



Course report 2019

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| Subject | Administration and IT |
| Level | Higher |

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Although the question paper increased to 50 marks this year, the structure of the paper remained the same. The increased marks gave the opportunity to broaden the range of questions and to allocate more marks to particular topics.

There had been a concern that this might prove challenging for candidates, as less emphasis had been placed on theory in the preceding years, however, this was not the case, with candidates performing on a par with previous years.

The average mark was slightly better than last year. The paper appeared to be accessible, with the majority of candidates answering all questions, although not all candidates achieved high marks.

All questions performed as intended.

Assignment

The structure and marks remained the same for this component — 70 marks across the main applications.

Few candidates were strong in all areas. It is not unusual in assignments for either the database tasks or the spreadsheet tasks to be poorly completed. This year, some of the database and spreadsheet tasks proved challenging, however, the two most difficult were at the end of the assignment and this minimised their potential to have a negative impact. This was balanced by the communication and word-processing tasks, where all candidates did well. The average mark for the assignment was slightly better than last year.

All tasks performed as intended. Over the years, it has become apparent that few candidates achieve full marks in the assignment. This could be due to the nature of the tasks or completing the practical activity under controlled conditions. This was considered when setting the grade boundaries, in particular for upper A.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1: this was well answered with most candidates gaining all 4 marks from the issues in the case study. Development marks were available, so most candidates made more points than required.

Question 2: this was fairly well answered by those candidates who understood that there are disadvantages to only using a mystery shopper. These candidates were able to give what became a justification of other methods. It can be difficult to know exactly who the mystery shopper is: some organisations will use an agency and others will use their own staff from other branches — both answers were accepted. Many candidates spoke about the potential bias of the mystery shopper and emphasised that it was a one-off occasion. Good answers spoke about the benefits of bringing customers together to have discussions, enabling them to be questioned further.

Questions 4(a) and 4(b): this was very well answered and was not a problem for the majority of candidates. It is difficult to outline the time stealer in any great detail, for example, not much more needs to be added to 'interruptions from colleagues'.

Question 5: Gantt chart — this was answered slightly better than in previous years. Candidates were able to say how it could be useful to monitor tasks.

Question 6: most were able to gain good marks for this question and gave answers covering a wide array of communication methods. Letters were not accepted as a communication method, as it was felt that it was unlikely in the context and would likely be supplemented by another, more detailed method.

Good answers spoke about emails; how quick they are to send, how they ensure all staff receive the same message and that management can monitor them to check if staff open messages. Meetings and presentations were common answers, although there was some overlap. Some candidates spoke about wasting staff time in meetings but this was not relevant as it was about a legal matter. Candidates who chose to write about noticeboards sometimes struggled to develop their points.

Question 8: candidates were obviously very familiar with this topic and gave full answers. Many wrote about the individual's responsibility to other members in the team and of the need to be willing to learn. A few misread the question and answered as if it was a team leader question — where possible marks were awarded for relevant points.

Question 12: this was fairly well answered — candidates made a good attempt at justifying the need for a named cell. Candidates must be able to answer questions on IT functions and features, for example named cells and ranges. Note: this may be less familiar to candidates who have not completed the National 5 Administration and IT course.

Some of the comments regarding pivot tables and the ability to summarise data and to filter on only what is required were very good.

Assignment

Presentation: as usual, this was well done. There are limited marks available for the research part of the task and so it was enough to have one warm-up for dance and one for vocal. Any poor suggestions were ignored. Some candidates printed and removed slide two from the handout printouts and provided it as a full-size handout. The instructions did not suggest this, but it was accepted.

Email: we have relaxed what is expected in an email. We are only looking for a greeting, for example 'hi', something about the purpose of the email, and a close that can just be their name. These are internal communications and would be very informal.

Database form: most candidates gained full marks for this task. It included a sub-form where the words 'costume allocation' appeared automatically, so a holistic view was taken on the main heading. For example, if the main heading was the name of the show but the field headings tell the story about the data — this was accepted. Some candidates removed the field names beside Rachel Suing — this was also accepted.

Word processing: the majority of candidates did very well in this section of the assignment.

Most errors made in this task were the usual issues regarding accuracy and attention to detail, for example:

- ◆ it was common to see typos in the name of the show (birdie or bride instead of bridie)
- ◆ the find and replace function was not always used, so not all six occurrences were changed
- ◆ placement of the footnote icon
- ◆ the different footers

Pivot table: this was a relatively easy pivot table to do and most candidates achieved full marks. The main reason that marks were not awarded was for formatting text and numbers.

Spreadsheet task — Membership details: most candidates coped well with the membership details task, as it was a typical Higher Administration and IT spreadsheet task. Some candidates multiplied the COUNTIF by the fees in the other sheet instead of using SUMIF, but this would only have worked if the fees were named or absolute.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 3: the case study mentions that staff would be undergoing training on the issues. Candidates were expected to give practical examples of what would need to be covered to ensure compliance. The majority of candidates gave the principles of GDPR rather than applying them to the situation. Many said to change passwords on a regular basis but this did not fit with the case study issues.

Question 4(a) and 4(b): while this question would appear to be a very traditional one, quite a few candidates did not seem to know what 'time stealers' are. Some gave answers that were not realistic in a work setting, for example, employees spending too much time smoking.

Question 7: this question really split the group and was the one with the highest percentage of no response. Many candidates did not appear to know what a mission statement is.

Question 9: although candidates were obviously very familiar with this topic and gave full answers, some found this question more challenging than expected.

Candidates wrote about lighting and heating or furniture and computers but many made repetitive statements about the need to be able to adjust them or just that it should be 'suitable'. Others mentioned 'comfy couches' and 'somewhere to smoke'. There was a lack of solid understanding of ergonomics and some candidates did not have enough knowledge.

Question 10: this question was one where half the group gained good marks and the other half performed badly. Sometimes it was down to poor literacy skills and, as the topic is quite challenging, some candidates struggled to write what they meant. Some answers were not realistic, for example two people in a meeting who do not speak each other's language — this situation would have been addressed before the meeting took place.

Another common answer was that audio-conferencing was a barrier to communication but in that case, another method should have been chosen.

Barriers happen during communication and often could not have been foreseen.

Question 11: along with question 3, this was the most challenging question. Candidates had knowledge of the different roles and many could structure their answer in the preferred way for a 'compare' question. A number of candidates lacked the ability to compare. If this question had been a 'discuss' question, the marks would have been a lot higher.

Assignment

Spreadsheet task — Income and expenditure: candidates found this task challenging and as a result, marks were low. Bringing in the figures from previous calculations was done well and a mark was awarded for a consequential error. Generally, candidates had an issue understanding what each of the subsequent calculations should have been.

Some candidates coped with the IF statement to find out the weekly charge but then did not multiply by the number of weeks. Others made typos in the formula.

Candidates calculated performance rights correctly (sales multiplied by 16%) but then multiplied this by 20% for VAT to give an answer of £182.27. Candidates should have noticed this number was lower than the performance right figure.

The HLOOKUP was often correct but again not multiplied by the profit in cell C24.

Note: the IF statement and the HLOOKUP are worth 2 marks and an additional mark for each multiplication. Breaking up the formulae like this allows candidates to pick up marks.

Database task — Report: this task presented a couple of challenges for candidates. The query had three criteria and it was unusual to come across an answer with the correct records, however, many candidates gained 2 out of 3 marks. The calculation caused problems for some candidates but more to do with a lack of understanding, as they added the late fee to the cost of hire.

Showing the totals and labels was also badly done.

A high percentage of candidates attempted this task and most achieved around half marks, so it was more accessible than the spreadsheet task (accessible marks were: the heading, £ sign, the new field heading and the mark for presentation).

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Candidates were well prepared for the question paper, so it was well done by the majority of candidates.

Teachers and lecturers are advised to raise awareness with candidates that many questions are within a context and that they need to apply knowledge and not just a straight recall of facts.

Some candidates may have knowledge but really struggle to create a meaningful sentence, making it difficult to award marks. It is difficult to find the time to work on literacy skills working through the course, but sometimes candidates do not achieve marks because markers cannot understand what they have written.

Assignment

Most candidates were well prepared and did well in the assignment.

Some candidates find the database and spreadsheet tasks challenging. It is therefore important to show candidates how marks can accumulate from doing even the simplest of functions, in order to build their confidence. For example, formatting for currency even if the amount is wrong.

Teachers and lecturers are encouraged to share knowledge of IT functions, for example of complex formulae or aggregated query.

Candidates often use capitalisation incorrectly; although there can be great debate about which words in a heading should have a capital letter. Future e-files will use only capitals in field and column headings. This should be how candidates format if they then have to add a new heading in a spreadsheet or database. If creating a main heading in a database report, encourage candidates to use capitals.

As well as demonstrating skills in the assignment, candidates must be prepared to answer questions on IT functions and features in the question paper. Many candidates can do a VLOOKUP but would struggle to say what the function is actually doing. For example, candidates should be able to justify when a VLOOKUP is useful and/or the benefits of naming a cell.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2018 | 4052 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2019 | 3770 |
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of course awards | Percentage | Cumulative % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Maximum mark | | | | |
| A | 28.7% | 28.7% | 1081 | 84 |
| B | 27.1% | 55.7% | 1020 | 72 |
| C | 22.7% | 78.4% | 854 | 60 |
| D | 13.9% | 92.3% | 524 | 48 |
| No award | 7.7% | - | 291 | - |

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.