



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Economics
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 dissertations were generally of high quality, but in some cases candidates did not perform well due to a poor choice of title — either because the subject matter was out of the appropriate timescale or because they had undertaken insufficient research to back up their points with evidence. Candidates who followed the guidance about the dissertation published on the SQA website generally performed well.

Many candidates performed well in the examination and demonstrated excellent understanding of current economic issues. The best candidates were able to write about complex economic issues in a fluent and discursive manner.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Dissertation

Many candidates produced well-researched and thorough dissertations which were well-structured and scored highly because the candidates were able to come to reasoned conclusions. The best candidates referenced their sources and used footnotes to good effect.

### Examination paper

Item A was generally well done. Many candidates were well-informed on the recent developments in the energy market. It is pleasing that more candidates tackled question 7 in a relevant manner and followed the command word 'justify'.

Essay 1(a)(i) and (ii) The best candidates produced accurate diagrams and explanations and scored highly on this part of the question.

Essay 2(a) and (b) allowed students to demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding on the recovery in the UK economy and the possible threats to it. The best candidates were credited for including relevant statistics to back up their points.

Essay 3(a) and (b) on the Housing Market were well done, as was Essay 5(a) on emerging economies.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Dissertation

Some candidates found it difficult to organise and present their information in a logical and coherent manner. Coming to a reasoned conclusion requires candidates to look at all sides/aspects of an issue in a balanced manner before reaching a judgement. Some weaker candidates had not given the dissertation enough time and presented dissertations that were

littered with inaccuracies both in terms of content and spellings. Any diagrams included in the dissertation must be relevant and referred to in the text.

### **Section A question 6(a) and (b)**

Some candidates were unable to explain negative externalities and draw an accurate labelled diagram to show negative externalities arising from production.

### **Section B**

Essay 1 — weaker candidates confused monopoly with monopolistic competition. Some candidates were unable to explain allocative efficiency and scored poorly in (b) as a result.

Essay 3(d) was a challenging question which some candidates misinterpreted and gave a list of policies that the UK government and Bank of England could use, rather than tackling the issue of whether they should intervene at all.

In Essay 5(b) many candidates wrote responses which were little beyond Higher level, and gave very few up-to-date examples.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

- ◆ Some centres need to give more support to their candidates during completion of the dissertation. Centres should give advice on the choice of title, research and the structuring of ideas. All candidates should be made aware of the dissertation marking instructions and guidelines published on the SQA website.
- ◆ Economic Theory used in the dissertation should be used to add value to explaining the issue, rather than being bolted on in a disjointed manner. Basic Economic theories do not require detailed explanation.
- ◆ Candidates who perform well in the examination have practised examination-style questions.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to read widely and to keep up to date with economic events/issues in the UK, EU/Eurozone and globally.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	81
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	66
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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 100				
A	53.0%	53.0%	35	70
B	18.2%	71.2%	12	60
C	21.2%	92.4%	14	50
D	3.0%	95.5%	2	45
No award	4.5%	-	3	-

## 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.