Course report 2019

Subject	Philosophy
Level	National 5

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

In 2018, grade boundaries were set at notional percentages. Our aim was to maintain this standard in the 2019 paper.

Question paper

Overall, candidates performed less well than in 2018 and the paper proved to be more challenging than expected. Centre estimates indicated that the candidates may have been less able than in 2018. Several straightforward questions were badly done. However, ambiguous wording in a couple of questions may have adversely affected some candidates. The grade boundary was lowered to take account of this.

The average mark for the question paper was 53%.

Assignment

Overall, candidates did not perform well in the assignment. Some candidates used the resource sheet inappropriately and the assignment write-up was distinctly poorer than last year across all areas of the assessment.

The average mark for the assignment was 52%.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Section 1: arguments in action

Candidates performed well in the following questions:

♦ **Question 1(a):** most candidates understood the difference between statements and commands and exclamations.
♦ **Question 1(c)(ii):** nearly all candidates correctly stated the premise and conclusion of Alexander's argument.
♦ **Question 1(d):** most candidates gave two correct premises to make a valid argument.

Section 2: knowledge and doubt

Candidates performed best in the following questions:

♦ **Question 2(a):** many candidates correctly identified the appropriate descriptions of rationalism, empiricism and scepticism.
♦ **Question 2(b):** the majority of candidates achieved a good mark on Hume's definition of impressions and ideas.

Section 3: moral philosophy

Candidates performed well in the following questions:

♦ **Question 3(c):** most candidates were generally able to describe Bentham's hedonic calculus.
♦ **Question 3(e):** the majority of candidates achieved a good mark for this question on Mill's higher and lower pleasures.

Assignment

Candidates who chose a straightforward philosophical question or claim tended to achieve the highest marks in the assignment. As in previous years, candidates found section A (description) the most straightforward.

The most successful assignments regularly referred back to the question during the course of the write-up and were more likely to show logical progression throughout. These assignments achieved the most marks.

Candidates who set out their view at the beginning of the assignment and argued to that conclusion tended to perform well.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 2: knowledge and doubt
Candidates found the following questions demanding.

- **Question 2(c):** many candidates struggled to gain any marks in this question. They were expected to explain that:
    — the idea of God is complex
    — we form an idea of God using ideas based on impressions
    — we argue (or any suitable synonym) the qualities of goodness and wisdom (or any other suitable qualities) to form the idea of God

- **Question 2(d):** a significant number of candidates misunderstood the question. Some candidates received some marks for referring to complex ideas. However, to gain full marks candidates were expected to refer to content such as:
    — Hume says there are no ideas without impressions
    — if we have defective sense organs, we cannot form impressions of certain things
    — if we have no impression of colour, then we have no idea of it
    — Laplanders can't imagine the taste of wine because they have had no prior impressions of wine
    — a selfish heart can't imagine generosity
    — animals may have ideas that we don't have because they have access to different impressions

- **Question 2(g):** this question was not answered well and many candidates did not receive any marks. Candidates were expected to state that Descartes concludes that, as he could be dreaming, he cannot trust any knowledge gained from his sense experiences.

- **Question 2(i):** This question on Descartes' deceiving God argument was not done well. Candidates appeared to be confused between the deceiving God argument and the malicious demon device. Candidates were expected to refer to Descartes' use of the deceiving God to cast doubt over knowledge based on reason. For example, God may even be deceiving him about mathematical truths; his speculation that God is deceiving him about the existence of the entire world; Descartes' conclusion that the foundations for all of his knowledge are undermined by the possibility that God might be deceiving him.

Section 3: moral philosophy
Candidates found the following questions demanding.

- **Question 3(d):** candidates were expected to refer to at least one of the components of the hedonic calculus in their answer, for example 'returning the wallet would give you and the owner immediate and certain pleasure'.

♦ **Question 3(h):** a considerable number of candidates received 0 or 1 mark for this question on Utilitarianism. Candidates were expected to include content such as:
— predicted v actual consequences
— short-term v long-term consequences
— local v global consequences
— examples to explain the difficulty of predicting consequences

♦ **Question 3(j):** a quarter of candidates achieved full marks for this question. However, over a quarter of candidates received 0 marks. The mandatory content clearly states that candidates need to know the main features and three common criticisms of a moral theory other than Utilitarianism.

Assignment

Some scripts were submitted without a title. This clearly disadvantaged the candidate. Candidates were also disadvantaged where they simply gave an area of philosophy as their title. For example, 'Epistemology' is not acceptable as a title. It should be clear to the marker what the title is.

Twelve of the available 20 marks for the assignment are awarded for analysis and criticisms. Candidates continued to find this area demanding, with large numbers struggling with these sections.

Some candidates struggled to deal with their chosen philosophical question or claim. Simply writing down all they know about a particular topic will not accrue marks. Candidates must respond to their own question or claim in a relevant and appropriate manner. The assignment should read as a connected piece of writing and not as a series of separate sections.

Resource sheets were sometimes used inappropriately, For example, some resource sheets contained a mini version of the assignment and others contained coded messages for the candidate.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should ensure that candidates are fully prepared to answer questions on all areas of the mandatory course content as listed in the course specification. The headings from the mandatory course content are below, with a brief outline of what teachers and lecturers are expected to cover with their candidates.

Section 2: knowledge and doubt

At this level, it is not mandatory for candidates to read Hume's original text but it is essential that candidates know and understand the mandatory course content.

Arguments concerning the origin of ideas

Hume gives two arguments to support the claim that all ideas are copies of impressions:

1. *All ideas can be traced back to earlier impressions*
Hume argues that any idea you can think of, no matter how complex, can always be traced back to impressions we have experienced. He gives the example of the complex idea of God. Candidates should be able to explain how the complex idea of God works.

2. *If I don't have the impression, then I don't have the corresponding idea*
Hume argues that, when a person does not have an impression, they also don't have the idea: they lack the corresponding idea as they have not gained the impression to derive the idea from. Candidates should be able to describe Hume's three examples of this: malfunctioning senses; absence of relevant experience; absence due to species limitation.

Impressions and ideas including simple and complex ideas

Candidates should be able to explain and give examples of what Hume meant by impressions and ideas. They are expected to explain simple and complex ideas with examples such as Hume's 'golden mountain' and 'virtuous horse'. They should be aware of Hume's response to the apparently unlimited nature of the imagination and able to explain the 'operations of the imagination' in terms of compounding/transposing/augmenting/diminishing. (Suitable synonyms for these terms can be used.)

Missing shade of blue

Candidates should be able to explain Hume's counter-example of the missing shade of blue and suggest problems with it.

Section 3: moral philosophy

It is important that teachers and lecturers cover more than the headings in the mandatory course content of moral philosophy.

Calculating potential happiness:

Candidates should be able to explain Bentham's hedonic calculus and show how it works by applying it to an example. They should also be able to describe problems with the hedonic calculus.

Candidates should be able to explain and give examples of what Mill meant by higher and lower pleasures, and refer to competent judges. Candidates should also be able to describe problems with Mill's theory of higher and lower pleasures.

Difficulty of predicting consequences

Candidates are required to do more than simply repeat that there is a difficulty in predicting consequences. They should be able to offer examples to explain the difficulty of predicting consequences and make several points about the 'difficulty of predicting consequences' — roughly half a page in the exam booklet and enough content to gain 6 marks. Areas explored on the 'difficulty of predicting consequences' might be:

♦ predicted v actual consequences
♦ short-term v long-term consequences
♦ local v global consequences

Centres should also make candidates aware that they could be asked to write for 6 marks on both **evil pleasures** and **tyranny of the majority.**

Assignment

It is important that candidates take care in choosing their philosophical question or claim. As in previous years, some candidates made the assignment more challenging for themselves by choosing questions or claims which sit more easily in other subjects, such as English, RMPS or Modern Studies. This meant they were unable to access all the available marks.

At the beginning of the research process, it is worth cross-checking the marking instructions against the proposed title to ensure the chosen topic allows candidates to access all the available marks. Centres should give candidates a copy of the marking instructions.

The assignment task expects candidates to engage in description, analysis and criticisms in the context of a coherent piece of writing. Failure to cover all of these areas will mean a loss of marks. In particular, failure to cover criticisms will mean an immediate loss of 6 marks. However good the description might be, it can only be awarded a total of 6 marks.

Centres should advise candidates how to use the resource sheet effectively. The resource sheet must not contain a coded plan for the assignment, or a partially written assignment. Candidates will not be credited for direct lifts from the resource sheet. Resource sheets are checked to ensure they contain no more than the permitted 200 words. Although no marks are awarded for the resource sheet, markers scrutinise them carefully and malpractice is penalised. Resource sheets must be submitted along with the candidate's assignment for the 2019-20 session. A penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the subject page of the SQA website.

While it is acceptable for teachers and lecturers to give generic advice to the whole class, teaching the assignment as a whole-class exercise with all candidates doing the same topic is unacceptable. The individual nature of the task will be reflected in the content of the resource sheet.

SQA will carry out an investigation if all the candidates from the same centre submit resource sheets with similar content.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	270

Number of resulted entries in 2019	272

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	26.8%	26.8%	73	66
B	18.0%	44.9%	49	56
C	15.4%	60.3%	42	46
D	18.0%	78.3%	49	36
No award	21.7%	-	59	-

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.