Course report 2023

Advanced Higher Classical Studies

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   44

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   35

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	14	Percentage	40	Cumulative percentage	40	Minimum mark required	105
B	Number of candidates	9	Percentage	25.7	Cumulative percentage	65.7	Minimum mark required	90
C	Number of candidates	8	Percentage	22.9	Cumulative percentage	88.6	Minimum mark required	75
D	Number of candidates	3	Percentage	8.6	Cumulative percentage	97.1	Minimum mark required	60
No award	Number of candidates	1	Percentage	2.9	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected.

Most candidates chose to answer on Section 3: Heroes and heroism, though a few candidates answered questions on Section 1: History and historiography and Section 2: Individual and community. This session no candidates answered questions on Section 4: Comedy, satire and society.

Project–dissertation

The project–dissertation performed as expected.

Candidates selected a wide range of topics for study.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidates showed good knowledge of the texts. Most candidates showed a sound understanding of the specific demands of each question type. Most candidates had a clear understanding of how to demonstrate the appropriate skills for each question type and so performed well.

Candidates performed particularly well in Section 2: Individual and community.

Most candidates also performed well in Section 3: Heroes and heroism.

Part A — Classical literature

Questions 2, 9, 10 and 11 were done extremely well, with candidates showing clear awareness of the skills they needed to demonstrate in each question.

Part B — Classical society

Questions 6, 13, 15, and 23 were done extremely well, with candidates achieving the correct balance of breadth and depth in their answers to access the higher marks available.

Project–dissertation

There was an improvement in engagement with particular areas of their project–dissertations this session, with more candidates appreciating the importance of analysing and evaluating in depth suitable to Advanced Higher level. The introductions were also much better generally this session, with candidates making an effort to introduce their own work rather than give a summary of the topic area they intended to write about. This enabled most candidates to access high marks for this marking criterion.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Some candidates did not have a solid understanding of what skills were being assessed in different questions and so did not answer in a way that enabled them to access all marks on offer.

Part A — Classical literature

Few candidates effectively worked reference to wider reading into their analysis and evaluation points in the source analysis questions (questions 1, 9, 17) and source evaluation questions (questions 2, 10, 18).

Some candidates did not clearly indicate what specific elements of their texts they were comparing in the source comparison questions (questions 3, 11, 19).

Some candidates did not add enough factual detail from their knowledge of the texts to make clear their understanding of the context or subject matter of the sources.

Part B — Classical society

Some candidates were not able to justify their points with enough detailed reference to the prescribed texts. Candidates should be made aware that higher marks are awarded for points which show depth of knowledge.

Questions 8 and 16 were not answered well with a few candidates unable to address the key concerns of the question set.

Question 22 was answered poorly by a few candidates because they attempted to gain analysis and evaluation marks by discussing material outside the prescription (this is wider reading) or did not present a properly balanced answer giving sufficient weight to both the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*.

Project–dissertation

Most candidates did not offer effective comment on the usefulness of their sources. Candidates should be encouraged to comment on the provenance of at least two of their sources, using the skills developed in Higher Classical Studies source evaluation questions. Note that markers are looking for comment on the usefulness of the primary sources, not secondary ones.

Few candidates made effective comparisons within their dissertations. Candidates must specifically describe what they are comparing and must select pertinent comparisons from later times, rather than trying to make something less appropriate fit.

Some candidates did not use wider reading at all in their analyses and evaluations. Candidates should attempt to respond to wider reading in some of their evaluation and analysis points.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Candidates should have the chance to study all the material outlined in the course specification.

Question paper

The Advanced Higher questions and marking criteria are designed to enable candidates to display ability in the different skills of classical studies and it is essential that candidates are made aware of this and are given practise. Ideally candidates should be given tasks to complete which enable them to process the knowledge of the set texts in a way which develops the skills of the course.

It is a good idea to ensure that almost all exercises which candidates carry out during class learning and revision are in the same format as final assessments. Candidates should not feel that there is a difference between learning the content and learning how to answer the exam questions: exercises which facilitate their learning of the course content should also enable them to practise the skills of the subject at the same time.

Part A — Classical literature

Candidates should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the marking instructions for each question type. In this part of the paper, candidates are expected to show the specific skills requested by the question type.

Source analysis and evaluation questions

Candidates should be reminded that the marker is looking for four paragraphs either analysing or evaluating a different aspect of the source referred to in the question. The depth of knowledge shown in these points is what raises the marks. Reference to wider reading to expand a point already well made in depth, can further raise marks.

There is no requirement for a conclusion in these questions.

Source comparison and modern source comparison questions

Candidates should be reminded that these questions address the skill of comparison: how much and in what ways is one source like another. This is a largely descriptive exercise requiring the candidate to show detailed knowledge of the prescribed texts. Marks are not awarded for analytical or evaluative development of any points. Candidates do not need to specify whether something is a 'similarity' or a 'difference': rather they need to compare how different sources may deal with a similar idea.

Part B — Classical society

Candidates should be given the opportunity to practise writing essays on the full range of themes in the options of study. This will prepare them for the likely thought process which will be looked for in any of the essay questions in the exam. Candidates should be reminded that markers are looking for individual points which show depth of development. A huge

number of partially developed points will not gain more marks in an essay than the appropriate number of partially developed points will. Two partially developed points will not be considered equal to one fully developed point.

Project–dissertation

When candidates begin their work on the project-dissertation, they should be reminded that it is not the same as an essay. The markers are looking for evidence of skills developed over months of research.

Teachers and lecturers should regularly work through the demands of the marking criteria with candidates to ensure that candidates understand that the project–dissertation is a way for them to show their research and presentation skills: the markers read the dissertation in order to find out what the candidate can do, not to discover something about the subject matter.

Any topic can produce a good dissertation and any topic can produce a weak dissertation. Candidates should select topics which will enable them to easily access a range of appropriate sources and interrogate them.

Centres should ensure candidates are aware of the difference between a primary and secondary source. A primary source is direct evidence of something in the past: in classical studies, all writers from the classical world are primary sources, as are all physical artefacts or archaeological remains. A secondary source is something written about a primary source.

Centres should encourage candidates to assess why their primary sources are useful or whether some may be doubtful and include this discussion in their final dissertations.

During the research period, centres should encourage candidates to summarise the views of one or more secondary scholars on an aspect of their topic and then either offer reasons to support that scholar, or reasons to refute that scholar. Including a paragraph like this in their dissertation will enable them to access marks for engagement with wider reading.

Centres should make sure that candidates understand the importance of including comparisons in their dissertation: 8 marks are on offer for this. Three well-explained comparisons are required in every dissertation.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.