



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Business Management
Level(s)	Advanced 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

Candidate performance in the question paper improved significantly this year although performance in the report was down on last year. Again this year there was an increase in the pass rate, which is now at its highest. This year saw the proportion of A grades increase again, and 5.5% of candidates achieved the top band — compared with no candidates last year. The fact that several top grades were awarded is encouraging and shows that candidates are more aware of what is expected of them at this level. Centres are to be commended for the hard work and perseverance that made it happen.

Business Report

Many candidates produced well-structured reports that met the criteria and were supported by robust evidence. Several candidates scored maximum marks in the Business Report, but there was a marked difference in performance between centres where candidates followed SQA guidelines closely and those where there seemed to be a lack of familiarity with the criteria.

This year again several centres failed to include the Researching a Business NAB, making it impossible to mark the report, since it is based on the information in the NAB.

Question paper

Performance in the examination was considerably better than in previous years, which is reflected by the increase in the pass rate. Most candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of examination technique and there was a more evenly distributed range of marks across both sections of the paper.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Report

Candidates clearly understand that the strategy should be a plan of action and not an objective. This combined with a well-structured report which followed the SQA guidelines produced high quality reports. Candidates who performed well tended to follow the structure of the marking scheme in compiling their reports.

Candidates who chose small businesses with simple strategies had the advantage of being clear from the outset about what they were trying to investigate and tended to score higher than those tackling larger or more complex organisations.

Although performance in Section 1 continued to be better than in Section 2, markers noticed an improvement in the latter, particularly in Section 2 (b). In this section candidates were able to refer to more evidence of the type of information used by the business or the

candidate to decide on the strategy, such as SWOT analysis, sales figures, evidence from the internet as well as the initial interview with their business contact.

There were many good examples of Gantt charts which candidates used to demonstrate the timeline for the strategy. Candidates were able to break down the steps in the Gantt chart to explain what was involved in each step, in order to gain more timeline marks

Question paper: Section 1

On the whole it was clear that candidates were more engaged with the case study and again this year many candidates seemed well prepared. Candidates were much better at linking their answers to the case study and using examples from it to gain marks. As a result fewer general marks needed to be awarded.

Questions 1, 6 and 8 were particularly well answered, with most candidates scoring well over half marks.

Question paper: Section 2

Candidates provided strong responses in some essays where revision had clearly been undertaken. However there was more evidence of breadth than depth in the Section 2 questions.

- ◆ Question 10 (a): candidates scored well when describing the factors which have led to the growth of multinational companies in recent years.
- ◆ Question 10 (b): candidates showed good knowledge of the Classical school of management and scored highly when describing the ideas of this school.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Report

Many candidates still had no evidence in the appendices and so forfeited marks they could have gained.

This year fewer candidates produced reports with multiple strategies. When this did happen each strategy was marked separately and the highest-scoring one was credited. If a strategy is to have several strands, each strand must be interconnected and linked to one strategy.

Candidates did extremely well in the Resources section, but many still struggle with the Implications for the Functional Areas. Candidates must explain what the change/difference to the functional area is.

Many candidates still do not understand that opportunities in the SWOT are external items, not internal. Opportunities are items which an organisation can take advantage of, eg the increasing number of people worldwide using the internet.

Some candidates are still basing their whole report on one method of research — an interview with the owner who answered questions relating to every heading in the report and

the whole report was taken from this. The report should be compiled using several sources of information eg screen shots of resources, customer surveys, etc.

Question paper: Section 1

There were few problems with the questions in this section. Candidates engaged with the organisation in the case study and made effective use of the material in order to produce well-constructed answers.

Question paper: Section 2

- ◆ Question 9 (a): most candidates focused on organisations as a whole and did not differentiate between private sector organisations and public sector organisations.
- ◆ Question 12 (b): candidates tended to focus on the description of non-financial incentives, but found it more difficult to discuss their effectiveness in increasing motivation.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Report

Candidates are advised to pay close attention to the marking guidelines on the SQA website, using the appropriate headings, and to ensure the information contained under those headings is appropriate. Candidates should ensure their reports fully comply with these guidelines before submitting them.

The quality of advice offered to candidates by centres is crucial. After several years under the current arrangements it is disappointing that so many centres failed to submit NABs this year.

The strategy should be a plan of action that is yet to be undertaken. It should not already have been completed. Any part of the strategy that is complete will not gain any marks.

The quality of the information in the Researching a Business NAB is crucial, and candidates are advised to ensure they list several objectives and have a full list of SWOT items so that they can comment on these in the report.

Findings in the report must be supported by evidence. The Researching a Business NAB provides the background, but additional information and research is vital.

Scripts should be presented in one-and-a-half or double line spacing in size 12 font, with wide margins and printed single sided.

Question paper

For several centres the advice is to continue to do what they are doing in terms of teaching the content and exam preparation. Other centres, operating in less ideal circumstances with

minimal teacher contact time, need to ensure they and their candidates are familiar with all the support material on SQA's website.

Candidates need to be aware that they can gain development marks for using real life examples of points they are making in the essay questions and should be encouraged to do so.

Candidates are becoming better at gaining description marks in the essay questions, but need to work on the second part of the question and answer the impact or the implications.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	221
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	246
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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 - 150				
A	21.5%	21.5%	53	105
B	22.8%	44.3%	56	90
C	29.3%	73.6%	72	75
D	6.5%	80.1%	16	67
No award	19.9%	-	49	-

For this Course, the intention was to set similar grade boundaries to last year. 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.