



Course report 2025

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: 540

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 603

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	219	36.3	36.3	77
B	149	24.7	61.0	66
C	115	19.1	80.1	55
D	67	11.1	91.2	44
No award	53	8.8	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

The question papers and assignment performed as expected and therefore grade boundaries were set at notional levels.

Question paper 1 — Classical literature

Candidates used a variety of texts to answer the essay question and the modern comparison question. Across both essay questions, most candidates used *Antigone*, followed by *Oedipus the King*, *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*. Some candidates used *Medea* and a few referred to other texts such as *Lysistrata* and *Agamemnon*. Candidate performance was similar in both essays. The number of candidates discussing *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey* increased this year.

Question paper 2 — Classical society

As has been the trend over many years, more candidates opted to answer questions on 'Power and freedom' than on 'Religion and belief'. Overall, candidate attainment was stronger in Life in classical Greece than in Life in the Roman world.

Assignment

Most candidates based their assignment topic on an aspect of the course content, and most commonly on aspects of classical society. A few candidates chose topics outside of the course content but still related to an aspect of the classical world.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper 1 — Classical literature

Most candidates performed well in question 1. Most candidates chose question 1(a), with candidate performance in question 1(a) and 1(b) very similar. Candidates chose appropriate texts, with some opting to use one text, while some candidates used more than one. Both approaches proved successful for many candidates.

Candidates handled different interpretations better than in previous years and often signalled this by using clear phrases such as ‘a different interpretation is...’. In question 1(b) many candidates discussed conflict well, but some did not focus on selfishness, which the wording made clear had to be an important consideration in the essay.

Candidates who used *Lysistrata* in their responses tended to attain lower marks than candidates using other texts.

Some candidates found question 2 challenging, which was also the case in previous years. However, markers observed an overall improvement in the conclusion for this question.

Some candidates interpreted source content and therefore gained no marks. A few candidates wrote lengthy responses that were sometimes unfocused. A few candidates appeared to have problems managing their time — either running out of time when answering question 2 or not answering it at all.

Question paper 2 — Classical society

Most candidates approached each question appropriately. Some candidates displayed outstanding knowledge of the classical world, showing impressive use of analysis, evaluation and argument. In question 1 and question 4, many candidates made intelligent comments about the nature of the sources. In question 2 and

question 5, candidates had good knowledge of the classical world to match against the content of both sources, although some candidates took a long time to reach the point where marks were awarded.

Many candidates did well in both options of question 3. In question 3(a) there was an important distinction that the question asked about 'Athenian citizens' and not 'people who lived in Athens', which was a factor a few candidates did not recognise. In question 3(b) many candidates described the negative aspects of Athenian control well, but few candidates discussed any benefits.

Most candidates did well in question 6 and many candidates used a wide range of knowledge to approach both options.

Candidate performance in question 7 was mixed. Some candidates displayed limited knowledge of the detail of Roman republican government, although many candidates made good comments about the workings of the Roman assemblies. Some candidates were only able to paraphrase the source content. In the corresponding question in Religion and belief (question 9), many candidates had good knowledge of the cult of Mithras and other cults, although fewer had good knowledge of the cult of Isis which was discussed in source B.

In question 8(a) some candidates effectively distinguished the difference of experiences between enslaved people, but many were unable to clearly distinguish the types of jobs likely to have been undertaken by those owned publicly from those owned privately. While enslavement is a popular topic for candidates, some candidates did not appreciate the requirements of this specific question. Many candidates gave good responses to question 8(b).

Many candidates did well in question 10(a), displaying good knowledge of the Roman attitude to all three religions. In question 10(b) candidates had good knowledge of the life of a Vestal Virgin, but a few candidates did not use it effectively to judge whether their life was privileged.

Some candidates did not manage their time effectively. Overall candidate attainment was lower in the Life in the Roman world section.

Assignment

Most assignments were of very good quality. Candidate performance was impressive, and introductions and conclusions well done. Candidates gained good marks over a wide range of topics. Most candidates achieved higher marks for the assignment than for the question papers.

Most candidates chose a clear, focused and realistic title in the form of a question. For example, 'In what ways was democracy a fair system of government for the people who lived in Athens?' or 'What were the attractions of the mystery cults to Romans?'. A few candidates made the basis of their title a modern comparison, which is not good practice as this should be an integral, but not dominant, part of every assignment. A few candidates made no comparisons whatsoever, which resulted in them missing out on 5 marks.

A few assignments were simplistic and were based on topics inappropriate for Higher candidates, such as clothing.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1— Classical literature

Most candidates chose relevant texts and characters in their essays. Candidates can find success through a variety of routes, but by trying to cover too many texts or characters they can sacrifice depth of analysis.

In the main body of the essay, some candidates produced two, three or four mini responses. For example, in looking at conflict caused by selfishness, candidates might refer to three characters such as Antigone, Odysseus and Achilles without drawing contrasts and making comparisons among them. Stronger candidates cross-referenced in their answers between these characters and texts.

In question 2, some candidates ran out of examples by taking too large a quotation as the basis for making one point. For example, using the statement from this year's paper 'Some have power because of their achievements in war, others because of their intelligence or cunning' to make a single point. If the statement is broken down into three parts, 'achievements in war' (Achilles' slaying of Hector in the Iliad), 'intelligence' (Oedipus solving the riddle of the Sphinx), and 'cunning' (Odysseus devising the Trojan Horse in the Iliad), many more marks are available.

Question paper 2 — Classical society

You should communicate to candidates that when they see a topic that they feel confident in answering, they should consider the wording of the question and the specific demands this wording makes. This was particularly relevant for question 8(a) this year, as detailed in section 2 of this report.

A few candidates were unable to complete the paper. In some cases, this was partly caused by candidates taking too long to make their points, which was evident in question 2 and question 5.

For example, candidates might answer a point by writing:

‘Source B is written by a modern author discussing women. I am going to compare this source to my knowledge of women in Athens. The source says, ‘Until the 1960s, many schools in the UK had separate play areas for boys and girls’. This means that boys and girls played in separate areas of the playground. This is similar to life in Athens as girls and boys had separate education, and the girls would not go to school at all.’

However, candidates could achieve the same number of marks by writing:

‘The source says there were separate playgrounds for boys and girls. This is similar to life in Athens as girls and boys had separate education, and the girls would not go to school at all.’

Candidates gain no marks for rewording or interpreting the source content. It is not necessary for candidates to give detailed introductions and conclusions for 12-mark responses, which rarely gain any marks.

Assignment

Markers reported some issues around resource sheets, and you are reminded that:

- a resource sheet must be included with the assignment
- the resource sheet must be on one side of A4 paper
- the resource sheet must not exceed 250 words
- any illustrations or pictures must be attached directly to the resource sheet, and be part of the one-page limit (some centres were unaware of this restriction)
- no part of the assignment, apart from short primary sources, must be directly lifted word-for-word from the resource sheet

Candidates who do not meet these guidelines may miss out on marks.

Some candidates included website addresses and hyperlinks in their resource sheets. This is not required. Furthermore, a few candidates expected markers to access websites to access their sources. This is not allowed and candidates who do

this may not access the full range of marks if they do not include the sources they use either on their resource sheet or the body of their assignment.

Personalisation and choice is an important part of the course and you should encourage candidates to research a topic of their own choice. However, a few centres presented candidates who had studied the same topic with identical or similar wording as a title. If the content and structure of their assignment is very similar then it is difficult to judge if the work is the candidate's own.

Some candidates appeared to have approached the assignment by researching issues that are more pertinent to the modern world and their own views and then finding out how these issues applied to the classical world. This is approaching the assignment the wrong way round. Two problems with this approach are firstly that candidates often focus their attention on their own views rather than researching the classical world, and secondly that they find it very difficult to access enough knowledge of the topic in the classical world.

Candidates must not include explicit sexual descriptions in any part of their assignment.

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](#).