

*Research and Information Services*

**MONITORING STANDARDS REPORT**

SCOTTISH  
QUALIFICATIONS  
AUTHORITY



# **Comparison of Economics CSYS 1992, 1998 and Advanced Higher 2004**

# Summary

Overall, it was the view of the Panel that AH Economics 2004 was certainly *no less demanding* than both CSYS Economics 1998 and 1992 and, if anything, may be *marginally more demanding*.

- ◆ **Syllabus:** The AH Economics 2004 syllabus as a whole was judged to be comparable with the earlier years in terms of demand. In common with CSYS Economics 1998 and 1992, it is challenging because of its evolutionary, contemporary nature.
- ◆ **Assessment Instruments:** Despite the various changes made to these over the years, the level of demand was generally comparable. There was, however, some evidence to suggest that candidates were under pressure to complete the exam paper in the reduced time allowed for AH Economics of two-and-a-quarter hours.
- ◆ **Scripts:** The awarding of grades to different levels of performance had been consistently applied over time: the A/B and C/D graded scripts from 1998 and 1992 were comparable with the A/B and C/D graded scripts from 2004.

## Observations

- ◆ The establishment of a stable, proven, setting/marking team for Economics has produced consistency in standards.
- ◆ The adoption of structured questions has led also to greater consistency between question papers (there is greater comparability between the exam questions for 2004 and 1998 than for 1992).

## Recommendations

- ◆ Consideration should be given to the Principal Assessor's recommendation that the time allowed for the AH Economics' paper be increased from two-and-a-quarter hours to two-and-a-half hours or a reading time allowance be introduced to bring the overall assessment demands into line with previous years.
- ◆ SQA should make dissertation marks available to candidates/teachers for the purposes of feedback/future guidance.
- ◆ Consideration should be given to running workshops (at the beginning of the session) for *new* presenting centres/teachers to lessen the steep learning curve involved in preparing candidates for AH Economics for the first time.
- ◆ Evidence scripts given to Monitoring Standards Panels should contain the marks/aggregate marks awarded to facilitate the monitoring process.

# 1 Syllabus

## 1.1 General approach

**The general approach has not changed.** The essence of AH Economics 2004, and its predecessor qualifications CSYS Economics 1998 and 1992, is that it has an *open-ended* syllabus driven by contemporary economic events/issues. Theoretical understanding acquired at Higher is built on and extended through its application to *contemporary* economic problems. The emphasis is on integration with knowledge and skills applied to a greater range of more complex economic situations. The approach is designed to develop the core skills of *Critical Thinking* and *Reviewing and Evaluating*.

### 1.2.1 Elements *added* to the syllabus

Of the three qualifications being considered, CSYS Economics 1992 had the most open-ended syllabus, stating ‘The syllabus incorporates the economic principles of the Higher Grade and candidates will be expected to apply these principles to recent events and issues in the British economy.’

For CSYS Economics 1998, five *indicative* areas were added to the syllabus ‘to show the direction in which candidates’ knowledge of concepts, economic events and institutions should be extended to enable them to analyse and interpret current issues more adequately.’

AH Economics 2004 now incorporates, in the dedicated Microeconomics Unit, theory of the firm content (which was removed from Higher Economics). Whilst this material has been formally added, knowledge of it would have been expected previously. The Applied Economics Unit is designed to enable candidates ‘to apply knowledge and understanding of economic theories to current issues relevant to the UK economy, Europe and the wider international economy.’

It was the view of the group that **these additions represented changes of presentation rather than substance to the more recent syllabus**. A mapping of the three syllabuses in terms of their theoretical and contemporaneous content can be found in **Appendix A**.

### 1.2.2 Elements *missing* in the more recent syllabus

*Macroeconomic debate* was present in both the 1998 and 1992 specifications but does not appear in the 2004 specification. This has not been removed as such but is integrated into the background knowledge necessary to provide theoretical context.

### 1.2.3 Changed parts of the syllabus

The syllabus evolves over time, in keeping with the evolution of economic theory and its application. It reflects current economic thinking/events.

#### **1.2.4 Effect of level of demand**

The syllabus as a whole is comparable in terms of demand. It is challenging because of its evolutionary, contemporary nature. This was true also of CSYS Economics 1998 and 1992.

#### **1.3.1 Depth of syllabus**

The *depth* of the more recent syllabus is comparable with the older syllabuses.

#### **1.3.2 Breadth of syllabus**

The *breadth* of the more recent syllabus is comparable with the older syllabuses.

## **2 Assessment instruments**

### **2.1 Trends or gradual changes**

#### **2.1.1 Exam Papers**

The general trend for more structured questions and fuller marking instructions is reflected over time in both exam papers and instructions to markers (with AH Economics 2004 exhibiting more structured questions and fuller marking instructions).

The structure and weighting applied to assessment elements has changed significantly since 1998 with the removal of the computer model-based *Paper 2*. The model and its intrinsic analytical approach had become dated and were removed in keeping with the contemporary emphasis of the course.

#### **2.1.2 Dissertation**

Changes have been made to the dissertation assessment instrument since the introduction of the AH. These changes, not documented in the original specification, are as follows:

- ◆ Session 2003/04: One externally assessed dissertation, upper word limit 3,500-4,000
- ◆ Session 2002/03: One externally assessed dissertation, upper word limit 2,000-3,000
- ◆ Session 2001/02: Two dissertations –one internally assessed, one externally assessed, upper word limit for both: 2,000-3,000

Comparing 2004 dissertations with 1998, the following differences are evident:

- ◆ There has been a reduction in the upper word limit (set at 3,500-4,000 in 2004 compared to 3,000-5,000 in 1998)
- ◆ There has been a reduction in the weight attached to the dissertation as an assessment component (25% in 2004, 32.5% in 1998)

Part of the philosophy behind the reduction in weight was that it had become easier for candidates to access information and produce dissertations given advances in technology. Whilst it could be argued that these changes might make the AH dissertation more demanding, **it was the view of the Panel that these changes were not significant.** The dissertation was thought to be a challenging instrument of assessment and has remained so over time. Its aims and philosophy have not changed with candidates being given, effectively, freedom of choice over their topic. Its worth is judged on the basis of (i) economic content, (ii) application of theory, (iii) coherence, (iv) structure and (v) validity of conclusions.

It was suggested that SQA should release dissertation marks for candidates' and teachers' feedback and guidance.

### 2.1.3 Analysis of assessment instrument changes

**Table 1** compares the structure/weighting of the assessment instruments over the three years. The removal of *Paper 2* for AH Economics has been compensated for by the increased weight given to the essay questions in the single exam paper.

Table 1: Comparative structure/weighting of Assessment Instruments over the years					
Assessment Elements	CSYS 1998, 1992	Weight	AH Economics 2004	Weight	Net Change
Paper 1	Interpretation	17.5%	Interpretation	25%	+ 7.5%
	2 Essays (from 6)	25%	2 Essays (from 6)	50%	+ 25%
Paper 2	Computer Model Interpretation	25%	-	-	- 25%
Dissertation	Topic from syllabus	32.5%	Topic from Applied Economics Unit	25%	- 7.5%

**Table 2** provides a summary of all the changes made to the assessment instruments between the years and their perceived effect on demand.

Table 2: Summary of changes to assessment instruments and their perceived effect on demand	
Change	Effect on Demand
Removal of Paper 2	Less demanding
Double weighted essays	More demanding
Structured Questions	Less demanding – more guidance provided to candidates
Structured Questions	More demanding – more precision expected from candidates
Paper One time reduced from 2hrs 30mins to 2hrs 15mins	More demanding
Dissertation - reduction in weighting	More demanding

The Panel's view was that the **changes listed had largely compensated for one another** (or, in the case of the dissertation, had been compensated for in other ways). On balance, however, it was felt that **the reduction in time for the now single exam paper had made AH Economics marginally more demanding.** This was particularly so as no provision is made for reading time. The panel felt

that consideration should be given to the view expressed by the Principal Assessor that the time allowed for the exam should be increased to two-and-a-half hours or reading time allowed.

## **2.2 Repetition of papers, sections or type of tasks**

The structure of the AH Economics paper, formerly Paper One for CSYS Economics, has remained consistent as follows:

- ◆ Section A: one compulsory interpretation item
- ◆ Section B: choice of two from six structured-essay type questions

The nature of the dissertation has remained consistent also.

### **2.2.1 Do candidates in all years perform in the same way on these questions?**

Allowing for differences in topics and style of questions, candidates appear to have performed in broadly the same way when attempting this paper across the years considered. The quality of the dissertations, however, has improved.

### **2.2.2 Discernible trends and effect on level of demand**

The scripts examined suggested that there are no discernible trends in terms of candidate performance with respect to the question paper. The Principal Assessor, however, reported that more A/B grades were awarded but there were also more fails (e.g. while 62 candidates were presented in both 2003 and 2004, there were three failures in 2003 and seven failures in 2004). The average mark for the paper had fallen gradually from 44.4 (out of 75) in 2001 to 40.9 in 2004; it was suggested that this was a reflection of trends in written skills. The percentage of passing candidates had fallen from 95% in 2001 when AH Economics was introduced alongside CSYS Economics to approximately 71% in 2004. This was attributed to less experienced centres beginning to present candidates at AH level.

As a consequence, it was noted that the relatively small number of candidates and the fact that approximately 75% of candidates were presented by six centres, meant that pass marks/grades could be subject to severe fluctuations. It was suggested that consideration be given to running workshops for *new* presenting centres/teachers.

There is a clear improvement in the quality of the dissertation in terms of both presentation and content. The Principal Assessor reported that the average dissertation mark had risen from 15.7 (out of 25) in 2001 to 16.3 in 2004. The improvement in dissertation quality may be accounted for by the following:

- ◆ More time is spent on dissertations
- ◆ More teacher input goes into dissertations
- ◆ AH Economics tends to be taught by increasingly experienced teachers
- ◆ Improved dissertation guidelines are available

- ◆ Advances in technology have allowed for
  - easier production (drafting, editing, etc) of dissertations
  - easier information access / gathering

### **2.3.1 Coverage of syllabus in Question Paper**

The *coverage* of the more recent syllabus in the more recent Question Paper is comparable with that of previous years.

### **2.4.1 Level of demand of questions and marking scheme**

The questions and the marking scheme are comparable in terms of demand despite a trend towards more structured questions and, generally, fuller marking schemes. The adoption of structured questions has led also to greater consistency between question papers (there is greater comparability between the exam questions for 2004 and 1998 than for 1992).

The setting/marking team for Economics has been established for a number of years and it would appear that this stability has produced consistency in standards.

## **3 Scripts**

**Appendix B** gives the grade boundaries for AH Economics 2004 and CSYS Economics 1998. (No grade boundary information was available for CSYS 1992.)

### **3.1 A/B graded scripts**

#### **3.1.1 Exam Scripts**

Overall, the Panel felt that there was a high degree of comparability between the A/B graded scripts from 2004 and 1998. The A/B border could be quite clearly discerned in terms of (i) accuracy, (ii) development of points and (iii) the overall coherence of answers.

As far as the Panel could judge, the A/B grades for 1992 were also in keeping with later standards. The 1992 exam paper was judged to have been a tough, full paper accompanied by good, full answers from candidates.

#### **3.1.2 Dissertation**

The Panel thought that Grade A dissertations in 2004 and 1998 were comparable, although technological advances had resulted in better-presented dissertations in 2004. No dissertations were available for 1992.

### **3.2 C/D graded scripts**

#### **3.2.1 Exam Scripts**

In general, the C/D boundary was thought to be clear over the three years. The differences between C/D graded scripts for 2004 and 1992, however, were thought to be clearer than the differences between C/D graded scripts for 1998.

Overall, the Panel felt that the C/D graded scripts for the three years were comparable with equivalent performances having been demonstrated by candidates.

### **3.2.2 Dissertation**

Dissertations for 2004 were better presented as a result of advances in technology, suggesting that the reduced weight attached to this assessment instrument in the AH is appropriate. Nevertheless, in general, the dissertations for both 2004 and 1998 appeared to be of a 'C' standard indicating the written paper/s to be the main discriminator/s between grades. (No dissertations were available for 1992.)

### **3.3 Panel's perceptions of the evaluation of script boundaries exercise**

Firstly, the Panel would point out that philosophy for AH is different from that of CSYS. AH is supposed to have 'A' Level equivalence and, therefore, is marginally more demanding than CSYS. While candidate performances were thought to be equivalent in terms of the grades awarded, more failures were evident at AH possibly reflecting this.

Secondly, it should be noted that this exercise was made more difficult and at times became rather frustrating as the following information was lacking:

- ◆ Dissertation marks for 2004 and 1998
- ◆ Dissertations for 1992
- ◆ Marks / aggregate marks for *Paper One* (not provided consistently)
- ◆ Full marking scheme for 1992

It should be noted further that:

- ◆ Paper Two was dropped with the advent of AH making comparison across time more difficult
- ◆ Dissertations were returned to candidates until 1995
- ◆ Grade distributions achieved by candidates for the three years would have been helpful

## Appendix A: Comparison of AH Economics 2004, CSYS Economics 1998 and CSYS Economics 1992 Syllabuses

AH Economics 2004	CSYS Economics 1998	CSYS Economics 1992
<p><b>Applied Economics Unit</b></p> <p>‘analyse current economic issue and their background.’</p>	<p>‘application of concepts introduced in the Higher.....to the understanding of [current] economic issues’</p> <p>Indicative Areas: (1) The Macroeconomic Debate, (2) Factor Markets, (3) Financial Markets and Institutions, (4) Behaviour of Firms, (5) International Economics: Developing Countries, the EU</p>	<p>‘incorporates the economic principles of the Higher Grade and candidates will be expected to apply these principles to recent events and issues in the British economy.’</p>
Syllabus as implied by Exam Paper	Syllabus as implied by Exam Paper	Syllabus as implied by Exam Paper
<p>Interpretation Item: ‘Offshoring’</p> <p>Essay Topics covered: Inflation / Monetary Policy Govt Budget / Fiscal Policy European Union: Enlargement Currency Fluctuations: £,\$,Euro House Prices Mergers / Takeovers</p>	<p>Interpretation Item: ‘Black Markets’</p> <p>Topics covered: Inflation / Monetary Policy Govt Budget / Fiscal Policy European Union: Single Currency Barnett Formula National Minimum Wage Asian Financial Markets</p>	<p>Interpretation Item: Bus De-regulation</p> <p>Topics covered: Inflation / Monetary Policy Govt Budget / Fiscal Policy European Union: ERM British Steel closure in Scotland Privatisation of British Rail ‘Peace Dividend’/End of Cold War</p>
Microeconomics Unit		
Perfect Competition		
Monopoly		
Monopolistic Competition		
Oligopoly		
Externalities		

## **Appendix B: Comparison of 2004 AH Economics cut off scores and 1998 CSYS Economics cut off scores**

For comparison purposes, these have been converted into percentage marks rather than raw marks out of 200 for CSYS and out of 100 for AH.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2004 AH</b>	<b>1998 CSYS</b>
<b>A</b>	68%	70%
<b>B</b>	57%	60%
<b>C</b>	47%	50%
<b>'D'</b>	42%	37.5%