



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Administration
Level	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 most candidates scored, on average, higher in Paper 2 than in Paper 1. This shows a clear ability to undertake both the problem solving and the skills demanded by this practical paper. In particular the database questions were answered very well, with forms, queries and reports being completed to a reasonably high standard. Most Markers commented that candidates had completed/attempted all of the paper, demonstrating better time management. Disappointingly, the standard of word processing continues to be poor — in particular the lack of knowledge of business documents and their layouts continues to provide unexpected difficulty.

Markers also commented that, on the whole, candidates continue to be better prepared and more confident in the theory area of the exam. Most centres are teaching candidates the correct techniques for answering the command words. However, some candidates from some centres have not been made aware of the mark allocations and the techniques for answering these theory questions. Centres are advised to view the examples in the Understanding Standards website for exemplification of these techniques.

Discussion questions, as with last year, were handled well. Candidates struggled, however, with some of the lower order command words. Both 'outline' and 'describe' questions require an initial and brief explanation — candidates frequently named an item or method but did not give any expansion. **No marks** are awarded for naming — a brief description or summary must be given for the mark to be awarded. This failure on the part of the candidates continued into their 'describe' answers. Again an outline is required, supported by expansion, development or an example for full marks to be gained.

The C pass was set at notional difficulty — however, to reflect the higher order mark allocation for word processing in Paper 2, the boundaries for both A and B were lowered by two marks.

Areas in which candidates performed well — Paper 1

Section 1

Questions 1 and 2

Most candidates showed good knowledge of homeworking and flexible working practices. This was one of the few areas where the description question was answered well.

Section 2

Questions 1 (a), (b) and (d) were generally answered well, although this was not a popular choice of question.

The marking guidelines accepted, and candidates provided, a number of varied operational decisions relating to an e-commerce facility. Most candidates also showed fairly extensive

knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of an e-commerce website to an organisation's customers.

Candidates also showed a fairly good understanding of the need for a manager to monitor and evaluate tasks — justifications given were, on the whole, appropriate and well explained.

Questions 2 (a) and (c) were generally answered well — this was a popular choice of question in this optional section.

Many candidates were able to give the answer 'checking to see if the applicant was lying' or 'getting another person's opinion of the applicant in addition to the application form'. However, some candidates were confused by the term 'securing references', feeling that they needed to demonstrate ways in which data could be held secure in an organisation.

Both open plan and traditional layouts were discussed reasonably effectively in this question. Candidates showed good knowledge but unfortunately some did give only the 'flip' side of the argument as a further development — this is not awarded any marks in a Higher paper.

Questions 3 (a) and (b) were generally answered well — Question 3 was also a popular choice of question in this section.

Candidates were able to give lots of examples of information given on a school intranet (this was worth one mark); some were able to develop this further by outlining additional features, eg file sharing, etc. For most candidates, the term 'features of an intranet' was confused with 'uses of an intranet'.

Candidates were able to suggest methods of gathering information about customer satisfaction: some gave the same answer for surveys and questionnaires — repetition should be avoided unless clear distinction is made between the two methods suggested.

Questions 4 (a) and (b) were answered well.

Candidates gave many good outlines for customers not complaining, and clearly understood the importance of good customer service to an organisation (good discussion points were scored here).

Questions 5 (c) and (d) were generally answered well.

Most candidates showed good knowledge of teams (lots of information about Belbin's roles) and therefore scored well in this discussion question.

Meetings documents were both outlined and justified well by the majority of the candidates who opted for this question. Those who achieved half marks tended to do so because of a failure to justify the use of the document chosen.

Areas which candidates found demanding — Paper 1

Section 1

Questions 3 and 4

Although candidates were able to give valid points about working from home, few concentrated on 'factors regarding IT' — this was the main focus of the question and many candidates missed this point.

The compare question, worth two marks, was done better than in the past. However, many candidates, when giving their comparison statements, failed to relate the points of comparison or simply stated 'and the other didn't'. This does not merit any marks.

Question 1 (c) was poorly answered. Most candidates who tackled this question answered it from an organisational point of view. The question asked for implications for a senior manager. While points may have been valid implications, they needed to relate specifically to the senior manager and not the organisation.

Questions 2 (b) and (d) caused some problems for most candidates.

Candidates could name the external methods of informing potential applicants of a vacancy, but unfortunately they did not offer an initial outline or expand sufficiently for the two description marks per statement.

Candidates were, on the whole, confused by the term 'presentation software'. Many gave examples of different software and hardware used by a speaker, rather than focusing on the features of PowerPoint for example (animation, speaker's notes, etc). The use of bold and different colours are not unique to presentation software and therefore did not merit any marks.

Question 3 (d) was poorly completed. Candidates frequently gave duties of the chairperson rather than justifications for an effective chairperson, although just two marks were allocated to this question.

Questions 4 (c) and (d) were not answered well. It was clear that many candidates had very limited knowledge of the appraisal process or the different types of appraisal that can be carried out.

Questions 5 (a) and (b) were not well answered.

Primary information was frequently confused with internal information, and therefore advantages and disadvantages did not always marry. Again, candidates were able to name or state examples of primary information, but there was no evidence of any outlining.

As with Question 5 (a), candidates were not able to provide an outline or an expansion of ways in which quantitative information could be presented, merely providing examples.

Paper 2

This section covers both positive and negative aspects of the IT paper

Question 1 (a) — Database Form

Most candidates completed this task well; the only point at which many lost a mark was for the truncation of information, ie when the form was created some of the field headers were cut off (this must be adjusted to be fit for purpose).

Question 1 (b) — Database Query/Search

This was handled well — the testing part of the task was narrowing the search for pupils who would be 18 or over on 1 September. As with previous years, searching on a date field does provide a higher level of challenge. Candidates were either able to cope well with a 'wildcard or' search or could not.

Question 1 (c) — Database Report (Calculated Field and Summary Calculation)

Candidates are very comfortable creating a database report. Even if the two calculations were missed, candidates have learnt to continue with the other instructions and therefore a number of 'easy' marks were gained.

When using summary calculations, candidates should be coached to edit the 'string' provided by the software to be more meaningful and therefore fit for purpose.

Question 2 (a) — Spreadsheet (Summary)

Candidates imported the information from the database with little problem and used either SUMIF, subtotalling or sum functions appropriately to calculate the new amount. The replication mark for this formula was frequently not awarded because the candidate forgot to absolute the cell references before copying down. The percentage increase (as expected) provided a more challenging scenario. Typically this was successfully completed by 'A' candidates.

Question 2 (b) — Spreadsheet (Community Placement)

Surprisingly, lots of candidates chose to use a nested if statement rather than a true VLOOKUP for the first complex piece of formulae. A number of very imaginative IF statements were used, but if they worked the marks were awarded. When a candidate chose to use the VLOOKUP, it was generally done very well. Candidates were also very comfortable with the use of the COUNTIF function.

On the whole, the spreadsheet tasks were tackled well. Candidates are better prepared to progress through a task, completing each stage of the instructions to ensure that 'easy' marks are picked up.

Question 3 — Word Processing (Minutes)

As with previous years, the word processing section will ask for candidates to demonstrate knowledge of and complete a business document. Each year Markers are disappointed by

the lack of knowledge shown under exam conditions. It is essential that candidates are drilled in the layout of a variety of business documents, eg letters, memos, minutes, agendas, reports, etc. This year candidates were asked to complete a set of minutes. The standard demonstrated by most candidates was very poor — knowing where to put apologies for absence and any other business, among others, was frustrating. To add to this challenge, candidates again failed to key in text accurately, and it was also rare to see a satisfactory search and replace.

On a positive note, the footer was inserted correctly, page orientation was changed satisfactorily, and the graph was completed and imported well.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

My advice is very similar to previous years. For Paper 1:

- ◆ Ensure that candidates are familiar with the ‘command words’ as stated in the Understanding Standards section of the SQA website. This has been updated to ensure consistency between the levels (Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Higher).
- ◆ Ensure that candidates do not just state or name when asked to outline.
- ◆ Ensure that stating or naming is not accepted as the initial outline as part of a description.
- ◆ Ensure that there are two pieces of information for each item described (the initial outline and further expansion).
- ◆ Do not encourage the use of bullet points in a discussion.
- ◆ Ensure that there are separate statements (two points) for each comparison (these should be related).
- ◆ Ensure that candidates do not simply ‘flip’ an argument or a comparison.
- ◆ If a theory paper is keyed-in or transcribed, please use double line spacing and spell check for ease of marking.

For Paper 2:

- ◆ Encourage candidates to attempt all tasks within Paper 2 (ensure that candidates are practised at checking that the correct version of a printout has been provided).
- ◆ Candidates should regularly practice integrated scenarios to allow them to prepare for the problem solving aspects of the paper.
- ◆ Higher candidates should be encouraged to proofread all keying in work more carefully and not to forget all previous learning regarding the consistency and layout of business documents.
- ◆ Business documents will be tested within the IT paper; candidates should ensure that they have the appropriate knowledge of layout, headings, terminology, etc.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	2,914
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	2,608
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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	19.9%	19.9%	518	82
B	23.1%	42.9%	602	71
C	25.3%	68.3%	660	60
D	10.0%	78.3%	261	54
No award	21.7%	100.0%	567	-

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.