



Course Report 2015

Subject	Business Management
Level	Higher (new)

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Overall the paper was handled well. In section one, candidates were able to make use of the case study in answering the questions where appropriate. This showed that they had prepared well for this style of question. The topic of the case study was obviously one which candidates could identify with, which made the questions accessible. Newer topics to the course did not cause any major issues. The paper proved slightly less challenging than intended and this was taken into account when the grade boundary was set.

In section two many candidates displayed good content knowledge. Appropriate application of the command words allowed candidates to gain high marks in many of the questions. Stronger candidates were able to gain marks for development of points made.

Component 2: Assignment

This component was handled very well by many candidates. The assignment proved to be an accessible assessment allowing candidates to gain high, and in many cases, full marks. This was possible where centres had followed the issued instructions and guided candidates into using the appropriate headings for the report. The introduction and collating/reporting sections, which both contain 3 marks, allowed almost all candidates to gain these marks. This restricted discrimination to some extent, and this was taken into account when setting the grade boundary.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Overall candidates prepared well for the change in structure of the question paper. They were able to make use of the case study when appropriate. Command words were handled well and many candidates displayed good content knowledge. Certain topics did cause difficulty such as finance, sales promotions, stock handling, channels of distribution, and Maslow. All questions are now mandatory and such topics cannot be avoided.

Component 2: Assignment

There were some very good and interesting reports. Most candidates had followed the instructions well, using the specified headings, and were able to gain high marks. The analysis and conclusion/recommendation sections proved the more difficult areas in which to gain marks but stronger candidates dealt with these areas well.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1 (a): Most candidates were able to recognise that Google used job production and gave a correct description. They were also able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages successfully.

Question 1 (c): Candidates were able to explain the benefits of Google's corporate culture quite well. The use of the command word 'explain' meant they were able to apply knowledge to the case study.

Question 1 (d): Descriptions of revenue and the trend in profitability were handled well.

Question 1 (g): Despite not being credited for direct lifts from the case study, candidates performed reasonably well in this question. For example 'they plan to install solar panels in the new HQ' was not awarded a mark on its own but required the addition of 'to reduce their carbon footprint'.

Question 3 (c): Candidates showed a good understanding of the benefits of fair trade certification.

Question 4 (c): Most sources of long-term finance were discussed well by many candidates. Many candidates demonstrated depth of knowledge on this question and were credited with development marks.

Question 5 (b): The benefits of positive employee relations were explained well by many candidates.

Question 5 (c): Candidates appeared to know the content of the Equality Act and were able to discuss the effect of it on organisations well.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates who chose a topic that allowed them to gather sufficient evidence to analyse in detail were able to gain high marks. Using the headings shown in SQA guidelines allowed reports to be clear and for candidates to pick up marks under each heading. The introduction marks and those awarded for headings, display and terminology were easily gained.

The candidates who chose to use SWOT analysis as their analytical technique handled it better than those choosing PESTEC. Other techniques were used but not as frequently as SWOT and PESTEC.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1 (b): Candidates found describing the advantages of a product portfolio challenging for the full 5 marks. Very few made reference to the exhibit from the case study, and some answers were referring to branding.

Question 1 (d): Candidates found it difficult to differentiate between making money and profit.

Question 1 (e): Some candidates failed to recognise that internal growth was mentioned in the question and only external methods were acceptable.

Question 1 (f): Some candidates answered this question by describing the recruitment process, failing to recognise that a discussion of external recruitment was expected.

Question 2 (a): Many candidates discussed advertising and celebrity endorsement, failing to recognise that the question specifically focused on sales promotion not promotional techniques in general.

Question 2 (b): A large number of candidates discussed physical methods of distribution instead of channels of distribution.

Question 2 (c): Candidates found it difficult to gain 2 marks as the question used the command word 'compare'. This was due to lack of knowledge of sampling as opposed to application of the command word.

Question 3 (a): Candidates did not show a very strong knowledge of centralised stock storage, some thinking of it as storing in bulk.

Question 3 (b): This question asked for disadvantages only of just in time stock control. Candidates were able to explain problems with delivery and that customers would be unhappy as a result, but generally answers lacked depth. There were a lot of candidates who stated that there would be no time to check the quality of goods, but this fails to recognise that JIT operators are more likely to have rigorous quality checks in place and the responsibility for quality can be left to a trusted supplier.

Question 4 (a): Many candidates showed little understanding of the purpose of a cash budget.

Question 4 (b): Many candidates gave quite shallow answers as to why a competitor would be interested in the financial information of an organisation.

Question 4 (c): Some candidates included short-term sources such as overdraft and some difficulty occurred when discussing debentures.

Question 5 (a): Candidates performed poorly, many mixing up Maslow's theory with McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y. Little knowledge of the pyramid or different stages of the theory were shown.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates who did not choose a topic wide enough to allow them to analyse in detail were not able to gain as many marks as those candidates who chose broader topics. It is important to actually state the purpose of the report clearly.

The research methods used have to be explained. Candidates who just stated the methods used gained no marks. The marks were awarded for explaining why the research method was useful in producing the report.

Analysis did not always refer back to the purpose of the report. An analytical point had to clearly link to the topic of the report, whether or not direct referencing was used, to gain a mark. Candidates who gave findings only were not credited; points of analysis had to be made.

Conclusions and recommendations were sometimes difficult to relate to supporting information. They were sometimes written as if the candidate just thought them to be appropriate for the organisation without any evidence.

Very few candidates did exceed the specified requirements regarding length. Those who did were as a result of poor display, ie excessively large font and inserting items that could have been in the appendix section into the main body of the report.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Ensure candidates read questions carefully and actually answer what is being asked as opposed to what they expect to see.

Make sure candidates take the number of marks allocated to each question into account. One mark is available for each point with development marks being credited.

Continue to practise use of command words.

As far as possible make the answers legible. Marks cannot be awarded for something which is impossible to read.

Word processed scripts should be printed in double line spacing and the end of the script clearly highlighted. Page numbering is also recommended.

Component 2: Assignment

Select an organisation and a topic for which there is plenty of information available in order to make sufficient analytical points to gain the maximum amount of marks.

Explain clearly the analytical technique chosen and refer to it in the report. The analytical technique may be contained in the appendix section.

Analyse all findings and make sure there is evidence in the report for each finding. Consider use of footnotes or refer directly to the specific appendix.

Conclusions and recommendations should be justified either in the conclusions/ recommendations section or elsewhere in the report.

Ensure appendices are legible. Although no marks are awarded in the appendices section, analysis marks are awarded only if it is evident from the research.

A font size no smaller than 11 point and 1.5 line spacing is recommended.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	5259

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	32.3%	32.3%	1698	75
B	26.0%	58.3%	1367	65
C	21.5%	79.8%	1130	55
D	6.6%	86.3%	345	50
No award	13.7%	-	719	-

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional values of 50% for a C and 70% for a Grade A. It was noted that the Assignment did not discriminate well between the different levels of ability.

There was also some unintentional overlap in content of questions in the question paper. The grade boundaries were increased to reflect this.

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.