



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Business Management
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

Candidate performance in the business report improved significantly this year, and there was evidence that the average candidate had a better understanding of what is required for the report. However, performance in the question paper was down on 2013, though higher than previous years. Although no candidates achieved an upper A this year, the overall number of candidates achieving an A pass was higher than in previous years.

The average standard of this year's candidature, based on comparison of the results at Higher level with those of 2013, was similar, although centre estimates were up on last year. There were more candidate entries this year than last.

The Business Report

A significant improvement was seen and many candidates produced well-structured reports that followed the SQA guidelines closely. Many more candidates seemed to be aware of the requirements of the report, and candidates who used a small business with a straightforward strategy tended to perform very well. There were many reports displaying good presentation, with appropriate section titles taken from the marking guidelines. Many more candidates provided evidence for their research.

It was clear that candidates are being well advised to use small businesses so that they understand and can describe what the business actually does.

There were several centres who failed to include the Researching a Business NAB, making it impossible to mark the report. The report should not be a repeat of the NAB. Centres are reminded a copy of the NAB must be submitted with the Business Report.

The question paper

Most candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of examination technique, but many candidates only did very well in one section, either the case study or the essays, but struggled to do well in both.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Business Report

This year more candidates were aware that the strategy should be a plan of action and not an objective. This, combined with a well-structured report which followed the SQA guidelines, produced high quality reports. Evidencing was much improved, and many candidates had sufficient evidence in the appendices, which was referenced in the body of the report.

More candidates were clearly linking how the strategy meets the objectives and clearly linking the strategy to the SWOT.

Candidates continued to perform better in the first section of the report, and gained higher marks, than in section 2.

There was evidence that force field analysis was carried out by more candidates, but candidates must comment on how it helps assess the likely success of the strategy in order to gain marks.

Section 1, The Strategy, tended to be very well done by candidates. More candidates were able to explain how long each element of the strategy would take to implement rather than just listing the tasks to be done.

The question paper: Section 1

Many candidates seemed well prepared this year, and the case study was generally well done. Candidates were much better at linking their answers to the case study and using examples from it to gain marks. As a result, fewer general marks needed to be awarded.

Question 1 – the force field analysis: the diagram was well drawn and candidates scored highly for the diagram.

The question paper: Section 2

Candidates provided strong responses in some essays where revision had clearly been undertaken.

Question 10(b): candidates scored well when describing the stages of group development but less well in assessing how the process influences the success of teams.

Question 9(b): candidates showed good knowledge of the Classical and Human Relations schools of management and scored well in describing the schools, however they were less successful in explaining how each approach could improve an organisation's effectiveness.

Question 10(a): candidates who discussed different areas of the EU such as enlargement, single market and social chapter, gained more marks than those who concentrated on one area.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Business Report

Candidates who focused on large organisations and did not follow the SQA guidelines did not produce well structured, comprehensible reports.

Many candidates still had evidence in the appendices but did not reference this evidence and so forfeited marks they could have gained.

Candidates did very well in the Resources section, but many still struggle with the Implications for the Functional Areas. Candidates must explain what the change/difference to the functional area is. There was evidence that some candidates are still using the out of date guidelines.

Some candidates are still producing reports with multiple strategies. If this is the case, each strategy is marked separately and candidates lose marks. If a strategy is to have several strands, each strand must be interconnected and linked to one strategy.

Where candidates had few objectives, or a small number of SWOT items in the NAB, they struggled to gain a reasonable amount of marks in the report. Some candidates are still writing about objectives and stakeholders that are not listed in the NAB.

Many candidates do not understand that opportunities in the SWOT are external items, not internal.

Candidates should not 'hedge their bets' and say the strategy might affect a stakeholder in one way but then say it might not. The report should be evidence based not guess work.

Some candidates based their whole report on one method of research — an interview with the owner who answered questions relating to every heading in the report — and the whole report was taken from this. The report should be compiled using several sources of information, eg screen shots of resources, customer surveys etc.

The question paper: Section 1

Question 1: many candidates struggled to correctly categorise drivers and assets for change. Candidates struggled with the overall evaluation of the force field analysis and so found it difficult to gain maximum marks for this question.

The question paper: Section 2

Question 10(a): some candidates did not answer the question correctly and focused on the effects on the UK as a whole rather than UK businesses. Many candidates focused on the single market and not on other areas of the EU.

Candidates gave few development points or real life examples in the essays.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Business Report

Candidates are advised to pay close attention to the marking guidelines on the SQA website, use the appropriate headings, and ensure the information contained under those headings is appropriate. Candidates should ensure their reports fully comply with these guidelines before submitting them.

The strategy can be a plan that the business has identified or one that the candidate deems appropriate for the business, but the candidate should make it very clear at the start of the report whose strategy it is. This will affect the way the candidate answers the section: the strengths and weaknesses of the information used by the business to decide on its future strategy.

The strategy should be a plan of action that is yet to be undertaken — it should not have already been completed.

The quality of the information in the Researching a Business NAB is crucial, and candidates are advised to ensure they list several objectives and stakeholders so that they can comment on these in the report. Candidates should also have a full list of SWOT items.

Any objectives, stakeholders or SWOT items not in the NAB but mentioned in the report must have an explanation as to why they have been added or they will not be credited.

Findings in the report must be supported by evidence. The Researching a Business NAB provides the background, but additional information and research is vital. A single interview with an owner or manager is not adequate evidence on its own.

If a website is used as evidence, the web address is not adequate on its own. A screen shot of the website should be referenced and in the appendices.

Scripts should be presented in one-and-a-half or double line spacing with size 12 font, wide margins and printed single sided.

The question paper

For several centres, the advice is to continue to do what they are doing in terms of teaching the content and exam preparation. Other centres, operating in less ideal circumstances with minimal teacher contact time, need to ensure they and their candidates are familiar with all the support material on SQA website.

In force field analysis, candidates need to understand that drivers are reasons for the change, whereas assets are things in place which will help the change take place. To evaluate the force field diagram, candidates can include comparison of the relative strengths of drivers and resistors and explanation of why individual drivers outweigh individual resistors.

Candidates need to ensure that they read the questions carefully before choosing which to answer, noting what each is asking, eg whether the impact refers to UK businesses or to the UK as a whole.

Candidates need to be aware that they can gain development marks for using real life examples of points they are making in the essay questions and should be encouraged to do so.

Candidates are becoming better at gaining description marks in the essay questions but need to work on the second part of the question and answer the impact or the implications.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	190
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	221
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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 150				
A	12.7%	12.7%	28	105
B	22.6%	35.3%	50	90
C	29.4%	64.7%	65	75
D	13.6%	78.3%	30	67
No award	21.7%	-	48	-

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.