

## Principal Assessor Report 2004

**Assessment Panel:**

Social Sciences

**Qualification area**

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

Sociology  
Intermediate 2

## **Statistical information: update**

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2003</b>	108
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2004</b>	162
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### **General comments re entry numbers**

2004 saw a sharp increase (50 per cent) in the number of candidates, which was particularly welcomed after the small drop in candidates from 2002 to 2003. There continued to be a large number of Higher candidates who should have been presented for Intermediate 2. Conversely, there was a small but significant number of candidates at Intermediate 2 who should have been presented at Intermediate 1.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards

A	59.3%
B	8.0%
C	9.3%
D	1.9%
No award	21.6%

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

With regard to external assessment, this session saw a small but significant increase in the overall percentage of candidates who received an A pass, a small percentage decrease in those who achieved a B pass and an identical proportion of candidates who achieved a C pass, compared with the 2003 exam. Only a marginal proportion of candidates achieved either a D grade or No Award, demonstrating that the decline in the proportion of candidates attaining a B pass is due to a higher proportion achieving an A pass. Differences in the data for the outcomes of external assessment and Course awards is influenced by the receipt from centres, of information on the outcomes/achievement of internal assessment.

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

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	59.3	59.3	96	42
B	8.0	67.3	13	36
C	9.3	76.6	15	30
D	1.9	78.5	3	
No award	21.6	100*	35	

\*Rounded down from 100.1 per cent

### 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 grade boundaries for each subject area

As the standard of the exam has remained unchanged from 2003 the *a priori* grade boundaries were retained.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

Almost two-thirds of candidates who completed the external assessment attained an A pass. The standard of some of these scripts suggested that some of these candidates may have benefited by being presented at Higher. Many of those candidates who achieved a D award or No Award may have benefited from being presented at Intermediate 1.

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

- Questions that required descriptive answers saw candidates providing generally strong responses. Candidates attaining an A pass generally answered most of the questions well, including those that required evaluation.
- Most of the Research Methods questions (A7, B4 and B5) were answered well by most candidates.
- Candidates responded well in general to the Socialisation questions (A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5).
- A3. The nature-nurture question was answered well by most candidates, with them correctly providing a response for one side (nature) of the debate.
- B1, B2 and B3. Most candidates responded well to the stratification questions, with confusion between forms and systems becoming less apparent than previously.

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

- A6 and B4. Some candidates mixed up primary and secondary research methods with primary and secondary socialisation, suggesting that they had not taken the time to read the questions carefully.
- B5. A reasonable number of candidates – generally most from given centres – used surveys or case studies as examples of research methods that use primary sources of data. Neither of these methods is in the syllabus, thus disadvantaging candidates.
- A2 and A5. A reasonable number of candidates – generally most from given centres – used inappropriate, non-comparative or unclear cultural examples, potentially disadvantaging them in terms of scoring marks. References were made to Catholic and Protestant culture in Scotland, or Glasgow culture (often insufficiently compared with British culture), neither of which accurately reflects the aims of the syllabus. Also, some candidates compared Muslim culture with the culture in a Muslim country (eg Saudi Arabia), which is insufficiently comparative. A number of candidates – generally most from given centres – also continue to make reference to past cultures in the present tense, eg feudal Japan or 19<sup>th</sup> century USA, which would be more appropriate responses if referred to in the past tense.
- B5. Though the first part of this question was answered well by most candidates, many candidates demonstrated either confusion with the part of the questions asking for range and scope, or left that part out altogether. Additionally, a significant number of candidates neglected to read the instruction at the foot of the page requiring them to turn the page to complete the question.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

- Candidates need to write full answers and not very brief (sometimes one word) answers. The lines provided on the exam paper for candidate responses provide a good indication of the extent an answer should be.
- Candidates must be able to provide answers that contain explanation as well as descriptive answers. Responses containing an explanation usually carry higher marks, thus increasing the score of the candidate.
- Candidates should be reminded that questions will be based on a sample drawn from all three Intermediate 2 Units. As such, candidates must prepare for the whole syllabus rather than particular aspects of it. Some candidates gained lower marks because they demonstrated greater knowledge and understanding of a particular area, such as socialisation as opposed to social stratification.
- Candidates must write good responses throughout both sections of the paper in order to attain a good pass.
- Candidates should use cultural examples that reflect the aims of the syllabus, indicating generally national rather than local examples. Where comparisons of more localised examples are used, they should be substantively distinct from one another, including reflections on deeply ingrained and generally long-standing cultural traits. The cultures should always be sufficiently contrasting. Where past cultures are used, candidates should be made aware that such cultures no longer exist and that they should address them in the past tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read all of the instructions and questions on the exam paper carefully, in order to avoid missing or misinterpreting any instructions/questions.