



## Course Report 2017

Subject	Philosophy
Level	National 5

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**

Feedback from the examining/marking team and practitioners was positive and indicated that the assessment was fair and all questions were accessible. Candidates were given the opportunity to show the knowledge and skills they had acquired and developed across the course.

Overall, candidates showed evidence of preparation for the course assessment and performed well. However, there were some candidates who struggled to gain many marks across the course assessment.

## **Component 1: question paper**

The question paper was considered to be slightly less demanding than intended. Grade boundaries therefore reflect this with the agreed pass mark set at 42 for Grade C. No issues were raised by centres regarding the content of the question paper.

## **Component 2: assignment**

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 within the Knowledge and Doubt section:

Q2 (a) According to empiricists, how do we gain knowledge?

Q2 (b) What does Hume mean by impressions and ideas?

Q2 (c) According to Hume's theory, how is it possible to imagine a golden mountain if such a thing does not exist?

This performance suggests that candidates have better knowledge and understanding of Hume than in previous years.

## Component 2: assignment

Eighteen marks out of the available 30 are awarded for knowledge and understanding. Candidates tended to perform well in this area, with the average mark being 13.19 out of 18. This average was marginally higher than in 2016.

Most candidates recognise the importance of using relevant knowledge when responding to their philosophical question or claim. This is evidenced in their written assignment.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Component 1: question paper

In the Arguments in Action Section, candidates found the following three questions demanding. Approximately one third of candidates received zero marks for each of the following three questions.

Q1 (a) (i) What is a valid argument?

Q1 (a) (ii) Read the argument below:

Is the argument valid or invalid?

Give a reason for your answer. Your reason should refer to the above argument.

Q1 (a) (iii) Read the argument below:

Is the argument valid or invalid?

Give a reason for your answer. Your reason should refer to the above argument.

This was a disappointing performance given that candidates should know what 'validity' means. It is clearly stated in the content of the Course Assessment Specification that candidates need to be able to:

- ◆ explain validity
- ◆ recognise valid arguments (and invalid arguments)
- ◆ generate examples of valid arguments (and invalid arguments) to show understanding

The answers to both the fallacy questions (below) were often inadequate. Similarly to a fallacy question in 2016, answers to these questions lacked accurate explanation. Comparatively few candidates scored full marks. Again, this was disappointing, given that these were straightforward questions which candidates should be able to answer.

*Q 1 (b) Explain why an illegitimate appeal to authority is an unreliable form of reasoning. Give an example to support your answer.*

*Q 1 (c) Read the argument below.  
Is the [...] argument reliable?*

*Give a reason for your answer. Your reason should refer to the [...] argument.*

The mandatory content information in the Course Assessment Specification states that candidates are required to know about the following fallacies: attacking the person; false dilemma; illegitimate appeal to authority; slippery slope.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Twelve of the available 30 marks for the assignment are awarded for analysis and evaluation. Candidates continue to find this area demanding, with the average mark being 6.37 out of 12.

Some candidates failed to deal with their chosen philosophical question or claim. Simply writing down all they know about a particular topic will not accrue marks. They must respond to their own question or claim in a relevant and appropriate manner. Their assignment should read as a connected piece of writing and not as a series of separate sections.

As in previous years, candidates again made the assignment more challenging for themselves by choosing questions or claims that sit more easily in other disciplines such as English, RMPS or Modern Studies. This meant that they were not able to access the full range of available marks.

Some candidates continue to complicate the assignment task by plagiarising the words of others. This remains a significant problem, and again candidates penalised themselves in a number of ways, including compromising their own integrity.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Centres should ensure that candidates are fully prepared in all areas of the content of the course as listed in the Course Specification 2017–18 (which replaces the Course Assessment Specification). Candidates should read the Course Specification and use it as a checklist of what they should know.

Candidates are struggling to recognise and explain the four fallacies listed in the Mandatory information: attacking the person; false dilemma; illegitimate appeal to authority; slippery slope. Candidates are expected to be prepared to identify, explain and give examples of these fallacies.

Candidates should ensure that support notes and resources found on the internet are accurate in terms of what Descartes, Hume, Bentham and Mill actually said.

Centres should ensure that candidates have a clear grasp of **all** the concepts in the Course Specification 2017–18. While they are not expected to engage with original texts in

Knowledge and Doubt and Moral Philosophy, they are expected to show understanding of all the listed concepts/arguments.

Candidates should be aware that the question paper will sample from across the Course Specification and there will be no predictable pattern in the way this is done – for instance, Descartes and Hume might both come up in any one year or just one of them. The same is true for Moral Philosophy. Utilitarianism and the optional moral theory might both come up in any one year or just one of them.

Candidates should understand what it means to explain criticisms.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Teachers/lecturers should ensure that candidates are familiar with the most up-to-date advice and documentation. New documentation will be published for 2017–18.

Candidates must choose a **philosophical** question or claim. This is most important — candidates disadvantage themselves if their title sits more appropriately in another discipline. It is also important that candidates do not select an area of Philosophy that is too difficult for them. Candidates must fully address their chosen philosophical question or claim throughout their assignment. It is not enough to write down all they know about the area their investigation comes from.

Candidates should understand that the best assignments will read as a connected piece of writing rather than a series of standalone sections.

Candidates must know how to use sources without plagiarising them.

Candidates should have an open choice of topics and the assignment should be completed independently. The assignment should not be taught as a whole class exercise with everyone doing the same assignment.

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

Number of resulted entries in 2016	300
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	277
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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 -				
A	31.4%	31.4%	87	58
B	17.3%	48.7%	48	50
C	20.6%	69.3%	57	42
D	5.1%	74.4%	14	38
No award	25.6%	-	71	-

## 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.