Course Report 2017

Subject	Administration and IT
Level	Higher

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: Question paper

This element of assessment worked well with most candidates performing to a higher standard than last year.

Some questions were very accessible to the majority of candidates and others proved challenging even to the more able. There was no obvious sign that candidates found any one question difficult — the majority of candidates answered every question.

Advice given to centres in the Course Report last year seemed to have been taken on board, and there was a marked improvement in exam technique.

The question on presentation software caused issues with candidates of all abilities. As the command word used was 'justify' and this is a higher-order level skill, it was felt that A and B level candidates were disadvantaged by this question. This resulted in an adjustment being made to these grade boundaries.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment was completed to a good standard with candidates demonstrating strengths in both word processing and spreadsheets. Again, there is evidence that candidates are well prepared, focusing on their strengths and moving through the paper to find those questions where they are most likely to maximise marks.

There were reported issues in a large number of centres regarding printing an A5 booklet and, whilst most candidates did manage to produce the document, it was felt that the grade boundaries should be adjusted by 1 mark to acknowledge the difficulties some candidates faced.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1   Most candidates gained more than half marks for this question. Answers were good and detailed. Candidates were more able to give a description of a Gantt

chart this year than last. Development marks were available, and this gave candidates the opportunity to develop their thoughts.

Question 2   This question was answered well by all candidates, despite being a 'justify' question. Most gave much more than was required to gain the 2 marks.

Question 3   Those candidates who answered this question in the traditional layout, with a linking word joining the two statements of comparison, tended to do better in this question. Structuring the answer in such a way obviously helps the candidate in ensuring that they have written about similar features.

Question 4   This was very well done and there were few candidates who did not achieve full marks for this question.

Question 6   Answers tended to focus on returns policies and service level agreements. Less mention was made of other areas, eg surveying customer satisfaction. Candidates did, however, achieve high marks as up to 4 marks could be awarded for any one area.

Question 7   This question was designed to allow candidates to display their knowledge on what is a very wide area. Most reacted well and gave full and wide-ranging answers. Marks were awarded for examples of specific types of technology, eg Skype.

Component 2: Assignment

DB form   Despite this being the first time we have tested sub-forms, candidates coped very well with it and the average mark was 3 out of 4.

Pivot table   The majority of candidates managed to show the data for wages only for the two sites.

Query   This was well done by the majority of candidates.

Calculations in query – report
- ♦ Most candidates queried correctly to exclude Twelvetrees.
- ♦ Most formatted currency correctly.
- ♦ Grouping and sorting by owner was well done.

Summary SS   This was remarkably well done – very few candidates did not achieve full marks.

Repayments SS
- ♦ Despite the difficulties and the concepts in this question, it was completed to a high standard by the majority.
- ♦ Calculation of interest rate and then amount in the one cell was very good, gaining candidates 3 marks. In the past, calculating the amount rather than the rate has been difficult for a lot of candidates.
- ♦ Similarly, the calculation of the repayment amount using a division and a vlookup seemed to cause few issues.

Presentation	♦	This task was completed to a high standard by the majority, with most gaining 5 out of 7.
	♦	Printing out the map as a single slide was well done with many candidates inserting arrows or circling the place names to aid markers.
	♦	Selecting a design, inserting footer and inserting the correct spreadsheet all executed to the correct standard.

Presentation
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Diary
♦ The vast majority printed in the correct view and had the correct date.

Booklet
♦ Despite the issues experienced by some centres regarding printing, the marks for this word processing task were higher than for some previous years.
♦ Candidates created good front covers and inserted the watermark and footers correctly.
♦ In the main the endnote was positioned correctly.
♦ Very few had difficulty in inserting the paragraphs in the correct order.
♦ Most had the table in landscape orientation. It was obvious to markers that in some cases the table had been changed to landscape but then reverted to portrait when printed as a booklet. (The table was much smaller and the footer jumped up the page.) The orientation mark was awarded in these cases.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1
Some candidates suggested that Karen should draw up a to-do list, but this had already been mentioned in the case study. Only if there was some mention of putting tasks into order was a mark awarded.

It was also felt that Karen was not in a position to delegate to others and therefore this was not accepted as a strategy. However, if the candidate spoke about Karen having a discussion with her colleagues and asking them for their help, a mark was awarded.

Question 2
Some candidates spoke about health and safety issues and it was felt that this was not fully pertinent. However, reference to data protection matters was awarded.

Question 3
Those candidates who opted to write a number of points about open plan and then points about cellular layout tended to lose their train of thought and it was difficult for markers to find linked points.

Also, for the first time, a good percentage of candidates seemed to infer that a cellular office only had one person in it. This is not necessarily the case and sometimes led to comparisons which did not make sense.

Question 4 Whilst it did not necessarily cause problems for candidates, a number seemed to ignore the command word or demonstrated a full knowledge of teams and wrote far too much. Had the question been 'describe' or 'discuss', the development points would have been valid, but in the 'outline' question four separate points were required.

A cap of 1 mark was put on team roles, as it was felt that some candidates only wrote about this feature.

Question 5 All candidates seemed to struggle with this question. It may have been the use of the phrase 'presentation software' that caused issues, with candidates not realising the question was referring to PowerPoint. As a result, some wrote about the presenter, layout of room, the need for microphones, etc.

Other candidates gave answers about barriers to communication.

Candidate answers to this question were disappointingly weak given the number of times the average pupil may have used presentation software.

Question 6 Some candidates gave weak answers to this question and relied too heavily on customer and staff emotions, and on the overall effect on the organisation. As mentioned last year, this was capped at 1 mark for each.

Other candidates did not describe three features and gave a lot of information about returns policies but did not give anything about other areas. In this answer, it would have been possible to give four points about one area and then two single points about another two areas.

Question 7 Some candidates strayed into working practices when answering this question. If it was a straightforward description of the practice no marks were awarded; but in some cases, this was more of a preamble to allow the candidate to discuss the technologies that could be used.

Component 2: Assignment

DB form
- ♦ Candidates were unable to access the full range of marks available because of keying-in errors, and because they did not include the customer ID in the customer section of the form.

Pivot table
- ♦ This proved challenging for all — the concept of showing the total for the column/site and not as an overall figure for both sites was difficult for most.
- ♦ Many candidates didn't change the data to be relevant to the information, or if they did it had errors in it.

Query	♦ Some candidates were confused about the sleeping capacity, either only looking for an exact match or doing less than.
Calculations in report	♦ The concept of Twelvetrees taking a percentage as their fee before the owners received payment seemed to cause issues. It may be a context that is unfamiliar to young people. Both the main heading created and the calculations were evidence that candidates did not understand the 'story'. Marks were awarded for consequentiality, and the formatting mark was awarded whatever the figures were. ♦ Lack of attention to detail meant that candidates were unable to gain the field heading mark either due to typos or because of capitalisation.
Summary SS	♦ Some candidates did not use absolute ranges and typed the formulae for each row.
Repayments SS	♦ Some candidates were unaware of how to hide columns and deleted them instead, which meant they were unable to achieve the print mark. In this instance it did not affect the rest of the question, but in future years deleting columns could have a detrimental effect. ♦ Some candidates only worked out the percentage for interest, which was awarded 2 marks, and then calculated the amount in the Total Amount Due column. The mark was not awarded in this column. Some candidates did this as a vlookup, which was accepted, but it should be noted that it is unlikely that one question would have two vlookups in it, and candidates should be made aware of this. ♦ Some calculated the monthly payments by using a nested IF. However, the cell reference to the number of months had to be absolute. Again, if a nested IF had been used to calculate the interest, it was unlikely to be tested again in the same question.
Presentation	♦ Issues with this task related mainly to the accuracy and consistency of keying-in. ♦ A number of candidates did not understand the instruction to insert notes and just typed them on the slide.
Diary	♦ 'AGM meeting' was not accepted as it was felt that this displayed a lack of knowledge regarding an AGM.

Booklet   The common errors were:

- ♦ Not changing the date despite having just selected it in the previous task.
- ♦ Table of contents not picking up all the headings.
- ♦ Endnote at the end of the page where marker is, rather than on last page.
- ♦ Spreadsheet was poorly done and did not show the correct data. In a lot of cases it was not done at all.
- ♦ Some candidates rephrased the information on the Board Members and inserted pictures of their own choosing, all of which must have cost them time.
- ♦ Keying-in errors in the last paragraphs.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

The majority of candidates were better prepared for the question paper this year compared to last. Answers tended to be better structured and candidates were more able to respond accurately to the command words.

A number of very poor candidates attempted this paper — a significant proportion gained less than 10 marks. These candidates demonstrated very poor literacy and appeared to lack even basic knowledge of the course. Although the course overall is vocational in nature, it is important to ensure that sufficient time is given to the knowledge element of the course, which accounts for a third of the overall marks.

Awareness of the need for detailed knowledge should be reinforced — too often candidates demonstrate superficial knowledge of a topic and do not gain full marks.

Component 2: Assignment

Elements of this assignment were more challenging than in previous years, and were designed to allow discrimination between grades.

The marks for the spreadsheet tasks were better this year, whilst candidates found some of the database tasks more challenging. Some candidates maybe did not understand the context of holiday lets and, in some cases, it seemed that poor literacy levels may have had an impact on their understanding of the tasks. In a lot of cases the amounts calculated in the database report did not make sense. Centres should ensure that candidates assess the information they present to check for realism.

Whilst the pivot table was difficult, it was designed to be for A candidates. Last year the majority of candidates gained full marks, and this year it was intended to test the more able candidates. Centres should allow candidates more time to experiment with pivot tables and avoid covering only what has been in past papers.

The printing of an A5 booklet is part of the course and should not have presented the challenges it did. However, in some cases equipment and software were to blame. Whilst accepting that there may be restrictions on printing in some centres, candidates must be allowed some opportunity to print all types of files so they are able to deal with issues on the day. This also applies to printing speaker notes and to different views of diaries. Centres should ensure software or printer issues are resolved during the academic year to ensure completion of all possible tasks within the course.

There were a higher than normal number of candidates who did not attempt the database report. They could have achieved some marks by doing everything except the calculations. Centres may need to revisit the marking principles of this assignment and ensure that

candidates understand that most instructions gain 1 mark, and that whilst they may feel that their work of is little value, it may gain something if submitted.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	3965

Number of resulted entries in 2017	4099

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	30.8%	30.8%	1263	67
B	25.5%	56.3%	1044	57
C	19.1%	75.4%	782	48
D	7.7%	83.1%	317	43
No award	16.9%	-	693	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

♦ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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 very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

♦ Each year, SQA therefore 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 Business Manager 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.