



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Retail Travel
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

Once again this year two centres entered candidates for the Retail Travel project, with one centre presenting candidates from two campuses. In general the process was well managed by the presenting centres, and submissions were of a reasonably high standard. Flysheet covers were completed with students' signatures to confirm that the projects presented were the students' own work. Cross-marking comments were noted on candidates' individual summary sheets, and the sampling undertaken was noted on each college's Internal Verification documents.

To support the marks allocation for technical ability, in relation to documentation, both centres used detailed checklists, along with the summary marks sheets for each stage of the project, indicating clearly the level of support offered to the candidate.

Most students presented word-processed administrative documents for the clients (eg letters to the client, itineraries and supplementary information). Opportunities to integrate core skills learning with the project were developed by both centres, which was good practice. (Care should, however, be taken to avoid the overuse of letters to the client to communicate many pieces of information. This can lead to a less cohesive project.)

Both centres encouraged candidates to keep a logbook or diary of progress to support all stages of the project. Most candidates did present the brochures/reference sources they had used as an appendix to their project, along with appropriate printed web pages.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Many candidates performed well in the Planning stage of the project. Those whose marks were fully justified presented well-prepared plans which included aims, SMART objectives and flowcharts with clear timescales for the completion of tasks.

Many candidates performed well in the Development stage. This section of the project was generally well presented, with substantial research undertaken by candidates. Access to internet facilities and the use of trade reference sources, including a variety of tour operators' brochures, was clearly evidenced in most cases.

A few candidates approached the task in a manner which demonstrated professional retail skills; presenting the relevant information in a format that was easy to read and attractive for the customer; and completing documents accurately and to trade standard.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Some candidates did not perform as well as could have been expected in the Planning stage. If candidates grasp the importance of setting SMART objectives and order their tasks,

they should find the following stages much easier. Time spent preparing the candidate for writing their plan is invaluable.

Candidates, as usual, found the Evaluation stage particularly demanding. Improvement in the quality of work presented in this section of the project has been evident over the last few years, but the majority of candidates still perform least well in this section.

Candidates must be encouraged to produce a more detailed evaluation of their approach to the project. This is usually better achieved by those who can draw from the work undertaken to produce their detailed planning flowchart and logbook of progress throughout the project. Candidates can comment on their ability to adhere to their plan, using their notes concerning difficulties encountered and solutions to overcome these.

Centres must take care when allocating marks to this section to ensure that candidates include sufficient evidence to warrant the marks awarded.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

The timing of the introduction of the project is critical. It is important that the candidate is competent in the skills required to undertake the Retail Travel Project — these are gained through outcomes in Travel Agency Practice & Procedures and Surface Travel. However, it is also vitally important that its introduction is not left too late, to avoid candidates being overwhelmed by the pressure of completing project by the end of May.

Allocation of class time for project work is essential – approximately 20-30 hours is required, preferably with access to all relevant resources including internet access. Students must be advised that they will also be required to spend a substantial amount of their own study time researching information and writing it up. Administrative and travel documentation should, however, be completed under supervised conditions with access to all notes and, perhaps, tutor-prepared sample documents in a reference folder.

Many candidates have little experience in the area of planning, and some practice exercises can be done in the class before embarking on the briefs. It is important that the candidate is comfortable with the concept of aims and objectives of the project and does **not simply list tasks** to be undertaken.

Once the candidate decides which brief he/she would like to tackle, the planning procedure used in the practice exercises can be adopted. The 500 words allocated to the Planning stage should be presented in prose rather than as bullet points. After the candidate has justified his/her choice of brief, he/she should summarise the information required and the approach to be taken for the chosen brief only. Candidates must remember to include information sources to be consulted, resources to be used, and details of the documentation that will need to be issued.

Information presented in the planning flowchart, including timescales, does not have to be counted in the 500 word allocation for the Planning Stage.

It is vital that the candidate completes a project logbook or diary throughout the project. This should be used to record any difficulties the candidate encounters and their solution. It also acts as a confirmation of the candidate's adherence to the timescales planned for each task. These notes will be of considerable assistance when writing up the Evaluation stage of the project.

Summary checklists and additional checklists are provided by SQA, and make marking reasonably straight forward. Projects should be cross-marked to ensure consistency of marking across staff and class groups. Note that half marks should not be allocated.

In the Development stage it is important for the candidate to research different products, from different operators; give detailed information about each suggested product, including an accurate costing; and justify his/her choice. It is vitally important that the candidate effectively extracts accurate and relevant information to present to the client in an attractive and easy to read format and **in the candidate's own words.**

Any internet printouts should be retained as evidence only and presented in the appendix to the project. These **must not** be presented to the client with highlighted information suggesting the appropriate choice of product!

All documentation should be completed to trade standard (detailed and accurate). This should include word processed letters and, ideally, an itinerary for each client who is setting off from a different departure point or following a different itinerary. The clients' itineraries should include accurate check-in, departure and arrival times for all travel arrangements.

The client booking file must reflect all products booked and be an accurate record of all financial transactions. It is recommended that candidates are directed to offer an insurance policy that would realistically be sold by a travel agency. It would be appropriate if candidates were encouraged to sell the insurance policy that is used in the Travel Agency Practice and Procedures unit. They must be instructed to issue a proposal form.

As the Evaluation Stage of the project is the area that candidates find most difficult, perhaps some additional tutor input to teach evaluating skills could be considered by centres.

Good use of the planning flowchart and logbook to record progress/difficulties does help candidates to give a fuller response to this section.

Improved candidate performance could be achieved by ensuring adequate time is allocated to this section. Good time management must also be encouraged, as many candidates fall behind schedule at this point and are faced with having to complete outstanding assessments for other units in their programme. As some candidates find the demands on their time overwhelming at this stage, less time and effort may go into the Evaluation stage than the other two stages.

The benefits to candidates of completing this Higher Retail Travel project should not be underestimated, both for those candidates who progress to the HNC Travel, where a graded

unit is mandatory, and for those seeking employment in the Travel Industry. Processing the client's requirements from enquiry stage through to dispatching their tickets, gives a much better understanding of the customer care, retail and administrative skills that are required for working in the travel industry.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2010	58
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	67
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	22.4%	22.4%	15	140
B	20.9%	43.3%	14	120
C	32.8%	76.1%	22	100
D	6.0%	82.1%	4	90
No award	17.9%	100.0%	12	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.