

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

**Social Sciences**

**Qualification area**

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

**PHILOSOPHY - Advanced Higher**

### **Statistical information: update**

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	4

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	6

### **General comments re entry numbers**

Numbers are too small to identify any trends. However, it does seem strange that different schools are presenting each year. There does not seem to be any pattern of loyalty to the subject building up.

There are now 8 schools which have taught this course, and at most, one has done so twice. It would be interesting to know why schools which have taught the course in the past have not done so again.

## Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

C: 45/90 (50%)	B: 54/90 (60%)	A: 63/90 (70%)
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### 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 syllabuses evolve and change

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

No change from previous years, and in line with norm.

No candidates were close to any boundaries except B/A, and markers considered whether to lower the A threshold in order to award A to either or both of the two top candidates. After serious consideration and having regard to the grade descriptors, we decided this could not be justified.

The one fail was significantly below the pass mark, partly because there were only significant answers to two questions.

## **Comments on candidate performance**

### **General comments**

Better spread of marks, but generally disappointing, especially by comparison with previous years. This is the first time we have not awarded any As, and the first time we have failed any candidate. Overall, we did not feel that, as in previous years, the standard was quite up to that of first-year undergraduates.

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

Too few candidates to form a view.

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

Four candidates from the same school had exactly the same approach to their answers, even beginning their answers to the same questions with the very same words. Two of these candidates also attempted the logic questions using informal techniques which were entirely inappropriate for the formal questions asked.

In addition one candidate wrote A+ essays – but unfortunately made no attempt to answer the questions asked. Another did not mention the topic of the question until the final line of his/her answer, and one candidate wrote a long preamble to his/her final answer without beginning to answer it. These candidates clearly need further tuition in either general or subject specific exam technique.

## **Recommendations**

### **Feedback to centres**

As noted in previous years, candidates must be given clearer guidance on what constitutes a philosophical problem, and how to begin to discuss such questions. This is NOT a paper on history of ideas, and it should perhaps be made more explicit that even the most accurate reportage of the views of the ancients will not achieve more than a bare pass in the absence of evidence that the candidate is engaging with the argument.

Ditto coaching in standard answers when almost no effort is made to relate them to question asked.