Course Report 2018

Subject	Economics
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

The question paper sampled mandatory content across the three sections of the course, providing candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate a range of skills. The question paper performed largely as expected providing a fair and accessible paper for candidates to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they had acquired across the breadth of the course. Feedback from the marking team confirmed this, and post-examination analysis indicated that the question paper generally provided an appropriate level of demand, and this was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries, with the only adjustments being made to raise the A and upper A boundaries slightly.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed as expected, with many candidates achieving very good marks.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Overall, candidates seemed well prepared in many aspects of the course content assessed.

Questions in which candidates performed particularly well were:

Question 1(c) (i) — candidate responses to questions on inflation are improving, with many able to achieve full marks in this question.

Question 1(e) — describing economic features of the EU did not prove problematic for most candidates.

Question 2(b) —— responses using production possibility curves were generally of a good standard.

Question 3(c) — many candidates were able to access a good number of marks on this question about positive and negative effects of unemployment, with some achieving full marks.

Component 2: assignment

Most centres have clearly informed their candidates about the recommended layouts and format for the assignment and many candidates were therefore able perform very well. In addition, the majority of candidates had chosen suitable topics, with most avoiding the pitfall of previous years — selecting theoretical topics which do not lend themselves well to analysis or conclusions.

A good range of topics were presented alongside a large number about the introduction of sugar tax and alcohol minimum pricing. Encouragingly, many candidates had engaged in a good amount of reading, examining a wide range of sources including broadsheet newspapers.

The 'Introduction', 'Research', and 'Application and understanding' sections were largely completed to a very high standard with many candidates gaining full marks. The 'Analysis and evaluation' section was also completed to a better standard than in previous years, perhaps due to the better choice of topics. Many candidates managed to achieve good marks in this section, based on good research evidence.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Some questions proved more problematic for candidates. These included:

Question 1(b) (i) — some candidates placed the maximum price level above the equilibrium point in their diagram.

Question 1(d) (ii) — some candidates were not able to clearly describe components of the Balance of Payments, and also seemed unclear about what is included in the Balance of Trade.

Question 1(d) (iii) — while many candidates did seem to have some knowledge of the current position on elements of the Balance of Payments, many were unable to describe any actual trends.

Question 2(a) — some candidates failed to provide sufficient explanation of the basic economic problem, instead deviating to explanations of opportunity cost and choices which were not directly relevant to this question.

Question 2(c) — while many candidates were able to earn marks by correctly drawing the short run average cost curve, they were less good at explaining its shape, indeed a number of candidates confused it with long run average costs, incorrectly including explanations of economies and diseconomies of scale in their responses.

Question 3(a) — candidates did not seem to be well versed on the impacts of supply-side policies.

Question 4(a) — comparative advantage continues to be a topic which candidates find challenging. Many attempted to illustrate their answers with numerical examples, but often this was done poorly.

Question 4(c) (ii) — some candidates failed to read the question carefully, and as a result earned no marks due to explaining benefits to the multinational rather than to the developing economy.

Component 2: assignment

The majority of topic titles are good but there are some candidates chose topics which were not posed as a question, for example 'increasing inflation' or 'impact of a hard Brexit'. Such topics do not achieve high marks in the 'Analysis and evaluation' or 'Conclusions/recommendations' sections.

Some candidates placed information in the wrong sections, eg research quoted in the 'Application and understanding' section, leaving less room for mark worthy information.

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. Teachers and lectures should ensure they are familiar with the way that questions attract marks in past question papers and, in particular, their detailed marking instructions.

Teachers and lectures should note the different expectations of questions involving the drawing of a diagram. Questions beginning 'explain, using a diagram' require candidates to draw a diagram and provide explanation in writing, whereas those beginning 'draw a diagram to show' require no written response.

Component 2: assignment

The standard of the assignment was again high — and an improving picture. To improve further, centres should ensure that the topics chosen by candidates are both current/topical and posed as a question.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	642

Number of resulted entries in 2018	656

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	46.8%	46.8%	307	72
B	23.9%	70.7%	157	61
C	14.2%	84.9%	93	50
D	5.3%	90.2%	35	44
No award	9.8%	-	64	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.