



Administration Higher External Assessment Report 2008

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

Unlike previous years, candidates appeared to be better prepared and more confident in the theory area of the exam. Markers commented that candidates had a better understanding of the command words and that higher order questions were handled better ie discuss and justify. Unfortunately the only compare question (Section 1, Question 4) was not answered well. It was felt that this question stretched the knowledge of the majority of the candidates and therefore allowance was made for this in setting the grade boundaries.

While databases, spreadsheets and word processing were examined in Paper 2, the order of tasks was different. This year, for the first time, the word processing element was set as the second task. This was to allow candidates to progress quickly from the database tasks and to achieve “easy” marks in word processing. Surprisingly, however, candidates struggled with basic word processing techniques. Spreadsheets were examined in the final task. As with previous years, this area proved the most challenging for candidates.

It appeared that the majority of candidates were 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 aggregate and calculated fields.

Most candidates realised that they needed to move on, if they were stuck, in order to complete the paper and achieve the best possible marks. The spreadsheet tasks were the stumbling block for most candidates.

Markers felt that groups of candidates were either very well prepared for the IT paper or that they had very poor skills and that they would have been better suited to Intermediate 2.

To reflect the unexpected difficulty in both Paper 1 and Paper 2 the grade boundaries were reduced.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

The following questions were completed well:

Section 1

Question 1 and 2

Most candidates were able to outline leadership skills and showed good knowledge of this area. However some candidates still named or stated leadership skills without giving a brief development. In question 2 some did not focus on how the team would be affected by poor leadership.

Section 2

Questions 1(a), 1(b) and 1(d) were generally answered well.

Candidates showed good knowledge of flexible working practices and their impact on the modern working environment. However, when outlining flexitime, few mentioned core time as part of their answer. Discussion techniques had improved although few candidates achieved the maximum 8 marks for question 1(b). Most candidates gained both marks for the justification of installing electronic safeguards in a computer system. There was little confusion of the term “expense”.

Question 2(d) was generally answered well.

Candidates were able to outline the benefits of dealing with customers face to face, although some did misinterpret this question as they gave details regarding customer service.

Questions 3(a), 3(b), and 3(d) were generally answered well.

Training both in-house and externally was answered well as was the justification for staff counselling. Some candidates, however, did not justify but explained staff counselling. Candidates were able to show knowledge of how a Senior Administrative Assistant would manage time, but struggled to describe, merely providing outlines and therefore only achieving half of the marks available.

Questions 4(b) and 4(d) were generally answered well.

Candidates showed good knowledge of the types of information – the marking scheme did allow for a wide variety and therefore most candidates were able to score well in this question. Some candidates, however, did misread the question and talked about types of decision. Knowledge of The Computer Misuse Act was much improved compared to last year.

Questions 5(a)(i) and (ii), 5(b), 5(c) and 5(d) were generally answered well.

Personal development planning was a content area that was handled well. However, description proved challenging as most candidates again provided the initial outline without any further development or example. In question 5(b), candidates showed good knowledge of comments and conditional formatting. Office layout was discussed well but occasionally candidates gave the “flip side” of a discussion in a separate statement - this gained no marks. Some candidates confused the term “expense” in question 5(d), others answered this very well.

Paper 2

The following tasks were completed well:

Question 1(a)

Most candidates managed partial success in searching on multiple fields. Many had problems searching for permanent beds (use of wild card query) or searched for 4 beds rather than 4 or more beds.

Question 1(c)

Many candidates scored approximately 7 out of 13 for this task. The simple aspects of report generation were carried out well. The calculated fields within the query, however, were the areas which challenged the majority of candidates.

Question 2

Candidates coped very well with the insertion of an introductory paragraph and the insertion of standard paragraphs. However, these were the only aspects of the letter that were pleasing.

Question 3(a)(i)

Candidates were able to calculate the sales for April.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

The following questions provided a challenge:

Section 1

Questions 3 and 4

Although advantages and disadvantages of both internal and external recruitment were discussed, candidates frequently gave the “flip side” of the argument, this gained no further marks. Comparison of the job description and the person specification was very badly done – candidates struggled to give 4 separate statements of comparison.

Section 2

Question 1(c)

Most candidates were able to give 3 ways of preventing viruses but could not develop their answer and as a result only half of the marks were achieved.

Questions 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c)

Candidates had problems giving the initial consequence of inadequate preparation for meetings. Although candidates were able to discuss different types of software, some missed the context ie in planning a meeting. Many mentioned Powerpoint in their answer but did not show how this assisted the planning of a meeting. Most candidates had no knowledge of action minutes.

Question 3(c)

Although this was a discussion question, many candidates simply described complaints procedures. The question should have focused on good practice once the complaint had been received.

Questions 4(a) and 4(c)

Candidates once again struggled to gain the second mark allocated to description. Many candidates gave poor decision making as their answer, over and over again. Some candidates focused their answer to question 4(c) on manual filing. However, the stem of the question stated electronic file management.

Question 5(b)

Most markers commented that candidates showed little knowledge of a named range and also struggled to give a reason for using dynamic linkage.

Paper 2

Question 1(b)

While there had been an improvement on previous years, aggregate functions (count and sum) still proved to be a challenge for candidates.

Question 2

Candidates surprisingly showed little knowledge of the layout of a 2-page business letter. Marks were lost for not using open punctuation, the omission of the reference, the date, suitable salutation and complementary close. Some candidates also confused the inclusion of Enc with an instruction to import data. The table, on the whole, was completed well. However, a number of candidates failed to insert/calculate the total, even though the heading was given.

Business documents should be fit for purpose and consistent. The font for the body of the letter should have been the same throughout, including those pieces of data which were imported from the database.

Question 3(a)(i)

Although spreadsheets normally provide the greatest challenge for Higher candidates, “easy” marks were still not picked up: insertion of consistent style headings, formatting cells for currency or percentage, replication of formulae and printing in a specific format. Candidates appeared to look at the task and give up rather than work through the problem ensuring that basic marks could be achieved. Four marks were allocated to difficult formulae – the projected yearly income and the percentage difference. While these clearly separated the “A” candidate from the rest, candidates should be encouraged to attempt all formulae and then replicate and format as required.

Question 3(a)(ii)

For those candidates who attempted the first part of the task, the chart was very badly done or completely omitted. Many candidates constructed a pie chart – thinking that all percentage data should be displayed in this way. However, the only correct way for this data to be displayed was as a bar chart.

Question 3(b)

Many candidates did not attempt this task or failed to produce a formulae printout. Candidates clearly had difficulty using countif, sumif and conditional formula (if statement).

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Although there had been an improvement in the techniques for answering questions in Paper 1, centres should still ensure that candidates are familiar with the “command words” as stated in the Understanding Standards section of the SQA website. In particular: 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 and ensure that there are separate statements for each comparison.

Paper 2 does not just test IT skills – problem solving is built in to each scenario and each task. While candidates should be encouraged to attempt all tasks within Paper 2 (marks can be picked up for these simple IT skills), candidates should have practiced integrated scenarios to allow them to prepare for the problem solving aspects of the paper. Higher candidates are expected to produce a high standard of work, this should be “fit for purpose” and consistent. As in previous years, consistency is assumed and not instructed.

Spreadsheets and the problem solving aspects of the paper can make or break a candidate. Ensure that candidates are entered at the right level and therefore capable of achieving success.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2007	2,997
------------------------------------	-------

Number of resulted entries in 2008	2,939
------------------------------------	-------

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	7.1%	7.1%	209	80
B	18.9%	26.0%	555	67
C	30.1%	56.1%	884	55
D	15.2%	71.2%	446	49
No award	28.8%	100.0%	845	-

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.