



Course report 2025

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 33

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 40

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	23	57.5	57.5	105
B	10	25.0	82.5	90
C	5	12.5	95.0	75
D	0	0	95.0	60
No award	2	5.0	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

In this report:

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

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected this session. Candidates submitted responses for all options in the paper. The most popular option was option 3, Heroes and heroism. Approximately a third of candidates chose option 4, Comedy, satire and society. A few candidates chose option 1, History and historiography and option 2, Individual and community. The questions in each section were equally challenging and no questions proved to be unexpectedly demanding or straightforward for candidates.

Project–dissertation

The project–dissertation performed as expected this session. The titles reflected a wide range of research interests.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Section 1 — History and historiography

Most candidates presented strong answers for this option, showing a detailed awareness of the prescribed texts and the aspects of study. Most candidates were well prepared to meet the expectations for different question types.

Part A — Classical literature

The source comparison question (question 3) proved the most challenging. Candidates can gain full marks for reference to recall material that fits the question — areas where ‘Thucydides and Polybius describe scenes of major defeat’. This question prompts candidates to engage closely with the ‘description’ of the scenes, therefore responses that did not refer to specific description detail were unlikely to access high marks. Candidates should note that the sources in the question paper are selected to contain enough material for discussion to gain full marks.

Part B — Classical society

All essays for this option were of a very high standard.

Section 2 — Individual and community

Most candidates presented very strong answers for this option, showing a detailed awareness of the prescribed texts and the aspects of study. Most candidates were well prepared to meet the expectations for different question types.

Part A — Classical literature

Most candidates gave very strong responses to questions in this part but found the evaluation question that focused on Aristotle (question 10) the most challenging. It is important that candidates show detailed knowledge of the arguments Aristotle makes rather than focusing on memorising his conclusions.

Part B — Classical society

Most candidates gave very strong responses to questions in this part but found the question that focused on Aristotle the most challenging. It is important that candidates show detailed knowledge of the arguments Aristotle makes rather than focusing on memorising his conclusions.

Section 3 — Heroes and heroism

Most candidates provided strong answers for this option, showing a detailed awareness of the prescribed texts and the aspects of study. Most candidates were well prepared to meet the expectations for different question types, although a few did not appreciate that 'wider reading' is not credited as a separate criterion of assessment. Candidates will not gain marks for simply referring to other parts of a text unless they integrate it into an evaluative or analytical point, as described in the marking instructions.

Part A — Classical literature

Question 17 proved to be the most challenging for candidates. Some candidates did not appreciate that this question was asking them to closely analyse the events that are happening in the scene and comment on how those illustrate different aspects of tragedy. Some candidates made reference to other events in the Trojan War without tying those to a point about 'this scene', therefore missing out on marks as they did not demonstrate analysis of the scene in the question.

Candidates answered the comparison questions well (questions 19 and 20). Most candidates showed detailed knowledge of the prescribed texts.

Part B — Classical society

Question 24 on Aeneas was the most popular essay. Most candidates handled it well although some did not do enough to link their descriptions of what Aeneas did to an evaluation of whether this made him a role model or not. A few candidates made a general point initially and then left the reader to infer how the evidence they were giving led to the conclusion they had stated.

Question 22 was very popular. Most candidates handled it well although some showed a limited range of knowledge about women within the prescribed texts. The best responses contained reference to most of the following: Penelope, Eurycleia, Odysseus' maids and Nausicaa. Candidates should note that Calypso is not a woman and that reference to women outwith the prescribed texts can only be credited as wider reading to complement points about women within the prescribed texts.

Most candidates provided strong responses to the other two essay questions (questions 21 and 23), showing good understanding of the texts they discussed.

Section 4 — Comedy, satire and society

Many candidates were well prepared to meet the expectations for different question types, but some did not appreciate that 'wider reading' is not credited as a separate criterion of assessment. Candidates will not gain marks for simply referring to other parts of a text unless they integrate it into an evaluative or analytical point, as described in the marking instructions.

Part A — Classical literature

Most candidates did well in question 25. Most candidates showed solid knowledge of Athenian politics and how its different aspects relate to what was said by the characters in the extract.

In question 26 many candidates did not display understanding of how the events of the play related to aspects of Athenian society and the corruption of traditional values and approaches within it.

Many responses to the comparison questions (questions 27 and 28) did not show clear understanding of what is required to illustrate the skill of comparison. Some responses took the form of mini essays rather than extended responses showing detailed knowledge of how texts and ideas are similar or different.

Part B — Classical society

Most candidates provided strong or very strong responses in this part but in question 29, candidates found it challenging to point to areas where Aristophanes is exaggerating for comic effect rather than to make a serious point.

Project–dissertation

Overall, the standard of dissertations was very high. Most candidates showed a detailed understanding of the marking requirements.

A — Justifying

Most candidates showed a detailed understanding of the marking grid and as a result the standard of introductions was generally high.

Some candidates did not seem to have considered why they chose their title over another possible one. For example, in a dissertation about the fall of the Roman Republic, candidates could select different titles such as, ‘How far was Julius Caesar responsible for the fall of the Roman Republic?’ or ‘To what extent did divisions in Roman society make the fall of the Roman Republic inevitable?’. A candidate who has read in detail about the fall of the Roman Republic will be able to explain why they preferred one of those questions over the other.

B — Using sources

Most candidates used sources well, although some did not include at least two secondary sources and some did not comment on the usefulness of two of their sources.

C — Analysing

Most candidates did well, taking the time to discuss the required number of analysis points in depth. However, only a few managed to link any of their points of analysis to comments discussed in secondary sources.

D — Comparing

Almost all candidates did well with comparison, making sure that they clearly explained what was being compared and gave an appropriate amount of detail. A few candidates presented much more detail about the modern comparison than the classical information. The level of detail should be equal on both sides.

Those candidates who tried to present their comparisons at the end of the dissertation generally found it harder to show how their points linked directly to the classical information they had discussed.

E — Evaluating

Almost all candidates did well with evaluation, taking the time to discuss the required number of evaluation points in depth. However, only a few managed to link any of their points of evaluation to comments discussed in secondary sources.

F — Argument and conclusion

Most candidates presented strong coherent dissertations that adhered to the title and methodology set out in the justifying section of their work.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

You may find it useful if most written work that candidates do from the start of the course is in the format required for assessment. Ensure that candidates fully understand how marks are applied. The marking grids aim to show specifically how to build responses that may be considered ‘sophisticated’, ‘nuanced’ or ‘well-developed’. It is important that candidates understand that the marks are applied holistically and therefore they should familiarise themselves with the criteria in the marking grids.

Question paper

All questions require detailed knowledge of the prescribed texts, so setting these types of questions regularly during the course is a good way of helping candidates memorise the details of the texts as well as understand the skills of Classical Studies.

Part A — Classical literature

Source analysis questions (questions 1, 9, 17 and 25)

Ensure candidates understand that the point of these questions is to analyse four different areas of prescribed texts relevant to the question. The source extracts have been selected to include a range of suitable points for discussion. In strong answers, candidates can use wider reading within points to further improve their marks, provided the wider reading complements one of their analysis points in an effective way. For example, candidates could compare the analysis they have just made in their point with how something similar could be inferred from another piece of relevant wider reading. However, candidates must master how to construct detailed analytical points before considering how they could add reference to wider reading.

You should encourage candidates to recognise that responses to questions do not follow a formula. The response the candidate gives must be a logically relevant response to the question. So, if the question asks about an episode of a text, then anything within that episode is what the candidate has been asked to analyse. The candidate has not been asked to analyse anything outwith that episode, so doing so will not gain marks.

These questions do not require a conclusion.

Source evaluation questions (questions 2, 10, 18 and 26)

Ensure candidates understand that the point of these questions is to evaluate four different areas of prescribed texts relevant to the question. The source extracts have been selected to include a range of suitable points for discussion. In strong answers, candidates can use wider reading within points to further improve their marks, provided the wider reading complements one of their evaluation points in an effective way. For example, candidates can compare the evaluation they have just made in their point with how something similar could be inferred from another piece of relevant wider reading. However, candidates must master how to construct detailed evaluative points before considering how they could add reference to wider reading.

You should encourage candidates to recognise that responses to questions do not follow a formula. The response the candidate gives must be a logically relevant response to the question. So, if the question asks about an episode of a text, then anything within that episode is what the candidate has been asked to evaluate. The candidate has not been asked to evaluate anything outwith that episode, so doing so will not gain marks. However, it is important to recognise that in a question that begins ‘To what extent does ...’, it is relevant to highlight something significant that has been omitted from the source, scene, or episode that the question has asked to be evaluated.

These questions do not require a conclusion.

Source comparison questions (questions 3, 11, 19 and 27)

These questions are not looking for candidates to analyse or evaluate the sources. Candidates need to identify four areas of comparison between the sources they have been given (for example, 'attention to realism in battle scenes', 'consideration of the importance of class division', 'emphasis on suffering caused' and 'exaggeration of real life scenarios'), and then provide details from the texts that show how similar or different the sources are on these points.

These questions require a conclusion.

Modern comparison questions (questions 4, 12, 20 and 28)

These questions are not looking for candidates to analyse or evaluate the sources. Candidates need to identify four ideas from the modern source that they have been given (for example, 'history is written by the victor', 'education is crucial for a fair society', 'heroism can be destructive' and 'laughter is an excellent way to make a point'), and then provide details from their course knowledge that show how similar or different these ideas are from those presented in the relevant classical texts.

These questions require a conclusion.

Part B — Classical society

Detailed knowledge of the prescribed texts makes a huge difference to the quality of candidates' answers, so it would be advisable for you to spend teaching time reading the texts with candidates and setting tasks that will help candidates develop detailed knowledge of content.

Candidates need to practise communicating their points succinctly in essay questions. Introductions do not need to be lengthy.

You should emphasise to candidates that memorised responses are unlikely to gain good marks, as candidates must select appropriate textual evidence for the question that has been asked.

Project–dissertation

The purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate research and presentation skills. Candidates can select a familiar topic or one that is more obscure. Selecting a more obscure topic will require considerable work by the candidate to ensure that they can display suitable expertise in that topic in their dissertation.

You should try to make sure that candidates follow a programme of research in order to produce their dissertation. If candidates do this, they often find it more straightforward to gain high marks in justifying and engagement with sources.

When they are composing the dissertation, make sure that candidates are paying attention to how they show sufficient skill in the different marking criteria. For example, make sure they effectively engage with five primary sources and two secondary sources within their dissertation.

You should encourage candidates not to focus on a particular skill at the expense of another, for example commenting on the usefulness of every primary source they use instead of making analytical and evaluative points responding to what they have presented in a secondary source.

Make sure that candidates pay close attention to their title. The argument of the dissertation must be clearly focused on the title. Encourage candidates to choose specific questions for their dissertation title as this makes it easier to frame an argument clearly based upon it. Candidates should be wary of broad questions such as, ‘What was life like for an enslaved person in the Roman world?’ which is so broad that it is very difficult to create a tight, coherent argument based upon it.

When guiding candidates in how to write an introduction, you should stress that it is an introduction to their work, not a general introduction to the topic. Their introduction should be written last, with the intention of showing the reader what the dissertation is about, how it was researched, and why it proceeds as it does.

You should make sure that candidates study the marking grid closely — their introduction is not a thesis abstract summarising their argument, it is a justification of their research.

You should discourage candidates from producing work that is overly long, as this can often be self-penalising as it may affect the quality of their argument.

Candidates should note that there are no marks given for use of rhetorical flourishes or over-elaborate language.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).