



Course report 2025

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 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 890

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 1,009

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	290	28.7	28.7	85
B	204	20.2	49.0	72
C	186	18.4	67.4	60
D	167	16.6	83.9	47
No award	162	16.1	100%	Not applicable

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 or equal to 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 proved challenging for some candidates. While many candidates were familiar with Apple's brand, the case study focused on aspects beyond marketing and selling iPhones that were less familiar to candidates.

Section 2 performed as intended, allowing candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the course.

The question paper performed in line with expectations, with the mean mark in this component remaining the same as the previous year. A few questions proved more accessible for higher ability candidates and therefore a marginal adjustment was made at the 'A' and upper 'A' boundary marks.

Project

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

More candidates than in previous years were able to attract all of the marks available in this component.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidates extracted relevant information from the case study to answer each question.

Question 1

Despite some candidates thinking India was a new market for Apple, many candidates effectively explored the reasons for Apple relocating some of its manufacturing out of China.

Question 5

Candidates who evaluated the trends, rather than just describing them, were able to score highly in this question.

Question 7(a)

Most candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of how environmental initiatives affect the activities carried out by organisations' functional areas. Many candidates labelled the functional areas clearly in their responses, allowing them to access all of the marks available.

Question 7(b)

Most candidates produced well-informed answers on the consequences of using child labour in an organisation's supply chain. A few candidates were credited for describing real-life examples from organisations to support their answers.

Question 8

Most candidates demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the classical school of management.

Question 9(a)

Many candidates were able to explore the trait theory of leadership. Some candidates described the desirable traits of a leader and were awarded general marks.

Question 9(b)

Candidates who clearly labelled Belbin's team roles in their responses tended to gain high marks in this question.

Question 10

Many candidates produced detailed responses on the analytical techniques and were able to attract a high number of marks.

Project

Candidates' performance in the project component was marginally improved on last year, with more candidates attracting all of the marks available.

The introduction, research and structure sections proved the most accessible, with many candidates gaining full marks in these sections.

Almost all candidates demonstrated that they had carried out a significant amount of recent research and evidenced their findings with footnotes. Most candidates included a well-structured bibliography that showed the date accessed and the date the source was published.

Many candidates produced very detailed findings that described a recent action, activity or development an organisation had carried out in relation to their project's aim and within the two-to-three-year time period.

A few candidates produced impressive projects with the topic of the UK government's influence on an industry as their aim. These tended to score highly as the findings were recent UK government actions.

Candidates tended to construct conclusion points well 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 2

Most candidates did not appear to understand the difference on the US economy of profit being repatriated compared with the tax revenue generated from corporation tax.

Question 3

Many candidates read the question as 'continue' and not 'discontinue' the development of autonomous vehicles and this adversely impacted their analysis.

Question 4

Despite this being a competition policy question that builds on Higher level knowledge, many candidates struggled to detail the impact this has on the industry.

Question 6

Many candidates did not sufficiently describe the effect of the financial data in the exhibit on stakeholders. Some candidates did not label the stakeholders clearly in their response and were unable to attract any of the available marks as a result.

Questions 8, 9(a) and 9(b)

Although these were generally answered well overall, some candidates did not attempt them.

Project

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

Some candidates who chose the topic of technological developments or business ethics as their project's aim strayed into product development and/or marketing activities.

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

Many candidates' recommendations continued to be vague, lack viability and be 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 that were out of date.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

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

Centres must ensure their internal assessments reflect the same level of demand as the external assessment.

Course content

Centres should continue to encourage candidates to carry out the necessary reading and research to ensure they are abreast of the topics in the course, particularly those in the ‘current issues’ section of the course specification. These topics will be assessed in a context relevant to management today. Encouraging wider 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.

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 question paper for examples. Encouraging candidates to carry out wider reading on foreign direct investment (FDI) in these regions is strongly recommended.

Question paper

Centres using questions and sections from past SQA and commercial papers should sufficiently adapt the case study and not just section 2. It is important that evidence demonstrates candidates’ performance in all three units of the course. Centres

should gather evidence that mirrors the challenge and length of the external assessment.

Centre evidence containing questions that 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 evidence for exceptional circumstances.

Centres should continue to encourage candidates to source evidence from the case study as the basis of their responses in section 1 and not rely on general mark allowances. General mark allowances are not a given for every question and candidates must not assume they will be awarded in future.

It remains important that candidates keep abreast of current issues in relation to the course specification. The question paper will, in part, be shaped by current issues, so candidates should be attuned to the analysis of these issues. In addition, centres should embed wider reading into the delivery of the course. Reading should not be limited to sources about the UK, but should also cover the broader global economic climate, particularly the EU and ASEAN regions, and China.

Candidates are encouraged to use a full page for the force field analysis diagram. Drivers and resistors must be sufficiently detailed as to why these are drivers and resistors for the organisation. Candidates who attempt to make an overall evaluation should weigh up both the drivers and the resistors to support their course of action.

Candidates can gain additional marks for describing examples that relate to the question being asked. Centres should encourage candidates to compile a collection of relevant and recent examples related to the course topics. For example, a few candidates produced particularly knowledgeable answers to question 7(b) by offering different examples of child labour and its consequences when used by multinational organisations in their supply chains.

Despite candidates covering the bulk of the financial terms and developing a working understanding of the concepts from their study in the Higher course, many candidates do not perform well in financial questions at Advanced Higher. Finance, as a topic, is central to business management, and centres must make more

opportunities to practise data analysis questions using financial and statistical data available to candidates throughout the course.

Project

Candidates must select only one aim for their project. For example, ‘technological development and ethics of Company X’ would be two project aims and centres must advise candidates against doing this.

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.

Where candidates select the topic of business ethics as their project aim, centres should remind them that this topic should explore altruistic and philanthropic activities by the organisation. Candidates should avoid straying away from ethics and into an evaluation of effective HR practices such as compliance with legislation, providing additional training, offering perks, awarding bonuses and contracting competitive salaries.

Where 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.

Where candidates select the topic of an organisation’s impacts on its home and host countries as their project aim, centres should remind them that they 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’ 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, must 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.

Findings should contain a date of when the action, activity or development took place where possible. 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 within this period. Centres should encourage candidates to find the most recent evidence available to them. For example, an organisation may state on its website that it established a charity five years ago, however candidates must detail what specifically the charity has done in the past two-to-three-year period, for example, how much it donated last year.

When presented as findings in the analysis and evaluation section, organisation aims, commitments and pledges (for example, 'to improve gender representation in leadership roles by 2040') lack the necessary details (the 'what' and 'when' elements) that make up a strong finding. Candidates must describe their findings with enough detail to clearly explain **what** has happened and **when** this occurred. Aims, commitments and pledges must be qualified with current progress within the two-to-three-year period.

It is entirely possible to attract all marks in the analysis and evaluation section from only a few recent findings if the candidate draws out valid developments. 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 be challenging.

Conclusion and recommendations

As National 5 and Higher both assess the candidate's ability to make justified recommendations, it is important the recommendations at Advanced Higher level are logically drawn from the analysis and evaluation section, sufficiently detailed in terms of a clear and viable course of action, and robustly justified. It is not enough for the candidate to simply repeat 'continue to do X' at this level.

Recommendations should be 'SMART': specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Research

Centres should advise candidates to source their findings from an organisation's annual report and not its website, as company websites can often contain out of date information, lack detail and not show when information was published or updated. Referencing an annual report makes clear that the activity, development or action in the finding is within the two-to-three-year period, and makes it simpler for candidates to include a robust reference to the source.

A valid date of publication is required in the bibliography for each source. A company's website without a valid date of update or publication will not be accepted as an up-to-date source.

All organisation-produced sources, such as its website, sustainability report and annual report, count as one source. However, news articles are counted as separate sources.

Third-party websites, such as Wikipedia and ethicalconsumer.org, that provide an overview of a company's ethical actions tend to contain activities that the organisation has taken many years ago and not within the two-to-three-year period. Centres should remind candidates to source findings from credible sources that prove the company has done something in the time period required.

Candidates should avoid writing the same impact multiple times throughout their project, for example, 'this will lead to increased profit for the year'.

Structure and referencing

Although candidates should be encouraged to structure information in their project using subheadings, they must be careful not to place information under the wrong headings.

Analysis and evaluation from any sources without a clear date of publication will not be credited. Online sources must have a date of publication and a date of access. Where it is not possible to find a date of publication for a source, such as a company's website, 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, 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]. Last Updated: 2024. Available at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/ah-course-spec-business-management.pdf [Accessed June 2024].

Referenced sources from websites selling pre-written essays are not accepted. Centres should refer to the coursework authentication guidance when advising candidates on appropriate sourcing. Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with the [generative AI assessment guidance](#) available on the SQA website so they are clear on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable use of generative AI tools in assessments.

Footnote anchor points should be placed after the finding but before the candidate's analysis and/or evaluation.

Appendix: 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 is 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 to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of our 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. 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.

- 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.

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