

Course report 2026

Higher Business Management, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

Note: we've made changes to the course assessment from session 2026–27.

Check your [subject page](#) for more information.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 10,190

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 10,772

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	3,636	33.8	33.8	83
B	2,324	21.6	55.3	70
C	2,132	19.8	75.1	57
D	1,571	14.6	89.7	44
No award	1,109	10.3	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

General commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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's very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do

this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected; however, a few questions were more demanding than intended. We took this into account when setting the grade boundaries.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected; however, we took into account a change to the marking approach for recommendations, when candidates provided multiple suggestions to continue activities, when considering grade boundaries.

How candidates performed

Question paper

- 1(a) Most candidates described sectors of industry and sectors of the economy.
- 1(c) Most candidates described changes Vue could make to its marketing mix to counter the threats.
- 1 (d) Most candidates explained costs and benefits to Vue if it took over Cineworld.
- 1e(i) Some candidates did not accurately describe ratios. A few candidates missed marks because they did not use the data in Exhibit 1.
- 1(e)(iii) Some candidates did not accurately describe the ways Vue's stakeholders could use its financial information. If candidates described using financial information with no mention of a stakeholder, they did not gain marks.
- 1(g)(i) Most candidates discussed the costs and benefits to Vue of recruiting externally for the vacancy. A few candidates discussed the costs and benefits to the applicant, which did not gain marks.
- 1(g)(ii) Most candidates described the advantages to Vue of offering the employee benefits listed.
- 2(a) Some candidates demonstrated an understanding of methods of direct selling by discussing them effectively. Some candidates did not achieve all marks because they did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the term 'direct selling' in their discussion. A few candidates missed marks because they described methods instead of discussing them.
- 2 (d) Most candidates described ways in which a manager can measure the success of a decision.
- 3(b) Most candidates explained the impact of external factors.

- 3(c) Some candidates described limitations of using accounting ratios. A few candidates did not attempt this question.

Assignment

Topic

Most candidates chose appropriate topics that allowed them to research and analyse sufficient evidence, enabling them to access the marks available. A few candidates chose multi-stranded topics — for example, internal and external factors — which meant they could not gain full marks.

Structure

Most candidates used the headings and layout specified in the coursework assessment task and the Understanding Standards materials to provide a clear structure. A few candidates exceeded the word count by more than 10%, which attracted a penalty. A few candidates exceeded the maximum four A4-sized pages of appendices.

Introduction

Most candidates provided background information, using shorter statements to indicate the topic they were researching, and a concise description of the main activities of the business. This was sufficient to gain marks.

Research

Most candidates explained their research methods well. A few candidates wrote about the purpose of research methods with no link to an explained value, which did not gain marks.

Analysis and interpretation

Many candidates made clear analytical points based on their findings. Some candidates reworded findings instead of analysing them, which did not gain marks. A few candidates made points that did not link to the purpose of the assignment, so

they did not gain marks. A few candidates gave recommendations in the analysis section, and these did not gain marks.

A few candidates repeated the same analytical points for different findings, which is not good practice.

Conclusions and recommendations

This section continues to be one of the more challenging aspects of the assignment. Most candidates included very few conclusions. Candidates did not gain marks if their conclusions only repeated findings. To gain marks, candidates must give an overall judgement or summative point that draws together evidence from at least two different findings they have presented in the analysis and interpretation section. Most candidates gained marks by making recommendations that were justified. A few candidates made recommendations that were not justified based on the analysis and interpretation section, and appeared as new information. They gained no marks.

Additional marks were available for developing recommendations. Candidates gained marks for negative development if they explained the consequences of not implementing the recommendation. Candidates making positive development points frequently repeated points they had made in the analysis and interpretation section, which did not add sufficient value.

Some candidates made multiple recommendations to continue, maintain or increase existing activities, which is generally not good practice. Remind candidates that recommendations must identify specific areas for improvement, based on the evidence presented, to gain marks.

Preparing candidates for assessment

You can use the materials on the [Understanding Standards](#) website to help you prepare candidates.

Question paper

You should use the updated specimen question paper (70 marks, reduced from 90 marks) to show candidates the format of the revised exam.

Encourage candidates to:

- Regularly practise responding to case study questions. You can support this by providing past question papers and marking instructions, helping candidates become familiar with the style of assessment and the expectations for their responses.
- Clearly identify terminology by using labels in their descriptions. For example, in a question relating to the role of a manager, candidates should label the specific role, as a generic description would not gain marks.
- Qualify terms such as 'expensive' and 'time-consuming' with appropriate context or detail to ensure their responses are specific enough to gain marks.
- Cover all content areas in the course specification and ensure they spend an appropriate amount of time on each. They should revise the full course content, including topics that have not featured in recent question papers, and any areas of the course specification that have been updated. Question papers always cover content from all five areas of the course.
- Submit typed scripts if their handwriting is difficult to read. To help markers, print scripts using 1.5-line or double-line spacing, and use double-sided printing where possible.

Assignment

Candidates must:

- Select one topic from the Higher course specification and one organisation to base their assignment on. The chosen topic and organisation should provide sufficient scope to allow for detailed analysis and evaluation. The assignment

must not combine multiple topics. Topics identified separately in the course specification are regarded as distinct areas of study. For example, SWOT analysis and the marketing mix, or internal factors and external factors are separate topics and should not form the focus of a single assignment.

- Base their analysis of findings on researched evidence. They should reference each point and consider whether to use footnotes or refer directly to the appendices. Candidates must not include recommendations in the analysis section. They should avoid repeating analytical points for different findings.
- Avoid introducing new information in the conclusions and recommendations section — this section should be based on the findings in the analysis and interpretations section.
- Keep within the word count for the assignment; they will receive a penalty if they exceed it by more than 10%.
- Include an accurate word count on the flyleaf.
- Use the template available on the Higher Business Management [subject page](#) on our website, as reports are scanned and marked from image.

You should encourage candidates to:

- Go beyond repeating individual findings in their conclusions. They should provide an overall judgement or summative point that draws together evidence from at least two different findings from the analysis and interpretation section.
- Clearly link recommendations to evidence from the analysis and interpretation section. In line with national standards and the current marking instructions, only recommendations that candidates justify in the conclusions and recommendations section using information from the analysis and interpretation section can gain marks. Make candidates aware that negative impacts of recommendations can gain marks if fully developed.
- Make recommendations on what improvements a business can make rather than suggesting that the business continues to do what it is doing presently. Multiple suggestions to continue activities will not gain marks in future. Understanding Standards materials were updated in 2025 to reflect this. In addition, the marking instructions in the 'Detailed marking instructions' section of the Course

Assessment Task documents were updated in September 2026 to clarify the marking criteria.

- Limit appendices to a maximum of four A4-sized pages.
- Print assignments double-sided, using 1.5-line or double-line spacing.