Course Report 2016

Subject	Classical Studies
Level	Higher

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The paper performed well. Analysis showed that the questions presented an equal level of challenge to candidates irrespective of which questions and topics they attempted.

Component 2: Assignment

The changes made to the marking scheme were very successful and allowed candidates to adopt a range of approaches which showed their skills in producing their assignment. On average, candidates performed slightly better in the assignment than in the question paper.

As a result, grade boundaries were set at the notional boundaries for A, B and C grades.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates showed a high degree of knowledge and understanding in the 12-mark questions. Many candidates displayed detail knowledge of the increasing domination of Athens over her allies in the Delian League in Question 2(a). Similarly, for those who attempted Religion and Belief, candidates were able to show how important prayer and sacrifice was to the Greeks, displaying detailed knowledge with good exemplification (Question 4 (a)).

In the Classical Literature questions, candidates scored well in most components, especially in evaluation and knowledge. The texts that were used most often were *Medea, Antigone,* and *Oedipus the King.* These were used successfully, as were other texts such as epic poetry and plays such as *Agamemnon* and *Bacchae.* Candidates performed best when they used one or two texts. Both questions produced some outstanding responses, where candidates reflected on the issue and context, which was presented with a high degree of skill.

Component 2: Assignment

Many candidates produced excellent assignments, showing careful analysis of an appropriate topic. The vast majority of candidates selected topics from the course content, although a few candidates went outside of this to discuss, for example, art, architecture and other periods of history; many of these candidates did this with considerable success.

Some candidates produced assignments from the content of Power and Freedom. This topic was often analysis of the life of an Athenian Woman, some of which were completed to a high standard, showing for example: differences between rich and poor women; or

challenged ideas — eg did Athenian women really have a miserable life? Candidates could form questions as the basis of their topic ('How democratic was Athens?'), or name a topic ('Democracy in Athens in the Fifth Century BC'); both approaches could be successful and lead to stimulating and thoughtful discussion.

As in 2015, candidates who used literature as the basis of their assignment often scored very well. This may be because there are similarities between the way that essays are marked in Section 2 and the marking scheme of the assignment, and so class work and examination technique interlocks well, as well as making the selection of three sources relatively straightforward.

Markers reported very few issues with the new format of the resource sheet which was used successfully in a variety of ways by candidates; most commonly as a store of sources, or as a general plan.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Some candidates found some aspects of the source evaluation questions (question 1 and question 3) challenging. For example, in question 1, some candidates failed to establish that Plutarch was writing five centuries after the time of Pericles.

In establishing the purpose of the source, candidates are not credited for giving a general point about the source content, eg in question 3, no marks were awarded for saying that the purpose of the source is to describe Demeter; candidates were expected to understand, for example, that Isocrates was trying to link the Eleusinian mysteries to the city of Athens.

Some candidates did not understand that a 'To what extent …' question involved judgements and tended to concentrate on giving knowledge and understanding.

A number of candidates appeared to ignore the wording of the question on conflict (question 6). They did not show that the context of this question was conflict within families, and produced an essay that suggested a preconceived approach. Whilst credit was given for an understanding of other conflicts found in classical literature (as the wording of the question implied), candidates were expected to show how family conflict was important.

In the essay questions in Section 2, a number of candidates performed poorly in the 'Analysis of the theme in the wider classical world and in the modern world' aspect. Some candidates did not attempt to show how the context was understood generally in the classical world. The following example is based on the Marking Instructions and is reproduced below as an example of good practice:

Candidate text is Oedipus the King
The candidate discusses heroism in the way that it was shown by Homer in the texts such as the Iliad and Odyssey as a physical hero in the shape of a mighty warrior who is of great value to his people, and shows how Oedipus is a hero, but in a different way, as a saviour of his people and an intellectual hero who solves riddles.

Candidates often failed to give appropriate modern comparisons related to the text they had chosen and the context of the question. For example, many candidates discussed how 'conflict' in general is still common in the world by referring to the conflict in Syria or to gender conflict, but not making any connection with their text(s). Candidates should focus on *family* conflict or another type of conflict that they have discussed and which is relevant. For example, a candidate could discuss how family conflict forms the basis of soap operas or 'tabloid talk shows'. Often the plot lines or discussions are based around the conflict of separated and divorcing parents. This can be seen in the play *Medea*, where the children are used by Medea as part of the revenge on her husband when she uses them to deliver the cursed wedding gifts for the new bride, or she kills them to punish Jason.

Component 2: Assignment

The wording of topics for the assignment sometimes appeared to hamper candidates; some often lacked focus and were too vague. Candidates also worded questions with the comparison in the title. This caused problems, as they were scoring very well for modern comparison, but less well for analysis and evaluation as they could not be double-credited.

All topics should have an element of modern comparison, and so it is good practice to advise candidates not to make this the basis of their assignment in itself.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates should be reminded that 12-mark questions are not essays. A large number of candidates gave conclusions that repeated the content and analysis of their answers, and therefore gained no marks. Some candidates also did this for eight-mark source handling questions.

Candidates sometimes forgot to introduce appropriate analysis in the 12-mark questions. Candidates could gain up to two marks for analysis of 'cause and effect', but to score 10 or more marks they had to examine different interpretations, or make contrasts and comparisons. For example, in question10 (a), a candidate would have to show that many Romans did not believe in signs or omens (eg Cicero's comments in 'De Divinatione') to gain a score of 10 or above.

In the 'three source' questions (questions 7 and 9), some candidates simply lifted information from the source in quotes or paraphrases. This is not sufficient to accrue marks. Candidates should interpret the content of the source. For example, in question 9 (source B) the phrase regarding the worship of Vesta is described as an 'old custom'. A candidate should interpret this not by simply saying that Vesta had been worshipped for a long time, but would be expected to say, for example, that this was because fire was a basic need of primitive Romans for survival and so it is little wonder that she had been worshipped from early times, or that by the Classical period many households did not have a hearth, and so Vesta seemed a goddess more appropriate to an earlier time.

A number of candidates also attempted to introduce points of omission after discussing each individual source; if they adopt this approach, candidates often, deliberately or otherwise, write down that points mentioned in other sources are points of omission, giving muddled answers. It is best practice to cover points of omission after dealing with all the sources. Candidates who use two sources instead of three sometimes then use points mentioned in the other source as a point of omission. This is not credited.

Many candidates began or concluded their answer to the 'three source' question by stating that the sources are only 'partly useful'. As this is a truism applicable to every set of three sources, candidates should be aware that it accrues no marks.

Candidates who perform well show depth of knowledge and exemplification. Many candidates make statements in their essays that are of a general nature, and which could be better illustrated with examples or quotations or paraphrases. For example, when describing Oedipus as a hero, many candidates were able to discuss how he tries to save the people from the plague, but then fail to illustrate how he does this (eg sends Creon to the oracle to find a solution, sets up an enquiry led by himself to find out the murderer of Laius etc). Candidates are assessed on the quality of their responses as well as the quantity. The criteria for obtaining six marks of knowledge in the essay is not just giving six facts, but relates to nuance of language and exemplification. Relatively few candidates obtained six marks.

Component 2: Assignment

Many candidates chose appropriate topics that resulted in some excellent assignments. However, centres should issue careful guidance in the topic, as the content is judged against the topic title. Some candidates chose topic titles that did not match the content very well, and hence were unable to access the full range of marks available.

A number of assignments did not reach a standard appropriate to Higher level; some lacked key components such as modern comparisons, or had single sentence conclusions.

Whilst many candidates did complete good assignments on women and slavery, others produced answers that were more appropriate for a National 5 assignment. A good number treated Athenian women as an amorphous group, and some accounts of slavery did little more than discuss the 'jobs' that slaves did. Candidates who performed better challenged the assumptions on the status of Athenian women, producing evidence to show they may have had a fulfilled life and questioned imposing modern viewpoints of feminism on classical Athens; or, in the case of slavery, looked at whether Roman slaves enjoyed a better life in the first century AD than they did a hundred years earlier, and accounted for this.

It is perfectly acceptable for candidates at centres to produce assignments on the same topic, but centres should also take into account personalisation and choice.

Centres are also reminded that the assignment should be completed in controlled conditions, and that candidates are not permitted to revise their assignments at a later date (eg in response to teacher revision comments).

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	97

Number of resulted entries in 2016	422

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	28.7%	28.7%	121	63
B	28.4%	57.1%	120	54
C	22.5%	79.6%	95	45
D	8.5%	88.2%	36	40
No award	11.8%	-	50	0

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.