Course Report 2015

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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

Some candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge of economic theory and good understanding of command words, while others struggled to attain sufficient marks in certain topics. Almost all candidates attempted every question. There was no evidence to suggest that the non-optional nature of the question paper left candidates unable to finish or attempt all sections.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates selected a wide range of topics, from locally-based issues to more general economic areas. Although some excellent Assignments were produced, and many candidates successfully met the criteria for success, there were many for whom performance in this component was poorer than expected.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

There were several questions which some candidates did not read carefully enough, for example describing the Bank of England rather than the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in question 3(a), or discussing the European Union instead of the Eurozone in question 4(b).

There were several questions for which some candidates were unable to provide sufficient depth of answer. Examples include:

- In question 3 (a), many candidates knew that the MPC sets interest rates, but struggled to write enough to gain development marks or provide another role.
- In question 3 (b), some candidates provided simple descriptions of the effects of increased interest rates, but did not explain the impact of these on the UK economy.
- In question 3 (c) many candidates achieved marks for the diagram but struggled to attain the additional marks available for explaining the multiplier.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates who performed well tended to be those who had considered and adhered to the layout suggested by SQA — this tended to produce well-structured reports which tackled all aspects required.

An appropriate choice of topic for the Assignment proved tricky for some candidates. Those who selected very broad economic topics such as ‘Unemployment’ tended to be unable to attain good marks for evaluation and analysis, and therefore, while they produced sound economic theory, they were unable to earn high marks overall. Other poor choices included topics that provided only limited opportunity for appropriate economic content and/or analysis, leading the candidates more towards issues focusing on, for example Geography, Politics or Business Management.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates tended to perform well in the following questions:

- In question 1 (a) (ii) many candidates successfully described effects on the balance of payments of increased sales of Scottish textiles.
- In question 1 (a) (iii) many candidates provided good descriptions of the effects of a strong pound.
- In question 1 (d) candidates tended to discuss the effects on government finances of increased employment well.
- In question 2 (a) many candidates produced good descriptions of opportunity cost.
- In question 4 (a) many candidates succeeded in producing good descriptions of multinational location factors.

Component 2: Assignment

Research

Candidates generally demonstrated evidence of a good range of research sources.

Application and Understanding

This section was tackled well by the majority of candidates — successfully including information from at least two viewpoints, along with a range of economic theory.

Conclusions

Those candidates who chose a straightforward and accessible topic/question for their Assignment tended to perform well in this section.

Structure

Many candidates achieved good marks in this section, using the recommended headings, and including charts and applying economic theory consistently.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question Paper

Candidates tended to perform less well in the following questions:

- In question 1 (a) (i), many candidates failed to clearly relate exports to the passage.
- In question 2 (b) (i), some candidates failed to explain the price mechanism clearly.
- In question 2 (b) (ii), some candidates failed to produce sufficient examples of government intervention, or failed to explain them clearly.
- In question 4 (b), some candidates failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of Eurozone impacts.
- In question 4 (c), candidates described floating exchange rates rather than providing advantages and/or disadvantages of this type of exchange rate.
- While candidates were relatively good at describing price elasticity of demand in question 1 (c) (i), they were not so good at explaining it with the help of a diagram. In addition, the elasticity diagram in question 1(c) (ii) was often poorly labelled.

Component 2: Assignment

Introduction

While some candidates made the purpose of their report very clear, earning the full 3 marks, there were many who failed to 'set the scene' adequately, neglecting to provide sufficient background information relevant to the issue being explored.

Research

The majority of candidates provided good insight into the contents of their research findings, and included sufficient sources of research, but many failed to include any detail regarding the usefulness and/or validity of their choice of research source.

Analysis and Evaluation

Those candidates who achieved low overall marks often lost marks in this section, neglecting to provide their own interpretation of their research findings. Descriptions of the findings were insufficient to earn marks in this section. A poor topic selection for the Assignment often coincided with an inability to provide sufficient depth and breadth of analysis.

Conclusions

Some candidates did not justify their final conclusions.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

In Section 1, when a question includes the instruction 'Your response must make reference to information provided in the article', it is recommended that candidates quote from the passage by careful selection of a meaningful exemplification of their response.

Many candidates produced excellent, well-labelled diagrams to illustrate their answers when required, but from a technical point of view, centres should advise candidates to avoid use of colour in their diagrams due to the black and white nature of the scanning process for e-marking.

Centres should continue to guide candidates to correct application of command words as recommended on the SQA website.

Component 2: Assignment

When providing background information in the Introduction section, candidates would be better to focus on particular economic aspects regarding their choice of issue rather than personal reasons, such as ‘because it affects my college’ or ‘because my rugby club may be affected’.

It is recommended that candidates not only include relevant graphs/charts in their appendices, but also remember to refer to them effectively and meaningfully in the body of their Assignment. Inserting page numbers would also enhance structure.

Centres are advised to consider the instructions available on the SQA website when guiding their candidates through the Assignment. For example, the recommended headings provide candidates with the basis for an effective structure. It is also recommended that centres advise their candidates to confine themselves to analysis of economic issues contained in the Higher Economics Course when selecting the topic for their Assignment.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0

Number of resulted entries in 2015	179

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	35.8%	35.8%	64	67
B	26.3%	62.0%	47	57
C	17.9%	79.9%	32	47
D	10.6%	90.5%	19	42
No award	9.5%	-	17	0

For this Course, the intention was to set the boundaries at notional. Overall, the assessment was more demanding than intended. The question paper was more challenging with new topics and command words. The boundaries were adjusted by 3 marks below notional for each boundary.

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.