



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Economics
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Fewer centres entered their candidates this year, so comments pertain to a smaller cohort than previously. Overall candidates had been well-prepared for this examination and performed to a high standard. Some centres could have considered entering a few candidates at a lower level when it was clear they were struggling to reach the level of attainment required to pass at Higher level.

Most candidates were aware of the rubric of the examination, but a few undertook more than two essays in Section B, which did not help their performance in the examination overall.

Some candidates did not realise that on many questions there are no marks for identifying a term or concept without relevant description or explanation.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Section A

Item B was generally well-answered, with many candidates demonstrating excellent knowledge and understanding of relevant economic concepts and theories. Item B (e) was particularly strong for many candidates who wrote with accuracy on fiscal and monetary policy. Items B(f) (i) and (ii) on real wages were well done.

Section B

Essay 1 was popular with candidates and was generally well answered.

Essay 1 (a): The best candidates were able to not only explain the basic economic problem, but directly tackled why scarcity can never be solved. Part (c) on market failure gave candidates opportunity to demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding of market failure.

Essay 5(a) (i): This was well done. Many candidates were able to accurately draw the circular flow of income diagram showing injections and leakages. (ii) The best candidates were able to explain the multiplier effect using a numerical example and the formula. Parts (b) and (c) on aid and development were well done too, with many candidates being well-prepared on this area of the syllabus.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A

Item A (b): Some candidates were unable to apply their knowledge to this question and struggled to come up with relevant responses.

Item A (f) (i) and (ii): Some candidates were unable to define the price elasticity of supply.

Item A (f) (ii): Some candidates were unable to extend their understanding of the price elasticity of supply to accurately respond to this question.

Item B (a): Many candidates were unable to interpret the graph and did not appreciate that the graph showed both a recession and recovery.

Section B

Essay 4 (c) Some candidates were unable to identify supply-side policies and explain their impact on unemployment. Part (d) (ii) was poorly done by a few candidates who seemed unprepared for this question.

Essay 6 (a)(ii): A few candidates misinterpreted this question and wrote on the price elasticity of demand. Parts (i) and (ii) showed that some candidates find the Balance of Payments a difficult area of the syllabus.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	620
Number of resulted entries in 2015	421

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark – 100				
A	55.1%	55.1%	232	70
B	20.9%	76.0%	88	59
C	13.1%	89.1%	55	48
D	5.7%	94.8%	24	42
No award	5.2%	-	22	-

For this Course, grade boundaries have been stable for a number of years and the intention was to set similar grade boundaries to previous years. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.