



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Play in Early Education and Childcare
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Overall the standard was high this year and candidates were well prepared to complete the project. Candidates have clearly been set realistic timescales and have been offered placements that meet the requirements of the project specification.

The majority of candidates chose the 'Ruaridh' case study and this is tackled well, with candidates choosing a variety of types of play experiences to meet his needs.

Portfolios were presented and many benefited from being word-processed. The inclusion of placement observations, children's work, and photographs (with appropriate permissions) enhances the project.

Centres should ensure that they are using the current project specification and marking scheme. SQA recommends projects are internally verified by Centres particularly where there is more than one Campus or lecturer delivering the project.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates perform well in the Research-based report and the Case study report, particularly when they can relate it to their own placement experience. Many candidates can identify areas of good practice observed and can describe their own involvement in the type of play chosen. Many candidates can empathise with the child in the chosen case study, through their own experience.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates continue to find the Planning Stage demanding. This stage is often very general, with candidates re-writing the candidate brief. This plan should be specific in relation to what the candidate plans to do across the whole of the project. It should show evidence of prior reading, research and be related to placement experience. On the whole, centres tend to mark this section more generously than the grade boundaries would suggest and this can affect the estimate given to candidates by centres.

Candidates find the 'theorist' element of the research report demanding. They should discuss two theorists in relation to the type of play chosen, and to gain high marks at Higher level they are expected to relate the theorist to the type of play. In their Conclusion, candidates often identify this aspect of the project as the most demanding, and centres should consider giving additional support or a specific reading list to support this aspect of the Project.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Candidates should have some experience working with the age of the child in the chosen Case Study. Centres should ensure that candidates are aware of appropriate activities for the age group through delivery of the Course Units.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that they are using the most current Project Specification and Marking Scheme. Centres should avoid devising their own marking scheme or using older versions that may disadvantage the candidate.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates have the appropriate skills to complete the Project, eg research skills, report writing skills, analytical skills and the ability to draw conclusions and make recommendations and to evaluate complex information.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates have access to a wide range of research material in a variety of formats. Consideration could be given to issuing candidates with a list of appropriate resources to focus their research, particularly in relation to the 'Play theorists'.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates are given sufficient time to complete all aspects of the Project. Time should be allocated prior to the submission of the Planning Stage to allow candidates to carry out preliminary research.
- ◆ Steps should be taken to avoid plagiarism and academic dishonesty, and candidates should use a clear system of referencing (eg Harvard) to ensure they acknowledge the work of others. Centres should consider using 'anti-plagiarism' software to ensure the authenticity of the students work.
- ◆ Centre staff should be familiar with the Project Specification (particularly the grade boundaries), the Course Units and SCQF level before supporting candidates and marking projects.
- ◆ Centres should use internal verification procedures to ensure consistency of marking between campuses and staff.
- ◆ Centres should not fill in marks on the project fly sheet or the EX6 form.
- ◆ Candidates should adhere to the recommended word count for each stage and should be advised to clearly state the word count for each section. They should be reminded that where too few words are given they miss opportunities for gaining marks, and where they significantly exceed the word count responses will not be clear, concise or focused on the important issues.
- ◆ Centres should not submit incomplete work or work that clearly does not meet the requirements of the Project Specification.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	205
Number of resulted entries in 2012	167

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	14.4%	14.4%	24	140
B	31.7%	46.1%	53	120
C	32.3%	78.4%	54	100
D	6.0%	84.4%	10	90
No award	15.6%	100.0%	26	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). 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 management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ 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, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this 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.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.