



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Economics
Level(s)	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

Overall, candidates performed well in the examination paper which gave wide scope for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of Micro Economics and Current Issues. The percentage of A grades was higher than in previous years due to many Centres better preparing their candidates for the demands of the examination paper.

Some candidates underachieved in the Dissertation compared to their examination performance due to poor attention to structure and detail. They would have benefited from more guidance from teachers on the requirements of the dissertation marking scheme published on the SQA website.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Dissertation

Most candidates chose relevant and appropriate titles.

Examination Paper

Section A was generally well done.

Section B

Essay 1 (b): accurate diagrams gained high marks.

Essay 2 was answered particularly well, with those candidates who chose this essay demonstrating a deep and technical understanding of Quantitative Easing.

Candidates who selected Essay 3 tended to score highly as long as they focused on youth unemployment.

Essay 4(c): many candidates were able to critically evaluate the measures that could be taken to ensure the survival of the Euro.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Examination Paper

Section A

Question 4(b): very few candidates made it clear in their diagrams that the PED/PES for petrol is inelastic.

Question 5: many candidates did not know the principles of good taxation and therefore performed poorly on this question.

Question 6: some candidates found this question challenging because they could not present arguments to justify their choice of tax.

Essay 1(a): a substantial number of candidates compared perfect competition and monopoly rather than monopolistic competition.

Essay 1(c): some candidates only answered one aspect of this question and therefore lost marks. Some were uncertain why small firms thrive in markets.

Essay 6: this was generally poorly done because candidates had little technical understanding of pensions in general and state pensions in particular.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Dissertation

Centres need to ensure that candidates are aware of the published Marking Scheme. In particular, candidates should be encouraged to ensure that, where appropriate, they offer a balanced approach before reaching a conclusion. Conclusions need to be more than a restatement of the contents of the dissertation. If diagrams are included they must be relevant, referred to in the text and referenced if necessary. Correct referencing is important — full footnotes and a Bibliography are required.

Examination

Centres should ensure that candidates develop their ability to discuss, evaluate and justify to gain the highest marks. Some answers were too descriptive or did not directly answer the question. Diagrams must always be correctly labelled.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	74
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	81
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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	51.9%	51.9%	42	70
B	24.7%	76.5%	20	60
C	12.3%	88.9%	10	50
D	2.5%	91.4%	2	45
No award	8.6%	100.0%	7	-

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.