



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Economics
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Marks in both components of the examination were slightly better than in previous years.

The improvement in the dissertation element may be related to the issuing of more detailed dissertation guidelines in June 2009.

The range of topics covered in the written paper (Paper 1) seemed to meet the expectations of candidates and their teachers.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In 2010 there was a much larger number of very able ('A' Grade) candidates.

There were some very good responses to Section B, Question 4 (recession), and Question 5 (quantitative easing).

Many candidates had detailed, sophisticated and up-to-date knowledge when considering some complex ideas and relationships.

Responses to Section A (the UK's budget deficit) were generally sound.

Areas which candidates found demanding

It was surprising that a number of candidates found it difficult to discriminate between a structural deficit on the balance of payments and a structural budget deficit (fundamental in Section A of the written paper).

Essay Question 1 and Question 3 seemed to be tackled by weaker candidates and were not well done. These topics covered financial regulation and an ageing population.

A few candidates were dependent on dated information.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Candidates should read the passage more carefully in Section A of the written paper.

Candidates need to ensure that they can answer **all** parts of the essays in Section B of the written paper.

Candidates need to give full attention to the choice of a suitable dissertation topic. Choosing a limited or inaccessible subject limits the quality of final work.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	78
Number of resulted entries in 2010	76

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark — 100				
A	40.8%	40.8%	31	70
B	15.8%	56.6%	12	60
C	25.0%	81.6%	19	50
D	5.3%	86.8%	4	45
No award	13.2%	100.0%	10	–

General commentary on grade boundaries

While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Head of Service and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.