



External Assessment Report 2012

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

The same problems evident in previous years persist. There is evidence at both levels that candidates are given a very narrow preparation that stands them in good stead if they get the 'right' questions but leaves them unprepared for questions that require a little more skill in handling the material. The same errors in script after script also suggest that, in many cases, candidates are not only ill-prepared but, of more concern, wrongly prepared.

A significant number of candidates are disadvantaged because of difficulties they have with expressing themselves. It is important to realise that philosophy is very often concerned with precision and making fine distinctions. An appropriate facility with the language would normally be required to do well in the subject.

A number of candidates might have been better attempting Intermediate 2 rather than Higher. Consideration should be given as to whether candidates are being entered at the most appropriate level.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Intermediate 2

Question 2: Of all the questions, the one on God gained the highest average score (67%). However, it was relatively easy for candidates to garner five marks through rote learning of a simplistic summary of Aquinas' argument, and more marks were available for just being able to list some appropriate criticisms.

Question 4: Epistemology. This section was done reasonably well, with more candidates gaining full marks than any other total. However, after that there was an even spread of candidates gaining each of the other available marks, including zero.

Question 7: There was a normal distribution of marks on the Moral Philosophy question and it mirrors the distribution of marks over the whole exam. Most candidates had a reasonable knowledge of the basics concerning Bentham and Mill.

Higher

Question 1 (e): Most candidates were able to recognise the formal fallacy of 'affirming the consequent'.

Question 1 (e): Most candidates knew when a sentence was also a statement.

Question 1 (j): Most candidates had little difficulty constructing an argument that was related to the given illustration — although the argument wasn't always sound.

Question 2: Those candidates who had studied Anselm's ontological argument and associated criticisms in detail were well prepared for the question this year.

Question 3: Those candidates who answered this question generally demonstrated a clear understanding of Libertarianism and associated arguments.

Question 5: Generally speaking, candidates had a good grasp of Descartes' method of doubt and of some of the issues surrounding the Cogito.

Question 7: Nearly all candidates were able to give a clear account of Bentham's utilitarianism and the hedonic calculus.

Question 8: Most candidates were able to adequately describe two problems with Kantian ethics.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Intermediate 2

Question 1 (b) (iii): Most candidates were able to give an adequate definition of validity but many more struggled to define soundness. This led to problems when they had to assess an argument for soundness. Many candidates seemed to think it was sound because the premises and the conclusion were all true, whilst large numbers seemed to think the conclusion did indeed follow from the premises. Candidates of the first kind lacked knowledge of what is meant by 'soundness'; candidates of the second kind need practice in assessing arguments for validity.

Question 2: When criticising Aquinas' cosmological argument, too many candidates simply 'repeated rote learning' that Aquinas had contradicted himself without giving any thought as to whether it was likely that a philosopher of his standing would have made such an obvious error or whether, if the error was present, the argument would have been worthy of consideration for so long. If candidates are going to make this criticism it is essential that they are also aware of how the criticism can be rejected.

Question 3: As usual, the candidates who attempted the free-will question struggled to demonstrate any understanding of compatibilism. Just over one in six of the candidates tackled the question, with the rest answering on God. However, the average score for the question was just 38%. It is vital that candidates who tackle this subject understand that compatibilism is not to be characterised as a half-way position between hard determinism and libertarianism with a little bit of both. It is vital that they also understand why this is the case and that compatibilists are determinists.

Question 5: The question on Descartes was badly done, and candidates gained an average mark of only 5.5 out of 15. In some centres so many of the candidates seemed to have no idea what was meant by the Trademark argument that this has given cause for concern about how this is being taught. This question was very similar to one of the NABs, and also very similar to the question asked in 2009, and yet nearly one in six of the candidates gained

zero marks for this question. Although it is not necessary to pass more than one of the epistemology NABs to complete the Course, it is worth considering whether a candidate has been properly prepared for the exam if there are published NABs that they would be completely unprepared to answer. In the 2009 External Assessment Report it was noted that, 'It is important that candidates are prepared for questions that relate to any part of the Course, and not just the first part of each topic.'

Question 6: The question on Hume was also done badly. Generally speaking, the few candidates who did well on the Hume question did well on the whole paper, whereas those who did badly on the Hume question also did badly on the rest of the paper.

Question 7: There was considerable confusion surrounding rule utilitarianism, which was often just characterised as simply following rules without any explanation as to how those rules are determined.

Higher

Question 1 (f): Many candidates only had a vague notion of what, in the context of this Course, constitutes a false dilemma. Candidates should be reminded of the definition in the published glossary, and should be clear that a false dilemma is a specific kind of argument and not just a limited choice.

Question 2: A significant number of candidates confused Anselm's argument with that of Descartes; a significant number of candidates were very confused about what constitutes a *reductio ad absurdum*; and a number of candidates inappropriately introduced the problem of evil. Most candidates were familiar with Gaunilo's attempt to undermine Anselm's argument but, possibly because of confusion with Descartes' version of the argument, too many candidates failed to understand how the criticism worked.

Question 4: Too many candidates got confused when explaining Gettier examples. It is, perhaps, understandable that teachers will often go for a simpler example (eg the sheep in the field or the stopped clock) rather than one of Gettier's own, but there is also a danger in this strategy. A large number of candidates would give an appropriate example but then, because of the example, be misled into explaining that there was something wrong with the justification. The candidates should know that Gettier examples are set up precisely to show that all three criteria, justification included, have been adequately met but knowledge has not been generated. A formal presentation of Gettier's own examples and an explanation of why they are better should help overcome this problem.

Question 6: Disappointingly, a large number of candidates were unable to discuss what Hume says about the reason of animals.

Question 7: The question this year required candidates to have a solid understanding of the specified varieties of utilitarianism. Most candidates could give an adequate overview of Bentham's utilitarianism but were often seriously confused about Mill. Most knew Mill was associated with a distinction between higher and lower pleasures, but many candidates wrongly claimed the distinction was introduced to reduce the difficulty of calculation or as a

response to the criticism that utilitarianism ignored justice. Others claimed that a measurement of quality was intended to replace a measure of quantity. Many candidates had the most superficial understanding of the role of rules in utilitarianism, and the distinction between an act utilitarian use of rules and a rule utilitarian use of rules was rarely explored. A poor grasp of detail frequently led to the various types of utilitarianism being completely misrepresented in the candidates' answers.

Question 8 (a) & (b): What should have been an easy four marks often went unclaimed because candidates were unfamiliar with the definitions given in the glossary.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

First and foremost, it is essential that the content of the Course is covered accurately and in an appropriate level of detail. There is evidence of centres missing out the 'harder' material, and this is disadvantaging the candidates. The Arrangements contains a glossary for each Unit, and many candidates would have performed better if they had simply learned the definitions properly. There does need to be understanding, but simply knowing the material is a pre-requisite.

A candidate should only be considered prepared for the exam if they are able to make a reasonable attempt at any of the NABs and any of the questions in the most recent past papers. It may seem like a good idea to coach the candidates with pre-prepared answers for a range of questions, but this does not help the candidates if they get a question that doesn't fit in with what they were expecting.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2011	312
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	332
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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	22.0%	22.0%	73	42
B	15.1%	37.0%	50	36
C	13.0%	50.0%	43	30
D	5.4%	55.4%	18	27
No award	44.6%	100.0%	148	-

Statistical information: update on Courses

Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2011	912
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	918
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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	20.0%	20.0%	184	84
B	21.1%	41.2%	194	72
C	25.1%	66.2%	230	60
D	6.5%	72.8%	60	54
No award	27.2%	100.0%	250	-

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.