



Principal Assessor Report 2005

Qualification area

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

Managing Environmental Resources Higher
--

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	89
---	----

Number of resulted entries in 2005	72
---	----

General comments re resulted entry numbers

A slight decrease in candidate numbers, almost entirely from the school sector where one school's presentation was reduced by 50%.

There were 34 candidates presented from FE colleges and 38 from the school sector.

Candidates were from four schools and five FE centres. There was one new centre (a FE College). All other centres had previously presented.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 110	-	-	-	-
A	22.2	22.2	16	77
B	22.2	44.4	16	66
C	27.8	72.2	20	55
D	6.9	79.2	5	49
No award	20.8	100.0	15	-

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 no change in the grade boundaries from previous years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

All questions in the paper were accessible to candidates. The vast majority of candidates achieved some marks for each question.

The marks ranged from totals of 30 to 89 out of 110.

Throughout the paper the quality of answers was generally good, particularly in the open ended questions and essays where knowledge gained through direct experience, such as on field trips, or by more mature candidates, produced detailed and thoughtful responses.

In section A some questions requiring discrete factual information were poorly done, whereas those which were more open ended, based on the application of knowledge to management issues and problem solving were tackled better. Discriminating questions functioned appropriately.

Candidates from the FE sector, particularly more mature candidates, do not perform as well as candidates from the school sector in numerical problems and graph drawing.

In section B, good candidates in general did well in both essays with marks in double figures. Candidates at C level or below were scoring 7 or less out of 15.

Seven candidates did only one essay and one candidate none. This did not appear to be due to lack of time or oversight of the need to complete two essays.

In Q8 twenty nine candidates selected option A and forty did option B.

In Q9 ten candidates selected option A and fifty six did option B.

In all questions marks ranged from 1 to 15.

Candidates generally achieved more marks in the structured essay, question 8, compared to the unstructured essay. Some good candidates produced high quality essays but failed to produce enough examples or details to achieve full marks.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Questions 2, 3, 5 and 6 were generally done well. Throughout the paper, problem solving questions were done well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Many candidates found difficulty with questions 1, 4 and 6 through lack of knowledge of basic biological facts and processes such as mutualism, photosynthesis, carbon cycling, soil profiles, community, climax community.

In question 2 energy use and source of energy were confused, and few answered Q2 (a) (iv) Scottish Renewables Obligation, and question 3 (c) (ii) on aspects of Life Cycle Analysis, correctly.

Percentage change Q7 (a) (iii) was also a source of difficulty.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Centres should be congratulated on the support they give to candidates in preparation for the external examination.

Candidates who have been on field excursions and have been involved in practical investigations clearly benefit from the experience and use the knowledge gained to provide detailed and original examples that gain marks in the examination.

Such activities should be actively pursued in presenting centres and integrated into course work when ever appropriate.

Centres should check the unit specification in the current Higher MER arrangements document for the precise factual content, particularly biological knowledge, which the examination is testing. The document also provides candidates with suitable exemplification of organisations, initiatives, legislation etc. that candidates are expected to know.

FE centres should ensure that candidates are given exemplification of numerical problems and graph completion and interpretation, as the skills of more mature candidates are not as well developed in these areas compared to candidates from the school sector.

All candidates should be given encouragement and practice in the two types of essay question. The need to produce detailed descriptions and explanations relating directly to the essay topic, and the marks awarded, should be emphasised.

Structured essay questions, question 8, are generally done better than unstructured essays, question 9.

Bullet points should be used only where appropriate in an essay such as when giving examples. They should not be used as an alternative to an essay as they tend to be too brief, and lack the detail and context required to be awarded the marks.