# Course Report 2017

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| Subject | Philosophy |
| 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

## Summary of the course assessment

### Component 1: question paper

The average mark for the question paper was lower than might have been expected. This was not due to any particular problems with the question paper itself, but it became clear that centres have found it difficult to interpret what is required in terms of depth and detail. This appeared to be widespread and therefore, to ensure candidates were not disadvantaged, the boundaries for both a C and an A grade were lowered at the awarding meeting. (The B boundary is then calculated automatically.) Other issues were identified which will only have affected those candidates who might have accessed the highest marks, so the boundary for an A1 was lowered by an additional one mark.

### Component 2: assignment

Issues with the assignment that have previously been identified continue to be evident, and these will be addressed through the review. No changes were made at the awarding meeting as a result of candidate performance in the assignment.

# Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates gained the highest average score in the Arguments in Action section, doing well in short-answer questions where they were not required to be precise and could gain a second mark by providing an appropriate example. Candidates showed that they were able to write descriptive answers, even if they were sometimes demonstrating this skill when they should have been making evaluative comments.

There was no one area in the assignment where candidates did well across the board other than, as to be expected, in giving descriptions of various philosophical positions.

# Areas which candidates found demanding

## Question paper

### Arguments in Action

There is evidence that candidates are still struggling to analyse arguments into their component parts. Question 1 was intended to be an easy question, so it is of some concern that less than 40% of candidates could identify correctly a simple premise indicator.

More importantly, a significant number of candidates are being taught inadequate definitions of deductive and inductive reasoning. Many candidates are saying that deductive reasoning ‘moves from the general to the specific’. However, it is likely that most teachers will illustrate deductive arguments with examples such as, ‘If Andrew rode his bike to school, then his bike would be in the bike rack. Andrew’s bike isn’t in the bike rack and so Andrew didn’t ride his bike to school,’ and yet this doesn’t move from the general to the specific. In the same way candidates stated that inductive reasoning ‘moves from the specific to the general, but in Question 4 said that analogical arguments were best described as inductive reasoning and then gave an example that didn’t move from the specific to the general. **It is important for centres to note that these inadequate definitions will not be accepted.**

Candidates not being encouraged to think about definitions and topics in sufficient depth was also evident from their answers on appeals to authority and ambiguity:

- In Question 3 (appeals to authority) most candidates were able to gain two of the three marks available, but did so by mentioning only a single criterion for a legitimate appeal to authority and supplementing that with an example. Candidates should be aware that a number of criteria might need to be satisfied before someone can be considered a legitimate authority.

- Similarly, in Question 6 (ambiguity) a number of candidates gained zero marks (22%). 34% of candidates were able to gain two marks, but this was mostly achieved by explaining one kind of ambiguity and giving an example. Candidates should be aware that there is more than one kind of ambiguity and should be able to explain and give examples of more than one kind of ambiguity.

- The same principle should be applied to other areas of content, eg there is more than one kind of inductive argument and there is more than one way in which a deductive argument can fail to guarantee a true conclusion.

### Knowledge and Doubt

The majority of candidates had only a very superficial knowledge of Descartes’ trademark argument, and most gave answers that might be more appropriate to National 5 level. It is clear that the majority of candidates have not been properly exposed to the relevant part of the text. It is essential that teachers read the text with their candidates, to enable candidates to explain all relevant terminology, and that candidates can evaluate the claims and arguments presented in the text. This has been highlighted previously but it is clear that many centres are not acting on this.

Course Assessment Specification: *All candidates should be able to demonstrate an **in-depth** knowledge and understanding and the ability to analyse and evaluate extracts from the following rationalist and empiricist texts.*

Course Report 2015: *'It is important for centres to realise that at Higher level candidates must be familiar with the content of the original texts and not just rely on a superficial understanding of the basic principles.*

Course Report 2016: *For Knowledge and Doubt centres are reminded that candidates at Higher level are expected to be familiar with the texts, and should not simply rely on secondary sources. It is particularly important that candidates can engage with the text and make appropriate analytical and evaluative observations.*

A standard search can find school-level resources as well as school-level textbooks that introduce the material, but there is no substitute for reading and studying the texts themselves. Failure to do so will result in candidates being disadvantaged.

### Moral Philosophy

It is important that at Higher level candidates can do more than memorise facts however, analysis and evaluation is not a replacement for knowing the material. At Higher, candidates should be prepared to answer questions that require them to analyse and evaluate, nevertheless, they can also be expected to demonstrate that they know and understand what it is they might be asked to evaluate.

The Course Assessment Specification requires that: *All candidates should be able to demonstrate an **in-depth** knowledge and understanding and the ability to analyse and evaluate the following aspects of utilitarianism and Kantian ethics ... Bentham's hedonic calculus ... The categorical imperative ...*

It is concerning that a significant number of candidates were not able to gain one mark by listing at least four of the criteria that Bentham used to measure pleasure and pain. To have an **in-depth** knowledge and understanding of the hedonic calculus requires knowing what these criteria are and how Bentham uses them.

Similarly, it can be expected that candidates who have an **in-depth** knowledge and understanding of the categorical imperative should be able to quote or give a close paraphrase of Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative. Knowing what Kant said is a prerequisite for evaluating what he said. If candidates are only given the general gist of what Kant said, it is likely that crucial details will be omitted and candidates will misunderstand the theory and be unable to properly evaluate the theory.

## Assignment

There remain significant issues with the assignment, including:

- Being too descriptive and failing to develop an argument.
- Choosing topics that were non-philosophical.
- Choosing philosophical topics but not addressing them in a philosophical way.

- Over-reliance on teaching notes or a single source, sometimes to the point of plagiarism.
- Working too closely with others instead of being involved in independent study.

# Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

In all areas of the course it is important to enable candidates to explore the topics at a depth more appropriate to Higher level. A minimal understanding of the material will make it difficult for candidates to achieve high marks.

There is evidence that centres are relying on old, out-dated support notes. It is important to remember that older support notes will have been produced for a particular purpose, and for a course that may have had a different emphasis. Older support notes should not be regarded as giving clarification and guidance on the current course. The same is true of older question papers and their associated marking instructions.

Evidence submitted as part of the exceptional circumstances process revealed that centres are teaching topics that are no longer part of the course — some topics that were removed from the course some time ago. It may be that some centres are teaching National 5 topics that are not part of the Higher course and then including questions on this material in their Higher prelim. Centres must ensure that they are using the latest version of the course documents.

There was also evidence that centres are marking candidates' work too generously. This is important because it will give both candidates and their teachers unrealistic expectations of what might be achieved in the external exam. This is a particular problem in the Arguments in Action section where, on occasions, answers that were simply wrong were, nevertheless, being marked correct. It is vital that any teachers preparing candidates for the course fully understand all the concepts that they are teaching and give candidates accurate feedback. Another problem was prelims containing 'evaluate' tasks, but the candidate being rewarded for purely descriptive answers.

In the exam, some candidates made reference to the concepts of adequacy, relevance and sufficiency. If it contributed appropriately to their answer, candidates were rewarded for doing so. There is evidence of some confusion concerning these concepts, and centres should take note of the following advice, which was also included in the 2017 marking instructions:

'Acceptability', 'relevance' and 'sufficiency' primarily refer to the premises of the argument, ie:

- Acceptability concerns whether the premises are true or, if not known to be true, can at least provisionally be taken as true.
- Relevance concerns whether the premises are relevant to the conclusion they are intended to support, and
- Sufficiency concerns the degree of support they give to the conclusion and whether or not there is enough support to rationally accept the conclusion.

In considering these issues it would be usual to consider them in order — Are the premises acceptable? If they are acceptable, are they relevant? If they are both acceptable and relevant, are they sufficient? The reason for this is that if the premises fail to be acceptable and/or relevant, they will also fail to be sufficient; it only becomes an issue of sufficiency per se if the premises have already been deemed acceptable and relevant.

Teachers/lecturers should also note that the procedure isn't strictly necessary. If an argument is deductively valid then it will have met the relevance and sufficiency criteria, but the acceptability criterion may still need to be assessed on other grounds. Similarly, some arguments may be trying to establish what conclusion would follow if the premises were true but the actual truth of the premises might not be a matter of concern.

Teachers/lecturers should be aware that some textbooks use different terms, and may divide the material up differently. Although it is expected that learners will be familiar with the approach taken in this course as laid out in the course assessment specification, there may be legitimate reasons for considering a topic in relation to more than one of the three criteria.

Candidates should be rewarded for any accurate answer supported by appropriate reasons.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

# Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

## Statistical information: update on Courses

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| **Number of resulted entries in 2016** | 1008 |

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| **Number of resulted entries in 2017** | 764 |

## 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 | 24.3% | 24.3% | 186 | 60 |
| B | 19.0% | 43.3% | 145 | 51 |
| C | 21.5% | 64.8% | 164 | 42 |
| D | 10.2% | 75.0% | 78 | 37 |
| No award | 25.0% | - | 191 | - |

## 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.