

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Business Services

Qualification area:

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

Administration — Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	3,722

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	3,945

General comments re entry numbers

There was a small increase in entries this year — 223.

Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Upper A	—	102 marks
Lower A	—	84 marks
B	—	71 marks
C	—	59 marks

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as syllabuses evolve and change

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

There was a decrease in the number of candidates this year who failed to gain an award.

The most significant increase in awards was at Grade B, with Upper and Lower A remaining much the same as last year, and a small increase in those gaining a C pass.

It was recognized that the layout of the information in the spreadsheet task in paper 2 may have caused some difficulties for 'C' candidates. In recognition of this, the grade boundary for a C pass was adjusted accordingly.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

As with last year's paper candidates performed better in paper 2 than in paper 1. However, the gap in performance between the two papers has narrowed from last year, with candidate performance in paper 1 improving from last year.

Many of the comments made in last year's report are still applicable to this year's paper. Candidates continue to demonstrate the ability to recall facts, but are still failing to demonstrate higher order skills. Candidates seem to be better prepared for questions that ask them to compare and contrast than they were last year, but questions that ask them to discuss and justify were generally very poorly answered. Many candidates answered by giving everything they knew about the topic, but totally failed to answer the question — thereby gaining no or few marks.

Markers continue to comment on the poor spelling, grammar and sentence construction, although some markers indicated an improvement since last year. Some candidates answered in bullet points — which is acceptable. However candidates must ensure that they have developed the points enough to answer the question — one word answers are not acceptable at Higher.

Candidates generally tackled the IT paper very well. Again the one area where candidates performed less well was where problem-solving was being specifically tested (again this year in the construction of the formulae in the spreadsheet). This paper sets out to test the candidates' ability to use the software to solve a problem, not the routine use of software.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Section 1

Questions 2, 4 and 5 (although a significant number of candidates took 'outsourcing' to mean 'homeworking')

Section 2

Question 1(b) (c), Question 3, Question 4 (a) (ii), (b) (c) and Question 5 (a) and (c)

Paper 2

The majority of candidates completed the paper in the time allowed. The final document produced by many candidates was of an excellent standard. There was a marked improvement in consistency throughout the document this year, indicating that candidates had time to check the finer details — eg consistency of headings, spacing before/after displays, paragraphs and headings and consistency of body text. The interrogation of the database and the chart were very well done by the majority of candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Paper 1

Section 1

Question 1

Many candidates did not focus their answers on e-business, but gave general answers on how computers can save paper in an organisation. In Question 3 candidates often gave excellent responses on homeworking without making any reference to the **effects** that introducing homeworking would have on the organisation and the employee — they therefore gained no marks.

Section 2

Question 1

- (a) Candidates gave examples of the types of support administrative staff give within an organisation, but made no mention of the importance of administrative support.

Question 2

- (a) Candidates generally defined a ‘SMART’ target, but included little analysis in their answers.
(b) Candidates were able to discuss the necessity for procedures in general terms, but had difficulty in relating these to the review, analysis and evaluation of work methods. Few gave good examples of such procedures.

Question 4

- (a) (i) As in last year’s paper, candidates discussed inadequate travel preparation without giving the **possible consequences**.

Question 5

- (b) There were many long, rambling answers to this question, few of which actually answered the question. Candidates should have **discussed** the features of good information — ie accurate, relevant, sufficient, etc.

Paper 2

Spreadsheet task — insertion of formulae. Some candidates did have difficulty inserting the correct cell address for some of the prices into the some of the formulae. Few candidates demonstrated a total inability to interpret the information given — for example, while some candidates were unable to insert the correct cell address for the price for A3 double sided colour paper, they were able to insert the correct cell address for data CD-ROMS and floppy disks. By doing this they showed that they did understand the concept of matching the category to the price of copies. As mentioned earlier, it is acknowledged that the layout of the information given may have caused difficulties for some candidates and the grade boundary for a ‘C’ pass was set accordingly.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Centres must continue to emphasise knowledge and understanding within the Course.

Candidates need to have practice in reading and interpreting a question and then answering by demonstrating the skills of justifying and discussing.

Skills in the use of IT to solve problems need to be further developed.

Centres should ensure candidates are being presented at the correct level.