SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:	**Management and Enterprise**
Qualification area:	
Subject(s) and Level(s) Included in this report	**Business Management (Advanced Higher)**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	187
Pre appeal	187

Number of entries in 2003	237
Pre appeal	237

General comments re entry numbers

The number of candidates continues to rise as does the number of presenting centres, which rose from 43 in 2002 to 56 in 2003. Most centres, however, entered only a small number of candidates. The increase in both centres and number of candidates is less than occurred between 2001 and 2002, although numbers in 2001 were low (19 candidates). The number of entries reflects the growing number of candidates at Higher level and it seems likely that numbers at Advanced Higher level will continue to rise.

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

The grade boundaries were:

Upper A	84
Lower A	69
B	59
C	49

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

The grade boundaries rose slightly from previous years, bringing the grade boundaries closer to ‘a priori' scores. This was due in part to an analysis of candidate responses which indicated that the questions in the paper posed an equivalent challenge to previous years and also because the company involved in the case study was considered to be more accessible to candidates than that involved in the 2002 examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

This is only the third cohort for this paper and a clear pattern of the candidate group is still emerging. However, the overall standard of performance of candidates was not as good as in 2002. There was an increase in the proportion of both C grade and no award scripts and a fall in the number of B and A grade scripts, particularly in the A grade category.

Candidates who did less well did not provide answers of an Advanced Higher standard. This has been the main reason for poor performance among previous cohorts but it was more noticeable in this group. Hence, although the number of poorer candidates has risen, the reasons for their poor performance have not changed. The comments made in the PA Report for 2002, therefore, also apply for 2003.

Good answers had the following characteristics:

- they contained development points and examples to justify and support points made in the answer
- they made reference to material from the case study (especially in Section 1)
- they provided a structured response to questions
- they consisted of more than one main point
- they answered the question asked (especially in Section 2)
- they were concise and made several points in a few lines
- where it was applicable, they made reference to relevant theory
- the length of the answer was matched to the number of marks available for the question.

By contrast, poorer answers tended to be repetitive and to make only a single main point. They often did not provide justification for points or, where they did, it tended to be simplistic.

As in the 2002 diet, candidates who did less well tended to produce answers which did not demonstrate progress from Higher level. Often they resorted to a prepared answer which, for Section 1 in particular, did not always fit well with the issues in the case study. Their answers tended to be vague with a lot of superfluous description.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Section 1
This section is directly linked to the case study and many candidates coped well. Q1 (a) [on why expansion had taken place] was well done and many candidates scored well because they made good references to the case study. It seemed to 'settle' candidates. Questions 2 (force field analysis), 3 (motivation) and 5 (specialisation) also drew good responses. In Q3, better candidates were able to quote relevant underpinning theory and directly relate it to the question.

Section 2
Questions 7 and 8 were the most popular and part (a) in both cases was well answered and most candidates were well aware of the relevant points. Many candidates quoted good examples in Q8 and in the market segmentation and e-commerce sections of Q7 (b). The examples came from the case study and from other sources which is a key feature of strong answers in Section 2.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Section 1
Q4 was the most problematic question in this section. Some candidates did not answer the question asked and several seemed uncertain as to exactly what a public limited company is. The case study indicates that accessing additional finance was a key factor in the company's decision but not all candidates were able to refer to this.

Section 2
Candidates found Q6 the most difficult in this section. Answers to part (a) tended to be repetitive and concentrate on only one of the two schools of thought. Answers to part (b) were often vague and referred to businesses as a whole rather than to the specific issues facing family businesses such as succession, adapting to change and so on.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

The main issue arising from the 2003 examination is that, to succeed at Advanced Higher, candidates must produce answers of a suitable standard. Many candidates who did not do well provided answers which did not go beyond Higher. These answers lacked the depth and analysis required at this level. There are several things that candidates can be encouraged to do which may help them provide answers of Advanced Higher standard. The main ones are listed below.

- Using development points in answers – at Advanced Higher level, candidates should justify each point with a reason or reasons and, if possible, give a relevant example or examples. In Section 1 questions, these examples should come from the case study. Marks are only awarded for points which are supported by suitable reasons or examples.
- Making several substantive points in an answer, especially in Section 2 questions – each main point should be supported by reasons and examples; the marking scheme is based on the candidate making several substantive points. Answers which consist of one main point and a large number of essentially similar examples do not gain high marks.
- Answering the question asked – Section 2 answers, in particular, often consisted of sections of the core text which the candidate had learned regardless of whether or not this material directly answered the question. In Q8 (b), for example, some candidates discussed methods of change [eg top-down; change agents] and did not examine corporate culture. The question required candidates to explain corporate culture and analyse how it may make it easier or more difficult for an organisation to introduce change. In Q7 (b), candidates often reproduced answers which they had used at Higher level. E-commerce responses sometimes consisted of a general discussion on ICT while human resource planning was answered with a description of the main elements of the HR function.
- Applying knowledge to the case study – this refers to Section 1 where reasons given should be pertinent to the company in the case study. There is a tendency among some candidates to reproduce the general points they have learned without thinking whether or not they do actually apply to the company concerned. Only reasons which do apply to the company gain marks.
- Not using a pre-prepared response to a question – this is related to the previous two points and applies to both Sections of the paper. In Q3, for example, there was a tendency to write out general issues relating to financial and non-financial incentives rather than looking specifically at the two mentioned in the question. At Advanced Higher level, candidates do not gain a mark merely for stating that an incentive is financial or non-financial. Marks are awarded for considering how each specific measure may motivate employees in the company concerned.

Section 1 of the paper is directly related to the case study while Section 2 is more general. Candidates may use examples from the case study to illustrate their answers in Section 2 and, if they do so, they will gain credit. However, they are not expected to do this and other pertinent illustrations will gain marks.

Assimilating the information in the case study in the time available is challenging and candidates do benefit from previous practice in reading case studies and extracting relevant information from them.

There were some examples of a lack of knowledge among some candidates. Particular examples included:

- arrows in the force field analysis pointing outwards (few candidates mentioned assets for change)
- public limited company – several candidates treated owners and shareholders as though they were different.

Some candidates answered Section 2 first and then tackled Section 1. Candidates may, of course, choose to answer questions in any order they wish. However, in general, candidates who did begin with Section 2 performed less well than those who started with Section 1. Section 2 questions demand answers which are longer than those usually expected at Higher level and candidates benefit from practising answers to questions like these.