

## Principal Assessor Report 2005

**Assessment Panel:**

Social Sciences

**Qualification area**

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

Sociology  
Intermediate 1

## Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	10
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	21
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### General comments re resulted entry numbers

2005 saw a large percentage increase in the number of candidates, though from an exceptionally low base. Some of the Intermediate 1 candidates would possibly have benefited from sitting the exam at Intermediate 2 level. The pattern of resulted entries for Intermediate 1 continues to be variable, with the very low number of entries continuing to provide what appear to be statistical anomalies, but what in reality is statistically incalculable.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 60	-	-	-	-
A	9.5	9.5	2	42
B	19.0	28.6	4	36
C	33.3	61.9	7	30
D	0.0	61.9	0	27
No award	38.1	100.0	8	-

### 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 changes to the distribution of awards seem volatile in percentage terms but, as entries for this Course are so marginal, it would be difficult to discuss anything in the way of patterns or trends in any meaningful way.

As the standard of the exam has remained unchanged from 2004 the *a priori* grade boundaries were retained.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

- In 2004, half of the candidates who completed the external assessment achieved an A pass, whilst in 2005 this figure dropped to less than 10 per cent. There was a significant statistical rise in the number of candidates achieving a C pass. Over a quarter of candidates received a D grade or No Award, whilst in 2004 no candidates were in this category. However, for No Awards, this seems to reflect a pattern of sorts.
- A number of candidates provided brief one word or bullet-point responses.
- Most of the low or unsuccessful results came from a single centre.

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

- Questions that required descriptive answers (A1; A3; A4; B1; B4).

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

- A number of candidates struggled with providing either contrasting cultures or adequate descriptions or explanations of contrasting cultures (A5; A6; B2).
- A2; B5. 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 question(s) carefully.
- A8. Most candidates struggled with the question on range and scope of a research method.
- B2; B3. Some candidates got confused over forms and systems of stratification.
- A number of candidates failed to answer question B5, suggesting either confusion relating to methods/socialisation or failure to turn the page (as it was the last question). The latter appeared to be the case with some candidates.

## 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. There are also additional pages incorporated within the booklet to expand on questions.
- 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 1 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 rather than the present 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.
- As the content on the Intermediate 1 Units and Course is very similar to that in Intermediate 2, centres should look to moving candidates who could cope with Intermediate 2 up to the appropriate level as soon as possible, including providing Unit assessment and presenting for the Course assessment at the appropriate level.
- Many candidates require more centre input into understanding the differences between forms and systems of social stratification and what is meant by the range and scope of research methods.