External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Administration
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

Based on marker's reports and statistical information it is evident that this year's examination was accessible to the majority of candidates.

The average mark in Paper 1 was broadly similar to those of the last four years, whilst Paper 2 saw a small, but reasonably significant, increase in comparison with recent examinations.

Overall candidates performed better in Paper 2 than in Paper 1. Candidates appeared well prepared for the IT paper, demonstrating a high degree of competence in skills across all IT applications.

In the theory paper candidates appeared to have a good understanding of command words, as many responses were well structured, but there was a lack of depth in several topic areas which limited their ability to gain additional marks. In particular, 'describe' questions caused difficulty — in some instances candidates simply named the outline part of the question, whilst many responses lacked the depth of knowledge to gain the additional mark for the second scoring point.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Section 1, Question 3: Candidates exhibited a good knowledge of the different types of decision made by management.

Section 2, 2c: Effective teams was an area of the theory where candidates demonstrated a detailed knowledge and were able to articulate this knowledge well.

Paper 2

Database

1b: The Totals Query was very well done, with many candidates achieving full marks for this question.

Spreadsheet

2a: It was evident that there was an excellent understanding of both Vlookup and CountIf functions, and many candidates scored highly in this question.

3 Report: Candidates scored very highly on this task, demonstrating excellent knowledge of features such as table of contents.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Section 1, Question 5: This question used the command word 'compare'. However, many candidates failed to structure their answer in the necessary way, ie as a single comparative statement, to gain marks. In addition to this, there appeared to be a lack of knowledge regarding external and internal recruitment — candidates' answers were often very simplistic and lacked sufficient detail.

Section 2, Question 2 b: Many candidates did not read the stem of the question carefully and gave a general response about various types of software applications when in fact the question specifically asked for 'presentation' software. A significant number of candidates simply 'named' the feature and/or did not have the depth of knowledge, which meant that they struggled to get more than half the marks available for this question.

Section 2, Question 4 b: Candidates had difficulty outlining the methods of surveying customer satisfaction, and often provided basic responses such as 'questionnaires contain questions'. Other available marks also eluded many candidates as too often they gave general benefits of carrying out market research rather than making a specific additional comment pertaining to the method identified.

Section 2, Question 4 d: Although candidates structured their answers well by discussing points in the appropriate way, it was clear that responses overall were weak and that there was a lack of a comprehensive knowledge of ergonomic factors.

Section 2, Question 5 b: Despite the question asking specifically for the benefits of flexi-time, many candidates gave general benefits of flexible working and therefore struggled to secure marks.

Section 2, Question 5 c: Candidates found it difficult to express concise, relevant points regarding 'Customer Care' policies.

Paper 2

Question 1c (Database Report/Calculations): Candidates had difficulty calculating the Subsidy per Performance. Given that many candidates calculated the Reduced Ticket Price correctly it appears as though this was perhaps more of a problem solving issue rather than candidate's ability to construct a calculation in a query.

Question 2b (Spreadsheet/Nested If): Whilst the Sumif aspect of the question was reasonably well done, some candidates struggled to complete the remainder of the spreadsheet. Particular difficulty was encountered with regard to the nested IF Statement. Many candidates didn't manage to sort the spreadsheet as instructed.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

This qualification has now been superseded by Higher Administration and IT. Teachers, lecturers and candidates are therefore advised to consult the External Assessment Report for this qualification as the advice may be more specific and relevant for future examinations.

Paper 1

It is clear that most candidates are well prepared with respect to how to answer questions in terms of the command words. Their ability to gain marks is hindered more by the fact that their knowledge of topics is not substantial. This is particularly apparent with 'describe' and 'discuss' questions, and centres should consider strategies to increase the depth of candidates' knowledge.

The 'compare' command word continues to cause some issues. Candidates should always try to find similarities first as these are often easier to articulate and gain the same mark as any differences.

Candidates must be careful when giving advantages/disadvantages as they tend to repeat the same phrases, such as 'increased productivity', 'poor reputation', and 'increased motivation'. They must give thought to the context of the question and try, where applicable, to give specific advantages or disadvantages.

Paper 2

Databases

When building queries for a database, candidates who are less confident should attempt the easier elements first and then build up their query accordingly. This will help them to gain marks as each aspect of the query is worth one mark. When printing queries, candidates must ensure that all the information is visible as marks continue to be lost through truncation.

Spreadsheets

Candidates are coping well with most of the functions that can be examined in a spreadsheet, but more practice is needed with respect to 'Nested If statements'. Centres must also prepare candidates to select the appropriate ranges when using functions such as 'Sum If' as candidates often, incorrectly, select multiple columns.

Candidates continue to throw away marks by failing to print tasks correctly. Candidates must ensure that formulae are not truncated, as marks are not awarded even if the answer appears to be correct on the value view — the formulae must be seen to be correct.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	2686

Number of resulted entries in 2015	484

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 120				
A	48.6%	48.6%	235	84
B	19.6%	68.2%	95	72
C	15.7%	83.9%	76	60
D	4.8%	88.6%	23	54
No award	11.4%	-	55	-

For this Course, grade boundaries have been stable for a number of years and the intention was to set similar grade boundaries to previous years. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.