

## Principal Assessor Report 2004

**Assessment Panel:**

**Social Sciences**

**Qualification area**

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

**Politics - Higher**

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)</b>	56
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)</b>	60
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## General comments re entry numbers

Numbers are still rising for the examination but there seems to be a substantial drop-out from original entries (90+) and those taking the examination. The number of centres has also risen with several new centres from both the school and college sectors.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards

	Number of Candidates	%
A	18	30.0
B	28	46.7
C	7	11.7
D	0	-
No Award	7	11.6

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

The low numbers taking the examination make it difficult to comment on significant differences from year to year but generally there were more B candidates and fewer C candidates than previous years with only a small variation in the number of A candidates and No Awards.

## Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	30.0	30.0	18	63
B	46.7	76.7	28	54
C	11.7	88.4	7	45
D	0.00	88.4	0	
No award	11.6	100.0	7	

## 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

The Grade boundaries were set at the a priori level as in previous years – 63 and above for A; 54-62 for a B; 45-53 for a C.

## **Comments on candidate performance**

### **General comments**

Paper 1 – candidates performed well overall in this paper and there was a rise in the mean mark from 19.9 to 21.8 this year reflecting this performance.

Paper 2 – the mean mark remained exactly as it was last year at 36.2 and it would be true to say that performance overall was very similar.

Every question in Paper 2 was attempted; this, along with the lack of criticism of the paper (only one, adverse, comment was received) suggests that both candidates and centres were satisfied with the paper. A1, B4 and B5 and C7 were answered considerably more often than any others. There was clear evidence of centres preparing candidates well for these areas.

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

Each year there is a spread of good answers across the Papers. As always Q1 in Paper 1 was very well answered while Q3 in Paper 1 had more quality responses than previous years.

In Paper 2 there were many excellent answers to A1 particularly on Power (by far the most popular concept); answers to C7 were very good – (despite a slight problem with the wording which may have caused difficulty for some candidates – the marking process ensured no candidate was disadvantaged). Several candidates provided excellent responses to A2 on the Rule of Law.

Several candidates maintained a very high standard across both Papers and each of the sections of Paper 2. There is clear evidence of candidates improving their approach to essay writing.

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

As before there are still too many candidates writing the same for a 15 mark question as a 7 mark question in Paper 1. This is a difficult paper which requires very strict use of time. It appears as though some candidates spend too long on the relatively easy Q1 and less time than they should on Q3 which is worth more than double the marks.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

- Centres are reminded that the Subject Guide and the Spring1998 Supplement explains the differences between concepts/principles/ideas as well as models and theories and teachers need to incorporate these into their teaching and learning approaches.
- Some candidates are still poor on essay technique. It is important for candidates to refer to the question they are answering, draw conclusions on the basis of points they have raised and be as explicit as possible.
- Setters will continue with attempts to vary Paper 2 and sample the content to avoid undue predictability. While the Specimen Paper acts as a general model, centres should consult the Arrangements for the course (Third Edition, 1999) as to the possible range and nature of the material that can be sampled.
- Candidates should be encouraged to manage their time carefully in Paper 1, taking due account of the marks allocated to each question and thence writing answers of appropriate length.