



Course report 2023

National 5 Sociology

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: 281

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 235

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	76	Percentage	32.3	Cumulative percentage	32.3	Minimum mark required	68
B	Number of candidates	48	Percentage	20.4	Cumulative percentage	52.8	Minimum mark required	58
C	Number of candidates	34	Percentage	14.5	Cumulative percentage	67.2	Minimum mark required	48
D	Number of candidates	21	Percentage	8.9	Cumulative percentage	76.2	Minimum mark required	38
No award	Number of candidates	56	Percentage	23.8	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. The questions enabled candidates to display their learning with a good spread of marks obtained. There were a number of questions where most candidates performed well. There were also questions that were designed to stretch candidates where a wider range of marks were observed. Feedback from centres and the marking team on the question paper was very positive. Details of candidate performance on individual questions is detailed below.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected. There has been no change to the assignment task in recent years and it continues to be a useful gauge of candidates' overall performance.

Guidance from previous course reports appears to have been considered as there were far fewer assignment topics that were wholly inappropriate.

This component continues to allow a great deal of personalisation and choice, and markers indicated that candidates chose a good range of topics. All centres are encouraged to allow as much room for individual expression as possible, while ensuring topics are suitable and within the guidelines.

The template for submission of assignments had a beneficial impact on candidate performance, continuing the positive influence noted last year.

Taking performance in both components into account, along with the continuing legacy of pandemic disruption, a slight adjustment was made at grade boundaries. The modifications to course assessment had a greater impact than last year, however the upper A, A and C boundaries were each adjusted slightly to reflect the continuing effects of external factors on candidates.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidates performed well in questions 1(c), 1(e) and 2(a). It is noticeable that candidates continue to perform better in describe questions than in explain ones. In general, there was good understanding of sociological terms and some sociological concepts. One question where candidates performed a little better than expected was question 2(c), which is positive as this is an area that had been highlighted in previous course reports.

Assignment

Sections A and C continue to be the ones where most candidates perform well, although each is only worth 2 marks. Many candidates also did well in section D. Overall, there are far more assignments that are well structured, which the template appears to have helped with.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

As expected, question 1(f) proved to be the most challenging as this is the most conceptual area of the course and requires a deeper level of understanding. Some candidates also struggled with question 1(d). It is important for centres to remind candidates that when answering questions that ask for one advantage or one disadvantage that only one is given. There were a few candidates who answered by giving a list of advantages or disadvantages. There was also some confusion over participant and non-participant and overt and covert, although this was less of a problem than in some previous years.

Some candidates found question 2(b)(ii) troublesome, which was slightly surprising. The question, for 2 marks, asked candidates about the subculture they had talked about in question 2(b)(i) and it seemed to be the linked aspect that caused most of the problems. When a question is linked in this way, candidates will not be credited again for information that has been credited in the first part of the linked question. The repetition of information was the main reason that some candidates did not achieve higher marks in this question.

Assignment

Section E continues to be the area where candidates do not achieve the most marks, although this has improved over a number of years. There is evidence that Understanding Standards events and materials have improved performance in this section and there are very few candidates not attempting this section now.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should advise candidates that when asked to describe or explain one aspect, their description or explanation must all be on that one point.

Centres should advise candidates that where there are structured questions (for example i, ii), information in one part will not be credited if already credited in another part.

Centres are reminded that the question paper for the next exam diet will include social issues. There is an Understanding Standards event and materials planned that will cover this reintroduction.

Assignment

The assignment continues to be a valued part of this course. Centres should advise candidates to ensure that their topic and approach is sociological. A large number of candidates this year did assignments related to body image, which were not all done well. Centres are asked to encourage as diverse a range of topics within the guidelines as possible.

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](#).