



External Assessment Report 2009

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

As with last year, candidates appeared to be better prepared and more confident in the theory area of the exam. Markers continue to comment that candidates have a better understanding of the command words and that higher order questions were handled more confidently: discuss questions were completed with mixed results but the justify questions were done very well. Unfortunately, as with last year, the compare questions (Section 2, Questions 3d and 5d) were not done as well. This appeared to be due to both the complexity of the higher order command and the knowledge required to answer the questions successfully. It is our intention in future exams to ensure that every candidate will attempt this style of question. *To enable this, the compare question will now only appear in the compulsory section ie Section 1.*

As reported in previous reports, candidates are still not developing the describe questions; expansion, development or examples must be given to gain full marks.

It was disappointing to read from markers that there were increasing numbers of candidates whose handwriting was extremely difficult to read or indeed where transcription should have perhaps been carried out. Given that this is a Higher exam, markers commented that very poor writing skills demonstrated by a large number of candidates.

This year, Paper 2 was completed to a better standard. Most markers commented that candidates had completed/attempted most of the paper. As in previous years, the most challenging tasks were the spreadsheets and this still remains the weakest element at Higher.

It appears that the majority of candidates are still fairly confident with relational databases, working their way through each problem and picking up marks for the more straightforward techniques. As expected, only “A” candidates achieved high marks for the tasks involving calculated fields.

Surprisingly, the standard of word processing/copy typing was very poor.

To reflect the increased accessibility of both Paper 1 and Paper 2 the cut-off scores were moved closer to notional difficulty.

Paper 1

Areas in which candidates performed well:

Section 1

Question 1, 2 and 3

Candidates showed good understanding of induction training, although some did think that this was a trial period where the employer was able to make a decision to retain or discharge the employee. Selection methods used by the Human Resources Department were well described. Some candidates however, confused this with internal and external recruitment. The importance of customer satisfaction was justified well.

Section 2

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

Most candidates were able to outline the features of the mission statement but found more difficulty justifying its importance. As in the past, time stealers and how to avoid them are areas of the syllabus which candidates have a good understanding of. It is worth noting that “a telephone call” in itself is not a time stealer – unexpected calls or a large volume of calls is where the emphasis should be made.

Questions 2(a) and 2(c) were completed well. This was a very popular choice of question for the majority of candidates.

Career breaks and their benefits were well outlined and candidates showed good knowledge and good descriptive techniques when writing about meetings (methods of voting and meeting documents).

Question 3(a) was generally answered well.

Candidates were able to outline the ways in which email is monitored and how organisations can limit access to certain internet sites.

Questions 4(a), 4(b) and 4(d) were generally completed well. This was again a very popular question for candidates to choose.

Most candidates were able to outline decisions taken to minimise Sick Building Syndrome, although for some others, this was an area confused with health and safety. Moves from cellular to open plan layout were well described although it was not always the consequences that were described. Methods of informing staff of changes to legislation were outlined well but not always backed up by good justifications for the method.

Question 5(c) was generally completed well. As with question 1, very few candidates opted for this. Good knowledge and understanding was shown for methods of monitoring and controlling targets.

Paper 1

Areas which candidates found demanding:

Section 1

Questions 4 and 5

Candidates found great difficulty understanding and therefore describing the “features” of presentation software. A number of candidates attempted to describe other forms of software and even hardware such as OHPs and data projectors. Although it was clear that candidates did understand what an effective team was, many described the benefits and not the features. Others struggled to discuss and merely gave outlines of an effective team.

Section 2

Questions 1(b) and 1(c)

Candidates clearly did not understand the term “internal customers”. Where the factors applied to both internal and external customers, candidates were awarded the marks. However, this is an area which needs to be clarified to candidates. Strategies for improving efficiency in task management were listed and not discussed. Candidates need to develop answers looking at both negative and positive factors.

Question 2(b)

Of all the questions chosen, this was the most badly handled. Candidates tended to describe working practices without linking to how work/life balance could be improved. A common approach was to focus on “looking after the kids”. This did not gain full marks.

Question 3(d)

Although this was a comparison question, it was not technique which let candidates down but a lack of knowledge of both paper and web based sources of information.

Question 4(c)

Candidates gave outlines of the support systems but again failed to discuss. It was disappointing to find a large number of candidates confusing grievance with bereavement.

Questions 5(b) and 5(d)

As with previous discuss questions candidates gave outlined knowledge of CPD but did not engage in discussion. Although the candidates did attempt the comparison of databases and spreadsheets for storing and analysing information, it was the knowledge of the software which let them down.

Paper 2

In this next section, I will attempt to explain both positive and negative aspects of the IT paper:

Question 1(a) – Database Form

Most candidates coped very well with the creation of the database form. However, candidates lost marks for printing the wrong record. Unfortunately, this also meant that markers could not check the accuracy of the new record created and therefore a second mark was lost.

Question 1(b) – Search and Database Report

There were mixed results for this task. Although candidates showed that they could successfully carry out a search and create a report, marks were lost for choosing an inappropriate report heading, the truncation of field headings/data and the replication of data.

Question 1(c) – Search and Creation of Calculated Fields

A number of candidates omitted this task. This was designed as a discriminatory question for ‘A’ candidates. However, if attempted, there were some simple marks which could still have been achieved. Marks were awarded for a search on Baltersan, the inclusion of the different rooms, a search for less than 31 (capacity for boardroom) and the consistent creation of a new field heading. For those candidates who attempted this question, the common mistakes were not including the different room names (this was a problem solving issue) and the inconsistent or inappropriate heading chosen for the new field. Some candidates also struggled to select those boardrooms with a maximum seating capacity of 30.

Question 2(a) – Spreadsheet (Invoice)

This was generally well done. Candidates were able to use vlookup, multiplication and totalling formulae. However, the problem solving within this task proved difficult: very few candidates keyed in Menu 4, even though instructed and very few candidates doubled up either the number or the price for both nightly rate and food (2 nights). Only a small percentage of candidates used the rounddown formulae and tried to compensate by adjusting the formatting of currency to zero decimal places. Unfortunately this meant that candidates were inconsistent with the display of currency throughout the invoice.

Question 2(b) – Spreadsheet (Adrenaline Sheet)

This was designed to be the more challenging of the spreadsheet tasks. Candidates had great difficulty with the 2 complicated formulae (the revised price and the IF statement to continue or not). Candidates have great difficulty both problem solving and working with brackets in formulae – most calculated 20% instead of 120% to allow for profit. Most candidates attempted the IF statement but forgot to include “equal to” in the formulae. Unfortunately print marks were lost if the overhead data was left in either value or formulae views.

Question 3 – Word Processing (Newsletter)

Almost all candidates were able to change the page orientation, import a logo and create a first page. However, markers commented that there was a very poor standard of keying in. Two words, in particular, caused errors as they were typed in the American format. At Higher it is expected that candidates can proof-read and copy type accurately. A number of candidates were confused by the use of hyphens and dashes. Footers were not created accurately, and the slogans, for some, were not inserted at all, even though instructed. The guide of LHS and RHS seemed to cause more confusion. Most candidates inserted database and spreadsheet data in the correct place, although some did include irrelevant columns from the spreadsheet.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

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 is regularly updated to provide advice for teachers.
- Ensure that candidates do not state or name when asked to outline.
- Ensure that there are two pieces of information for each item described.
- Do not encourage the use of bullet points in a discussion.
- Ensure that there are separate statements for each comparison.

For Paper 2:

- Encourage candidates to attempt all tasks within Paper 2 (marks can be picked up for some simple IT skills), each section is approximately one third of the overall IT mark.
- 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 proof-read all keying in work more carefully and not to forget all previous learning regarding the consistency and layout of business documents.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	2939
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	2957
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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	8.7%	8.7%	257	84
B	22.1%	30.8%	653	71
C	34.2%	65.0%	1012	58
D	14.8%	79.8%	438	51
No award	20.2%	100.0%	597	-

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.