

Research and Information Services

MONITORING STANDARDS REPORT

SCOTTISH
QUALIFICATIONS
AUTHORITY



Comparison of Administration Intermediate 1 2006, 2005 and 2003

Summary of findings

The monitoring team concludes that overall, the level of demand of the course has increased, the performance of candidates has remained consistent and with the lowering of Grade Boundary marks, grades have also remained consistent.

Level of demand of arrangements/syllabus

The syllabus was broader and deeper in 2006 than 2003/05, so was more demanding. Integration within skills is introduced in the 2006 syllabus. Given the dynamic nature of the subject area, changes over a period of time are to be expected, so that the syllabus reflects up-to-date practices.

Level of demand of examination questions

There was an increase in demand in both the breadth and depth of the questions to reflect the syllabus changes in 2006. The 2006 paper covers a wider range of the syllabus, in the database and spreadsheet categories, than the 2003 and 2005 papers. Conversely, due to the increase in breadth of the theory in the 2006 syllabus, the exam paper inevitably samples a lesser percentage of the theory topics. The use of higher skill command words is evident in the 2006 paper.

Level of demand of examination marking

There were no differences in the marking instructions that made it more or less difficult to obtain the same grade over the three years. The same principles are followed when awarding marks.

Grading of candidates' performances

Scripts with the same grades in 2006 and 2003/05 show comparable performance.

Findings

1 Introduction

The panel found that the approach to learning and teaching was the same throughout all years. There were some notable changes to the population of candidates (see Appendix 1 for detailed figures). One change was an increase in the number of candidates sitting the exam: 1,048 in 2003, 976 in 2005 and 1,371 in 2006. This is an increase of 30% from 2003 to 2006.

A second change was the stage of candidates. There has been a significant increase of S3/4 candidates sitting the exam. In 2006, S3/S4 accounted for 30% of candidates, compared to 12% of candidates in 2003. A reduction in entries of S5 S6 and FE candidates is evident. This group of candidates formed 69% of entries in 2006, compared with 72% in 2005 and 87% in 2003. Compared to all other stages, S3 candidates performed particularly well, with a pass rate of 99%. The overall percentage pass rates and grades for the subject were consistent over all three years.

2 Level of demand of arrangements/syllabus

The syllabus was more demanding in 2006 than it was in 2003 and 2005 (see Appendices 2 and 3). Given the dynamic nature of the subject area, changes over a period of time are to be expected, so that the syllabus reflects up-to-date practices. The 2006 syllabus was also more detailed and specific in its requirements for learning outcomes.

The panel noted that:

- ◆ Standard Grade English was no longer specified as part of the recommended entry for the course. The panel judged that this has not had an effect on overall standards.
- ◆ There was a reduction in the automatic certification of Core Skills in the 2006 syllabus. This syllabus no longer certifies Problem Solving and Oral Communication. Both syllabuses certified Information Technology.

2.1 Differences in breadth

- a The breadth of the syllabus was wider in 2006, and correspondingly more demanding than in 2003/05 (see Appendix 2).
- b There have been numerous additions to the syllabus (see Appendices 2 & 3).
- c Some items were removed from the syllabus. The additions significantly outweigh the removals (see Appendix 2).
- d Given the increase in breadth and additions to the syllabus, inevitably the arrangements have changed.

2.2 Differences in depth

- a The panel found that the depth covered in the syllabus in 2006 was more demanding than in 2003/05.
- b There is more emphasis of integration within skills in the 2006 syllabus than the 2003/05 syllabus.

3 Level of demand of examination questions

- a General approach in the assessment instruments was similar, with slightly more problem solving in the 2006 paper. There was an increase in demand in both the breadth and depth of the questions to reflect the syllabus changes in 2006.
- b The 2006 paper covers a wider range of the syllabus, in the database and spreadsheet categories, than the 2003 and 2005 papers. Both spreadsheets and databases are examined in 2006, whereas in 2003 and 2005 only one is examined. Due to the increase in the breadth of the theory in the 2006 syllabus, the exam paper inevitably samples a smaller percentage of the theory topics.
- c The 2003 and 2005 papers started with basic word processing tasks, the second task tested databases, task 3 was a further word processing task which tested problem solving and sourcing skills, with task 4 being theory questions. 2006 starts with a spreadsheet task; task 2 is a database, with task 3 being an integrated word processing task. Task 4 is still theory questions. This results in a lesser emphasis on word-processing and more on spreadsheets and databases. The use of higher skill command words is evident in the theory questions in the 2006 paper.
- d Due to the change of syllabus there are greater demands from the assessment instrument in both breadth and depth in the 2006 paper. See appendix 4.

4 Level of demand of examination marking

- There were no differences in the marking instructions that made it more or less difficult to obtain the same grade over the three years. There have been variations in the demand in individual categories however these have negated each other.
- a There has been a change to positive marking, from a mixture of positive and negative marking in the IT categories, in 2006. However the same principles are followed when awarding marks. The database was more demanding and word processing was less demanding. There is less granularity across the marking instructions in 2006 due to the elimination of half marks. In the panel's opinion this did not affect the demand of the marking instructions.
 - b There were more examples of possible solutions in 2003 and 2006 compared to 2005 in the theory category.

- c There was more detail in the 2006 theory category due to the use of higher level command words.

5 Grading of candidates' performances

Scripts with the same grades in 2006 and 2003/05 show comparable performance. Performance in the theory category has declined in the 2006 scripts, though this is counterbalanced by an improved performance in the IT categories. The panel attributes this decline to the increased breadth and depth of the theory category.

From the limited sample of scripts available, the panel would conclude that in 2006, Grade A candidates were differentiated from Grade C candidates by the information technology categories, particularly the spreadsheet.

Given the type of questions in the assessment instruments and the detailed marking instructions which follow the same principles, variations in performance within the same grade are unlikely.

It is important to note that marks in all of the grades have reduced due to the increased rigour of the syllabus. This has been negated by a reduction in grade boundary marks. See Appendix 5. The panel would emphasise that overall the demand of the course has increased, performance of candidates has remained consistent and with a reduction in the boundary marks, grades have also remained consistent.

Appendix 1

Population of candidates sitting the exam

2006

ENTRIES	S3	S4	S5	S6	FE
1,371	5%	25%	56%	6%	7%

2005

ENTRIES	S3	S4	S5	S6	FE
976	0%	27%	55%	8%	9%

2003

ENTRIES	S3	S4	S5	S6	FE
1,048	0%	12%	65%	10%	12%

Appendix 2

Change to breadth of Arrangements between 2003/05 and 2006

Category	Change	Additions	Removals
Word Processing	Increase	Tables, graphics, search/replace.	Centring horizontally.
Spreadsheet	Increase	Text wrapping, hide/unhide columns and rows, average function.	
Database	Increase	Like operator, filter by form.	
Other IT skills	Increase	Powerpoint software, more specific internet functions.	Use of fax and telephone answering machine.
Theory	Increase	Additional legislation and electronic communication, mail, filing, reprographics, reception, petty cash.	Business travel and meetings.

Appendix 3

Change to depth of Arrangements between 2003/05 and 2006

Category	Change	Additions	Removals
Word Processing	Increase	Integration of data, header footer menu, tables.	
Spreadsheet	Increase	Relative cells, header footer menu.	
Database	Increase	Primary key	
Other IT skills	Same		
Theory	Increase	Problem solving	

Appendix 4

Change to weighting and demand of assessment instrument

Category	2003/05	2006	Increase of Demand - Breadth	Increase of Demand - Depth
Word Processing	50%	20%	More keying-in required to achieve a mark, more manuscript correction signs.	More complex task worth fewer marks - integration of software packages.
Spreadsheet		41%	Not tested in the 2003 or 2005 papers.	
Database	30%	19%	The same function worth fewer marks.	More reading and interpretation required.
Theory	20%	20%	Increase in problem solving.	More reading and interpretation required. Use of higher level command words.

Appendix 5

Grade boundaries

2006

			GRADE BOUNDARIES			
Code	Title	Max Mark	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
X214	Administration	100	77	63	50	43

2005

			GRADE BOUNDARIES			
Code	Title	Max Mark	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	D Mark
X214	Administration	100	79	66	54	48

2003

			GRADE BOUNDARIES			
Code	Title	Max Mark	A Mark	B Mark	C Mark	Band 7
X214	Administration	100	80	67	55	49