

## Principal Assessor Report 2005

**Assessment Panel:**

**Social Sciences**

**Qualification area**

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

**Psychology (New)  
Intermediate 1**

## Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	-
Number of resulted entries in 2005	78

### General comments re resulted entry numbers

This was the first examination under the revised Intermediate 1 Course arrangements, following the National Review of Psychology. Both the old Course and the new ran in the session 2004-05 (ie 'dual running'), therefore total entries, 116, were split between the two. The majority of these (78) took the new exam, and the total number of 2005 entries, which had increased from 64 in 2004, was in line with the continuing upward trend, and indeed the rate of increase was greater than in previous years. This is perhaps surprising given that the Course had undergone major revision, however, it may be that centres are showing a tendency to regard entry at Intermediate 1 a more realistic step than Intermediate 2, for certain candidates. It is certainly a pleasing trend, as it establishes Intermediate 1 Psychology as a viable Course.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 80	-	-	-	-
A	12.8	12.8	10	55
B	23.1	35.9	18	47
C	11.5	47.4	9	39
D	5.1	52.6	4	35
No award	47.4	100.0	37	-

### 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

The marks show a bi-modal distribution, with a substantial percentage of candidates achieving grade A or B (though none at grade A1), a small percentage at Grade C, and a substantial percentage with grade D/no award.

Grade boundaries were agreed at a slightly lower level than in the past, in recognition of the degree of difficulty encountered in the revised course arrangements. It is anticipated that grade boundaries will revert to their *a priori* level in the next year or two.

This was the first examination under the new arrangements, therefore comparison of statistics with previous years is of limited usefulness, however, the main difference lies in the lower percentage of grade A candidates.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

#### Comments on the question paper

As this was the first examination under revised arrangements, many of the general comments below involve comparison with the old exam.

Feedback from markers and other teachers indicates that the exam fully conformed to the Course Assessment Specification, and to the assessment objectives and content of the course. The duration, 1½ hours, was appropriate, as virtually no candidates appeared to have run out of time. The mark allocation (80) was also found to be appropriate, in that it allowed adequate differentiation between candidate performances, and unlike the previous exam, markers found they could credit work accurately without feeling the desire to award half marks.

The quality of answers showed that overall candidates had coped reasonably well; on the whole, although responses were naturally of varying standard, and marks were generally lower than in the old exam, they were appropriate in almost all scripts, in the sense that they demonstrated that the demands of the questions had been understood by the candidate.

In contrast to the old exam, very few candidates mistook the instructions as to which questions they should answer; only a handful of candidates mistakenly answered more than one of the option questions C2 – C5 (all other questions were mandatory, so there was no other opportunity for error).

In the option section, where candidates had to answer one question from C2 to C5 (representing four Social Psychology topics), C5 was very rarely chosen (Social perception topic), and numbers choosing the others were fairly evenly distributed across C2-C4.

#### Specific points:

Some questions needed more space allowed for the answer.

Marking instructions were found by markers to be effective and non-problematic.

## **General comments on candidate performance**

Candidates appear to have performed slightly more poorly overall this year than in previous years; this may be attributable largely to the major differences between old and new Courses/exams, to which teachers and students are having to adapt. In addition, it is likely that marks in previous years were inflated; as was made clear in the Review, the old exam had poor validity in terms of eliciting and measuring the knowledge and skills required at Intermediate 1. However, disparity between old and new exam performance was less than in the case of Intermediate 2, possibly because at that level the assessment objective of ‘analysis and evaluation’ skills was introduced, whereas at Intermediate 1 the required skills, ie knowledge and understanding, are similar to those assessed in the old exam.

As stated above, candidates on the whole clearly understood the demands of the questions (with some exceptions – see below). However, in general, they probably found the exam demanding, in that questions were varied and relatively unpredictable. The questions sampled knowledge, rather than attempting to elicit ‘everything’ the candidate had learned (as in the past). In contrast to the format of the previous exam, where questions were highly predictable, candidates were required to interpret the question, select relevant material from their own knowledge, and manipulate that knowledge to create their answer, expressing that knowledge in their own words. Because the exam demanded such skills, many candidates may have found it challenging; by the same token, however, markers found they could effectively discern whether there was genuine ‘understanding’, and felt that their differentiation of performance between grades was more accurate.

Although certain aspects of the exam may have been ‘difficult’ for some candidates, it should be stressed that there was also a high standard of performance in these areas, from other candidates. Some of the lower mark allocation questions required very basic knowledge (eg A2(d) – “examples of incentives...at work”), whereas the 6-mark questions were open-ended and required more complex knowledge. Thus the range of candidate ability was catered for, in terms of providing opportunities both for the strongest candidates to demonstrate the highest level of skills of knowledge and understanding, and for weaker candidates to demonstrate skills of an adequate standard.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

The research methods question, section B, was unproblematic, with most candidates performing well or adequately. Performance in Sections A and C was more varied than in B.

In most cases, candidates clearly differentiated the types of demand of different questions, as shown in the 'command' words 'describe', 'explain' etc; nature and length of answers were generally appropriate.

Many candidates were able to clearly demonstrate knowledge and understanding, and thus gained credit, in spite of limited use of specialist terminology.

Research studies questions, eg C4(c), C3(b), were generally answered well.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In general, the 6-mark questions, which required the most **discursive** responses, were rather poorly addressed, especially in the questions C2-C5, although performance was better in A2(b). However, some candidates did perform well in these, and even candidates who performed poorly had generally understood what was required, and gained some credit.

Questions requiring a description /explanation of **concept(s) or theories**, eg A1(e), C2(c), C4(d), were often poorly answered; this was related to level of skill in writing discursively (see above), and also perhaps related to the abstract nature of the concepts. Again, some candidates did respond to such questions competently. There was some evidence of candidates failing to differentiate between concepts that are related but different, for example: in A1(e) many candidates wrote about learning theory, focusing on operant conditioning / reinforcement, rather than describing social learning theory, as required.

Few candidates made **reference to research evidence**. The best opportunities for referring to research evidence were in the higher mark allocation questions, and such content in an answer gained credit (where correct), whether research evidence was required in the question or not, and whether mentioned in specific content marking instructions or not. Sometimes research evidence was used inappropriately, eg in A1(e) Bandura's research could gain credit, but some candidates wrote *only* about Bandura's research, instead of describing SLT theory, so they gained only limited marks.

Questions requiring a **definition or brief description of a term/concept**, eg C2(a), C4(b), were often answered satisfactorily, but in a number of cases candidates (who quite possibly had a sound understanding) lost marks through poor skills of expression.

In B1(d), many candidates lost marks through misinterpreting the question, often giving a type of sample (eg random sample), rather than describing the sample in the given scenario, as required.

Overall, most difficulties arose through misinterpretation of the demands of the questions. In a small number of questions, eg A1(f)(i), the wording of the question may have been insufficiently clear, however, most marks were lost through inadequate interpretation on the part of the candidate.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

**These recommendations are based on feedback from markers, as well as drawing on the good practice that is already in place in many centres.**

1. Centres are to be praised for entering more candidates at Intermediate 1 in 2005; there has been (and still is, to some extent), a problem that too many candidates have been entered inappropriately at Intermediate 2 and have struggled throughout, only to receive no award at all. Given that Course content is identical for both levels (though assessment demands are of course different), movement between levels is feasible: some centres already allow flexibility in this respect by running bi-level classes termed 'Intermediate' rather than 'Intermediate 2'. Students are informed that a decision will be made about their level of entry, ie either Intermediate 1 or Intermediate 2, after reviewing their progress a few months into the Course (eg after the first Unit). Such an approach facilitates more appropriate entries and higher overall achievement rates for candidates and centres, and also helps avoid a blow to student self-esteem where in an 'Intermediate 2' class they feel they are having to 'drop down' to Intermediate 1.

2. In preparing for assessment, centres should encourage candidates to:

- Develop the ability to identify the nature of the demand of the question, in terms of
  - (a) length: eg questions with the maximum mark allocation (6) should be substantial.
  - (b) what the question is actually about, ie each question should be read very carefully; question wording is similar to wording of the Unit/topic content, therefore candidates should be able to interpret each question by 'matching' the wording of the question with their own knowledge of Unit/topic content.
- Develop discursive writing skills for higher mark allocation questions, especially description/explanation of concepts.
- Thoroughly learn definitions of key terms /concepts.
- Incorporate research studies into their learning about **every** topic (and every aspect of each topic). Then, in assessments, they should make reference to such research evidence, even where not specifically requested in the question, and especially for questions with higher mark allocations. Candidates should be aware that this is an opportunity to gain credit. However, candidates should also recognise that if a question asks for description of a theory or concept, it is not appropriate simply to write about one research study (although reference to research can be credited in such questions).

Centres may help candidates develop such skills by providing plenty of opportunities for practice, in the form of class / homework tasks and formative assessments, followed by detailed feedback.