



Course Report 2017

Subject	Economics
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The question paper performed well and in line with expectations.

Section 1 provided a level of demand that allowed strong candidates to access all questions. Those candidates who had kept abreast of current economic news were able to draw on knowledge that allowed them to score highly in this section.

Most candidates performed well in section 2, and there was evidence of good preparation for this section.

All the essays in section 3 were chosen, but there was a tendency for candidates to choose either question 9 or question 11.

Component 2: Project

The performance this year was good and, indeed, some outstanding work was presented by a small cohort of candidates. However, some candidates presented a project that was highly descriptive and narrative and, as such, did not gain significant analysis and evaluation marks.

Not all candidates answered the specific title they chose, which resulted in some low marks being awarded. There was also some evidence of a limited range of topics chosen.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

In general, section 2 was done well. Stronger candidates were able to supply correctly labelled diagrams that were accurate and fully explained in the text.

Many candidates could provide excellent answers to question 8 (a) comparing the characteristics of perfect competition and monopoly.

There were some very good answers to question 9 (b) that asked candidates to describe the reasons why unemployment remained low in 2016. Also, question 11 (b) on quantitative easing was generally answered to a very high standard.

Component 2: Project

Candidates performed slightly better in the project this year than last. In particular, almost every candidate submitted a project with an introduction that provided background information and signposted the aims.

Projects were also generally well presented, with consistent use of economic terminology and effective use of diagrams/charts/graphs etc. Referencing and the use of footnotes were also done to a good standard.

The best candidates were able to use section headings to direct the argument around key areas, affording them the opportunity to present in-depth analytical and evaluative comments throughout, building synthesis into their response.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

The question in section 1 asking candidates to describe the difference between a budget deficit and the national debt proved challenging for many candidates. Some candidates did not understand the term 'regional disparities' and therefore found it difficult to explain the reasons for such large regional economic differences within the UK.

Some candidates also seemed to confuse productivity and production, and therefore struggled with question 2 in section 1.

There was a tendency for some candidates to provide simple descriptions and not follow the command words that ask them to explain, analyse and evaluate.

Component 2: Project

Some candidates scored low marks because they did not directly deal with the specific title set.

Some candidates wrote in a descriptive manner and, as such, did not make evaluative comments. Very few candidates managed to provide in-depth analysis, whilst others suffered from not being able to provide evidence for their analysis with research.

Although candidates did include diagrams/tables/charts in their project, many candidates did not refer to them or made 'token gesture' brief comments about them — again not fully using the evidence to support an analytical argument.

Some candidates placed too much emphasis on the use of historical data without providing research sources that were up-to-date and relevant to the economic arguments put forward.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

It is imperative that candidates keep abreast of current economic news, and that they regularly digest credible sources of news either via broadsheet newspapers, television news reporting, or the internet. The contemporary nature of the question paper should already highlight the paramount importance of this to candidates. Those candidates who can demonstrate knowledge of ongoing and current economic trends set themselves apart from candidates who rely solely on economic theory in their responses.

It is further advised that candidates are fully familiar with economic terminology and are able to accurately reproduce microeconomic diagrams and explain them.

Component 2: Project

Centres should support candidates in selecting a suitable issue and question. Complex titles can present candidates with the problem of disentangling the issue, which will invariably deliver a project lacking in in-depth analysis. It is also advised that candidates choose a current issue where there is clear debate.

Candidates who can provide analytical commentary and critical evaluative judgements based on evidence are best placed to produce a strong project. The quality and breadth of research presented will also invariably determine the level of analysis. Therefore, research should be up-to-date, and although historical sources can sometimes provide useful context, they should not be over-used.

Candidates should also explain the relevance of any graphs/diagrams/tables to the issue under investigation. This will also assist in driving the analysis through.

Finally, caution should be applied to the thought of 'up-scaling' a Higher assignment. The best projects submitted are the ones where the basic foundations — research and structure — are built around the academic standards and requirements of the Advanced Higher specifications.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	96
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	82
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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 -				
A	45.1%	45.1%	37	84
B	34.1%	79.3%	28	72
C	18.3%	97.6%	15	60
D	1.2%	98.8%	1	54
No award	1.2%	-	1	-

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.