



Course report 2023

Higher Economics

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: 779

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 891

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	333	Percentage	37.4	Cumulative percentage	37.4	Minimum mark required	79
B	Number of candidates	169	Percentage	19	Cumulative percentage	56.3	Minimum mark required	65
C	Number of candidates	159	Percentage	17.8	Cumulative percentage	74.2	Minimum mark required	51
D	Number of candidates	130	Percentage	14.6	Cumulative percentage	88.8	Minimum mark required	37
No award	Number of candidates	100	Percentage	11.2	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 sampled the course content identified in the 'Economics: guidance on modifications to Higher course assessments for session 2022–23' document.

The question paper performed generally as expected. Feedback from centres suggested that the paper offered the appropriate level of demand and allowed candidates to use the subject knowledge and skills they developed throughout the course.

Candidates attained an unusually wide range of marks. Some candidates did not provide specific definitions and descriptions of core economic concepts such as price inelastic demand and real income. This was unusual as Higher candidates typically demonstrate a thorough knowledge of basic economic concepts.

To account for the challenges in the question paper, adjustments were made to the grade boundaries.

Assignment

The assignment performed largely as expected with many candidates achieving good marks, although the average mark was slightly lower than in 2022.

Most candidates produced assignments using the correct structure and following the guidelines, enabling them to attain high marks in the introduction, research, and structure categories.

The marks candidates achieved for analysis and evaluation of findings and overall conclusions were generally lower this session.

Candidates who chose suitable economic issues and provided meaningful and useful findings linked to their economic theory scored highly.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1(b): most candidates were able to achieve high marks for describing this key economic topic.

Question 1(e): many candidates were able to achieve high marks in this question by applying their knowledge of monetary policy to the control of inflation.

Question 2(b): most candidates scored well by describing the characteristics of an emerging economy. However, candidates should focus on economic characteristics rather than social, political, or geographical factors.

Question 3(a): most candidates were able to accurately compare these two key economic concepts.

Question 3(c)(ii): many candidates were able to accurately explain some factors that affect price elasticity of demand.

Question 3(f): many candidates were able to accurately describe some internal economies of scale.

Question 4(c): many candidates were able to accurately explain some tools of fiscal policy and apply them to decreasing unemployment.

Question 5(b): many candidates were able to describe reasons for multinationals locating abroad so achieved a high mark for this question.

Question 5(c): most candidates achieved a high mark as they effectively described the reasons for imposing trade barriers.

Assignment

Introduction: most candidates scored very highly as they gave a suitable purpose for their assignment, including more detail than their title. They provided concise background information, including some relevant data.

Research: most candidates scored highly as they explained the suitability of at least two of their research sources.

Structure: most candidates received the available mark for the structure of their assignment as they used the appropriate headings, font size, and line spacing.

Application and understanding: many candidates achieved a good mark for this section as they applied suitable theory to at least two viewpoints.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(a): some candidates did not accurately describe the meaning of real income and instead related it to income after tax rather than inflation.

Question 2(a): some candidates did not accurately describe the meaning of globalisation and instead described multinational companies.

Question 3(b): some candidates did not accurately explain the shape of the normal demand curve and instead explained the shape of an abnormal demand curve or gave reasons for shifts in the demand curve.

Question 3(c)(i): some candidates did not accurately describe the meaning of price inelastic demand. They did not refer to the proportionately smaller change in demand when price changes.

Question 3(d): some candidates did not accurately draw a market diagram to illustrate excess supply and instead drew diagrams showing a shift in a supply curve.

Question 4(b): some candidates did not accurately describe the established economic types of unemployment (exemplified in the course specification) and instead gave vague descriptions of reasons a worker could be out of work.

Question 4(d): some candidates did not accurately draw a circular flow of income diagram with the required arrows and labelling.

Question 5(a): some candidates did not accurately describe the theories of absolute and comparative advantage. Some candidates gave incorrect or mixed-up numerical examples, exemplifying the other theory (absolute advantage) rather than the theory they intended to exemplify (comparative advantage).

Question 5(d): some candidates did not accurately describe the components of the UK Balance of Payments and instead described the overall balance of payments or different accounts of the balance of payments.

Question 5(e)(ii): some candidates did not accurately describe the role of the World Bank and instead described the International Monetary Fund.

Assignment

Analysis and evaluation: some candidates did not access the full range of marks in this section. This was because they did not link their analysis and evaluation to the theoretical points they made in the previous section. Some candidates also used theoretical points from their research (for example from revision websites) as their findings and this did not allow them to move on from the theory they provided in the previous section. Some candidates paraphrased their findings rather than quoting them, making it difficult for markers to identify where a candidate's own analysis started. Some candidates did not source their findings correctly or did not source them at all, making it unclear where each finding was from. Some

candidate's findings were word-for-word repetition of points they made in the previous section so did not receive further marks.

Conclusions/recommendations: some candidates did not access the full range of marks in this section because they did not make enough justified conclusions and recommendations and/or did not develop their justifications by bringing together several points they had made in previous sections.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use the information provided in the stimulus material before the data response questions. This information does not contain full answers, but it provides some useful background for answering the questions.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to ensure they have a sound understanding of all topics in the course. The core economic theory remains a valuable part of the course's assessable content, for example types of unemployment, shape of demand curve, and real income.

Precise definitions are vital in many areas of economics (for example a description of price inelastic or elastic demand must refer to the proportion demand changes when the price changes) and this is something that teachers and lecturers should stress to candidates and assess them on.

To fully prepare for the question paper, centres should assess candidates on topics from all three areas of the course. This can also provide evidence for potential exceptional circumstance applications.

Assignment

Choice of title: teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to frame their title as a question so they can answer this question throughout their assignment.

Introduction: candidates should avoid very long and detailed titles, for example those that specifically refer to impacts on all three economic agents. This can make it challenging to gain the purpose mark in the introduction, as the purpose may be a direct repeat of the title. The title and purpose stated in the introduction must match the whole assignment. Candidates cannot gain full marks for this section if the topics in the assignment do not relate to or follow on from the title and purpose stated.

Research: candidates should not repeat a reason for a source being suitable (for example, up to date or reliable) even with a different justification. They should only use each reason once.

Application and understanding: many candidates use subheadings such as 'Individuals', 'Firms', and 'Government' when writing this section. This can be a good layout, but candidates must ensure that the points they make relate to the appropriate subheadings they use.

Analysis and evaluation: candidates should clearly show findings using quotes and data so that markers can differentiate between their research findings and their own analysis and evaluation of their findings. Candidates should ensure their analysis and evaluation are not a direct repeat of theoretical points they made in the previous section.

Candidates should avoid theoretical findings (such as those from revision websites) to ensure they do not repeat the theoretical points made in the previous section. Findings should be from sources like news articles and government websites. This allows candidates to analyse and evaluate whether their applied theory is backed up or contradicted by their findings.

Conclusions/recommendations: candidates' conclusions should bring together several points they made earlier in the assignment rather than directly repeat an earlier point.

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](#).