"; "Structured Listing"; "Control statements"; and the difference between conditional and unconditional loops. Many candidates were unable to design a solution to a simple problem using a recognised design methodology. Code was frequently used instead.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

I would suggest that centres put extra emphasis on the following in their teaching of the course:

Clarify the difference between types of application packages and examples of application packages.

Students have clear definitions of the tasks undertaken by Memory and File management.

Students require a better grasp of solving simple problems using an appropriate design methodology.

Take more time explaining High Level Language constructs and ensure that the students can match the name of the construct with the appropriate code eg an unconditional loop is a FOR…..NEXT loop if you are using Basic.