Course Report 2018

Subject	Philosophy
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

In 2017 it was noted that the average score for the question paper was lower than might have been expected. This was not due to particular problems with the question paper itself, but with various factors relating to the depth and detail expected, which were specified in the course specification. This issue has also affected performance in 2018.

Centres should note that further detail in the course specification for the Revised National Qualification in Higher Philosophy will help teaching and learning.

Component 2: assignment

The significant problems with the assignment identified in previous years continued. 2018 is the last year that an assignment will form part of the course. To ensure candidates were treated fairly, double marking of the assignment was introduced. Although this alone will not have solved all the problems with the assignment, it has further increased confidence in the quality assurance processes.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper
Once again, candidates gained the highest average mark in the arguments in action section. Candidates performed strongly in the most open questions (for example Question 7 on why a fallacious argument can be persuasive) or in questions that required less precision.

Candidates also did well when giving a simple description of utilitarianism even if, at times, it bordered on the simplistic.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper
Knowledge and doubt
This section of the paper brought the majority of candidates' marks down. The course states that 'all candidates should be able to demonstrate an **in-depth** knowledge and understanding and the ability to analyse and evaluate extracts from [named] rationalist and empiricist texts'. The revised course specification for 2018-2019 contains similar wording and this has been stressed in course reports since 2015.

However, it was clear that most candidates did not have an in-depth knowledge of the texts. This was most evident in Question 14, which required candidates to say how Hume supported his claim that knowledge about causes is never acquired through *a priori* reasoning and always comes from our experience of finding that particular objects are constantly associated with one another. Candidates should be able to write about this by referring to Hume's examples and arguments — a 20-mark essay question in the specimen question paper asks 'To what extent is Hume's view of causation convincing?' Despite this, large numbers of candidates presented what appeared to be a pre-prepared essay on impressions and ideas and made little, if any, connection to Hume's view on causation.

With regard to Descartes, the quotations supplied in Question 9 are key parts of *Meditation I* and candidates might have been expected to immediately recognise the part of Descartes' overall argument to which they referred. The question was not a memory exercise. It was designed to discriminate between those candidates who understood that the order mattered and the argument was progressive, and those who did not.

Question 10 required candidates to state Descartes' reasons for introducing the idea of a malicious demon. However, many candidates had very little to say, despite there being two paragraphs in the text where Descartes, in the guise of the meditator, gives a clear explanation of why he is introducing the demon. Candidates were not required to give a detailed analysis of the text: an accurate summary would have been enough to enable candidates to gain marks for this question.

Moral philosophy
Scenario questions are intended to guide candidates in their approach to the moral theory being discussed. They are designed to steer candidates away from giving a prepared 'tell me

all you know about' essay. Unfortunately, many candidates did not seem to realise this and included lots of information that was not relevant to the question. Most candidates knew that utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory and were able to discuss some consequences related to the scenario. Often, however, any further characterisation of utilitarianism bordered on parody and completely misrepresented the theory.

Candidates' understanding of rule utilitarianism frequently got little further than saying that rule utilitarians follow rules designed to promote happiness. Sometimes not even that. A major problem is that the question required candidates to make clear the difference between act and rule utilitarianism, and many candidates took this to mean they were being asked to discuss Bentham v Mill. Many candidates declared that Bentham invented act utilitarianism and Mill invented rule utilitarianism. As teachers and lecturers are aware, there is an academic debate as to whether it is appropriate to classify Mill as a rule utilitarian. This course does not take a position on that debate. The bigger problem is that, having declared that Mill invented rule utilitarianism, the only other thing a significant number of candidates seemed to know about Mill was that he said something about higher and lower pleasures. Such candidates therefore assumed that higher and lower pleasures are related to rule utilitarianism and were therefore relevant to the scenario. Some candidates also declared that competent judges determine the rules.

Arguments in action
There was a disappointing amount of confusion about argument diagrams. The overwhelming majority of candidates were able to produce an argument that matched the first diagram, but many struggled with the second and third. The problem with the second was that many candidates were unable to accurately distinguish between linked arguments and convergent arguments. For the third diagram, many candidates struggled to find an appropriate example. In some cases, candidates didn't provide arguments but instead gave explanations. Also, there was a tendency for candidates to treat the arrow as a causal link rather than being the equivalent to the word 'therefore'.

Question 4 was particularly disappointing. The 2017 marking instructions and the 2017 course report said that it was not acceptable to state that deductive reasoning is arguing from the general to the specific, or that inductive reasoning is arguing from the specific to the general. Despite this advice, a significant number of candidates still answered in this way.

Question 5 was very similar to a question in the 2017 paper. The course report for 2017 said: 'Candidates should be aware that a number of criteria might need to be satisfied before someone can be considered a legitimate authority.' The marking instructions for 2017 listed five such criteria. Unfortunately, once again, large numbers of candidates were only able to gain 1 mark for this.

Question 8 was problematic. Most candidates were not in a position to describe the main features of a slippery slope argument and the examples proffered were often highly dubious, or were not even arguments but simply a series of extended conditionals.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Centres should provide opportunities for candidates to explore the topics in all areas of the course at a depth appropriate to Higher. A minimal understanding of the material makes it difficult for candidates to achieve more than a bare pass.

There is evidence that centres are relying on outdated course support notes. Older support notes were produced for a particular purpose and for a course that may have had a different emphasis. They do not provide clarification and guidance on the current course. The same is true of older question papers and their associated marking instructions.

For the knowledge and doubt area of study, we repeat that teachers and lecturers must read the text with their candidates, and that candidates must be able to explain all relevant terminology and evaluate the claims and arguments presented in the text. Particularly with Descartes' *Meditations I and II* and Hume's *Enquiries* Section II, teachers and lecturers are strongly advised to start by reading the text, explaining the text, and discussing the text. With the other parts of the *Meditations* and *Enquiries,* background explanation should be followed by a careful reading of the text to help ensure that candidates have the in-depth knowledge and understanding that the course requires.

For the moral philosophy area of study, it is crucial that centres address the issue of superficiality and misunderstandings of content. Centres should note that the course specification (2018-2019) requires candidates to demonstrate an **in-depth** knowledge and understanding of utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, and to analyse and evaluate the distinction between act and rule utilitarianism.

For the arguments in action area of study, centres should note the problems listed in previous course reports and the areas of weakness highlighted this year. It may be particularly helpful to remember that the skills of analysis and evaluation presuppose certain knowledge and understanding. For example, candidates are expected to be able to identity a fallacious appeal to authority, but they can also be expected to describe and explain this fallacy.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	764

Number of resulted entries in 2018	742

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	23.0%	23.0%	171	51
B	20.9%	43.9%	155	43
C	18.2%	62.1%	135	36
D	11.7%	73.9%	87	32
No award	26.1%	-	194	-

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 SQA's management team.

♦ 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.
♦ 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.