Course Report 2018

Subject	Economics
Level	National 5

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

This was the first year in which the total mark allocation for the question paper was raised from 70 to 90 marks.

All candidates completed the paper within the time allocated.

Candidates may have been confused by the wording of question 4(c) (ii) with particular the reference to the price per bottle in euros. The marking instructions for this question were widened to take account of this.

Overall the question paper was judged to be slightly more accessible than intended for A candidates and the grade boundaries were adjusted to take account of this.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed as expected. Given the frequency with which the sugar tax, Brexit, interest rates and exchange rates have been in the news this year it was unsurprising that these were the most popular topics for the assignment.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 1(a) (i) — a market was well defined.
Question 1(b) — market diagrams were generally well drawn.
Question 1(c) — a variable cost was given in the context of Highland Spring.
Question 1(d) (i) — barriers to trade were well described.
Question 2(d) — benefits of falling unemployment were well described.
Question 2(h) (i) — fixed costs were well defined.
Question 2(h) (ii) — costs curves were well drawn.
Question 3(a) — taxes were named correctly.
Question 3(d) — current and capital spending were well distinguished.
Question 4(c) (i) — an exchange rate was well defined.
Question 6(a) (ii) — good advice about borrowing was suggested.
Question 7(c) — the circular flow of income diagram was well drawn.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates performed well in the 'Introduction' and 'Research sources' sections of the assignment.

In a change to the assessment criteria this session, marks were allocated for 'findings' as well as for 'analysis and interpretation'. This change made the 'Findings, analysis and interpretation' section much more accessible to candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Overall, significant numbers of candidates still find 'explain' questions demanding.

Question 1(a) (ii) — many candidates found it hard to give enough reasons for the downward slope of a demand curve.
Question 1(e) — many candidates found it hard to give enough steps in the way inflation is measured.
Question 2(f) — significant numbers of candidates gave an advantage of being a European country, rather than being a member of the EU, or did not explain their answer.
Question 2(g) — many candidates found it hard to develop their explanation to gain full marks, and several did not explain their answer.
Question 3(c) — many candidates did not know what a transfer payment was, and of those who did a significant number only gave one example.
Question 5(a) — significant numbers of candidates failed to draw the correct diagram which consequently meant that their explanation was inappropriate.
Question 5(c) — several candidates could not explain the concept of an upward sloping supply curve, or confused their explanation with changes in demand.

Question 6(a) (i) — several candidates gave types of loans, rather than types of financial institutions.
Question 6(b) — many candidates found it hard to explain enough effects on borrowers of an increase in interest rates.
Question 6(c) — many candidates found it hard to give more than 'unlimited wants but limited resources' in their answer
Question 7(a) (ii) — significant numbers of candidates could not adequately describe the causes of inflation they had identified in Q7(a) (i).

Component 2: assignment

Significant number of candidates are still finding the 'Conclusions and recommendations' section testing. The main pitfalls are not justifying their conclusions and/or recommendations; bringing new material into the section for which no foundation has been laid in the 'Findings, analysis and interpretation' section; and merely repeating an analysis point with no development.

Some candidates still find the 'Theory' section challenging and did not incorporate theory points into the body of the 'Findings, analysis and interpretation' section. A small number of candidates used a discrete heading for their theory, despite the coursework assessment task explicitly saying that this should not be done.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Centres should give candidates maximum practise time with ‘explain’ questions. Marks should be allocated on the basis of one mark for each double-barrelled answer containing a ‘what and a why’, a ‘what and a how’, a ‘what and a therefore’, or a ‘what and a so what’. (Candidates who only give descriptions in explain question are not awarded marks.) For explain questions worth more than one mark, centres should ensure that candidates give not only the first, but every subsequent answer, in a double-barrelled format.

Centres should allow candidates practise time on microeconomics diagrams, including the surplus and shortage diagram which has proved difficult.

Centres should make sure that candidates understand that any question that asks for a diagram to show a market must have both a demand and a supply curve on the same diagram.

Centres should make sure candidates are using the correct axes labels (particularly costs/output rather than price/quantity for costs diagrams).

Centres should ensure that candidates are clear about the differences between Europe, the EU and the Eurozone.

Finally, centres should encourage candidates to re-read questions and scripts to ensure that they have given an appropriate number of points or examples and have answered appropriately in relation to the command word used.

Component 2: assignment

Centres should ensure that candidates use headings to provide their work with a structured format.

Centres should ensure that in the ‘Findings, analysis and interpretation’ section candidates follow the marking guidelines. There must be a source for every finding, and there must be a finding for any point of analysis. For example, a candidate should give a source, a finding and then an analytical point (with a maximum of three analytical points coming from any one finding).

Centres must ensure that candidates know how to justify a conclusion or recommendation.

Centres should ensure that candidates know to incorporate their theory points in the ‘Findings, analysis and interpretation’ section. Candidates should not include theory in the ‘Introduction’ section, or give their theory points under a separate heading.

Centres are reminded that whilst there is no restriction on candidates selecting the same topic as others, all candidates must gather their own research and produce their report on their own.

Centres are reminded that the assignment no longer has a discrete write-up phase. There is flexibility in how completing the assignment is administered in centres. The notional five hours for the assignment allows candidates to research and produce their report over time.

Centres are reminded that there is a word count rather than a page count for the assignment, which should allow candidates the opportunity to think about the final presentation of their report.

Centres should remind candidates to check that the number/name of each source in the body of the report matches with the number/name of the source in the appendices.

Centres should ensure that candidates submit their assignments on white, rather than coloured, paper.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	292

Number of resulted entries in 2018	277

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	72.2%	72.2%	200	87
B	15.9%	88.1%	44	73
C	6.5%	94.6%	18	60
D	4.0%	98.6%	11	46
No award	1.4%	-	4	-

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.