

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Social Sciences

Qualification area

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

Sociology
Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	6
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	8
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

2005 saw an increase of 2 candidates, which, despite showing an upward trend since Advanced Higher Sociology began, nevertheless remains a disappointing statistic. There is no increase in the number of centres presenting. There are two centres presenting.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 90	-	-	-	-
A	50.0	50.0	4	63
B	0.0	50.0	0	54
C	0.0	50.0	0	45
D	12.5	62.5	1	40
No award	37.5	100.0	3	-

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

With only 8 candidates presented in 2005 and a smaller number or none in previous presentations, it is not possible to draw any meaningful conclusions on the change in distribution of the awards, though the percentage of candidates attaining an A pass this year had dropped. Marks were attributed across the range in 2005, including an increase in the number of D grade or No Awards.

The Standard of the exam was unchanged and therefore *a priori* grade boundaries were retained.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

- The standard of performance by some candidates was excellent.
- No candidates responded to questions from Section D.
- Most candidates from both centres answered the same questions.
- Some candidates produced responses that were limited or did not relate sufficiently to the question.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

- A2. This question was answered by most candidates, with it generally being among the best of the responses for most.
- B1. A reasonable number of candidates responded to this question with great competence.
- C3. Candidates undertaking this question tended to perform well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- A2. Some candidates spent a lot of time discussing traditional sociological theories instead of the major challenges to sociological debate, often leaving a limited amount of space to answering the actual question.
- C1. Candidates tended not to respond to this question very strongly. Responses tended in parts not to be sufficiently based on sociological analysis.
- Candidates attaining the D grade or No Award provided much briefer responses and more limited analysis and evaluation than the other candidates.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

- Candidates must write consistently well across the paper to gain higher marks.
- Candidates need to exercise effective time management – eg approximately one hour for each of the three essays. There is a tendency for the third essay to be significantly shorter than the first two.
- To achieve a C pass, candidates need to perform at a standard above that required for an Upper A at Higher. To gain an A or B pass, candidates need to provide very strong responses to each part of each question, particularly in terms of evaluation and relating the answer specifically to the question asked.
- Centres need to ensure that candidates are adequately prepared for the external assessment, including helping them focus on the demands of each topic/question and to not provide either over-broad background (which may be irrelevant to the question) or insufficient sociological analysis.