



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Philosophy
Level	Intermediate 2 and 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

The number of candidates taking both Courses increased slightly this year rising from 244 to 274 at Intermediate 2 and from 813 to 906 at Higher.

However, the number of candidates achieving Grades A-C in each exam fell. In the Intermediate 2 exam the figure fell to 55.5% from 64.8% and in the Higher the figure fell to 65.3% from 74.2%. These figures should be taken in context as the results in 2008 were considerably better than those of 2007 so a fall is not that surprising. Indeed, the pre-appeal 2009 figures are still higher than the corresponding figures for 2007.

The candidate responses this year do suggest that many candidates are not prepared evenly. There is some evidence that candidates are much better prepared for some parts of the Course than for other parts.

It continues to be the case that more candidates answer on God than on free will and more candidates answer on Descartes than on Hume. This is the case at both Intermediate 2 and Higher. As might be expected the proportions studying each topic have not varied much but in the 2009 Higher there were slightly fewer candidates answering on free will.

Areas in which candidates performed well

At **Intermediate 2** there were candidates who wrote full and comprehensive answers to all questions but the only question on which candidates gained a higher average mark than in 2008 was the Critical Thinking question. On this question candidates tended to lose marks through not being able to recognise the fallacious appeal to consequences. The question followed the same format as in 2007 and 2008 so it is instructive to see what candidates were able to do this year that they were not able to do in previous years. Most noteworthy is that this year candidates had much less difficulty recognising an example of modus ponens as valid when compared to the number of candidates in 2008 who struggled identifying an example of affirming the consequent as invalid. This is not surprising and is consistent with research into the way in which people have difficulty recognising particular patterns of argument. Although the formal fallacies are not part of the Course candidates may well be helped in their understanding of validity if they are shown examples of common errors as well as examples of obviously invalid arguments.

If measured by the average score achieved for each question then in the **Higher** candidates performed best in the Critical Thinking and in the Moral Philosophy questions. Average scores also improved in both the Metaphysics questions, although the 2008 question on agnosticism proved particularly troublesome so improvement in response to the God question was not surprising.

All of the questions except one (Hume) had some candidates gaining full marks which shows that, despite the fall in the overall average score, the questions were appropriately accessible to candidates. The short Epistemology question had the highest percentage of candidates gaining full marks (7%) but also had a high percentage of candidates failing to achieve half the available marks for that question. With only 10 marks available it may be inappropriate to draw any strong conclusions but it appears that candidates who knew what was required to answer the question tended to do very well whereas others tended to do badly. In the God, free will and metaethics questions there were also a good number of candidates achieving full marks (4%, 5% & 6% respectively). It would seem that in topics with fewer marks available there are a significant number of candidates who are sufficiently well prepared to write what is required and more.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As in previous years the **Intermediate 2** candidates found it difficult to separate out their answers when a question was divided into a number of parts. This resulted in a lot of overlap between sections b and c in the God question. Often there was simply straightforward repetition and candidates found commenting on criticisms very difficult. Those candidates attempting the free will question found it harder than the God question and the moral philosophy question was slightly harder this year than last because it required candidates to focus on two different versions of Utilitarianism rather than effectively asking the candidate to write everything they knew about Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. The question was not as difficult as a question in 2007 that concentrated on just Kantian ethics. Clearly some candidates got confused between Rule Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics.

In comparison to 2008 the biggest falls in average marks was in response to the questions on Descartes and Hume. The scores obtained dropped from 7.9 & 8.6 down to 6 & 6.5 out of 15. The questions were entirely fair as the need to vary the questions from year to year does mean focussing on different areas and in some ways the questions this year were less obvious. It is important that candidates are prepared for questions that relate to any part of the Course and not just the first part of each topic.

In the **Higher** paper there were inevitably some aspects of every question that the candidates found demanding.

Critical Thinking

There was one question that most candidates found difficult. It is clear that many were able to recite the definitions of validity and soundness without really understanding those definitions. This was also revealed in the question that asked candidates to comment on an argument. Many were saying things like “the argument is valid and sound but contains a fallacy”. Many candidates had a very superficial understanding of even the basic concepts, which resulted in them making contradictory statements.

God

Given the number of candidates who were prepared to answer a question on the design argument it was very surprising how many were not able to give an accurate explanation of what constitutes an analogical argument. Whilst not all versions of the design argument are necessarily analogical it is reasonable to assume that candidates working at this level would have some understanding of how this form of the argument works. Given that all of these candidates had also studied the Critical Thinking Unit, it was also surprising that many did not appreciate the difference between an analogy and an analogical argument.

Free will.

As in previous years there were many candidates who were able to describe Libertarianism and Hard Determinism but then struggled to give a clear explanation of Compatibilism. This question also required candidates to answer in relation to a given scenario. Many candidates found this difficult and slipped into giving their pre-learned list of criticisms of the three positions instead of focussing on the question that had been asked.

Epistemology

This question proved difficult because of the expectation that candidates would be familiar with some standard technical vocabulary. The question on necessary and contingent truth was worth four marks. Both of these terms are flagged up in the support notes section of the Arrangements Document. A two-mark question referred to ‘propositional knowledge’. This term does not appear in the Arrangements Document. However, the Arrangements Document does say, “Candidates must be familiar with and use philosophical terms which are relevant...” and given that they are expected to distinguish between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ it is reasonable to expect candidates to be familiar with ‘propositional knowledge’.

Descartes

Most candidates were able to say something about Descartes' argument for the existence of God but many struggled to explain why it was necessary for Descartes to prove the existence of God and what role God plays in Descartes' wider argument.

Hume

It was lack of familiarity with the text that caused problems for some candidates. Without being properly familiar with what Hume actually says it is difficult to explain Hume's argument or to say what he means.

Moral Philosophy

This was a very open question but because candidates were expected to apply their knowledge to a given scenario there was a tendency to rely on describing what they thought Kantians and Utilitarians would do instead of discussing the various possibilities in full. This lack of discussion meant that often candidates would fail to go on to evaluate the positions adopted but, perhaps more troubling, was evident in the way that candidates would often assume that Act Utilitarians would almost inevitably approve of cheating in an exam.

Emotivism

Although this was only a ten-mark question and some candidates did very well there were other candidates that simply did not have enough information on the topic to answer the question well.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

As before, centres are reminded that it is important that candidates are fully prepared for all parts of the Course. With compulsory questions it is a very risky strategy to concentrate on those areas where Teachers/Lecturers feel most comfortable or those areas the candidates find easiest.

Candidates would also benefit from attempting to answer questions in different ways so that when it comes to the exam there will be less of a tendency to fall back on pre-prepared answers.

Intermediate 2
Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	244
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	274
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 60				
A	21.9%	21.9%	60	40
B	15.3%	37.2%	42	34
C	18.2%	55.5%	50	28
D	9.1%	64.6%	25	25
No award	35.4%	100.0%	97	-

Higher
Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	813
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	906
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 120				
A	21.7%	21.7%	197	81
B	20.6%	42.4%	187	69
C	23.0%	65.3%	208	57
D	9.2%	74.5%	83	51
No award	25.5%	100.0%	231	-

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 SQA therefore 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 Business Manager 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.