Course report 2023

Advanced Higher Business Management

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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   788

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   845

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	220	Percentage	26	Cumulative percentage	26	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	204	Percentage	24.1	Cumulative percentage	50.2	Minimum mark required	69
C	Number of candidates	202	Percentage	23.9	Cumulative percentage	74.1	Minimum mark required	55
D	Number of candidates	127	Percentage	15	Cumulative percentage	89.1	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	92	Percentage	10.9	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Section 1 proved to be more accessible than last year. Most candidates extracted relevant information from the case study and attempted each question.

Section 2 provided a level of demand which allowed candidates who had sufficiently revised the course to produce some excellent theoretical answers.

Overall, the question paper performed broadly in line with expectations and, as a result, the grade boundary was only marginally adjusted at the 'C' boundary.

Project

This component performed better than last year with fewer candidates straying from their chosen project aim. There was a broader range of project aims presented this year and more candidates produced detailed projects, allowing for deeper analysis and evaluation.

Both the national average marks for the question paper and project components increased this year.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidates extracted relevant information from the case study to answer each question and most candidates attempted every question.

Question 1: Many candidates provided detailed impacts of a possible robot taxation in the European Union (EU), allowing those candidates to attract development marks.

Question 3: Many candidates effectively evaluated the data given and were able to show the possible relationship between Bosch's Industry 4.0 and its performance data.

Question 4: Linking Bosch's use of joint ventures (JVs) to its growth was well done by many candidates. Candidates who were unable to link the costs and benefits of JVs to Bosch's growth often attracted general marks from the allowance made available on this question.

Question 6: The diagram of the force field analysis was well prepared by most candidates and the drivers and resistors were well explained.

Question 7: Many candidates demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the classical school of management and the human relations school of management.

Question 10(a): Despite transfer pricing traditionally proving to be a more challenging topic for candidates, it was pleasing to see this question performing better than anticipated.

Question 10(b): Some candidates described examples to attract marks in this question.

Project

More candidates this year ensured their analysis and evaluation points were relevant to the aim of their project and candidates who did so tend to score highly. It was reassuring to see that most candidates continued to provide references for their evidence using footnotes. More candidates this year wrote up to but within the given word count, allowing those candidates in some cases to secure development marks.

More candidates this year successfully produced conclusive comments by deducing from two or more points detailed in their analysis and evaluation section.

Most candidates demonstrated that they had carried out a significant amount of recent research (within two to three years) and the quality of this overall was high.

Almost all candidates achieved the mark available for using the exact headings as prescribed in the candidate guidance. Most candidates included a well-structured bibliography that showed the date accessed and the date the source was published.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Questions 2, 7 and 9: Although most candidates were able to gain some marks for each of these questions, the volume of marks available proved challenging for some.

Questions 2 and 8(b): Despite the 'explain' command word being assessed frequently at National 5 and Higher levels, many candidates were unable to provide the necessary level of detail in their responses.

Questions 8(b): Considering most of the candidates choose to link corporate social responsibility (CSR) with stakeholders as their project aim, this question was answered surprisingly poorly. Disappointingly, most candidates could not demonstrate knowledge of CSR and were unable to explain its impact on an organisation's stakeholders. Some candidates detailed impacts on the organisation itself and therefore attracted none of the marks available for this question.

Question 9: Some candidates do not understand the gender pay gap.

Question 10(b): Although candidates' performance in this question was generally strong, a few candidates confused the concept of exploitation with general multinational organisation impacts on host countries or they were unable to detail the nature of the exploitation. For example: 'an organisation paying its workforce low wages' is not enough to be credited as the exploitation is not sufficiently detailed. A better answer would be: 'an organisation paying its workforce very low wages as there is no minimum wage law or regulation in the country'.

Project

There are still some candidates who stray from their project's aim and so did not score as well as they could have. Some candidates who investigated CSR, business ethics or technological development as their project's aim often digressed into analysing the product portfolio or the marketing mix.

Although it was pleasing to see a broader range of project aims this year, candidates who did the technological development topic tended to focus on dated technology and not the 'development' of this technology and how it impacted the management of the organisation recently.

Many recommendations continue to be vague, lack viability, and are weakly based on the candidate's analysis and evaluation for the Advanced Higher level.

Although candidates demonstrated that they had carried out extensive research on their project aims, some used findings which were out of date, so were not credited.

A few candidates scored low marks because they submitted very short projects which can limit the level of in-depth analysis and evaluation.

A few candidates lost the mark for terminology. For example, referring to unethical actions of the organisation as CSR.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres are encouraged to use internal assessments robustly to ensure candidates are aware of the required standard before being presented for the Advanced Higher qualification.

When preparing candidates for future it may be helpful to note the guidance below in relation to specific areas of course content.

European Union (EU)

Following Brexit, centres should teach the EU topic in the 'Global business' section of the course specification as a trading bloc. Like the ASEAN trading bloc topic and the economy of China topic, candidates must be aware of the founding purpose and aims of the EU, recent developments, and the impact of trading with the EU.

More specifically, candidates should have an understanding of the general opportunities and challenges for UK organisations and Multinational Companies (MNCs) trading with and operating within EU member countries, including an awareness of the Single European Market and the four freedoms of the EU. Candidates would also benefit from a general awareness of the consequences following Brexit, such as the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

The EU is a trading bloc, and it will be assessed in a similar format to the ASEAN trading bloc topic. As with the economy of China and ASEAN trading bloc questions in the past, candidates must ensure that their responses are specific to the EU in order to attract all of the marks available. This is demonstrated in the 2018 past paper marking instructions for question 8(a) and 8(b).

Although an awareness of the EU Social Chapter may prove useful, it will no longer be directly assessed.

Current issues

The Advanced Higher course specification 'Current issue' topic emphasises that the topic areas within this unit will be assessed in a context relevant to management today. This means that centres must encourage candidates to keep abreast of recent activity in relation to those topics. Centres should remind candidates to read news articles and gather examples on current government activity, business ethics and technological developments to help them prepare for the demands of the external assessment.

Specifically, the technological development topic exclusively focuses on the 'development' of technology and how organisations are currently impacted by changes to their technological infrastructure. Centres should encourage candidates to keep abreast of recent technological developments and issues relating to this field.

Question paper

Centres should continue to encourage candidates to source evidence from the case study as the basis for their responses in section 1 and not rely on general mark allowances. General mark allowances are not a given for every question and candidates must not assume they will be awarded in future.

It remains of importance that candidates keep abreast of current issues in relation to the course specification. This should not be limited to the UK but should include a broader global economic climate as well, particularly the ASEAN region and China. The question paper, in part, will be shaped by current issues, therefore candidates should be attuned to the analysis of these issues.

Candidates should be reminded that they are encouraged to use a full page for the force field analysis diagram. Drivers and resistors must be explained. Candidates who attempt to make an overall evaluation should weigh up the drivers and resistors to support their course of action.

Labels must be provided by candidates in their responses when a theorist is stated in the question, for example Belbin, Lewin, Mintzberg.

Centres should encourage candidates to gain additional marks by describing examples which relate to the question being asked. For example, a few candidates produced particularly knowledgeable answers to question 10(b) by offering different examples of MNC exploitation.

Project

Introduction

The project aim must be taken directly from the Advanced Higher course specification on SQA's website — centres must guide candidates away from National 5 and Higher topic areas. For example, a project aim on growth should analyse recent evidence on the use of joint ventures and/or foreign direct investment as those are the growth-related topics in the Advanced Higher course specification.

Candidates must select only one aim for their project. For example, 'technological development and ethics of Company A' would be two project aims and centres must advise candidates against doing this.

Many candidates stray into the marketing mix when analysing CSR and technological development and this should be avoided.

It is important that candidates understand the business model of the organisation they choose. Candidates who choose to produce projects on technology giants (such as Google and Facebook), tend not to understand the processes of these organisation in terms of how sale revenue is generated and what realistically contributes to expenditure.

Candidates who wish to attract marks for detailing impacts on the environment should be encouraged to include it in their project's aim. For example, 'the impact of Company A's CSR initiatives on the organisation itself, its stakeholders and the environment'.

Candidates who choose the project aim to explore the impact of a MNC on its home and host countries must provide evidence for the home country and the specific host countries to avoid simply producing a project on general theory on the impact of a multinational organisation. Recommendations for this project aim should be to the organisation and not the home/host countries' governments.

Analysis and evaluation

Candidates' points must be sufficiently developed for the Advanced Higher level. For example, 'improves/damages the organisation's reputation' needs to be taken further. Candidates must demonstrate an understanding of the impact of this before marks can be credited. On this note, reputation should be linked to something customer or investor facing. For example, installing a heat pump in an office is not something generally customers would know about unless it is marketed.

Although Higher allows for the interpretation of findings, analysis at Advanced Higher requires one step further and a detailed, logical impact should be derived from the finding. An evaluation is often demonstrated by a comment on scale, such as candidates making a comparison.

Every finding must be referenced with a footnote located at the bottom of that page. The position of the footnote should be after the finding and before the candidates' analytical or evaluative comment. This is demonstrated on SQA's Understanding Standards website.

Conclusions and recommendations

As National 5 and Higher both assess the candidate's ability to make justified recommendations, it is important the recommendations at the Advanced Higher level are logically drawn from the analysis and evaluation section, sufficiently detailed in terms of a clear and viable course of action, and robustly justified. It is not enough for the candidate to simply repeat 'continue to do X' at this level.

Research

Candidates should strictly limit their findings to recent activities (within two to three years).

Centres should discourage the use of field research.

All organisation-produced sources, such as its website, sustainability report, annual report etc count only as one source. However, this is not the case for news articles and those are counted as separate sources.

Structure and referencing

The bibliography must contain key features, as demonstrated in the candidate instructions, in order to attract the mark available. The year published must be present for all sources. A company website is considered up-to-date so the year of access can be used as the date of publishing. Sources which do not features all of the necessary details in order to create a robust reference should not be used. Microsoft Word's bibliography tool is recommended.

Referenced sources from websites selling pre-written essays etc will not be considered and should be firmly discouraged. Centres are reminded to refer to the Coursework Authenticity document when advising candidates on appropriate sourcing. Centres must be vigilant against the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in candidates' work.

A footnote sourcing a website should contain a full URL and not an abbreviated hyperlink.

Terminology should be appropriate for the Advanced Higher level. For example, 'employees are happy' or 'this makes money' does not reflect the required standard.

Cover pages and contents pages are not required.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)

♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.

♦ Where levels of difficulty 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 on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.