

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Business Education

Qualification area

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

Administration — Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003	4,050
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Number of entries in 2004	4,205
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General comments re entry numbers

There was a very small increase in entries this year.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

	% Candidates
A	13%
B	24.2%
C	27.3%
D	13.3%
No Award	22.2%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

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Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Minimum mark
A	13.0	13.0	548	76
B	24.2	37.2	1,019	64
C	27.3	64.5	1,148	53
D	13.3	77.8	557	47
No award	22.2	100.0	933	

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 arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

There was a very slight decrease in the number of candidates gaining Lower A and B passes this year. The number of C passes was consistent with last year.

Grade boundaries were reduced this year to account for two factors:

- accessibility of the knowledge and understanding aspects of Paper 1.
- increased level of difficulty of the problem solving aspects of Paper 2.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidates continued the trend set in previous years of performing better in Paper 2 than in Paper 1. The mean mark for Paper 2 was 29.7, compared to 28.5 for Paper 1.

Candidate performance in the knowledge and understanding component of the external examination has improved year on year since the introduction of Higher Administration. However, that trend did not continue this year, with candidates' performance in Paper 1 being poorer than last year. In 2003 the mean mark for Paper 1 was 29 compared to 28.5 in 2004. Although this was a small reduction, had the upward trend shown over previous years continued, we would have expected the mean mark to increase to 30.5/31.

There was a marked improvement this year in candidates' ability to demonstrate higher order skills in the knowledge and understanding component of the paper. Fewer candidates were penalised for failure to compare and contrast or justify within a question. Although the 'technique' of answering such questions was much improved, the depth of answers was, in general, poorer than in previous years. Many candidates did not give full enough answers. While Markers last year commented on an improvement in spelling, sentence construction and grammar, almost all Markers commented on the 'backward step' in these areas this year.

In Paper 2 candidates continue to perform less well in the problem-solving aspects of the paper. Accuracy in word processing continues to improve. Candidates appeared to have difficulty in understanding what was required in some aspects of the spreadsheet tasks.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Section 1

Questions 1, 2 and 4 (although a significant number of candidates described a procedure for 'changing the management' in Question 4, rather than a procedure for 'change management')

Section 2

Question 1, Question 2 (a) and (c), Question 3, Question 4 (b) and Question 5 (a), (b) (ii)

Paper 2

Minutes — very well done. Most candidates gained very high marks in this task, with the average mark being about 15.5 (out of 20 marks). Accuracy had improved markedly from previous years.

Life 1 — generally the sort was well done, although a significant number of candidates sorted only the figures and did not sort the associated providers. The chart was generally well done by those who had submitted this printout. The construction of charts continues to improve year on year.

Discounts — a significant number of candidates submitted no printout, or incomplete printouts for this task. The printouts that were submitted generally fell into 2 categories; (1) candidates who were not able to complete the more complex formulae, but were still able to insert the straightforward formulae, ie for 'sub total' 'sub total after discount' and 'total to pay'; (2) candidates who were able to think through the 'problem' and insert the more complex formulae for 'policy discount allowances', 'overall discount amount' and 'overall discount rate'. Each formulae was awarded one mark and one mark was awarded for boldening the 'total to pay' for both customers, therefore candidates could have gained at least half the available marks for insertion of the more straightforward formulae.

Report — documents submitted were generally consistent in layout and formatting. Marks were awarded to the values contained in the Discounts spreadsheet within the report and marks were picked up here as candidates were not penalised for consequential errors.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Paper 1

Section 1

Question 3

There were many long, rambling answers to this question, repeating the same point several times, eg ‘a tall structure has many layers (omitting to say what the layers are), whereas a flat organisational structure has few layers.’ then ‘a tall organisational structure has lots of managers, whereas a flat organisational structure has few managers’. Many candidates made the assumption that a tall organisational structure means a large organisation and a flat organisational structure means a small organisation.

Section 2

Question 2(b)

Again many long, rambling answers to this question. However, candidates failed to make reference to **factors** influencing choice of method of communication — tended to give advantages and disadvantages of methods of communication.

Question 4(a)

In general questions that looked for consequences were not well answered throughout the paper. Question 4 was the most popular question in Section 2, but it was also the most poorly answered. In Question 4(a) candidates discussed employees planning their own business travel and accommodation, but failed to go on to describe the **consequences** of an organisation allowing this.

Question 4 (c) (i)

Candidates discussed time management in general terms, but failed to discuss the factors that influence time management.

Question 4 (c) (ii)

Again, candidates failed to outline the possible consequences of inadequately defined targets. They discussed targets in general, but failed to develop their answers to include consequences if targets were not adequately defined.

Question 5 (b) (i)

Another question that asks for consequences. Candidates again failed to develop their answers to include consequences.

Question 5(c)

In general candidates were unable to expand their answers beyond saying that the use of the Internet would allow organisations to reach a wider audience.

Paper 2

Minutes — some candidates clearly expected a ‘mailmerge’ in this paper and had included merge fields either in the Minutes or in the Report. Some candidates failed to include the formatting required (ie italics) for the footer in the page number.

Life 1 — many candidates only picked up one requirement of the formulae to calculate the savings made over

a 10 year period by buying from ThriftyCo. They either calculated the difference in premium between ThriftyCo and the other providers, OR they calculated the premium over 10 years. Very few candidates accurately inserted a formula to calculate the premium difference between males and females. It is accepted that the wording of the question may have contributed to this.

Discounts — as indicated previously, a significant number of candidates submitted no printout, or incomplete printouts for this task. Candidates seemed to have difficulty in distinguishing between ‘rate’ and ‘amount’.

Database — the query was generally poorly done. The inclusion of the & within the field being searched caused difficulties for some candidates. Candidates should have been able to cope with a query of this nature at Higher level.

Report — the inclusion of only the name and branch fields from the database was not well done.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Centres must emphasise knowledge and understanding within the course and encourage candidates to develop their answers to the level demanded by a Higher level course.

Problem solving skills in the use of IT need to be further developed. In any examination paper there will inevitably be areas which present a greater challenge for 'C' candidates than 'A' candidates — there must be an opportunity for differentiation. All candidates need to be able to identify areas where they are able to demonstrate the skills they do have. In a practical IT paper it is essential that candidates do not see something they cannot do and give up on the rest of the paper. Where candidates have difficulties in some aspects of the paper, they should be encouraged, through the use of practice papers and questions using similar problem solving skills, to develop the skills to identify the more straightforward aspects of the question and to complete these, thereby giving themselves an opportunity to gain marks, not only in that question, but in other parts of the paper. For example in Paper 2 candidates would gain marks for the insertion of the chart, the spreadsheets and the database interrogation, regardless of the accuracy of the original document.

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