

## Principal Assessor Report 2002

**Assessment Panel:**

**Computing and Information Systems**

**Qualification area**

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

**Information Systems - Higher**

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of entries in 2001</b>	2420
<b>Pre appeal</b>	
<b>Post appeal</b>	2521

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	2865
<b>Pre appeal</b>	
<b>Post appeal</b>	

### General comments re entry numbers

There was an increase in numbers of presentations again this year which is an encouraging sign for this reasonably new subject.

### General comments

There was some excellent responses from some candidates but on the whole, there was a general feeling of disappointment expressed by most markers about the poor standard of response from candidates. The examining team and setters have had much discussion on possible causes of this but can see no obvious reason. The standard of the paper was similar to that of last year's paper.

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

Upper A - 84  
A - 70  
B - 59  
C - 49

### **General commentary on grade boundaries**

#### *Notional percentage cut-offs for each grade*

Question papers and their associated marking schemes are designed to be of the required standard and to meet the assessment specification for the subject/level concerned.

For National courses the examination paper(s) are set in order that a score of approximately 50% of the total marks for all components merits a grade C (based on the grade descriptions for that grade), and similarly a score of 70 % for a grade A. The lowest mark for a grade B is set by the computer software as half way between the C and A grade boundaries.

### **Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area**

These boundaries were set after much discussion on candidates ' results at the passmark meeting.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

The average mark of 77% for the coursework is very high compared with the average mark of 38% in the external exam.

Generally candidates performed well in questions which required the recall of knowledge. However markers reported that candidates' responses lacked depth and were poorer than previous years. In many cases the depth of knowledge demonstrated fell below what is required at Higher. The markers also reported on the poor standard of English with some candidates answering using text message type abbreviations.

Candidates tended to respond to questions in a general manner, rather than describing a solution to the particular scenario in the question – thus candidates showed limited ability to apply knowledge in a problem-solving context.

In general many candidates showed little understanding of the theory of normalisation – this is hard to rationalise when compared with the high coursework mark achieved by candidates since the coursework task is also based on the theory of normalisation.

An **average** mark of 27 out of 70 for the written paper is an indication of the many candidates for whom this level of presentation was inappropriate. Markers again reported a surprising number of candidates with less than 10 marks in the written paper with at least two candidates gaining no marks at all.

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

As stated above the coursework was done well.

The average mark in questions 2, 5, 10, 12, 13 was above 5 and these were the questions that markers identified as being answered well. Some markers, however felt they could not identify any area in their sample of scripts that had been tackled well

Of the three Optional Topics markers felt that Hypermedia was answered the best with most candidates answering question 13 particularly well.

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

Question 1 was not well done – candidates had difficulty identifying the repeating group and the keys. Also question 3d was not well done with candidates unable to explain how to use the facilities of a database to produce the report. This is hard to rationalise when compared with the high marks attained in the coursework which also tests the process of normalisation and creating reports and in which candidates achieve comparatively high marks.

Few candidates were able to work out question 1c about the dependency of attributes.

Question 2b showed that candidates had a poor understanding of the difference between broadcast and digital media.

Most candidates found difficulty in applying their knowledge of the concepts of decision-making, control and education in the scenario in question 4. In question 4c candidates tended to give a Standard Grade level of answer to the legal implications and very few candidates answered anything relevant about ethical implications.

All markers highlighted question 7 as the one that was least well attempted by candidates. Some centres have expressed concern over the depth of knowledge required in this question however some of the knowledge required is contained in the Standard grade syllabus at Credit level. In part b) candidates were asked to **describe** how the results could be achieved. They did not need to name a particular function but use and integrate their knowledge of advanced features, spreadsheets and databases to describe a solution in this unfamiliar context.

There is still confusion among candidates in the meaning of the terms describing the characteristics of information. These terms were often mixed up or not understood at all.

#### **Areas of common misunderstanding**

None reported

## **Recommendations**

### **Feedback to centres**

Presenting centres should stress to candidates the need to be able to integrate the knowledge obtained across the component units in the Information Systems course and their written descriptions of the knowledge should be detailed, accurate and complete. A level of depth and breadth appropriate to Higher level is required.

A question which asks for a description or an explanation will not be given full marks if the answer simply states the name of an information system or the feature of an application package.

Candidates should be reminded that problem solving questions often require candidates to relate their answers to the context of the question. Many candidates simply write down all that they know without relating it to the context.

Since this paper is only worth 70 marks in an exam lasting 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours, asking candidates for 2 responses for 1 mark is unavoidable if Higher standards are to be met. Centres should ensure that candidates are aware of the need to give as full answers as possible to make sure of maximum attainment.

### **Appeals**

There were over 900 appeals.

Many centres again provided inappropriate evidence to support these appeals. It must be borne in mind that all awards made by the SQA are based on demonstrated attainment and not on potential. It follows, therefore, that a centre making an appeal on behalf of a candidate should have made its own measurements of the candidate's attainment and must provide persuasive evidence to support the appeal. This evidence must be in line with the grade descriptors for Higher Information Systems for levels A to C. Good evidence is at the right level (not too easy), isn't limited to mostly KU type questions, samples appropriately and is marked correctly. The most persuasive evidence is an estimate examination, covering the entire syllabus and set at the same standard as the SQA examination and marked reliably. Lenient marking will count against the candidate at the appeal stage.

The SQA examination paper as set in a previous year is not valid as appeal evidence. However, a paper made up from several years' questions, preferably changed to, for example, a different scenario with an appropriate marking scheme would be treated as valid.