# Course report 2019

| Subject | Economics |
| --- | --- |
| Level | Advanced Higher |

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

# Section 1: comments on the assessment

## Summary of the course assessment

### Question paper

The question paper performed well and was in line with expectations.

Section 1 provided a level of demand that allowed those candidates who had kept abreast of current global economic news to answer all questions.

In section 2, some candidates showed excellent theoretical understanding of why firms in oligopolistic markets do not normally compete on price. Some candidates had trouble describing different barriers to entry which may exist in imperfect markets.

All the essays in section 3 were chosen, with a fairly even spread between questions 8, 9, 10 and 11.

### Project

Most candidates performed well and had clearly done some extensive research on their chosen topic. A few candidates produced work of exceptional quality, and had fully integrated their research findings within the body of their analysis.

Given the dominance of certain economic issues being played out in the media, it was refreshing to note that candidates presented a wide range of topics for the project. Markers commented that there were some unusual and original topics this year, and it was evident that some candidates were researching some very contentious and contemporary issues for their project.

However, some candidates presented a very short project which hindered their ability to present in-depth analysis and evaluation of the issue.

# Section 2: comments on candidate performance

## Areas that candidates performed well in

### Question paper

In general, section 1 was done well. Candidates who had clearly kept abreast of current global economic news were able to discuss the broader issues relating to China's changing economy.

In question 2 many candidates were able to explain the impact that falling car sales in China may have on global carmakers and the global economy.

There were also some excellent answers to question 6, which asked candidates to discuss whether China's high rate of economic growth is sustainable.

There were some very good answers to question 9(b). Some candidates had clearly studied quantitative easing (QE) in depth. For question 9(c) some candidates were able to provide an excellent analysis of the economic consequences of a further tightening of monetary policy on the UK economy.

Answers to question 10(a) were generally of a high standard, with many candidates able to show current reasons for low unemployment in the UK.

Answers to question 11(c) were generally of a very high standard. Many candidates had clearly followed the Brexit negotiations in the media and were able to provide some highly specific responses on the potential consequences of Brexit on the UK economy.

### Project

Candidates generally produced well-presented projects. Most candidates made effective use of their introduction to provide context for the topic and clearly stated the aims.

Referencing and the correct use of footnotes was very consistent across the range of topics.

Where candidates achieved a very high mark it was due to their ability to present in-depth analysis and evaluation of the economic issue. Where candidates had a specific focus on the question, and had chosen to apply depth to their analysis and not breadth, they scored very highly. Those candidates who were able to present a sustained argument that went beyond the mere narrative also scored highly.

## Areas that candidates found demanding

### Question paper

In section 1, question 5 some candidates could not fully explain why a rising interest rate in the US has led to a rise in the value of the US$.

In section 2, question 7(c) many candidates did not draw the correct diagram showing positive externalities in Higher Education. In section 2, question 7(d) some candidates were unable to fully discuss the economic arguments for and against continuing free tuition in Higher Education in Scotland.

In question 8(b) some candidates did not fully explain the economic arguments for and against building a new runway at Heathrow Airport.

Question 10(c) on the impact that artificial intelligence may have on employment was generally answered to a low standard.

## Project

Some candidates scored low marks because they submitted a very short project.

Although many candidates had clearly researched their chosen topic, it was not uncommon to see projects that were heavily loaded with research findings but lacking in supporting analytical comment. Where this happened, candidates still performed well but were unable to obtain the full range of marks available, particularly in analysis and evaluation.

# Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

## Question paper

It remains of paramount importance that candidates regularly engage with current economic news. This should not be limited to just the UK economic landscape but should include the broader global economic climate as well. It is highly advisable that candidates' engagement with the media is regular and consistent in approach throughout the entire duration of the course.

The content of the question paper is driven by current economic issues, so it is of the upmost importance that candidates should be attuned to media commentary and analysis of these issues.

Teachers and lecturers should strongly advise candidates not to write in bullet points when answering questions.

## Project

Candidates should chose a topic that is contemporary and contentious. Choosing a topic where there is clear debate allows candidates to penetrate the arguments found in the research.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates start to make progress with their project as soon as possible. Candidates do not need to set out their intended line of argument at the very early stages. Indeed, extensive researching of a topic may reveal sub-issues not immediately apparent at the beginning. Candidates who adopt a dedicated approach to their research may also find that the sub-issues explored will help them with their in-depth analysis.

Overly complex titles should also be avoided. Most contemporary economic issues revolve around a clear debate and therefore it is advisable that candidates provide clarity from their findings. The project should not be rushed but should go through a fine-tuning process to allow candidates the best opportunity to present a synthesis of research and analysis.

Please be aware that changes have been made to the marking instructions for the project from 2020 onwards. Future advice on the project can be found in the updated coursework assessment task.

# Grade boundary and statistical information:

## Statistical information: update on courses

| Number of resulted entries in 2018 | 96 |
|---|---|

| Number of resulted entries in 2019 | 107 |
|---|---|

## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of course awards | Percentage | Cumulative % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Maximum mark | | | | |
| A | 54.5% | 54.2% | 58 | 84 |
| B | 21.5% | 75.7% | 23 | 72 |
| C | 17.8% | 93.5% | 19 | 60 |
| D | 2.8% | 96.3% | 3 | 54 |
| No award | 3.7% | | 4 | - |

# General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
♦ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
♦ Where standards 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 to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.