Course report 2024

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 845

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 890

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	223	Percentage	25.1	Cumulative percentage	25.1	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	202	Percentage	22.7	Cumulative percentage	47.8	Minimum mark required	71
C	Number of candidates	195	Percentage	21.9	Cumulative percentage	69.7	Minimum mark required	58
D	Number of candidates	158	Percentage	17.8	Cumulative percentage	87.4	Minimum mark required	45
No award	Number of candidates	112	Percentage	12.6	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Section 1 was well received by candidates. The familiarity of the business brand and model meant that candidates found some of the questions more accessible than intended.

Section 2 proved to effectively discriminate and was generally well attempted by candidates.

The question paper performed broadly in line with expectations, with the mean mark in this component improving from the previous year. A few questions, however, proved more challenging than intended and therefore a marginal adjustment was made at the 'C' boundary mark.

Project

This component performed similarly to last year, producing the same mean mark. Most candidates prepared detailed projects and it was apparent most candidates had also carried out extensive research on their chosen organisation or industry.

Fewer candidates strayed from their project's aim this year. SQA's Understanding Standards website has functioned as a working source of guidance for centres and candidates.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper
Candidates were familiar with the business brand and model and could confidently extract relevant information from the case study to answer each question.

Question 1: Many candidates effectively described how Domino's sustainability measures benefitted its stakeholders and/or the environment. Most candidates labelled stakeholders clearly and centres should reinforce this good practice by encouraging candidates to include labels in their responses.

Question 4: This was an accessible force field analysis question for most candidates. The diagram was well-prepared, and most candidates explained the drivers and resistors correctly by linking them to the viability of drone technology for Domino's. Despite most candidates performing well in this question, some candidates concluded that drones would be viable for pizza delivery and that is obviously not the case currently in the UK from the information given in the case study.

Question 8: Although some candidates wrongly read the question and discussed impacts for the multinational organisation and not its home and host countries, this question was, overall, answered well. Some candidates were able to clearly label and detail the impact of different taxes on the home and host countries. A few candidates showed an understanding of economic measures, such as GDP and GNP.

Question 9(b): Most candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of the benefits of having a diverse workforce. A few candidates, impressively, drew evidence from recent studies and described real-life examples from organisations to support their answers.

Question 10: The question paper listed Lewin's three stages of change which allowed many candidates to perform well in this question.

Project
Overall, the quality of projects submitted were of a similar standard to last year with most candidates ensuring that their analysis and evaluation points were in-keeping with the aim of their project.

The introduction, research, and structure sections proved the most accessible, with many candidates attracting all the marks available.

Almost all candidates demonstrated that they had carried out a significant amount of recent research and most projects included a well-structured bibliography.

Almost all candidates evidenced their findings with footnotes and many candidates produced very detailed findings which described a recent action, activity or development an organisation has carried out in relation to their project's aim.

Conclusion points tended to be well constructed by candidates as they correctly drew from two or more findings in the analysis and evaluation section and formed a holistic comment.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 5: 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. Some candidates did not understand that corporation tax does not impact the franchisee's profit for the year figure or their profit margin, but the profit for the year (after tax) figure.

Question 6: Many candidates misread 'effects' as 'reasons' and lost out on the marks available. A few candidates thought that an increasing net debt figure meant there would not be funding available to open more stores or expand the business, whereas the opposite is often true in practice.

Question 7(a) and 7(b): Many candidates were awarded the general mark allowance for each of these questions, with only some candidates being able to provide specific facts about China to access the full range of marks on offer.

Question 9(a): Many candidates described ways an organisation complies with the Equality Act rather than described ways to improve gender representation. A few candidates erroneously used the term positive discrimination, despite this being unlawful in the UK.

Project

A few candidates chose the topic of technological developments as their project's aim and tended to focus on the technology which the organisation has operated for years instead of the 'developments' of the technology recently (within the two-to-three-year period) and how the changes or updates to this technology impact the management of the organisation.

Some candidates who chose the topic of technological developments or business ethics as their project's aim tended to stray into product development and/or marketing activities and were subsequently not credited for many of their analysis and evaluation points.

In addition, some candidates detailed findings which simply evidenced good human resource (HR) practices, for example fair payment, health and safety training, competitive pension. These candidates tended to concentrate their analysis and evaluation points on the competitive advantages of such HR practices and deviated from the project's aim of business ethics.

Many candidates' recommendations continued to be vague, lack viability, and weakly based on the candidate's analysis and evaluation.

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

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

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

Course content

Centres should continue to prepare candidates by encouraging them to carry out the necessary reading and research to ensure they are staying abreast of the topics within the course, particularly the topics in the 'current issues' section of the course specification. These topics will be assessed in a context relevant to management today. Promoting the reading of news articles and gathering up-to-date examples of business ethics, government influence, and technological developments will help candidates prepare for the demands of the course assessments.

The term corporate social responsibility (CSR) is dated and has been removed from the course specification. Although it is acceptable for candidates to continue using this term, it will no longer be featured in external examination materials.

For the economy of China, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the European Union (EU) topics, candidates should be able to detail their responses with specific evidence and facts about each region to access all the marks available. Please refer to the specimen question paper and the marking instruction for questions 7(a) and 7(b) in the 2024 past paper for exemplification.

From 2025, questions which assess candidates on topics that are not listed in the latest version of the course specification (revised in 2024), and therefore no longer part of the course content, will not qualify as valid questions as part of evidence for exceptional circumstances.

The Advanced Higher Business Management Course Specification is available on the subject page on SQA's website.

Project

There are distinct differences between reasons, analysis points, evaluation points, conclusions, and recommendations. Candidates must be mindful of repetition throughout their project.

If candidates select the topic of business ethics as their project aim, centres should encourage candidates to focus on an organisation's recent altruistic and philanthropic activities to ensure their findings enable analysis which clearly links to the project aim of business ethics.

Although the project aim of business ethics is by far the most popular, centres are reminded that candidates can choose any one topic from the course specification. Examples of alternative project aims are listed on page 9 of the course specification.

If candidates select the topic of technological developments as their project aim, centres should remind them that this topic is about the use of the technological developments for the management of the organisation's functional areas and not about selling technologically advanced products.

Candidates who choose the project aim to explore an organisation's impacts on its home and host countries must be clear in their findings, specifically which country, home or host, the evidence relates to.

Introduction

Candidates should explain their reasons for selecting the organisation or industry and/or project aim and provide supporting evidence using footnotes.

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 ethical initiatives on the organisation itself, its stakeholders and the environment'.

Candidates' reasons must link with the project's aim. For example, detailing the size of a multinational organisation and evidencing a measure of its scale, such as the number of employees it has or how many countries it operates within, should be followed by a further comment as to why this is relevant to the project's aim.

Analysis and evaluation

Centres should encourage candidates to fully detail their findings — this requires candidates to describe a recent action, activity or development by the organisation in relation to their project's aim. It must be clear from the finding what exactly has been done and/or reported by the organisation or industry and when this was achieved. There is a strict two-to-three-year time limit in the project and therefore candidates' findings must have been carried out by the organisation or industry in this period. The reference to the source of the finding must reflect this. For example, an organisation may state on its website that it established a charity, however candidates are required to detail what exactly the charity has done in the two-to-three-year period.

Organisation aims, for example 'to improve gender representation in leadership roles by 2040' etc when presented as findings in the analysis and evaluation section, lack the necessary detail, ie the 'how' and 'when' elements to comprise a strong finding. It is required, that candidates describe their findings with enough detail to clearly explain what has happened and when this occurred.

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 in the materials on SQA's Understanding Standards website.

It is very possible to attract all marks in the analysis and evaluation section from only a few recent findings, should the candidate draw out valid development. Candidates should not be encouraged to describe 20 different findings for only one analysis or evaluation comment each. Doing this increases the difficulty of the project as finding that number of relevant and

recent activities, actions or developments by the organisation or industry can prove challenging.

Conclusion and recommendations

Candidates must ensure that the conclusions and recommendations relate to the project aim. For example, conclusions and recommendations must refer to the home and/or host country if those are stipulated in the project aim.

Research

Centres are strongly encouraged to advise candidates to source their findings from an organisation's annual report and not its website. This makes it clearer that the activity, development or action in the finding is within the two-to-three-year period while also making it more straightforward for candidates to generate a robust reference to the source.

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

Online sources should have a date of publication and a date of access. Where it is not possible to find a date of publication for a source, then the use of this source is to be discouraged.

In addition, centres should encourage candidates to include the date and author along with the URL in the footnote or, alternatively, to insert the full reference as the footnote. For example:

[1] https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/ah-course-spec-business-management.pdf (SQA, 2024)

Or

[1] SQA. (2024). Advanced Higher Business Management Course Specification. [Online]. SQA. Last Updated: 2024. Available at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/ah-course-spec-business-management.pdf [Accessed June 2024].

Candidates should be careful to make sure that their footnotes copy over correctly into the required SQA template. Centres should help their candidates to check projects are fully complete before submission for external marking. When findings cannot be clearly evidenced, analysis and evaluation marks are not awarded.

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

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.

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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in March 2024 and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).