



Course Report 2018

Subject	Classical Studies
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Component 1: question paper

The question paper performed as expected, and feedback from markers and centres was that it was fair and accessible. A clear majority of centres are now teaching the Heroes and Heroism topic, and it is hoped that centres will embrace the full potential of Classical Studies topics available to study at Advanced Higher.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Candidate performance in the dissertation did not match that of the question paper. The general feeling of markers was that many candidates did not follow the published guidance, and as a result failed to show the research skills required at Advanced Higher.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Candidates generally performed very well in the question paper, suggesting they were well prepared. The answers to the modern comparison questions were greatly improved compared with previous years.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Candidates tended to focus well on the skills of analysis and evaluation in their dissertations. Very few candidates had an excessive amount of narrative in their work.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Candidates tended to find the comparison of sources questions in part A: Classical Literature the most demanding.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Most candidates struggled to gain marks for justification. Advice about this is in the next section. More candidates than usual picked titles for their dissertation which were too general, and which left little scope for presenting an argument. If candidates do not present an argument, they are unable to access the marks allocated for this skill. Many candidates' projects appeared to be modelled on their Higher assignments. This meant they struggled to gain marks, as the expectations for the Advanced Higher dissertation are different from the expectations for the Higher assignment. Candidates who based their dissertations very closely on topics examined in the question paper didn't perform well, as they did not present a clear argument.

Candidates' dissertations which had a 'To what extent...?' title didn't perform well. This form of title seemed to lead too many candidates into producing a long essay which weighed up several points of view in a superficial way, rather than a dissertation which presents a sustained line of in depth argument about a specific classical studies issue. Such a title will not necessarily lead to a weak project, but the experience of the markers was that such titles did not often lead to strong dissertations.

Candidates who tackled topics which appeared to have very strong personal meaning for them, for example a religious doctrine, often found it difficult to be objective about their evidence and as a result did not demonstrate a high level of understanding in their analysis and evaluation.

A significant proportion of candidates did not select appropriate material for comparison. Often it appeared that candidates were trying to make something they knew about fit their discussion, rather than attempting to research relevant examples for comparison. For example, it is not acceptable to compare a character in a story with a real-life person from history. Doing this could, in a suitable context, be considered evaluative or analytical, but candidates cannot be awarded comparison marks.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Centres should ensure that candidates practise all the different question types throughout the year, so that they are fully aware how to access the marks for them in the question paper. For example some candidates seemed unaware that an 'In what ways...?' question does not logically require any consideration of limitations and omissions, and so no marks can be accessed for points of that nature in this question type.

A few candidates seemed to confuse the 'In what ways...?' and 'To what extent...?' question types, with the 'How fully...?' and the 'Evaluate the usefulness...' questions from Higher Classical Studies. Centres should stress the skills assessed in these question types.

Centres should also make sure that candidates carefully practise the 15 mark 'Compare two sources' questions throughout the year, as many candidates failed to make effective use of the extracts in the question paper. Centres should also stress to candidates that they are not expected to add any modern comparisons of their own to any question in the question paper. The modern comparison question simply asks the candidate to compare the classical texts they have read with the modern ideas which are presented in the question.

Centres teaching Heroes and Heroism need to make sure that candidates understand what the heroic values of classical Greek and Roman society were, as some candidates seemed unsure.

Component 2: project–dissertation

Candidates need to understand that the dissertation is the culmination of several months of personal research and that the marks are awarded for showing the skills this requires. Centres need to ensure that candidates are fully aware of the way in which marks are allocated and should guide students carefully in their selection of a research topic. An Advanced Higher dissertation requires a well-constructed argument which uses academic language and reasoning of an advanced level. To prepare candidates for this, centres should spend time looking at academic articles with candidates to familiarise them with the standard of work appropriate at Advanced Higher.

The introduction is still proving difficult for candidates. Teachers and lecturers should spend time helping candidates understand the purpose of the introduction. It is to introduce their work: to describe their own thought process in planning and carrying out the research. It is not similar to the way in which a candidate may introduce an essay, by giving a summary or synopsis of the topic. It needs to contain an explanation of the topic, and a reason why the candidate thought the topic required investigation in a classical studies context. It is expected that candidates find their topic interesting or rewarding, therefore that fact alone does not gain any marks.

Centres should encourage candidates to initially research a topic to find out what specific research question would make an interesting dissertation about that topic; then to devise a title for a research project. Candidates who do not do this find it very hard to access the justifying marks, since they have not used any academic research or judgement in order to

select their title. These candidates find it very difficult to discuss other possible titles about the same topic, which they could have selected.

Candidates are also expected to describe how they researched their topic, which should be a description of what sources they used and why. Teachers and lecturers must also stress to candidates that the introduction to a dissertation should be the last thing written. It is only once the process of research and writing of the argument is complete, that a candidate can then describe that process and justify it. Appendix 1: instructions for candidates in the project–dissertation assessment task contains specific advice on this, and centres should try to make sure that all candidates read and understand this document.

Teachers and lectures should regularly check candidates' progress to make sure that they are demonstrating the use of sources within their work. It is extremely difficult to show clear use of sources if their source material is not quoted and discussed.

Teachers and lectures should guide candidates away from using jargon terms such as 'hindsight' or 'limitation', which assume that the marker automatically understands their point. These terms may be used, but the candidate needs to show that they have a full understanding of what this means.

Centres must ensure that candidates know how to show use of physical sources in their arguments if they have chosen to put them into their dissertation. Simply saying that a physical source exists is not evidence of using it: candidates must discuss any physical sources they include in order to gain marks.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	32
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	47
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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	38.3%	38.3%	18	105
B	34.0%	72.3%	16	90
C	19.1%	91.5%	9	75
D	6.4%	97.9%	3	67
No award	2.1%	-	1	-

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 which 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.

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 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.