

Standard Grade — advice on generating evidence for assessable Elements assessed by Question Papers

This advice supplements the advice we issued in subject update letters, and complements the generic advice in: *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 that is assessed by a Question Paper could be generated through the use of an assessment instrument, (eg a prelim) which replicates, as far as possible, the standard format, duration and security of SQA's Question Papers.
- ◆ Evidence for any Element assessed by a Question Paper is mandatory. The evidence must show the same breadth of coverage of Course content as SQA's Question Paper, and must relate to the Grade Related Criteria (GRC). While a prelim examination is not mandatory, it is an indicator of the candidate's likely performance in the external examination, where 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 for generating evidence where it is also used 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 that assess more than one Element, the balance of items, types of items and mark allocations should reflect the balance in SQA's Question Paper.

Common failings

Prelims that are statistically invalid

These prelims do not carry enough marks to test the candidate reliably. Prelims should have Element mark allocations that reflect those of the examination. In a prelim, the weighting attached to the Elements should be the same as in the 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 before the Course has been completed. In such cases, prelim evidence should be supplemented by evidence of knowledge and skills developed after the prelim. This supplementary evidence will be of greatest use if it consists of an additional assessment covering a range of topics, including some of those previously assessed. Centres should check External Assessment 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 are separated by a period of time, or where the prelim only covers part of the Course. In Standard Grades where the examination assesses two Elements, a prelim that assesses only one Element would be less demanding than the Course assessment.

Incorrectly categorised questions

If questions are incorrectly categorised for a particular assessable Element, this causes an imbalance between Elements.

Inconsistent marking by the 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 how they should be applied. 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.

Prelims that are not reliable as they have not been composed of the recommended minimum of three sources (preferably adapted) or the sources have not been identified as they are unknown. Information on the sources of questions within an assessment instrument is an important variable in evaluating this reliability. **Evidence not supported by sources of questions information is invalid.**

Where centres administer more than one prelim (eg S3 and S4 prelim) centres must submit the S4 prelim as evidence with the option of also submitting the S3 prelim as supplementary evidence.

Prelims that are not reliable as they are heavily weighted towards one of the three sources (i.e. 70%, 15%, 15%)

No indication of cut-off scores applied by the centre

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

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 External Assessment reports.)

General advice

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 Estimates and Appeals, assessment should be as late as possible so that there is maximum coverage of content and/or growth of competence. Where centres administer more than one prelim (eg S3 and S4 prelim) centres must submit the S4 prelim as evidence with the option of also submitting the S3 prelim as supplementary evidence. 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 its authenticity. 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.