



External Assessment Report 2011

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

The overall pass rate in the 2011 examination was higher than in 2010, possibly due to better preparation by candidates. The high-profile economic events that had occurred during 2010–11 were given wide publicity.

The range of issues covered in the written paper (Paper 1) seemed to meet the expectations of candidates and their teachers. The best candidates also followed the dissertation guidelines published in 2009, leading to higher scores.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The broad range of topics covered by Section B (essay questions) gave many candidates the opportunity to demonstrate a sophisticated and up-to-date understanding of the relevant issues. In particular, essay questions 2 and 3 elicited some excellent responses.

Responses to Section A were generally sound.

Areas which candidates found demanding

There was a higher number of relatively weak dissertations than in previous years. This was largely due to failure to follow the published guidelines. In particular, poor title choice left some candidates with inadequate economic content, and in other cases poor referencing lowered the overall score. Full bibliographies and footnotes must be included.

In Paper 1, candidates must fully label diagrams. Question 6 (a) in Section A was not well done in this respect.

Essay 5 was popular, but too many candidates failed to give current examples when asked for them in part (b), and wrote in a 'descriptive' rather than 'discursive' style.

Essays 1 and 6 were generally well done although candidates struggled with essay 6 (c).

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Candidates need to give full attention to the choice of a suitable dissertation topic, which must give the opportunity to apply economic rather than business theories. The published dissertation guidelines should be read by all candidates before they start the dissertation.

Wide reading of up-to-date economic sources is vital to success in all aspects of the examination.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	76
------------------------------------	----

Number of resulted entries in 2011	74
------------------------------------	----

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	44.6%	44.6%	33	70
B	27.0%	71.6%	20	60
C	21.6%	93.2%	16	50
D	5.4%	98.6%	4	45
No award	1.4%	100.0%	1	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.