



External Assessment Report 2013

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

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

Many candidates had a good general overview of the course but frequently lacked the ability to discuss specifics with an appropriate amount of detail. Similarly, candidates might be good at narrative, at telling a story, but less adept at probing the details of an argument.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Intermediate 2

- ◆ Question 2: Generally candidates who attempted the question on God did very well, with a large number of candidates managing to gain full marks.
- ◆ Question 3a), 3b): Although candidates who attempted the free will question often struggled to demonstrate any understanding of compatibilism, this year's question also enabled the candidate to discuss hard determinism and, whilst it wasn't always clear that candidates knew the difference between determinism and hard determinism, candidates generally did well on this part of the question.
- ◆ Question 5: Although there was a mixed set of responses to this Descartes question, a pleasing number of candidates did well with a good number gaining full marks.
- ◆ Question 7: The moral philosophy question, because it asked for comments on two different moral theories, allowed candidates to access a higher number of marks. Some candidates didn't seem to understand some aspects of the Course, typically Kantian ethics. However, it was pleasing to see more candidates with a reasonable knowledge of Kantian ethics.

Higher

- ◆ Question 1: With one or two notable exceptions, candidates knew the appropriate definitions of terms as they are used in the Critical Thinking section. They were also able to identify the two informal fallacies, although more were successful at identifying the slippery slope than the post hoc fallacy.
- ◆ Question 2: Candidates did well on this straightforward question about the teleological argument, and a good number of candidates gained the full twenty marks. However, there was a tendency to focus on the issue of design and say less about purpose. Anachronistic comments suggesting Hume attacked Paley were probably the result of the teaching rather than poor understanding.
- ◆ Question 6b): Those candidates who attempted the question on Hume did very well in explaining his theory of impressions and ideas and how it related to his empiricism. They tended to do less well when dealing with Hume's Fork.
- ◆ Question 7: Candidates appeared to perform well on the question relating to Kantian ethics, better than has sometimes been the case in the past. However, often this success was due to relying on rote-learned responses, but this did at least enable the candidate to demonstrate knowledge of the topic, even if they then struggled a little when applying the theory to the given scenario.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Intermediate 2

- ◆ Question 1c): A significant number of candidates were not familiar with the 'illegitimate appeal to authority', and even those who were found it difficult to say enough to gain all the marks available for this question.
- ◆ Question 3b): As with previous years, candidates who attempted the free will question struggled to demonstrate any understanding of compatibilism.
- ◆ Question 6: As usual, only a very small number of candidates attempted the Hume question, and a number of those struggled with even the basic concepts.

Higher

- ◆ Question 1d): Whilst most candidates had little difficulty explaining what is meant by 'valid', many struggled to explain what is meant by a 'strong' argument. This may be because candidates spend more time developing their understanding of deductive arguments and less time on inductive arguments.
- ◆ Question 1e): A notable number of candidates didn't seem to fully understand what was required when they were asked to put the argument into standard form, and a large number of candidates struggled to identify the intermediate conclusion and seemed only prepared to analyse the simplest of arguments.
- ◆ Question 1f) and 1g)iii): Candidates were often unclear about the difference between formal and informal fallacies with this, no doubt, contributing to the fact that many failed to identify the fallacy of denying the antecedent.
- ◆ Question 3: Some candidates appeared to have problems explaining compatibilism and being able to make the fine distinctions necessary. There should have been plenty for a candidate to say, focusing their answer on compatibilism, but many candidates seemed to have been prepared to write an essay covering all three positions and were intent on doing that, whatever the wording of the question.
- ◆ Question 4a): A lot of candidates gave very poor examples to illustrate the Gettier problem. Since the same poor examples kept occurring this would appear to be due to the teaching rather than candidate understanding.
- ◆ Question 5: Most candidates showed very little knowledge of what Descartes was trying to achieve in Meditation Six but were still able to accrue marks because of their knowledge of other parts of the text.
- ◆ Question 8: This question was poorly done given that it was such a basic question. Large numbers of candidates seemed to have no idea how rule utilitarians arrive at their rules.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Perhaps understandably candidates do better on the more introductory topics, but if they are to do well they also need to be properly prepared on the more demanding topics such as Kantian Ethics, Descartes' Meditation Six and Hume's Fork, etc. Since there is no choice of questions for candidates in the exam it is essential that candidates are prepared for all parts of the course.

Sometimes it is necessary to simplify things for the less able candidates, but it needs to be remembered that every simplification is also likely to introduce errors and a tendency to

superficiality. The more able candidates need to be prepared to deal in detail with the various topics and to make careful and fine distinctions.

**Statistical information: update on Courses
Intermediate 2**

Number of resulted entries in 2012	332
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	270
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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 60				
A	32.6%	32.6%	88	44
B	17.0%	49.6%	46	38
C	13.3%	63.0%	36	32
D	5.6%	68.5%	15	29
No award	31.5%	100.0%	85	-

**Statistical information: update on Courses
Higher**

Number of resulted entries in 2012	918
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	810
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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 120				
A	25.3%	25.3%	205	85
B	20.5%	45.8%	166	73
C	21.6%	67.4%	175	61
D	9.5%	76.9%	77	55
No award	23.1%	100.0%	187	-

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.