Course report 2023

National 5 Economics

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   333

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   490

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	294	Percentage	60	Cumulative percentage	60	Minimum mark required	82
B	Number of candidates	102	Percentage	20.8	Cumulative percentage	80.8	Minimum mark required	69
C	Number of candidates	42	Percentage	8.6	Cumulative percentage	89.4	Minimum mark required	57
D	Number of candidates	26	Percentage	5.3	Cumulative percentage	94.7	Minimum mark required	44
No award	Number of candidates	26	Percentage	5.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper mainly performed as expected, although a few questions proved to be more demanding than expected. The grade boundaries were adjusted to take account of this.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected. More than half the candidates chose to base their assignment on the cost of living, including inflation and interest rates.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1(c) — explanation of effect of an increase in inflation
Question 1(d) — market diagram
Question 1(f)(i) — definition of an exchange rate
Question 1(g) — description of advantages of international trade
Question 2(e) — definition of a multinational
Question 2(g)(i) and (ii) — naming factors and returns to factors of production
Question 7(a)(i) — definition of the level of unemployment
Question 7(b)(i) and (ii) — effects of unemployment on individuals and firms

Assignment

Most candidates followed the report structure given in the coursework assessment task. The most accessible sections remain:

♦ introduction

♦ research

♦ the findings element of findings, analysis and interpretation

♦ structure and presentation

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(f)(ii) — effect on exports of Sterling being weak: some candidates gave the effect on exporters rather than on exports.

Question 2(b) — scarcity applying to all economies: some candidates did not develop their answer beyond the basic 'unlimited wants and limited resources' to widen the concept to 'not enough resources to go round', and to the effect happening to all economies irrespective of wealth.

Question 2(d) — example of opportunity cost: some candidates did not give both the choice and the opportunity cost in their example.

Question 2(f) — advantages of moving to an emerging economy: some candidates gave advantages of moving 'abroad' rather than moving to an emerging economy. Some candidates based their answers on the advantages to the emerging economy rather than to the multinational.

Question 3(a) — defining effective demand: some candidates did not include the ability to pay in their definition.

Question 3(c)(ii) — supply curve sloping upwards: some candidates gave answers that referred to increasing demand.

Question 4(a) — ways trade barriers work: many candidates gave answers about why quotas and subsidies are put in place, rather than how they work.

Question 5(a) — determinants of supply: some candidates gave answers that related to demand rather than supply.

Question 5(b) — impact of taking out a mortgage: some candidate responses did not explain the possible consequences of taking out a large loan.

Question 5(c) — surplus diagram: some candidates gave answers about a market diagram instead of a surplus diagram.

Question 7(a)(ii) — define the rate of unemployment: many candidate responses only referred to the population rather than the working population.

Question 7(c)(i) — describe a fall in the standard of living: some candidate responses did not articulate the concept.

Question 7(c)(ii) — ways to measure an increase in the standard of living: many candidates did not give a way of measuring an increase.

Assignment

In general, candidates demonstrated poorer written English language skills than in previous years.

Some candidates failed to explain the value of their sources.

Some candidates did not match their findings and analysis to their title. This also impacted on their conclusions and recommendations, which should address the title of the report.

A few candidates chose a very narrow title, which can make producing meaningful analysis more difficult.

Some candidates were not able to achieve economic theory marks because they did not include this in the findings analysis and interpretation (FAI) section, while others did not put their theory points in the context of the surrounding paragraph.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

This course will return to full assessment requirements from session 2023–24 onwards. This means all course content is available for sampling in the question paper. However, the question paper will not feature direct questions on the European Union.

Candidates should ensure their diagrams are large enough for a marker to see the labels and curves clearly. Ideally, diagrams should be about a third of an A4 page, with any explanatory text below (rather than to the side).

Candidates should clearly label each question, particularly any additional answers at the end of their answer booklet.

Assignment

A few candidates still include 'the reason I chose this topic …' in their introduction. This is not necessary and does not attract any marks.

Candidates should ensure that their title and the body of their report match. If the findings take an unexpected direction, candidates should change the title at the end of the process. For example, if the original title was 'What is the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the three agents of the UK economy?', the candidate would have to keep referring to the war. If a candidate's findings were only about the cost of living, the candidate should change their title to, for example 'What is the impact of the rising cost of living on the three agents of the UK economy?'.

Candidates should be clear in their title if they are referring to the UK economy or the Scottish economy. Either is acceptable, but their findings and analysis should match the title.

Candidates should avoid choosing narrow titles as it restricts their ability to source suitable findings. For example, if the title was 'The impact of the Liz Truss mini-budget on individuals', candidates could not broaden their findings and analysis to incorporate the effect on government spending because of the mini-budget without changing the title to reflect an impact on the government.

Candidates should use a question as the title of their report, for example 'What is the impact of XXX on YYY?' as this makes the conclusions and recommendations easier to write.

Candidates should remember that when explaining the value of a source, they need to give a two-part answer containing what the value is, and why it is a value. For example, the article is up to date (what) because it was published in February 2023 (why).

Candidates should ensure that any URLs they use for sources are complete (rather than the shortened links) so that markers can go to the original source, if necessary.

Sources such as 'Economics Help' analyse information to explain concepts to students. When candidates use these sources, markers realise that the source has already done the analysis and therefore award 1 finding mark and no analysis marks. Candidates should only use these sources as background reading.

Candidates should be careful not to reword a finding as analysis. For example, 'XXX stated that manufacturing costs rose by 100% last year. This means that firms had to spend twice as much to produce their goods.' All this example shows is that the candidate knows what a 100% increase means. It is not analysis, as it does not add value to their report.

Candidates should incorporate any graphs they choose to use into the body of their report. This can help candidates refer to graphs in their analysis. Candidates should describe in words what a graph is showing.

Candidates must link recommendations to the title. For example, in an assignment about immigration, candidates would not gain marks for a recommendation to spend more on education unless they included analysis linking immigration and education.

Candidates should remember that they can only gain theory marks if their points appear in the FAI section. They cannot gain marks for theory points that appear in the introduction or conclusions and recommendations sections.

Candidates can gain theory marks for correct definitions of economic terms, provided they are in the context of the surrounding text. Candidates should ensure that they include enough definitions to gain the theory marks.

Candidates should write in a measured tone and avoid hyperbole, for example words like 'ginormous', 'astronomical', and 'massive'.

Candidates should be clear about the difference between discretionary income (income available for non-essential spending) and disposable income (income after tax is paid).

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.