Course Report 2016

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

Component 1: Question paper

In general, a good range of performance was displayed in the question paper, covering the full range of marks. While some candidates appeared very under-prepared, many performed very well.

In Section 1, candidates were able to make use of the case study in answering the questions, where appropriate.

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

In Section 2, in particular, stronger candidates were able to gain marks for development of points made.

The paper proved slightly more challenging than intended and this was taken into account when the grade boundaries were set.

Component 2: Assignment

Assignments were generally well done.

Most candidates used the recommended headings and incorporated appropriate information under each heading.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1 (b) (ii): Many candidates were able to provide sound reasoning to explain the conflict between government objectives.

Question 1 (c): The labour market diagram tended to be well done and well labelled.

Question 1 (f): Most candidates attained full marks for this question, with good knowledge of fiscal policy.

Question 1 (g): This question tended to be very well done; most candidates were confident when describing government interventions.

Question 2 (b) (i): This question tended to be very well done. Those who failed to maximise marks tended to identify a factor affecting elasticity without describing the effect.

Question 2 (b) (ii): This was generally well done, however a significant number of candidates did not label 'gain' and 'loss', so did not achieve full marks.

Question 2 (c) This question was well done.

Question 3 (b): This tended to be very well done; most candidates were very confident writing about the uses of National Income statistics.

Question 4 (a): Most candidates managed to attain the majority of the marks available for this question.

Component 2: Assignment

Introduction section: The majority of candidates chose suitable economic titles that allowed them to adhere to the assessment criteria. Most candidates scored well when providing background information in this section.

Fewer candidates selected topics that were too vague or too wide. (For example, titles that were very specific were able to attain good marks in the Application and Understanding section for background theory, but struggled to achieve many marks in the Analysis and Evaluation or Conclusion sections due to lack of analysis.)

Research section: Most candidates had used appropriate sources and completed sufficient research. Some candidates, however, included details of their findings, which did not gain them any marks in this section. Centres are reminded that it is the analysis of the value of the sources that gains marks here. In addition, it should be noted that since all information included in the report is presumably ‘relevant’, candidates are expected to explain why certain sources were particularly useful, rather than simply referring to their ‘relevance’.

Application and understanding section: This section was generally tackled well, with more candidates successfully presenting their understanding of the economics of their topic.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1 (a): Some candidates were unable to describe what is meant by ‘austerity’.

Question 1 (b): Candidates appeared to find it difficult to develop answers regarding national debt to a sufficient extent to attain both marks available for this question.

Question 1 (g) (i): A significant number of candidates were unable to clearly explain why income inequality is a market failure.

Question 3 (a): Candidates who failed to describe economic powers were unable to access all the marks available in this question.

Question 3 (c): This question was not done well by a significant number of candidates. Many were not aware of any trends in inflation or what has caused them. In addition, rather than recent trends, many candidates wrote about events that were many years old.

Question 4 (b): Some candidates were unable to describe components of the current account other than trade in goods and services.

Question 4 (c): Although improvements have been made in this area, many candidates continue to find answering questions on absolute and comparative advantage difficult.

Component 2: Assignment

Analysis and evaluation section: Many candidates struggled to attain full marks in this section with insufficient analysis or a lack of their own evaluations of their findings.

Conclusion section: Candidates also found writing their conclusions difficult, often repeating what they had written throughout the report, rather than giving justifications for conclusions they had reached. Often, candidates introduced new information in this section, for which no marks were awarded.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates should be reminded to read questions carefully. For example, full marks cannot be attained if only one description is given when more than one is asked for.

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.

In questions asking candidates to ‘compare’ or ‘describe the difference’, as in question 2 (c), candidates tended to achieve full marks if they drew direct comparisons such as ‘an example of a free good is … whereas an example of an economic good is …’ rather than separate paragraphs of descriptions.

As some candidates misinterpreted questions, they should be advised to read questions carefully and actually answer what is being asked as opposed to what they expect to see.

For candidates who use IT, it is recommended that word processed scripts should be printed in double line spacing and that page numbers are included.

Component 2: Assignment

It is encouraging to see better structure in assignments. Centres are reminded, however, that the time limit for report production is only approximately 1.5 hours, and that it should be produced under a high degree of supervision and control to ensure that evidence submitted by a candidate is the candidate's own work.

Centres should also encourage candidates who are word processing their assignment to use a minimum of 1.5 line spacing, 25mm margins, and font size 12 for a font such as Times New Roman. In addition, the insertion of page numbers is recommended.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	179

Number of resulted entries in 2016	558

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	40.5%	40.5%	226	69
B	22.4%	62.9%	125	59
C	18.3%	81.2%	102	49
D	7.2%	88.4%	40	44
No award	11.6%	-	65	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.