External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Geography
Level(s)	Intermediate 1 and 2

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The final presentation year for Intermediate exams saw the Intermediate 1 presentation down to 25 candidates and the Intermediate 2 presentation reduced to 316.

The majority of the candidates were in S5/6 — as new S4 candidates moved to National 5 — radically changing the cohort profile in comparison to previous years. The examination at both levels, however, was of the same standard as previously, and was marked centrally by experienced members of the examining team. In Intermediate 2, a commendable 19.4% of candidates achieved an 'A' pass, with 56.1% achieving 'C' or better.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In the Intermediate 2 examination candidates performed well in Q1 (Physical Environments) Q6 (Development and Health) and Q7 (Environmental Hazards)

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Intermediate 2, candidates struggled with Q2 (Human Environments) mainly due to not reading the questions properly. In Q2a they were asked to explain why some countries have a **high** population density, but many candidates proceeded to explain why areas had a **low** population density. In 2d many candidates seemed to have limited knowledge of the term 'farm diversification', and in 2e very few candidates mentioned **changes** in industrial location.

General

The overall standard of candidates in Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 showed an even more dramatic decline in overall numbers and ability, with many candidates clearly being presented at an inappropriate level.

The markers this year commented on the extremely poor standard of writing on some scripts and centres should be reminded that it is their responsibility to identify and support such candidates if necessary.

Intermediate 1

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	307

Number of resulted entries in 2015	25

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 60				
A	4.0%	4.0%	1	42
B	20.0%	24.0%	5	36
C	36.0%	60.0%	9	30
D	8.0%	68.0%	2	27
No award	32.0%	-	8	-

Intermediate 2

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	2525

Number of resulted entries in 2015	316

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 80				
A	19.6%	19.6%	62	56
B	16.5%	36.1%	52	47
C	20.3%	56.3%	64	39
D	13.3%	69.6%	42	35
No award	30.4%	-	96	-

Intermediate 1

The assessment functioned as intended. Therefore no adjustment to the grade boundaries was required.

Intermediate 2

The assessment functioned as intended. 2014 adjustment no longer required.

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.