



Course report 2023

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 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: 4,418

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 4,324

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,412	Percentage	32.7	Cumulative percentage	32.7	Minimum mark required	77
B	Number of candidates	1,199	Percentage	27.7	Cumulative percentage	60.4	Minimum mark required	64
C	Number of candidates	846	Percentage	19.6	Cumulative percentage	79.9	Minimum mark required	52
D	Number of candidates	569	Percentage	13.2	Cumulative percentage	93.1	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Number of candidates	298	Percentage	6.9	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

The question paper followed the format we have used for a few years. It is worth 50 marks and candidates are expected to answer all questions. There are a range of questions and command words to allow for differentiation. The 4 marks on database theory (question 4 (c) for 2 marks and question 12 for 2 marks) proved challenging to some candidates. This was taken into account when setting the C boundary. There was no evidence either from the statistics or from markers that made us consider altering other grade boundaries.

Assignment

Modifications reduced the assignment by 10 marks to 60 (rather than 70). The assignment performed exactly as expected and the average mark was in line with previous years.

With the reduction in IT marks, the weighting tipped slightly towards the question paper which was taken into account at grade boundary. Normally the assignment is 58% of total marks — this year it was 55%.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1

Candidates gave a wide range of possible solutions, many more than we had anticipated. The question worked well by allowing them to apply their knowledge in a range of different topics.

Question 2

This was well done with most candidates giving the usual leadership skills and a lot of candidates pulled on what was lacking in Jamie's skillset. Most candidates gained the 2 marks.

Question 3

Many candidates gave good answers detailing how to stay calm, record the interactions, seek advice etc.

Question 4(a)

Using an e-diary was well answered which was not surprising as we are used to seeing candidates answering this type of question for 5 or 6 marks in other years. Most candidates had very good knowledge of e-diaries and gained the 2 marks.

Question 4(b)

Most candidates could give at least one use of word-processing in advance of a meeting.

Question 5(a)

This was a very straightforward question and did not present any difficulties. Many candidates gave three or four time-stealers and most gained the 2 marks.

Question 5(b)

Many gave two strategies for each time-stealer which is what we expected.

Question 6

Some candidates had a very good knowledge of GDPR and gave textbook responses.

Question 7

Some candidates answered this question with ease and gained full marks. It was intended to be a question that C candidates would do well in.

Question 8(a)

Most candidates gave two good flexible working practices and gained full marks for this question.

Question 8(b)

Most candidates were able to write well about remote meetings, Microsoft Teams, phones, laptops etc.

Question 10

This question performed really well and most candidates managed to easily give more than two points.

Candidates spoke about the time saved by the company staff and the customer.

Another common answer was that the customer may find out more about the company in the FAQ section than they had been looking for.

Question 11

Those candidates who focused on the similarities did well. Many who did this made very simple statements, for example **both** allow managers to plan and track large scale projects.

Areas that candidates found demanding.

Question paper

Question 1

Very few candidates were still not aware that their answer should relate to the case study.

Question 3

Some candidates pulled on the 2019 case study about the travel agents and gave answers that were set within that context and not relevant to this question.

Question 4(b)

There was a lack of knowledge regarding the correct terms for meetings and we had to make some adjustments to what we had originally been looking for. Many candidates wrote about sending out letters or putting up a poster to say the meeting was taking place when we had thought we would see Notice of Meeting.

Question 4(c)

This question was challenging to most, with few candidates giving answers regarding databases within the context. Some candidates were able to say that the database could contain contact details of attendees. Some candidates also said that the database held information about venues the organisation used in order to pick the most suitable one.

Question 6

Many candidates seemed to lack knowledge of the legislation which meant they gave answers that were technically incorrect and struggled to gain marks. Candidates answered on ways in which data could be kept secure and we did accept one method (capped at one). There was little mention of all the different facets of the legislation.

Question 7

Many candidates struggled to give any more than one or two ways to keep data secure, this was disappointing given that it was something that should be accessible.

Question 9

This question proved to be very difficult for most candidates. The most common response was simple comparisons between open plan and cellular layout. For example, having friends in an open plan layout and being lonely in a cellular office. This meant there was often not enough detail to give marks to these comments, especially when it was just a flip.

Question 11

Knowledge of Gantt charts and action plans was very poor. Additionally, candidates found it hard to write about the differences between the two.

Question 12

The marks for the report in the assignment were very good and therefore most candidates must have managed to use a wildcard successfully. They will also have completed many tasks that required them to group the information in a report. However, most candidates struggled to say what a wildcard is. They were better at giving reasons for using grouping.

Areas that candidates performed well in

Assignment

Spreadsheet task — 1(a)

Many candidates coped well with the first part of the spreadsheet and were able to complete the nested IF.

Spreadsheet task — 1(b)

The VLOOKUP and the simple calculations for pay were well done by many candidates who attempted this task.

A few candidates did not attempt this task but those who did performed better than in task 1(a).

Spreadsheet task — 1(c)

This was a typical Higher Admin and IT task, and many candidates did well. Again, a few candidates did not attempt this part however, those who did mostly gained the marks for the COUNT IF and the SUM IF.

Word-processing task — 2

Most candidates performed very well in this task and each page was completed to a high standard. The front cover and the creation of table and sorting were well done. The table of contents seem to cause little concern.

Presentation task — 3

Many candidates did well in this as they found the required information and applied their knowledge to layout, notes page and footer.

Database task — 4

Most candidates did very well in this task. The calculation didn't seem to present any issues and most candidates managed to query successfully on all four criteria.

Pivot table task - 5

The pivot table was well done by many candidates. Total sales were calculated, and the running total was completed although this was a new function.

Areas that candidates found demanding.

Assignment

Spreadsheet task — 1(a)

Some candidates struggled with the order of the IF statement as well as the greater than and less than tests with many not applying an equals sign.

Spreadsheet task — 1(c)

Percentages always cause confusion for candidates, many did not attain one mark for the last calculation.

Word-processing task — 2

The few candidates who missed out on marks did for obvious reasons, there were mistakes such as typographical errors and errors in the different headers. Under assignment conditions everyone will make some errors and it is not that the task has particularly demanding aspects to it rather that it is just what happens under these conditions.

Presentation task — 3

There are still some issues with text overlapping the design chosen. Some candidates did not understand what a notes page is and put the text on the slide.

Database task — 4

The layout can be an issue for some candidates. Some candidates struggled to manipulate the data to ensure all the text was visible.

Pivot table task

Although this wasn't perceived to be a demanding task, many candidates struggled to change headings and remain consistent in capitalisation

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Some candidates appeared to be presuming what a question was asking them and did not take time to analyse the wording — they appeared to focus on a key word and give an answer they may have rehearsed. It would be worthwhile for centres to take several questions from different years on the same topic and discuss them. They may seem similar but there is a different focus in them.

There always seems to be a trending response. Last year it was the ‘pivotal’ role of the junior admin assistant, this year it was unrealistic ideas about the workplace which were in responses to question 8(b) and 9. Many candidates have a skewed idea of what working from home is and many have a lack of knowledge on what an office environment may be like. There might be an over focus on the Google slide and Microsoft play rooms and not enough about small, cramped offices with poor air conditioning and a kettle perched on a desk. A focus on realistic office environments will help candidates in the question paper.

Another area for consideration is flexible working. Many candidate responses (whilst straight from textbooks) now seem old-fashioned given how working practices have changed since the pandemic. As well as terminology for employees who go between home and office changing, it may also be worth considering the possible conflict between employers and employees in this space.

Candidates can opt to key-in their answers, and it may be something that centres could implement, if resources allow. Some candidates have poor handwriting and there is a concern that markers are unable to award marks that may be there. Whilst acknowledging that individual candidates may be reluctant to use a computer if they are in separate accommodation, it may be an idea for all candidates in the centre to key in their responses.

Assignment

As mentioned already the assignment was well done and standards were on a par with previous years. Issues or common errors were not unusual and tend to be similar year on year. Candidates should continue to be encouraged to check their assignment printouts.

The assignment must be completed in order due to potentially linked tasks. Candidates demonstrate good technique if they choose to spend the most time on tasks that are accessible to them. For example, we had placed the spreadsheet at the start of the assignment, and it was obvious that a few candidates ‘dropped out’ as they moved through the three parts. This was good technique as it allowed those candidates to move on to the word-processing task and the presentation task where they may have gained more marks.

This year’s assignment had a higher volume of marks in the presentation, and we did not have an e-diary task or an e-mail task as the difficulty of e-diary or e-mail does not differentiate much from National 5. Therefore, candidates should practice presentation tasks with a higher volume of marks.

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](#).