



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Administration
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

This year the average marks gained in both papers were just about the same. There was a small improvement in Paper 1. Paper 2 marks dropped slightly compared to last year. However, the trend is of a general improvement.

Candidates continue to improve in their ability to answer the command words correctly. 'Discuss' answers were rarely penalised for not being structured correctly. 'Outline' answers were slightly more detailed than in previous years, and candidates seem to be moving away from one or two-word answers to writing in sentences. 'Describe' is still proving difficult for some candidates, either because they lack the knowledge to gain the second mark or they do not understand that two points have to be made.

Candidates had more knowledge this year and there were fewer candidates who struggled to complete two questions from Section 2, with many using two or three additional booklets. There was a feeling amongst markers (although no statistical evidence) that more able candidates had chosen from questions on Page 3 and had not given due consideration to questions 4 and 5, which were on the back page. Both these questions had very standard 'discuss' questions which able candidates should have found more accessible than the discuss questions in 1, 2 and 3. This pattern has been observed in previous years.

There is evidence that candidates are more astute in the way in which they tackle Paper 2, focusing on their strengths or where they are more likely to gain marks. Most candidates performed strongly in the database question and the word processing task was fairly well done. The spreadsheet continues to present difficulties for some candidates. This appears to be due to issues surrounding numeracy. There were only a couple of functions that had not been tested before in the IT paper — the comment in the spreadsheet and the odd and even footers. The majority of the paper should have been accessible to most candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Case Study 1: often this type of question results in very short answers, but most candidates gave very good outlines of the working practices.

Case Study 2: as this was only for four marks, most candidates were able to gain reasonable marks for this question.

Case Study 5: candidates are much better at answering 'compare' questions, and the answers for this question were well structured. However, few candidates gave a similarity that would reduce the amount of writing they had to do. Sometimes candidates construct

very complicated sentences to show a difference and they can lose the thread of what they intended to write.

Section 2 Q2c: 'justify the expense ...' is a question that has been poorly done in the past, with candidates seemingly not understanding what the phrase means. This year, however, candidates gave some excellent answers to this question and understood exactly why it is important to train staff in customer care.

Section 2 Q2d: 'describe ergonomic features' was well done, with most candidates covering different features rather than covering similar types of features, eg furniture or decoration.

Section 2 Q3a: the Data Protection Act did not present any problems for the majority of candidates and again answers were written as full sentences.

Section 2 Q4a: the term 'data integrity' has not been used before, hence the definition given in the stem and the question only being worth three outline marks. Most candidates had little difficulty in gaining full marks.

Section 2 Q4b: this question was well done but, surprisingly, not as strongly as the first question in 4. Also, a number of candidates seemed not to know that e-commerce involved buying and selling online, and markers were instructed to ensure that there was some inference that the candidate did know what e-commerce is. Obviously there is an overlap with just having a website, but we did not accept any comment regarding the advantages of a website that did not have an e-commerce facility.

Section 2 Q4c: this question was exceptionally well done and was one of the few 'describe' questions where candidates found it easy to give the second point.

Section 2 Q5a: whilst only an 'outline' question, the concept can prove difficult for candidates but this was answered well by most candidates.

Paper 2

1a: most candidates gained four marks for this — three out of the four criteria were correctly carried out. However, finding the first Sunday in July proved to be difficult for the majority of candidates.

1b: 'aggregate fields' (in this case counting and averaging) did not present a problem for most candidates. A few enterprising candidates did it as two separate tasks, and this was still awarded marks. Given the marking principles laid down in Understanding Standards for this task candidates either achieve full marks or nothing.

1c: despite the fact that this task is designed to discriminate the more able, it was very well done this year. The double calculation did not seem to present any problems for candidates, the query on ostrich was completed by the majority. Very few lost marks for presentation, heading or logo. Centres are obviously preparing candidates exceptionally well for the database question. Some computers had been set to round up the calculation to whole

numbers and this was not penalised in the calculation mark but in the presentation mark, which many candidates lost for other reasons as well. Also, as there were two parts to the calculation and it was worth three marks, candidates were awarded for a partially correct answer.

2a: the first part of the spreadsheet was well done by the majority of candidates. The vlookup using either named range or absolute cells did not seem to present any problem. A very small group of candidates were misled by the word maximum in the heading and attempted a conditional statement. Marks were awarded accordingly. However, it had not been the intention to test conditional statements in this part of the spreadsheet question. For future reference, conditional statements will never have more than four conditions. Nor is it likely that the source information would be on a different sheet, as this makes for a very complicated and time-consuming process.

3: the word-processing task was well done and most candidates carried out the majority of the instructions. Converting table to text, inserting database searches and changing heading were all well done.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Case Study 1c: a number of candidates presumed that using an agency would preclude internal candidates from applying.

Section 2 Q1b: most likely because this was a 'describe' question, candidates found it hard to gain the additional comment mark. When this has been asked as a 'discuss' it tends to be well done. Many candidates gave six outlines.

Section 2 Q1d: this question seemed to prove difficult for more able candidates who struggle to find reasons for the Senior Administrative Assistant to have excellent IT skills. The answers were relatively simple, eg to train junior staff; to carry out tasks if junior staff absent; working for higher level managers therefore IT tasks will be more complex. More able candidates, maybe, presumed that there was more to it than this.

Section 2 Q2a: the only term that most candidates knew was 'verbatim'. The others were very poorly answered, with a lot of candidates guessing the definitions.

Section 2 Q3c: this proved to be quite a difficult question. Simply naming steps was not accepted. Some candidates put all the steps of a disciplinary process into the one sentence and could not expand on this. Good answers gave justifications for each of the steps in the process. Other candidates spoke about the need for the organisation to consider additional training, clearer instructions, setting up buddy systems, etc. Others covered the severity of the breach and the different approaches that could be taken.

Section 2 Q3d: candidates struggled to express themselves clearly with this question, rather than lacking knowledge.

Paper 2

Database: Searching for the first Sunday in June proved problematic, with most candidates not gaining this mark. This was the only mark in the database that was inaccessible by the majority.

Spreadsheet: Candidates who used a vlookup in part a and then sumif in part b tended to do very well in this question. A large number of candidates sorted the Food Producers sheet and then summed, but whilst this was awarded marks it was a time-consuming process and there was a high frequency of errors.

Very few candidates could create a formula to calculate the percentage share — the theory behind this is very low level maths but proved too difficult for the majority of candidates.

Disappointingly, a large number of candidates made simple keying in or formatting errors in the headings and also lost the mark for formatting the amounts correctly for currency and percentages. If the candidate had only completed the currency column they would still have gained one mark — both columns did not need to be completed.

Very few candidates knew how to insert a comment correctly. A previous paper had asked for a comment to be removed and it was felt that inserting a comment was a reasonable task.

The third part of the spreadsheet task also proved to be challenging, with candidates failing to understand the difference between Discount Rate and Discount Amount. The majority of candidates had a percentage figure in the Discount Amount column — their conditional statements were good, but because they had not multiplied by the course fee they did not gain any formula marks. If they subtracted in the last column then marks were awarded here.

Many missed the instruction to print the sheet without the little information box.

It is disappointing to observe the number of non-formula marks lost in the spreadsheet questions. Only half the marks are actually for formulae, with the others coming from replication, printing, inserting headings, formatting, etc.

A number of candidates do not replicate the first formula. Instead, they create a number of different ones and if any one of these is wrong then the replication mark is lost.

Word-processing: A number of candidates lost the keying in marks on page one — this is always an issue. Converting the table to text was well done but few candidates remembered to justify the text.

Task 1b was correctly inserted and the heading changed, but very few totalled the column. This has been asked in previous years.

On the last page the search results from 1a were added and the page orientation changed, but the keying in of an appropriate heading was very badly done.

The request to have different odd and even footers on pages 2 and 3 was only attempted by a few candidates.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Paper 1

Continue to develop writing skills — most candidates are well-prepared with regards to the command words and their success is more dependent on their knowledge rather than how they can answer.

The paper will continue to be structured with each of the choice questions having very similar marks awarded to each of the command words, eg 'discuss' will be worth eight marks in all Section 2 questions. Prelim papers should be constructed to mirror the structure of the SQA paper.

There has been some discussion regarding 'compare'. Centres invest a lot of time teaching candidates how to tackle this command word, yet it has only been worth two marks in recent years. It was decided to increase the marks to three this year to reflect the effort given to this command word. Candidates should be trained to find similarities first, as this tends to be easier. (Candidates do not need to give any differences to gain full marks.)

Candidates need to be made aware of the fact that in most cases the 'discuss' question is easier to gain marks in than the 'describe' question. They should therefore be very careful in the questions they choose and should carry out an audit of Section 2 before making their choices.

'Describe' is proving problematic for some candidates and it can be unclear whether they do not understand how to structure their answer or they have chosen a question where they only have enough knowledge to gain the outline mark. Centres should note that if a candidate gives a weak outline point, eg just naming, but then gives a detailed additional comment, this would gain 1/2. This year markers were asked to annotate scripts with an 'o' for the outline comment and an 'a' for the additional comment. Whilst difficult to get used to initially, most markers felt it helped them to award marks correctly for the describe questions. This might be a practice that centres would find useful to when teaching candidates.

Paper 2

Databases: Continue to develop database skills as this question is designed to increase in difficulty through the three parts. However, it is increasingly obvious that candidates are very comfortable with all aspects of databases. There are really only four areas that can be tested in the final exam and careful analysis of past papers should help centres to prepare candidates for question 1. Candidates should be confident that this question can be completed quickly and accurately, allowing them more time to concentrate on the spreadsheet.

Spreadsheets: Again there are a limited number of formulae that can actually be tested, and the paper tends to be structured in such a way as to allow lookups, countif, sumif and conditional statements to be tested. Parts a and b of the spreadsheet question will be connected but, to give candidates a fresh start, part c will be a stand-alone question. This should be reinforced with candidates.

Where the instruction is to 'print on one page', the whole sheet must be on the one side of paper. Back-to-back printing of a sheet will not gain the print mark.

Candidates need to be more aware of the easy marks that can be gained in the spreadsheet, even if they believe that their formulae are not correct. Showing candidates the marking scheme and discussing exam technique, eg replication of even a wrong formula will gain a mark, is to be encouraged.

Word-processing: The Arrangements Document requires business documents to be tested in the final exam. Whilst candidates are well-prepared for reports, time should also be devoted to covering letters, memos and minutes.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2011	3981
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	3585
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 120				
A	12.7%	12.7%	457	84
B	24.9%	37.7%	894	72
C	30.0%	67.7%	1076	60
D	11.2%	78.9%	401	54
No award	21.1%	100.0%	757	-

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.