Course Report 2017

Subject	Economics
Level	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 in line with expectations, and feedback from the marking team suggested it was fair.

Although a range of marks were attained in the question paper, the majority of candidates appeared well prepared and knowledgeable of many aspects of the course. Section 1 of the paper in particular allowed many candidates to attain good marks in response to questions based on the stimulus material.

There was no evidence that candidates experienced poor time management or were unable to complete the paper.

Component 2: Assignment

Assignments were generally well done.

Most candidates structured their report well. There was evidence that candidates had a clear understanding of the requirements and marking criteria of this component.

Performance in areas requiring evaluation and analysis were slightly better done than in previous years.

Those candidates who selected accessible titles which were up-to-date, and who were able to develop their analytical points with clear links to evidence, tended to score highly.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1

Question 1 (b) (ii): Questions describing theory such as methods of calculating unemployment rates were done very well.

Question 1 (e): Candidates were able to attain good marks in this question by drawing well-labelled and correct diagrams. However, it should be noted that no extra written explanation is required when the command word simply asks candidates to ‘Draw’.

Section 2

Question 2 (b): The majority of candidates were able to fully describe the characteristics of a perfectly competitive market.

Question 3 (b): Candidates who were able to develop their explanations of the effects of fiscal policy scored well.

Question 4 (a): Candidates tended to provide good explanations of different forms of economic assistance.

Component 2: Assignment

The vast majority of candidates structured their reports clearly and scored very well on the Introduction, Research and Structure sections. The Application and Understanding section was generally well done — indeed there was a tendency among some candidates to write excessively in this section which, given the time constraint for the 'write-up' phase, could be ill-advised.

There was an improvement in the ability of candidates to score well in the Conclusions/ Recommendations section.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1

Question 1 (a) and Question 1 (c) (i): Some candidates were unable to provide clear definitions of basic economic terms.

Section 2

Question 2 (c): Many candidates made poor attempts at drawing the long-run average cost curve, and many also confused their explanation of long run with costs in the short run.

Question 3 (a) (i): Candidates who were unclear on devolved powers did not score well on this question.

Component 2: Assignment

Again, choice of topic has a significant bearing on the successful completion of the report.

This year a range of reports focused on Brexit, but without verified economic data to use as evidence these reports scored poorly in the Analysis and Evaluation section. Centres are reminded that candidates should focus their report on a question, and one for which sufficient information is available. The question should be on a topic embedded in the Higher Economics course content, and should be based on recent economic issues, ie the last two to five years, and not on speculation.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

It is essential that candidates read questions carefully, and that they understand and respond to both the command word and any other key words in the question.

Centres are asked to remind candidates that knowledge of current trends (eg in inflation and unemployment) and the underlying reasons for the trends, are now included in the course assessment, and that they should therefore be prepared to provide such details, without stimulus material.

Component 2: Assignment

The standard of the assignment was again high. However, centres are reminded that:

- In the Research section, the marks are allocated for the evaluation of the research source, not for the details found in the source.
- Candidates should not have access to the internet during the ‘write-up’ phase, and the appropriate time allocation should be adhered to.
- Conclusions/recommendations must be based on evidence already analysed in the report. No marks will be awarded in this section for conclusions/recommendations based on ‘new’ information.

Centres should avoid large groups or entire classes addressing the same topic title.

Centres should adopt the following guidelines when advising candidates about the ‘write-up’ phase.

If candidates are using IT:

- margins should be at least 2.5cm
- line spacing should be at least 1.5 lines
- fonts should be at least equivalent to Times New Roman size 11/12

And for all candidates:

- page numbers should be inserted on every page
- candidates should ensure their name is on every page

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	558

Number of resulted entries in 2017	642

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	42.2%	42.2%	271	70
B	20.2%	62.5%	130	60
C	18.7%	81.2%	120	50
D	5.8%	86.9%	37	45
No award	13.1%	-	84	-

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.