



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Philosophy
Level(s)	Higher and Intermediate 2

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

Most candidates seemed reasonably well prepared for the more straightforward parts of the course, but a significant number struggled when they were expected to give more than a superficial overview of a topic or philosophical position.

There was continuing evidence of an over-reliance on pre-prepared answers, and candidates had difficulties when confronted with a question that required a little more thought. This may reflect teaching that perhaps concentrates on the more accessible parts of the course, leaving candidates unprepared to deal in depth with those areas that require a more sophisticated analysis.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Intermediate 2

Question 1: Most candidates performed well in the critical thinking section, with a high number gaining full marks.

Question 2: Many candidates knew more than enough to gain the six marks available for describing the cosmological argument, and many of those also knew enough critical comments to gain the remaining four marks.

Question 3(a) & (b): Candidates were able to competently describe the positions of hard determinism and libertarianism.

Question 4(a): The majority of candidates were able to say more than enough to describe the tripartite theory of knowledge.

Questions 5(a) & (b) and Question 6(a) & (b): Candidates generally performed well on the descriptive parts of these questions.

### Higher

For the first time, the Critical Thinking section gained the highest average score. Candidates had little difficulty with the basic concepts such as distinguishing statements and commands, or the difference between proving and asserting a claim. There was a good understanding of the limitations of inductive arguments, and candidates had little difficulty in identifying the conclusion in the source question.

Question 2, on the cosmological argument, was done well by a significant number of candidates.

Question 3: Those candidates who had a grasp of the conceptual distinctions did well.

Question 5: The parts of the question that required the candidates to describe how Descartes attempts to prove the existence of God and to explain why this is important were done much better than the parts on the clear and distinct rule.

Question 7: Most candidates had a reasonably competent understanding of utilitarianism.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Intermediate 2**

Question 1: A number of candidates were not clear on the definitions of validity and soundness, and often got them the wrong way round.

Question 2: There were candidates who were able to describe the cosmological argument but were not then able to make appropriate evaluative comments.

Question 3(c): A number of candidates found making an evaluative judgment between hard determinism and libertarianism difficult.

Question 4(b): It was noticeable that quite a few candidates who knew what the tripartite theory was, were not then able to make an evaluative comment about it.

Question 5(c): Candidates found it difficult to comment on whether Descartes had succeeded in overcoming the evil genius.

Question 6(c): Once again it was the part of the question that required the candidate to make evaluative comment (this time on Hume) that was found to be demanding.

Question 7: A number of candidates got side-tracked into discussing the scenario and telling stories rather than discussing Utilitarianism. The Act/Rule distinction remains unclear and confusing to a lot of candidates, and many did not know or remember any relevant strength or weakness for part (b).

### **Higher**

In the Critical Thinking section a number of candidates struggled to analyse and evaluate the source effectively and to identify the various roles of its constituent statements. The part in the section that caused most problems was when candidates were expected to explain the difference between the two formal fallacies. It was noteworthy that in their examples candidates would often get one or other of the formal fallacies confused with either *modus ponens* or *modus tollens*.

Although candidates performed well in response to Question 2, there is evidence that this was in part due to a reliance on pre-prepared answers and the open nature of the question. Very few candidates referred to more than one version of the cosmological argument.

Question 3: There were the usual problems with candidates failing to understand the subtleties of compatibilism.

Question 4 on foundationalism and coherentism, was done particularly badly. Many candidates seemed totally unprepared for what was a straightforward question.

Question 5: Many candidates had only a superficial and often inaccurate understanding of Descartes' clear and distinct rule.

Question 6: Many candidates seemed completely unprepared to discuss Section IX of the Enquiries and of those that did know something most didn't have enough information to discuss it in detail.

Question 7: Although most candidates had a reasonably competent understanding of utilitarianism many candidates did not seem to know how to use the scenario to critically examine utilitarianism and would often get sidetracked into simply discussing the scenario itself.

Question 8(b): A large number of candidates failed to spot the crucial point of the question.

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

There still seems to be a reliance on focusing on the 'easier' or more accessible parts of the course, and it is important that sufficient time is spent dealing with the more demanding parts of the content, particularly in relation to Descartes and Hume.

There is some evidence that the superficiality of some responses has as much to do with what some candidates have been taught as it is a reflection of candidate ability. Candidates should come to understand that some of the positions that they are learning about are not single positions that can be summarised in a few bullet points. Often a single label might cover a range of different but related positions rather than just one position.

Whilst it is undoubtedly important to prepare candidates for the exam this might more often take the form of helping candidates develop strategies for dealing with different types of question rather than relying on rehearsed answers to particular questions.



## Statistical information: update on Courses – Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2013	810
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1017
------------------------------------	------

## Statistical information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 120				
A	26.3%	26.3%	267	80
B	18.5%	44.7%	188	67
C	22.2%	67.0%	226	54
D	8.4%	75.3%	85	47
No award	24.7%	-	251	-

## Statistical information: update on Courses – Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2013	270
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2014	200
------------------------------------	-----

## Statistical information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 60				
A	31.0%	31.0%	62	42
B	12.0%	43.0%	24	36
C	14.5%	57.5%	29	30
D	7.5%	65.0%	15	27
No award	35.0%	-	70	-

## 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.