

Standard Grade Advice on generation of evidence for assessable Elements assessed by Question Papers

This advice supplements that already issued by SQA in subject update letters and complements the generic advice in the document: *Estimates, Absentees and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on Evidence Requirements*.

- ◆ Evidence used to compile an estimate for an assessable Element should reflect the requirements of the Course assessment.
- ◆ Valid evidence of attainment for an assessable Element which is assessed by a question paper could be generated through the use of an assessment instrument, such as a prelim, which replicates, as far as possible, the standard format, duration and security of SQA's question papers.
- ◆ Evidence for an Element assessed by a question paper is mandatory; it must show the same breadth of coverage of Course content as SQA's question papers and relate to the Grade Related Criteria (GRC). While a prelim examination is not mandatory, it is an indicator of likely candidate performance in the external examination when pressure of time and retention of learning are significant factors.
- ◆ In some subjects, the approach used by SQA is composite papers, in which all candidates, irrespective of ability, are tested on a single paper. This approach is only acceptable where it also operates in SQA examinations.
- ◆ In other subjects, the approach used by SQA is two or three discrete papers, one for each level. The approach used in gathering evidence for a subject should replicate SQA's approach.
- ◆ In papers assessing more than one Element, the balance of items, types of items and mark allocations should reflect that in SQA's question paper.

Common Failings:

Prelims that are statistically invalid

They do not carry enough marks to test the candidate reliably. Prelims should have the Element mark allocations that reflect those of the examination. In a Prelim the weighting attached to the Elements should be the same as that used in SQA examinations.

Insufficiently comprehensive prelims

This is where the Course Grade Descriptions are not fully sampled. Although Standard Grade is a two year Course, prelim examinations often take place in some subjects before the Course has been completed. In such cases, prelim evidence should be supplemented by evidence of additional knowledge and skills developed after the prelim. This supplementary evidence would be of greatest use if it consisted of an additional assessment covering a range of topics, including some of those previously assessed. Centres should check PA Reports and subject update letters for any specific subject advice.

A prelim that is not equivalent in demand to the Course assessment.

This can happen when the prelim is split and the two assessments used as a prelim are separated by a period of time, or where the prelim only covers part of the Course. In Standard Grade where the examination assesses two Elements, a prelim which assesses only one element would be less demanding than the course assessment.

Incorrectly categorised questions

Questions are incorrectly categorised for a particular assessable Element, giving an imbalance between Elements.

Inconsistent marking within a centre

It is essential that a consistent standard be applied to the marking of scripts. Before marking begins, everyone involved in marking should discuss and confirm the Marking Instructions and their application. There should also be some checking of the standards of marking across the marking team.

Unmarked prelim scripts

Some centres submit unmarked prelim scripts, making it impossible for the examiner to gauge the standards that have been applied by the centre. Unmarked scripts do not constitute valid evidence, even where they are accompanied by Marking Instructions.

No indication of cut-off scores applied by the centre

Evidence not supported by the cut-off scores is invalid. The cut-off scores are also essential information to enable Examiners to gauge the standards being applied by the centre.

Unacceptably low cut-off scores

For Standard Grade, cut-off scores should be set at approximately 70% for the upper grade, and 50% for the lower. Where a centre's prelim is less demanding than SQA's question paper the cut-off scores should be raised. (Decisions on cut-off scores take place in SQA annually for each Course, after all examinations have been completed, and the data is published on our website in the Principal Assessors' reports.)

The timing of a prelim needs to be considered carefully. To optimise diagnosis, assessment will be earlier rather than later in the Course. On the other hand, for the purposes of Estimates and Appeals, assessment should be as late as possible so that there is maximum coverage of content and/or growth of competence. Where the Estimate is based on an assessment covering only part of the Course, the level of demand is likely to be less than in the Course assessment.

You should ensure that assessment evidence is produced under supervised conditions, similar to those set for the Course assessment. The reliability of the evidence will be compromised if there are doubts about the authenticity of the evidence. The tasks set should be unseen by candidates, and should be administered under supervised conditions in accordance with the conditions for the Course assessment. Assessment instruments and marking instructions should be stored securely to prevent candidates gaining access to them outwith formal assessment arrangements.