



Course Report 2016

Subject	Philosophy
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: question paper

Overall, responses to the question paper gained lower marks than might have been expected. This was for two reasons:

- ◆ Firstly, there were aspects of the section 'Arguments in Action' that candidates found particularly challenging. Much of the material in this section will have been new to many centres, and there was evidence that centres had struggled to obtain accurate information about what was required for parts of this unit.
- ◆ Secondly, the method of marking the essays had been changed from that used in 2015 (this was announced in the autumn of 2015). This change very successfully addressed issues identified in 2015. However, the method will need to be adjusted for session 2016–17 as the criteria made it difficult for candidates to access the very highest marks.

The first of these problems affected all candidates and as a result the boundaries for both a C and an A were both lowered at the awarding meeting. (The B boundary is then calculated automatically.) The criteria used for marking the essays had a particular impact on the higher-achieving candidates, and so the A boundaries were further lowered to compensate for this.

Component 2: assignment

The method of marking the assignment has been changed since 2015 and it was marked in accordance with the method announced in the autumn of 2015 and exemplified at the Understanding Standards event in December 2015. This change in method of marking successfully addressed one of the issues identified in 2015. However, there will be ongoing development work for session 2016–17.

No changes were made at the awarding meeting as a result of candidate performance in the assignment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

There were some candidates who did well in all the questions gaining high marks in this section but, perhaps not surprisingly, the areas that gave fewer problems were those that were familiar from the previous Critical Thinking unit.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Section One: Arguments in Action

There were a number of questions that candidates found particularly challenging.

Q1 (a). There were a large number of candidates who did not fully understand what was required for an acceptable argument diagram. Specific guidance was issued earlier in the session and has been repeated in the marking instructions for the 2016 question paper.

Q1 (b). A large number of candidates were confused about the difference between counter-examples and counter-arguments. A small number of candidates interpreted 'counter example' differently to the way the course content intended, namely by referring to the method of proving invalidity by means of substitution. In this case these candidates were rewarded, exceptionally for each point they made and were not disadvantaged.

Q1 (c). It was common for candidates to ignore the command word 'Discuss'. The marking instructions were amended to ensure that all four marks were accessible to candidates who at least defined both inductive and deductive reasoning. It is important that candidates are reminded to pay attention to the command words used.

Q2 (a). There were no major issues for most candidates but some candidates gave a related statement rather than an argument.

Q5. This question did not function well. There are inherent difficulties with this kind of question. There is a difficulty in finding realistic examples in which candidates can be reasonably expected to see the problem. The realistic example usually only exists because the problem isn't easy to identify. The alternative of using very obvious examples obviates the reason for having an example. The same problem applies to certain fallacy questions. The issue was dealt with by ensuring positive marking of candidate responses.

Section Two: Knowledge and Doubt

Q6. Many candidates gave purely descriptive answers, and where there was evaluative comment those comments were often under developed. The most common approach was to give an account of Descartes' method of doubt but even when this was evaluated, candidates didn't say how this evaluation impinged on the question. A significant number of candidates seemed to write everything they knew about Descartes and spent much of their time describing clear and distinct ideas and the trademark argument instead of focussing on the question.

Section Three: Moral Philosophy

Q7. This question was specifically worded to encourage analytical and evaluative answers. Nevertheless, a significant number of candidates gave entirely descriptive answers. The accuracy of the evaluation was often poor. A lot of candidates simplistically asserted that Bentham was an act utilitarian and Mill a rule utilitarian and, whilst this was accepted, it would have been good if candidates had shown some awareness of why this classification is

not at all straightforward. Understanding of rule utilitarianism was poor, and candidates muddled the act/rule distinction with Mill's higher and lower pleasures and/or the concept of competent judges.

Assignment

The following difficulties were identified throughout marking of the assignment:

- ◆ Being too descriptive and failing to develop an argument.
- ◆ Choosing topics that were non-philosophical.
- ◆ Choosing philosophical topics but not addressing them in a philosophical way.
- ◆ Over-reliance on teaching notes or a single source sometimes to the point of plagiarism.
- ◆ Working too closely with others instead of being involved in independent study.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Philosophy is frequently about precision and making fine distinctions. It isn't sufficient to have a rough idea of what the answer might be.

In **Arguments in Action** it is important to know what does and does not constitute an acceptable argument diagram, and to practise the relevant skills. Specific guidance was issued earlier in the session and repeated in the Marking Instructions for the 2016 exam. It is strongly recommended that centres use this guidance when preparing candidates and teaching this particular skill.

It is also important to be able to accurately characterise and appropriately exemplify the various terms.

For **Knowledge and Doubt** centres are reminded that candidates at Higher level are expected to be familiar with the texts, and should not simply rely on secondary sources. It is particularly important that candidates can engage with the text and make appropriate analytical and evaluative observations.

In **Moral Philosophy** candidates should be helped to move beyond a simplistic and muddled overview of the various positions. In this year's exam, there were particular issues with the way in which Mill's higher and lower pleasures were characterised, and also with the distinction between act and rule utilitarianism.

When preparing for the Assignment, candidates should be issued with the 'Advice to Candidates' (Appendix 1) from the Assignment Assessment Task available on SQA's secure site, and particular attention should be drawn to the need to develop an argument.

Further advice for the preparation of candidates in session 2016–17

There have been some changes to the mandatory content of the Philosophy course and, more particularly, to the way in which the content is arranged. It is vital that centres understand these changes when preparing candidates for the 2016–17 session.

Arguments in Action

'Thought experiments' and 'appeals to intuition' have been removed from the mandatory information in the Course Assessment Specification and therefore will not be assessed in exam questions.

The main difference is a complete restructuring of the content of this unit to give it more coherence. It is now structured under the headings of knowledge and understanding, analysis and evaluation. Evaluation has been further broken down into issues relating to acceptability, relevance and sufficiency. This approach is common in the field of informal logic, although some writers prefer only two categories whilst others prefer more than three. If textbooks that take a different approach are used, it is important to ensure that candidates understand the approach taken in the course documents.

There appeared to be some confusion because knowledge required at National 5 was not specified for the Higher. The opportunity has been taken to make explicit content that was already implicit in, for example, the requirement that candidates represent an argument as an argument diagram. This accounts for what might appear to be new material under the knowledge and understanding heading. 'Deductive validity', 'inductive strength', the recognition that there might be both appropriate and inappropriate analogies, and appeals to authority, were also previously implicit but it was thought helpful to make them explicit.

Guidance on what is acceptable as an argument diagram has already been published and is repeated in the 2016 marking instructions.

Knowledge and Doubt

The list of key concepts has been removed as it appeared to cause confusion as to the emphasis of this unit. It has previously been intimated that candidates are expected to be familiar with the primary texts and these concepts only had to be understood in that context. The changes have been made to clarify that this is a text-based unit and not a topic-based unit. However, it should be noted that 'rationalism' and 'empiricism' are still retained in the titles 'Descartes' Rationalism' and 'Hume's Empiricism'; aspects of scepticism still need to be understood by anyone studying these texts; innate ideas is referred to in both texts; and whilst *a priori* and *a posteriori* are no longer mentioned, it is basic philosophical terminology that might be expected of candidates studying philosophy at Higher level.

There have been no changes to which parts of the two texts need to be studied, but the opportunity has been taken to clarify the required content. This was important with regard to Meditation 2 as some centres, perhaps being prompted by the key concept 'rationalism', were teaching more than was required. Although the required content has been listed in more detail, nothing has been added. It was thought appropriate to specifically mention 'The deceiving God argument' and 'The copy principle' as these have been frequently overlooked.

Moral Philosophy

Amendments to the content associated with this unit are making explicit what was implicit namely:

- ◆ specifying utilitarianism as a consequentialist theory
- ◆ the greatest happiness principle
- ◆ Mill's competent judges
- ◆ specifying Kant's moral theory as an example of a deontological theory
- ◆ the sovereignty of reason
- ◆ the good will
- ◆ duty versus inclination

The following is no longer specified:

- ◆ Distinctions between classical hedonistic utilitarianism, ideal utilitarianism and preference satisfaction utilitarianism.

This was removed because it appeared to cause some confusion over how much detail was required on ideal and preference satisfaction utilitarianism and whether they needed to be evaluated in the same way as classical utilitarianism. Since they have been removed from the mandatory information in the Course Assessment Specification, they will not be assessed in exam questions. However, it should be noted that candidates are still expected to consider the adequacy of utilitarianism as a moral theory. In this they should consider whether the principle of hedonism is adequate. and it would be perfectly acceptable for candidates to consider alternative forms of utilitarianism in this context. This, however, is not a mandatory requirement.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	510
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	1008
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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 -				
A	26.3%	26.3%	265	56
B	22.6%	48.9%	228	48
C	19.9%	68.8%	201	40
D	9.2%	78.1%	93	36
No award	21.9%	-	221	0

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.