

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Social Sciences

Qualification area

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

Sociology
Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	162
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	156
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

2005 saw a minor decrease in the number of candidates, after the 50 per cent increase in 2004. There continues to be a significant number of Higher candidates who should have been presented for Intermediate 2. There also continues to be a small percentage of candidates at Intermediate 2 who should have been presented at Intermediate 1.

The proportion of candidates within each grade boundary was either the same (Upper A), marginally lower (Lower A; B) or marginally higher (C; No Award) than in 2004.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 60	-	-	-	-
A	46.8	46.8	73	42
B	8.3	55.1	13	36
C	12.2	67.3	19	30
D	2.6	69.9	4	27
No award	30.1	100.0	47	-

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 regard to external assessment, this session saw a small decrease in the overall percentage of candidates who received an A pass, a small percentage decrease in those who achieved a B pass and an increase in the number of candidates who achieved a C pass or a No Award, compared with the 2004 exam. The proportion of candidates achieving either a D grade or No Award, whilst rising, continues to be fairly low.

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

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Just over 60% 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. This continues to be an issue, despite the general commonality of content in Intermediate 2 and Intermediate 1 Units and Course.

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 Socialisation questions (A1, A2 and A4) were answered well by most candidates.
- Candidates responded well in general to the research process question (A5) and the question on advantages and disadvantages of a research method (A6).
- A3. The nature-nurture question was answered well by most candidates, where a response for one side (nature) of the debate was correctly provided.
- Where candidates answered the questions on primary sources of data (B4) most answered well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

- A1. Some candidates answered the part of the question relating to mass media as an agent of socialisation weaker than the other two agents.
- A number of candidates struggled a little with explaining the relationship between social order and the socialisation process (A3).
- Many candidates struggled with providing answers on different forms of social stratification in contrasting cultures. Cultures provided were often similar (ie UK and US or Muslim culture with a specific Islamic country). 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 19th century USA, which would be more appropriate responses if referred to in the past tense. A reasonable number of candidates – generally most from given centres – used inappropriate, non-comparative or unclear cultural examples. References were made to Catholic and Protestant cultures in Scotland, or Glasgow culture, neither of which accurately reflects the aims of the syllabus (B2; B3).
- B4. A number of candidates either neglected to answer this question or answered it incorrectly, sometimes incorrectly referring to primary or secondary *socialisation* instead of *sources of data*.
- B5. The question on range and scope continues to be a difficult question for candidates to answer.

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 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 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.
- Candidates struggling with Unit assessment at centres should be moved to Intermediate 1, where the exam may be more appropriate for them. As the content on the Intermediate 2 Units and Course is very similar to that in Intermediate 1, centres should look to moving such candidates 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.