



Course Report 2018

Subject	Philosophy
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

2018 was the first year of the Revised National Qualification in National 5 Philosophy. The question paper was marked out of 80 and the assignment out of 20. Markers saw a full range of marks, from very low to very high, in both the question paper and the assignment. Candidates' answers and statistical evidence demonstrated that 'A'-grade candidates performed well but the assessment also allowed 'C'-grade candidates to access marks. There were some excellent answers from upper 'A'-grade students.

Candidates from S4 performed particularly well. This is a cause for celebration for candidates and their teachers and lecturers.

The assessment performed as intended, with the grade boundary being set at 50%.

Component 1: question paper

The average mark for the question paper was 58%. This was pleasing, especially given that the question paper was extended to allow the increase from 50 to 80 marks. Centres did not raise any issues regarding the content of the question paper.

Component 2: assignment

The mark allocation for the assignment has changed from 30 marks to 20 marks. The assignment has changed from 'open-book' conditions to a write-up in exam conditions with a resource sheet. The average mark for the assignment was 65%. The assignment performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Candidates performed well in the following questions.

Arguments in action

Question 1(a) — picking out arguments from statements

Most candidates understood the difference between a statement and an argument. The average mark for this question was almost full marks.

Question 1(e)(i) and 1(e)(ii) — naming, describing and explaining a fallacy

Most candidates were able to identify and explain the fallacies of attacking the person and false dilemma.

Knowledge and doubt

Candidates did well in the Hume questions below, focusing on the relevant areas.

Question 2(h) — How does Hume think we acquire knowledge?

Question 2(i) — According to Hume, what are simple ideas copies of?

Question 2(j) — According to Hume, how is it possible for us to imagine things that do not exist, such as unicorns?

Moral philosophy

Most candidates answered question 3(a) on Bentham's hedonic calculus correctly.

Most candidates were able to state one to two criticisms of utilitarianism and explain why these criticisms are a problem for utilitarianism. (Question 3(d) (i/ii/iii/iv/v/vi))

Component 2: assignment

Candidates are expected to engage with the following skills:

- ◆ A — introducing the chosen philosophical question or claim and describing responses to it (6 marks)
- ◆ B — using and analysing relevant information relating to the chosen philosophical question or claim (6 marks)
- ◆ C — explaining criticisms of responses relating to the chosen philosophical question or claim (6 marks)
- ◆ D — presenting ideas in a logical sequence throughout the assignment (2 marks)

Candidates performed better in sections A and B.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Candidates found the following questions demanding.

Arguments in action

Some candidates struggled to explain the slippery slope fallacy in relation to a given argument. For example:

Question 1(e) (iii) — *'I'm against lowering the voting age to 16. This will only lead to further demands to lower it to 14. Then it will be 12, and before we know it, 5-year-old children will be allowed to vote. That would be ridiculous! The voting age has to remain at 18.'*

Knowledge and doubt

A number of candidates had little to say in their answers to the following questions. Their content lacked accuracy.

Question 2(f) — Explain why Descartes thinks 'I am, I exist' is a truth he knows for certain.

Question 2(g) — Explain two weaknesses of Descartes' Cogito.

Moral philosophy

A significant number of candidates found Questions 3(c) and 3(g) demanding. Candidates disadvantaged themselves by referring only to the key features and not the given scenario.

Question 3(c) — *'Some supermarkets throw out food which is still edible, rather than donating it to people in need.'* Explain why a utilitarian might consider this to be morally wrong. You should support your answer by referring to the key features of utilitarianism.

In Question 3(g) — Describe two criticisms of your other moral theory, with reference to the given scenario — candidates often accrued low marks by failing to make reference to the given scenario when describing criticisms.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates performed least well in sections C and D. The skills required here are:

- ◆ C — explaining criticisms of responses relating to the chosen philosophical question or claim (6 marks)
- ◆ D — presenting ideas in a logical sequence throughout the assignment (2 marks)

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Centres should ensure that candidates are fully prepared to answer questions on all areas of the mandatory course content as listed in the course specification. Centres should give candidates a copy of the mandatory course content which they can use as a checklist of what they are required to know.

Arguments in action

It is concerning that some candidates struggled to explain the slippery slope fallacy accurately. Candidates are expected to identify, explain and give examples of these fallacies. The glossary in the course specification is helpful to candidates.

Knowledge and doubt

Centres should ensure they are using the most up-to-date documents. Evidence submitted as part of the exceptional circumstances process showed that some centres are teaching topics that are not part of the course. For example, Descartes' Trademark argument is not part of the National 5 Philosophy course.

It is important that candidates cover all the areas of study in the course content. The course specification states that 'candidates should be able to demonstrate their understanding of the listed content of Descartes and Hume and explain criticisms (strengths and/or weaknesses) of these positions and theories'.

While candidates are not expected to engage with original texts in the knowledge and doubt area of study, they are expected to show understanding of all the listed concepts and/or arguments.

There is no choice of questions in the question paper so it is essential that candidates are prepared for all aspects of the course. Candidates must be prepared to answer questions on both Descartes and Hume.

Moral philosophy

The course specification states that 'candidates must be able to explain two moral theories: utilitarianism and one other'.

Candidates should study a moral theory within the context of philosophy as their optional moral theory, and not a religion.

The course specification states that candidates should know 'three common criticisms of utilitarianism: evil pleasures; difficulty of predicting consequences; tyranny of the majority'.

While it was pleasing that many candidates knew one to two criticisms, candidates should be aware that there are three stated criticisms in the course specification and they should be able to explain all three.

Centres should ensure that candidates have practice in answering 'scenario'-type questions. This is to help them explain how the moral theory might be applied to the given scenario. It is also essential that candidates, if asked to do so, can give criticisms of the moral theory in relation to the given scenario.

Component 2: assignment

It is important that candidates take care in choosing their philosophical question or claim. As in previous years, some candidates made the assignment more challenging for themselves by choosing questions or claims which sit more easily in other subjects, such as English, RMPS or Modern Studies. This meant that they were not able to access all the available marks.

At the beginning of the research process, it is worth cross-checking the marking instructions against the proposed title to make sure that the chosen topic allows candidates to access all the available marks.

Some scripts were submitted without a title. This clearly disadvantaged the candidate. Candidates were also disadvantaged if they simply gave an area of philosophy as their title. For example, 'Free will and determinism' is not acceptable as a title. The marker should not have to guess what the title is.

Centres should note that the assignment task is an individual exercise and should not be taught as a whole-class exercise.

Centres should ensure that candidates know how to use and submit resource sheet(s). Candidates should use the resource sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they **must** submit it with their evidence. The resource sheet is not assessed formally but it is reviewed during the marking process.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	277
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	270
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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	35.9%	35.9%	97	70
B	16.3%	52.2%	44	60
C	16.3%	68.5%	44	50
D	13.3%	81.9%	36	40
No award	18.1%	-	49	-

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.