Course report 2024

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.

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Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 8709

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 9514

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	3359	Percentage	35.3	Cumulative percentage	35.3	Minimum mark required	80
B	Number of candidates	2235	Percentage	23.5	Cumulative percentage	58.8	Minimum mark required	68
C	Number of candidates	1878	Percentage	19.7	Cumulative percentage	78.5	Minimum mark required	56
D	Number of candidates	1205	Percentage	12.7	Cumulative percentage	91.2	Minimum mark required	44
No award	Number of candidates	837	Percentage	8.8	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.

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, the question paper performed as expected, however a few questions were considered to be more demanding than intended. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundary.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

1(a)(i)   This proved to be a challenging topic for most candidates. It was often missed out completely. Many candidates showed no understanding of a SWOT analysis. Some candidates were able to describe strengths and weaknesses but did not recognise opportunities and threats as being external. A few candidates described opportunities which had already been taken by the organisation.

1(a)(ii)   Many candidates tried to describe conflicts of stakeholders from the case study. It was only necessary to describe any conflict between the stakeholders mentioned in the case study.

Many candidates incorrectly used Boohoo plc as a stakeholder. Some candidates were unable to recognise the term stakeholder.

Some candidates described two different interests of the stakeholders, but no conflict was described.

1(b)(i)   Many candidates were able to discuss the costs and benefits of taking over the retail brands.

1(b)(ii)   Many candidates were able to discuss the challenges of Boohoo plc moving into Asia. A few candidates failed to recognise that Boohoo plc is an online retailer and does not send goods to retail stores.

1(c) (i)   Most candidates were able to describe the effect of using only sustainably sourced materials on the two functional areas.

1(c)(ii)   Most candidates were able to explain the impact of the 'throwaway' clothing culture and the possibility of introducing a plastic tax, but not for the full 4 marks.

1(d)   Many candidates did not appreciate from the case study it was not Boohoo plc, but their suppliers, who were not paying the minimum wage. This proved to be a challenging concept for candidates.

1(e)   A few candidates mixed up centralised with decentralised distribution centres.

1(f)   Some candidates read the columns in exhibit 3 the wrong way round, describing a decrease in performance as opposed to an increase.

2(a)   Most candidates were able to describe pricing strategies. However, a few candidates did find the topic challenging.

2(b)   Most candidates were able to describe the strategies used to extend the life cycle of a product. However, a few candidates showed little understanding of the topic.

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2(c)   Many candidates showed little understanding of sampling.

2(d)   Most candidates failed to fully understand what was meant by positive employee relations, giving generic motivational points.

3(a)   Most candidates displayed some knowledge of the sources of finance but were unable to make a comparison.

3(b)   Many candidates were unable to explain the benefit of preparing a cash budget despite showing an understanding of what a cash budget is. A few candidates did refer incorrectly to profits and losses being shown in the cash budget.

3(c)   Most candidates showed little understanding of corporate culture, answering the question in general terms for example 'good corporate culture'. In order to gain marks, it was necessary to show a method of displaying corporate culture for every point.

3(d)   Many candidates described the advantages of using spreadsheets in the finance department. This was acceptable but few showed any knowledge of alternative accounting packages.

4(a)   Most candidates showed a poor understanding of methods of appraisal.

4(b)   Many candidates discussed the advantages and disadvantages of internal recruitment compared with external, instead of advertising a job online.

4(c)   Most candidates showed an understanding of tall and flat structures.

4(d)   Many candidates were not able to relate internal factors to decision making, therefore no explanation was given.

5(a)   Many candidates were able to describe factors affecting the choice of a method of production, but insufficient points were not always made to gain full marks.

5(b)   Many candidates did not refer to specific methods of ensuring quality. They answered in general terms.

5(c)   Many candidates were not specific about which technology they were describing, answering in general terms.

5(d)   Most candidates were able to describe the importance of PR.

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Assignment

Candidates who used the headings and layout specified in the coursework assessment task and the Understanding Standards material performed well. Candidates who were able to analyse their findings and make suitable recommendations based on the analysis gained higher marks. Many candidates chose wide and focused topics, for example 'the extended marketing mix of xxx'. This allowed them to research sufficient evidence to analyse and access all the marks available. There was less evidence this year of candidates choosing topics that did not allow them to do so.

In some cases. background information was often far too lengthy. A short statement indicating what the business does and a description of the main activities of the business is sufficient.

Most candidates explained their research methods well.

The analysis section was handled well by many candidates who made clear analytical points. Some candidates made points that did not link to the purpose of the assignment. Such analysis gained no marks. Sometimes the phrasing used by some candidates turned an analytical point into a recommendation and no mark was awarded.

Most candidates offered very few conclusions, and this remains one of the most challenging areas. Conclusions should be a summary of what has gone before and not just repeated findings. The following is an acceptable example of a conclusion: 'Overall, the extended marketing mix is working well as xxxx are surviving in their market and their customers and sales are always very high.'

Candidates gained marks more easily by making recommendations, but these must be justified in the report. Additional marks can be given if a negative point of the recommendation is given as a development. Some candidates made recommendations that were not justified anywhere and appeared as new information, so no mark was awarded.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Candidates should read questions carefully, taking into consideration the command words in each section. Candidates should take care to answer what is specifically being asked. Centres can support candidates by providing access to past papers and marking instructions from previous years.

Candidates should look at the number of marks allocated to each question and write sufficient points to gain the marks.

Candidates should make sure they read the case study thoroughly and use the information when asked to do so in a question. Centres can support candidates by practising case studies from earlier years.

Centres should ensure all content areas detailed in the course specification are covered. Candidates should be encouraged to revise each topic listed. Although no longer mandatory in the assignment, SWOT analysis remains in the course specification.

Candidates whose handwriting is difficult to read, should consider submitting word processed scripts. These should be printed in 1.5 or double line spacing for ease of marking. As scripts are scanned it would be useful to print double sided.

Assignment

Candidates should adhere to the word count for the assignment, as a penalty is applied if they exceed it by more than 10%.

Topics must be from the Higher course content. Candidates should choose a topic and an organisation that allows them to have sufficient content to analyse. Candidates should choose only one organisation and one topic.

Candidates must 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 and should link conclusions and recommendations clearly to evidence. Candidates should be aware that negative impacts of recommendations will gain marks. A good quality report makes recommendations other than suggesting the business continues to do what it is doing presently. SQA's Understanding Standards website contains some useful supporting information for preparing assignments.

There is no longer any need to use an analytical technique.

Teachers and lecturers should be aware that it is permissible to give reasonable assistance to candidates. This includes advice on choosing a topic, sources of information, and the likely availability or accessibility of resources. Advice may be given on the structure of the report.

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Centres must use the SQA template available on the [Higher Business Management subject page](#) as reports are scanned and marked from image. It would be useful if assignments could be printed double sided.

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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

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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](#).