



External Assessment Report 2013

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 candidates showed an improved ability to cope with both Paper 1 and Paper 2. The majority of candidates gave full answers to Paper 1, and there was evidence that they had the knowledge to enable them to answer in depth.

The statistical evidence and the qualitative information from markers indicated that this paper was very accessible to the majority of candidates. Both staff and candidates are much more confident with the format of the exam, and those candidates who have revised content and practised key practical techniques can approach both papers with confidence.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Candidates' ability to answer compare, justify and discuss questions continues to improve. Knowledge in some areas of the Course is very good. Candidates wrote much more than in previous years, and many used a number of additional booklets. Questions 2 and 5 were the most popular.

Section 1: questions 1 and 2 on meetings were generally well done, although some candidates tended to stray towards the duties of the secretary in their answer to 1

Question 1

- ◆ 1a on support systems was a question that candidates found easy to answer.
- ◆ 1b on working practices is an area where candidates can give detailed answers, and most found it easy to gain the second point.
- ◆ 1c was well done, and the majority of candidates wrote well-structured discuss answers.

Question 2

This question was very popular and candidates scored highly.

- ◆ 2a was well answered, and in fact most candidates wrote more than is needed for an outline question.
- ◆ 2b — candidates found this question easy to do and again managed to gain the second point in most cases.
- ◆ 2d on customer satisfaction was well done. Again, a number of candidates wrote at length on this topic.

Question 3

This was not a popular choice

- ◆ 3a was well answered, with candidates having a good knowledge of this area.

Question 4

This was not a popular question.

- ◆ 4a on targets was well done by those who attempted the question and many gave features other than SMART.
- ◆ 4b — this is a familiar question, and again candidates scored well.

Question 5

- ◆ 5ai on Data Protection was well done

Paper 2

This paper was very well done, and the marks were higher than in previous years. A number of candidates came close to gaining full marks.

Database

- ◆ 1a Form was well done — the only reason a candidate did not gain full marks was down to truncation of fields.
- ◆ 1b — most candidates made excellent attempts at this, with a higher number than before managing to do the calculations and format for currency. Centres are obviously preparing candidates for this question. What was previously an A level task is becoming much more accessible.

Spreadsheet

- ◆ 2a — the vast majority of candidates found this question with the vlookup very easy and gained full marks. Some candidates did not use a vlookup and tried to use cell references instead. Invariably they made a mistake somewhere, plus lost a lot of time.

Letter

Solutions to this question were much better than the last time a letter was tested. Layout was invariably correct, and most candidates knew to put in a salutation and a complimentary close.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Section 1

- ◆ Q3 on software was very badly answered — it is rather disappointing that pupils who can use software to a high level are unable to describe it.
- ◆ Q5 — comparing Action and Formal Minutes was impossible for most candidates. The majority of them were unclear as to what Action Minutes are. Very few approached this question by looking at the similarities. In trying to write about the differences, most candidates tied themselves in knots.

Question 1

- ◆ 1d — similar to the question on software in Section 1, knowledge of relational databases was very poor. Acceptable answers had to refer to something that was unique to relational databases, and not a general comment on databases.

Question 2

- ◆ 2c — whilst the structure of answers was good, and most candidates did gain more than 4 marks, it was surprising the number that ran out of steam and could not develop points to achieve full marks.

Question 3

- ◆ 3b was not well done, with most candidates finding it hard to gain two scoring points for each factor. Many candidates did not know enough and therefore went on and gave an additional factor, which does not gain marks.
- ◆ 3c — this topic should be a familiar one as it has been asked in a variety of different ways over the years, and it was disappointing that candidates seemed to find this a hard question. Those who attempted it seemed unable to apply their knowledge of what makes an effective team and then reverse it.
- ◆ 3d — answers to this question tended to be weak and showed that candidates were not very sure of the topic.

Question 4

- ◆ 4c — answers to this were not as full as had been expected. Candidates seemed to run out of steam. It is a very wide topic and the solution allowed for a variety of approaches.
- ◆ 4d — many candidates did not know what was meant by a centralised IT department.

Question 5

- ◆ 5a(ii) — candidates were unsure of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act
- ◆ 5b — whilst knowledge of induction training was good, many found it hard to gain the second mark. Also, a significant number of candidates seemed to believe that induction training is part of the selection process.
- ◆ 5c — as with 2c, many gave points but seemed to lack the depth of knowledge that allowed them to expand on points.

Paper 2

Database

- ◆ 1b — it is perhaps unfair to say that this was badly done — most candidates lost only one mark. However, in comparison to the other two questions in the Database task, it was the one area where pupils tripped up. The main issue was either with the age requirement or the activity being available in September. Dates and numbers are always going to be problematic.

Spreadsheet

- ◆ 2b — most candidates found the hourly rate in the database and brought them over however a number of candidates then calculated the New Hourly Rate in same cell rather than showing the two amounts separately.
Some candidates included Sunday hours in the Saturday calculation. Whilst the mark

was lost at this point it was then treated as a consequential error.

Again, some candidates did not use the most efficient formula (sum if) but instead tried to pick up the information from the Activity Income sheet.

Using percentages to calculate the New Hourly Rate proved difficult for some.

- ◆ 2c — there was evidence that candidates found it difficult to bring in the Gross Pay from the previous sheet.

As in previous years some candidates are not sure about percentages and showed the Pension Contribution as a percentage rather than an amount.

Some created a table and did a vlookup rather than use a nested if. This gave the correct answer, so gained full marks.

Letter

Just a few points:

- ◆ Numbering of second page was rarely done.
- ◆ The last occurrence of 'sports' was often not replaced.
- ◆ Whilst there was usually a complimentary close, it often contained an error — capitalisation of 'sincerely', a comma inserted after 'sincerely', 'yours truly' or just 'yours'.
- ◆ 'Enc' was missing from most letters.
- ◆ It could be difficult to tell if any there was enhancement of column headings. There must be an obvious difference.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Paper 1

- ◆ Continue with the good practice. Standards are improving year on year.
- ◆ Give time to the structure of 'describe' answers and the second/additional mark.
- ◆ Tell candidates to beware of using catch-all phrases repeatedly, eg 'lose their competitive edge', 'poor reputation', etc. These are often used with little thought to the context of the question.
- ◆ We need to ensure that our candidates can actually write about the software they use daily. It is rather worrying that answers to the two software questions were so badly done. Candidates struggled to describe a word-processing package, yet most of them have been with us for three or four years.
- ◆ There are topics that lend themselves to 'discuss' questions — teams, internet, selection methods etc. In preparing candidates for exams, ensure that they can give more than eight points for these, and also spend some time in developing points rather than knowing eight separate points. Under pressure of the exam, many find it hard to recall eight points.

Paper 2

There are few surprises in this paper — candidates who are familiar with the past papers will find it very accessible. As with all exams there will be some parts that candidates struggle

with, but candidates need to know that they do not need to work through the paper from beginning to end.

The database task should be a familiar and comfortable task for all candidates to start with, but some may then find it better to do the word-processing task and leave the spreadsheet until the end.

Similarly the third part of the spreadsheet is usually the most difficult, and again it might make sense to leave it and gain marks from the word-processing task.

Each candidate should know their strengths and weaknesses, and approach the paper in a way that will ensure they gain the most marks.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	2492
Number of resulted entries in 2013	2400

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	26.7%	26.7%	641	86
B	29.7%	56.4%	714	74
C	22.3%	78.7%	537	63
D	8.9%	87.6%	213	57
No award	12.4%	100.0%	298	-

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.