Course report 2024

Higher Administration and IT

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:   4,324

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   4,593

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,426	Percentage	31.0	Cumulative percentage	31.0	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	1,065	Percentage	23.2	Cumulative percentage	54.2	Minimum mark required	71
C	Number of candidates	995	Percentage	21.7	Cumulative percentage	75.9	Minimum mark required	58
D	Number of candidates	643	Percentage	14.0	Cumulative percentage	89.9	Minimum mark required	45
No award	Number of candidates	464	Percentage	10.1	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

Overall, the paper performed as expected. However, the 3 marks available for question 5(a) — features of effective targets — proved challenging for many candidates to access. This was acknowledged when setting the Grade C boundary.

Assignment

The withdrawal of modifications meant that there were 10 more marks available in 2024, taking the total marks available to 70. This restored the assignment weighting to 58% of the overall marks available to candidates. The removal of the modifications allowed the database topics, forms and aggregate queries, to be assessed for the first time in several years.

The assignment performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper
Question 1
Many candidates were able to offer a wide range of solutions to the issues highlighted in the case study.

Question 2
Many candidates understood why it was important to delegate tasks from the point of view of a manager with common answers such as motivating employees and alleviating Greg's stress to meet deadlines.

Question 4(b)
Knowledge of the barriers to communication was good with many candidates gaining 2 or 3 marks. Candidates often wrote about the impact of noise and information overload.

Question 9(b)
This question was answered very well, with most candidates attaining full marks. Candidates showed an excellent level of knowledge about the benefits of good customer care including points about returning customers, improved reputation and increased sales.

Question 10
Many candidates were able to gain 2 or 3 of the marks available. Some candidates drew inspiration from section 1 and talked about delegating work to admin assistants whilst some spoke about checking the quality of junior admin assistants' work and providing them with help where necessary.

Assignment
Task 1 — Database form
Many of the candidates who attempted this task performed well.

Task 2(a) — Spreadsheet
The VLOOKUP function, along with sorting and filtering on the data, was very well done by most candidates.

Task 2(b) — Spreadsheet
Most candidates were able to successfully problem solve this task and built the COUNTIF and SUMIF functions correctly.

Task 4 — Word-processing
Most candidates performed very well in this task and each page was completed to a high standard. Section breaks and associated headers, footers and page orientation were well done as was the removal of the watermark. Candidates also coped well with converting text to table.

Task 8 — Spreadsheet
Most candidates were able to create a pivot table with the correct calculations and formatting — most marks that were not awarded were due to typographical errors in the column headings.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 3
Some candidates did not gain more than 1 mark for this question. Candidates did not have the depth of knowledge to compare the role of the employee and employer in terms of the Health and Safety at Work Act. Consequently, many candidates were unable to make comparisons around the same point.

Question 5(a)
This question was intended to examine candidates' knowledge of SMART targets. Whilst some candidates were able to link the question to their knowledge, most candidates were unable to do so. Few candidates were able to gain the full 3 marks here.

Question 5(b)
Many candidates gained fewer than half of the marks available for this question. Some candidates gave answers which lacked detail about specific methods of monitoring and evaluating progress and were unable to distinguish between them.

Question 6(a)
Most candidates missed out on the opportunity to gain the marks for describing the features of a table. Many candidates described when you would use a table rather than highlighting the features such as being able to sort data, do calculations etc.

Question 7
Some candidates approached this answer from a security perspective rather than electronic file management. A few candidates gave answers relating to paper-based filing. Only some candidates gained more than 2 out of the 5 marks available.

Question 9(a)
Some candidates spoke about why a survey would be used in general terms rather than giving reasons why an organisation might choose an online survey specifically.

Assignment

Task 3(a) — Spreadsheet task
Many candidates identified that they had to use a nested IF function to determine the discount percentage but neglected to use the cell references from the discount table in the sheet. Some candidates left the resulting answer as a percentage rather than calculating the discount amount.

Task 3(b) — Spreadsheet
The percentage difference calculation remains a challenge for candidates, with many unable to secure this mark.

Task 5 — Database aggregate/totals query
This was a standard aggregate query task, but some candidates did not attempt this task. For many candidates who attempted the task there was a lack of understanding of query design in terms of the tables that were required.

Task 6 — Presentation
A few candidates appeared not to understand what a notes page is and put the text on the slide. Most candidates did not perform the search for the Highland Games correctly as per the task criteria and missed the opportunity to gain 2 marks for this. Some candidates chose slide designs that caused text or graphics to overlap. Some candidates did not gain marks due to typographical errors.

Task 7 — Database report
Many candidates missed out on marks in the report. Many candidates could not compose a suitable title for the report and/or had typographical errors within this. Some candidates grouped on a randomly selected field rather than sort on the Hire ID field.

Most candidates could not problem solve the wildcard/or criteria in relation to the 'family member' or 'worlds' criteria. Some candidates included fields that were not asked for and had poor presentation with information truncated or field headings which overlapped. Some candidates could not problem solve or build the calculated fields correctly.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

For several questions, particularly those with higher mark allocations, candidates appeared to have a lack of in-depth knowledge. Many candidates knew about Gantt Charts and action plans but were unable to distinguish between them. In the meetings question many candidates did not mention key terms such as agendas or notice of meetings to help develop their answers. More focus on these unfamiliar words/topics may be helpful, for example a key word bank.

Some candidates appeared to not have read the case study properly, for example a few candidates did not appear to realise that the company had just recently moved to an open plan office. Candidates are advised to read the case study carefully to get an overview of the context and then briefly look at the questions that follow. They should then re-read the case study highlighting or noting down any issues spotted as they go through. There are no development marks for an outline command word so candidates need to be careful not to spend too much time on this.

Questions about software features continue to be a challenge for students. Despite most candidates correctly converting text to table and using shading in their assignment they could not describe these in the question paper when asked about the features of a table. Perhaps there is a need to ask candidates to think more about what these features do within the software and to express these in a written format so that they can explain what they do in detail.

The standard of handwriting continues to cause markers issues, and, in some instances, it can be difficult to decipher to award potential marks. Candidates can opt to key-in their answers and indeed, if resources permit, it is possible for all candidates in a centre to key-in their responses.

Assignment

Some candidates continue to make errors across tasks regarding spelling and capitalisation. These can be difficult to spot under exam conditions so to combat this it may be useful to have candidates regularly peer mark output to enhance their proofreading skills and make this an automatic part of the process.

In terms of producing their own headings candidates could use the task itself for inspiration. For example, in the pivot task the terms 'supplier', 'total cost' and 'percentage of overall total' are explicitly mentioned in the narrative and can be used as the column headings for the pivot table. This can also help with spelling issues.

It is important that when producing spreadsheets that formulae is 'future-proofed' wherever possible. Candidates need to be aware that cell references always take precedence over keying-in data, for example when calculating the discount percentage, the percentage figures were contained within the sheet and useable so candidates cannot in this instance

key the numbers in. This may be particularly relevant to candidates with no previous experience in the subject.

When learning about presentations it may be worth identifying those design templates which offer the maximum amount of 'blank' space. This may reduce the possibility of candidates not gaining marks due to graphics or text being obscured by the template chosen.

At Higher level, candidates must undertake a complex internet search – it is therefore important that candidates read the question or comments very carefully to identify all the criteria necessary for the search.

Whilst most candidates who attempted the aggregate/totals query did very well, a common mistake was in the design of their query. Candidates who used the 'query design' option and subsequently brought in all three tables did not have the correct answer despite using 'count' and 'sum' correctly. This is because one of the tables was not needed as no fields were being used from that table. To avoid this scenario, candidates can use the 'query wizard' option. This feature automatically brings in all the tables that are needed and excludes those that are not necessary. Consequently, if the candidate chooses the correct fields the design of the query should be correct.

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](#).