



## External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Philosophy
Level(s)	Higher and Intermediate 2

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

This was the last year in which these two courses were available. In both courses there were candidates who were well prepared and some who were less so. It was noticeable that candidates tended to be better prepared in some areas than in others.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### At Intermediate 2

- 2 Candidates were generally well prepared to comment on the cosmological argument.
- 7 This was a very open question allowing candidates to draw on their knowledge of both Kantian ethics and utilitarianism. A good number of candidates gained 14 or more out of a possible 20 (ie a mark indicative of an A), with several gaining full or nearly full marks.

### At Higher

- 1 Candidates generally performed reasonably well in the Critical Thinking section, gaining an average score of 12 out of 20, with 40% of the candidates gaining 14 or more. Although some of the questions were more challenging than others, when discrimination is across the section rather than within each individual question, this is to be expected.
- 3 This question was only answered by 78 candidates but was done very well with an average score of 12.5 out of 20 (ie 62.4%).
- 7 Generally candidates did well on this straightforward scenario question. 70% of candidates gained half marks or more. However, it should be noted that there was a clear tendency for candidates to say everything they knew about utilitarianism, even if it was irrelevant to the question, and many candidates seemed to have been coached to write a standard 'one size fits all' utilitarianism essay and then tack on some application to the scenario.
- 8(c) Even where candidates were not able to explain 'contradiction in conception' or contradiction in the will' they were often able to gain marks by explaining the standard criticisms of Kant's moral theory.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### At Intermediate 2

- 1 (c) This question was done very badly, with very few candidates being able to give a suitable example of 'attacking the person'.
- 4 A significant number of candidates gained zero marks for this question. A number of candidates answered without mentioning either rationalism or empiricism, and some candidates wrote about Descartes' method of doubt.
- 5 This question was done badly. Many candidates knew nothing about clear and distinct perception and very little about the Trademark argument.
- 6 The small number of candidates who answered on Hume found the question difficult and seemed only prepared to answer on impressions and ideas and the missing shade of blue.

### At Higher

- 1(e) Candidates often struggled to describe two ways in which 'attacking the person' arguments are unreliable.
- 1(f)(iii) Only about one in three candidates were able to suggest an appropriate hidden premise that might be doing some work in the argument.
- 2 This was a completely open question on the ontological argument. However, some candidates seemed completely unprepared to answer a question on the topic and a number of them gained zero marks. About 40% of candidates gained less than half marks. Those who were well prepared could score highly—28% gained 14 or more. It was quite common for candidates to lack the necessary precision in their language to deal with the argument accurately.
- 4 Although empiricism is clearly part of the course a significant number of candidates struggled with this question. Where candidates were well prepared they could perform well and many candidates achieved full marks on this question. Unfortunately, a few more gained zero marks.
- 5 (a)&(c) Candidates seem to have been well prepared to describe the basics of Descartes' method of doubt but not so prepared to put it into context or to discuss its various strengths and weaknesses.
- 6 Although candidates seem to have been prepared to give an overview of Hume's theory of impressions and ideas they often had an insufficient knowledge of the text to discuss Hume's arguments in detail.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

This was the last year in which these two courses were available. Centres continuing to offer Philosophy at either National 5 or Higher should make sure that they are thoroughly familiar with the changed content and changed requirements in the new courses. There is also guidance in the 2015 Course Reports for National 5 and the New Higher Philosophy.

## Intermediate 2

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	200
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	68
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### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 60				
A	17.6%	17.6%	12	42
B	20.6%	38.2%	14	36
C	25.0%	63.2%	17	30
D	4.4%	67.6%	3	27
No award	32.4%	-	22	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

## Higher

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1017
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	482
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### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 120				
A	25.5%	25.5%	123	82
B	21.4%	46.9%	103	69
C	19.3%	66.2%	93	56
D	9.1%	75.3%	44	49
No award	24.7%	-	119	-

Overall the course assessment proved to be more difficult than intended. The C grade boundary was lowered by 4 marks and the A and upper A grade boundaries were lowered by 2 marks.

## 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.