



Course report 2023

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: 550

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 490

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	173	Percentage	35.3	Cumulative percentage	35.3	Minimum mark required	54
B	Number of candidates	114	Percentage	23.3	Cumulative percentage	58.6	Minimum mark required	45
C	Number of candidates	91	Percentage	18.6	Cumulative percentage	77.1	Minimum mark required	36
D	Number of candidates	66	Percentage	13.5	Cumulative percentage	90.6	Minimum mark required	27
No award	Number of candidates	46	Percentage	9.4	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

Both papers performed as expected.

Question paper 1 — Classical Literature

Candidates used a variety of texts to answer both the essay questions and the modern comparison question. Most candidates discussed *Oedipus the King* in question 1(a), although some referred to other dramas or to epic poetry. Question 1(b) was attempted by slightly more candidates. Most based their answer on *Antigone*, with some candidates using *Medea* as their sole text, and a few referring to *Lysistrata* and *Agamemnon*, *the Iliad*, *the Odyssey*, and *the Aeneid*. Candidate performance was similar in both essays.

Question paper 2 — Classical Society

More candidates chose to answer on 'Power and freedom' than 'Religion and belief'.

Some candidates answered the 'Power and freedom' questions in one section and the 'Religion and belief' questions in the other. Where this happened, candidates tended to tackle the questions on 'Power and freedom' in the context of classical Greece and the 'Religion and belief' ones in the context of the Roman world.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022-23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper 1 — Classical literature

Essays were generally well written and well structured. Most candidates chose suitable texts and showed a very good knowledge of the characters, scenes and key issues as they related to their essays. Candidates who achieved the highest marks chose a thematic response (rather than a plot-telling one), selecting relevant characters and scenes to support their answers and arguing for and against the view outlined in the essay title. This last point was particularly well done in question 1(a). There were many excellent responses to question 1(b). Some candidates, using primarily *Antigone*, challenged the question by stating that whilst women did suffer for challenging the authority of men in classical texts, it could be interpreted that they suffered for other reasons, such as their own character flaws.

A few candidates chose texts and approaches which limited their opportunities to score well. For example, in question 1(a) some chose texts such as *Medea* where fate is not a key issue of the text, or decided to state that characters had complete free will and were unconstrained in any way by fate. This limited their ability to score well in analysis and evaluation. A few candidates chose broad sweeps of large texts such as *the Iliad* or *the Odyssey* to illustrate fate using short summaries of the impact of fate on characters, but this approach tended to limit their ability to score well as there was little depth shown and few attempts to compare and contrast characters.

Some candidates found it difficult to give a context within their introduction to question 1(a). Some contexts which could be given include:

- ◆ the classical Greek idea of the three fates/Moirai
- ◆ the belief in oracles
- ◆ the belief in seers and fortune-tellers

There were many excellent responses to question 2. The source was worded to give candidates a number of aspects to discuss with reference to their chosen texts, and most took advantage of this. A few candidates contextualised statements from the source. This gains no marks.

Question paper 2 — Classical society

8-mark source evaluation questions (question 1 and question 4)

These were generally well done. Candidates effectively discussed the provenance of these sources, making well-judged comments about their reliability and value (for example the limitations of using a comedy to understand contemporary society, and questions over how representative philosophers are of ordinary people). A few candidates tended to simply paraphrase the content (for example in question 1 'statements such as "Oh how they exaggerate" shows people made things up') which would not gain marks. Candidates often scored well in discussing omissions (for example in question 4, discussing different parts of the Underworld, in response to attitudes to the afterlife.).

10-mark comparison questions (question 2 and question 5)

The statement about contextualising, made above for the 10-mark comparison question in paper 1, also applies here. Most candidates had very good knowledge in both question 2 and question 5 about the comparative points each question focused upon. However, in question 2, a few candidates chose to compare elections in the UK today with meetings of the assembly instead of with the election/selection of office holders in classical Athens. Few candidates took the opportunity to discuss ostracism which the source offered. Most candidates answering question 5 knew about the cult of Asclepius, but did not take the opportunity to discuss it in depth (for example the use of snakes, possibly dogs), and there was some confusion between votive offerings, an offering of thanksgiving at the end of the process, and prayer and sacrifice which was part of the request for assistance.

12-mark responses (Q3, Q6, Q8, Q10)

Most candidates scored well in the 12-mark extended responses. They structured their answers into three or four aspects, deployed their knowledge well, and used this to develop analysis and evaluation. Question 3(b) (the Delian League) was generally well done. Most candidates showed detailed knowledge of the methods the Athenians used to control the members of the League, and many pointed out that some of these methods such as the imposition of a single currency could be interpreted as benefiting the members of the League, and thus accessed the marks for different interpretations.

Many candidates scored well in question 6(a) (the nature of the gods). The best responses concentrated on the anthropomorphic nature of the gods and discussed the challenge to the Homeric view of the gods by philosophers such as Plato, the different interpretation allowing candidates to gain marks for analysis. However, a few candidates simply listed different Greek gods which was not an approach which was generally successful.

Question 8(a) (the education of Roman girls) was not generally well done. Many candidates failed to see that the question was linked to the role women had in society, and many discussed in very brief terms the lack of education for women. Many candidates failed to distinguish such factors as difference between classes, the attitude of fathers and husbands, and changes over time.

Question 8(b) (revolts in the Roman Empire) was also well done. Most candidates showed good knowledge of the causes of the revolts, and some candidates very effectively compared and contrasted the two revolts mentioned in the question.

Some candidates scored well in question 10(a) (household gods) but some decided to discuss the Vestal Virgins which were irrelevant to the question. There were some very good responses to question 10(b) (Roman philosophy) where many candidates showed excellent knowledge of the attractions of Stoicism and Epicureanism. However, some candidates did not adequately distinguish differences between them, and which groups of Romans would find them attractive and why.

8-mark source comparison questions (Q7 and Q9)

Both these questions were done well. There was effective structuring and a systematic approach by most candidates, dealing with each source in turn, and then looking at any points of omission from the sources. Very few candidates made the error of trying to evaluate the usefulness of the sources, and most candidates dealt with all three sources in their answer.

Many candidates answering question 9 did not focus on the issue of the question when looking at Source A, which should have prompted discussion of the examination of the entrails of sacrificial victims, but most then made it a point of omission, for which they gained credit.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1 — Classical literature

A few candidates failed to gain the mark for 'signposting' in the introduction to their essay. It is comparatively straightforward to gain this mark by stating in a sentence or two the direction of the essay by using such phrases as 'in the first part of the essay I will look at'. It is perfectly acceptable to use 'I' in the essay in Higher Classical Studies.

Candidates might also find it useful to use words and phrases such as 'however', 'on the other hand', 'another way of interpreting this might be' when linking or comparing or contrasting.

Question paper 2 — Classical society

Some candidates were unsure when a question required a conclusion and were writing conclusions to questions which do not require this. A helpful way to remind candidates is that the word 'conclusion' in question paper 2 only occurs in the 'scaffolding' for the 10-mark comparison questions, and therefore that is the only place where it is required.

Some centres might wish to discuss structure in 12-mark questions, as few candidates gave an explicit opening sentence outlining the aspects to be discussed in their responses. This should be considered best practice, although provided effective paragraphing is used, it is generally clear to markers. Listing points as 'bullet-points' without structure was still done by some candidates, and this makes it difficult to achieve marks for analysis or evaluation.

Candidates should be encouraged to read the questions carefully to ensure their answers are relevant. In an example already discussed, it was noted that it was inappropriate to include the Vestal Virgins in question 10(a). Similarly, in question 3(a), some candidates failed to focus on the words 'privately owned', and they discussed publicly owned slaves, which was irrelevant.

A few candidates failed to complete the question paper. This was largely caused by overly long responses in the classical Greece section, resulting in a lack of time to answer questions in the Roman world section. Centres might wish to work on time management issues where appropriate.

There were a few instances of papers bordering on illegibility. Centres and candidates should seek to address this through the various options open to candidates in completing examinations and assignments.

Assignment

Centres are reminded that in 2024, Higher Classical Studies will return to the assessment arrangements as they were in 2019. This means that the assignment will return and that the other modifications in place for session 2022-23 will be removed. Centres may wish to refer to the Course Specification (pages 4-9) for the details of the course as it will be assessed in 2024.

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](#).