



External Assessment Report 2010

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

Candidates continue to be better prepared and more confident in the theory area of the exam. Candidates have a better understanding of the command words and the process required to gain marks. Higher order questions, particularly discussion questions, were handled well. Placing the only 'compare' question in the compulsory section proved successful, with candidates achieving at least half marks in this question.

It is the intention to always include the 'compare' question in Section 1 to ensure that all candidates attempt this style of question only once.

Surprisingly, Markers reported that candidates struggled with some of the lower order questions, in particular the 'outline' questions. Candidates frequently named an item or method but did not give any expansion. Outline questions demand more than just 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.

As with previous years, Markers reported that there were a number of candidates whose handwriting was extremely difficult to read or indeed where transcription should have perhaps been carried out.

Paper 2 this year was completed to a much better standard. Most Markers commented that candidates had completed/attempted all of the paper. When setting this paper, the team took the decision to make the spreadsheet section more accessible, learning from previous years' experiences. The section, while still testing higher skills, was more straightforward in the problem solving element.

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 aggregate queries/searches and calculations within a report.

The standard of word processing/copy typing continues to be disappointing — there is a limited amount of copy text that can be included in a Higher paper, and only 'A' candidates seem to be able to complete this small section accurately.

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

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Section 1

Questions 1, 3 and 5

Candidates showed good understanding of a mystery shopper and were able to describe the consequences and implications of poor customer service, although some candidates failed to outline both a consequence and an implication to gain full marks. The principles of good information handling were tackled well. Generally candidates showed good knowledge, with only a few listing the principles rather than outlining them.

Section 2

Questions 1(b) and 1(c) were generally answered well — a popular choice of question.

Most candidates showed good knowledge of additional selection processes and were able to construct their answer in a discursive way. Those who did not pick up high marks tended to simply name or list the methods without giving any outlines or carrying out any discussion.

Candidates are confident with the leadership role. Most gave good benefits — those who did not tended to outline team characteristics rather than benefits of leadership.

Questions 2 (a) and 2 (b) were completed well, although very few candidates chose this question.

The confidentiality and security of electronic information was suggested and justified well, and candidates were able to describe the key responsibilities that employers have for display screen regulations. Some failed to gain the second mark for description (a common problem with 'describe' questions).

Question 3 was generally well answered by all who attempted it.

Candidates gave good outlines of an operational decision and were able to discuss effectively the information required to make good decisions. While most candidates handled the time management techniques question well, some failed to describe three techniques fully. Time management skills tended to be outlined rather than justified in this last question, Question 3 (c)(ii), but most candidates completed it reasonably well.

Questions 4 (c)(ii) and 4 (d) were generally answered well — a very popular choice of question.

Candidates showed very good knowledge of meeting terms and were able to describe the features of an effective team. However, some candidates confused the features of an effective team with simple team attributes.

Question 5 (a) was answered well. Candidates showed good knowledge of office layouts and therefore the benefits of switching from traditional to open plan.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Section 1

Questions 2 and 4

While candidates seemed more prepared for the 'compare' question, the difficulty lay in their knowledge of focus groups. Many were confused, thinking that a focus group was a group of mystery shoppers. Flexible working was not well done; although candidates did display knowledge of flexible working, they answered the question from the employee's point of view rather than the employer's.

Section 2

Questions 1 (a) and 1 (d)

Some candidates thought that a person specification was written by the applicant, and therefore the justifications were a little confused.

While candidates were able to name ways in which an organisation could inform employees of changes to procedures, they struggled to outline and describe these ways. Very few gained full marks for this question.

Question 2 (c) was badly done by the few who attempted it. In particular, candidates could not define a one-to-many relationship and cross-referencing.

Question 4 (a) and 4 (c)(i)

Although Question 4 was a very popular question, it was not handled well. In particular, candidates appeared to have little knowledge of standard items in an agenda and, as in a previous paper, candidates could not distinguish between minutes and action minutes. Most answers pertained to the use of full minutes rather than the condensed, more specific form that is an action minute.

Question 5 (c) and 5 (d)

Candidates were able to discuss the use of the internet but unfortunately did not focus on the point of the question, which was the internet as a source of business information. The term 'remote meeting' was greatly misunderstood by those who attempted this question. Many candidates thought that a remote meeting was somewhere in the far flung reaches of the Outer Hebrides, rather than the electronic definition of a meeting where members are not all in the same location.

Paper 2

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

Question 1 (a) — database search/query

Candidates coped well with most of this task. The area that proved difficult was the 'wildcard' query on commonwealth. Results of this search were varied, but markers were able to award marks for the criteria correctly recorded.

Question 1 (b) — search and aggregate field

A number of candidates omitted this task. This was designed as a discriminatory question for 'A' candidates. However, marks were available for searching for 'core' athletes and for including the sport field that the athletes participated in. When counting for the aggregate field, candidates are not expected to change the column heading. However, if this summary were to be included in a formal business document, it would then be expected (not asked) that the heading be more appropriate.

Question 1 (c) — search and database report

There were mixed results for this task. Although candidates showed that they could successfully carry out a simple search and create a report, marks were lost for choosing an inappropriate report heading, not sorting by surname within the report, and keying-in errors in the footer. Frequently candidates chose to key-in a very large and complex heading covering all the search criteria.

I would advise that headings be succinct and to the point. Long headings tend to lose the mark through errors. The added difficulty of carrying out a calculation and subtotalling was only completed by 'A' candidates.

Question 2 (a) — spreadsheet (bookings)

This was generally well done. Candidates are consistently showing good use and knowledge of vlookups. However, there was some confusion over VAT rate and VAT amount. The column was to be headed 'rate' but some candidates went on to calculate the amount rather than the more straightforward insertion of the rate from the previous worksheet. Totalling was completed well but very few candidates included the round-down formulae, even though this was tested in last year's paper as well.

Question 2 (b) — spreadsheet (summary sheet)

Candidates used a number of inventive ways to problem solve this particular task. Most were awarded marks successfully. Sadly, most marks were lost for inconsistencies or keying-in errors in column headings and formatting. Candidates should always ensure that new headings follow the same style as previous ones, and that data within columns is formatted both appropriately and consistently.

Question 3 — word processing (monthly report)

Nearly all candidates received marks for enhancing the front cover of the report — just about everything was accepted. Database and word processing data were successfully imported, and candidates were able to change the page orientation with few problems. Marks were easily picked up for dealing with comments and footnotes.

However, as in previous years, it was disappointing to see so many Higher candidates making very silly keying-in errors, eg the omission of full stops. The standard of copy typing is quite poor. There were mixed results for the inclusion of a table of contents — the most common mistake was not ensuring that it was on a page of its own. This is an assumption (knowledge of business documents) and it is unlikely that it will be asked directly in a Higher paper.

Another assumption is that a front cover to a report (or any other business document) would not have a page number — many candidates lost the page numbering mark because of this lack of knowledge. Most word processing tasks will have a presentation mark allocated. In this year's paper, very few candidates scored this mark. The presentation mark is for consistency in fonts, line spacing, appropriate page breaks, etc.

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 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 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 (two points) for each 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 (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 proofread all keying-in work more carefully, and not to forget all previous learning regarding the consistency and layout of business documents.
- ◆ A business document will be tested somewhere 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 2009	2957
Number of resulted entries in 2010	2914

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	26.7%	26.7%	777	84
B	26.6%	53.3%	775	72
C	22.2%	75.4%	646	60
D	8.1%	83.6%	237	54
No award	16.4%	100.0%	479	–

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.