

Course report 2026

National 5 Philosophy, SCQF level 5

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 253

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 220

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	85	38.6	38.6	70
B	28	12.7	51.4	60
C	29	13.2	64.5	50
D	23	10.5	75.0	40
No award	55	25.0	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

This component performed as expected. The question paper was fair and balanced, with questions that allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Candidates achieved a wide range of marks, reflecting the range of attainment across the cohort.

We made no adjustments to grade boundaries for this component, unlike in previous years when the mean mark was lower.

Assignment

This component performed as expected, with candidates achieving marks that reflect the range of attainment across the cohort.

We made no adjustments to grade boundaries for this component.

How candidates performed

Candidates performed slightly better in the assignment than in the question paper.

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

Arguments in action

Candidates performed particularly well in this section.

Questions 1(e)(i) and 1(e)(iii): most candidates identified the conclusions.

Question 1(f): most candidates gained at least 2 marks for explaining why one argument contained a false dilemma and the other did not.

Knowledge and doubt

Question 2(a): most candidates stated the three criteria of the tripartite theory of knowledge.

Question 2(d): many candidates correctly matched the philosophers with the correct statements.

Question 2(f)(ii): many candidates gained at least 2 out of 3 marks for describing one of Descartes' sceptical arguments.

Moral philosophy

Question 3(a): many candidates gained 4 or more marks out of 6 for describing the key features of utilitarianism.

Question 3(b): some candidates gained full marks for describing the key features of their other moral theory.

Assignment

Candidates gained higher marks in the assignment than in previous years. Most candidates who achieved high marks selected questions from within the course

content, although there were also a few very good assignments on topics outwith the course content.

Most candidates gained at least 5 out of 6 marks for describing responses to their chosen philosophical question or claim.

Many candidates gained at least 4 out of 6 marks for analysing relevant information relating to their chosen philosophical question or claim.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

Arguments in action

Question 1(d)(i): only a few candidates explained why the argument was valid.

Knowledge and doubt

Question 2(c): many candidates gained 1 mark out of the possible 3 for explaining why sceptics believe the criteria of the tripartite theory of knowledge cannot be met.

Question 2(e): many candidates could not state what Descartes believed was the foundation of knowledge.

Question 2(f)(iii): only a few candidates gained 3 marks for explaining a criticism of one of Descartes' sceptical arguments.

Question 2(h)(i): only a few candidates gained 4 marks for describing Hume's missing shade of blue.

Question 2(h)(iii): many candidates gained 1 mark out of the possible 4 for explaining if they thought Hume was right to dismiss the missing shade of blue, with only a few gaining at least 3 marks.

Moral philosophy

Question 3(c): many candidates gained at most 2 out of 6 marks for explaining what advice a utilitarian would give someone in the scenario.

Question 3(c)(ii): some candidates only gained up to 2 out of 6 marks for explaining two criticisms of utilitarianism.

Question 3(c): only a few candidates gained 4 or more marks out of 6 for explaining what advice a follower of their other moral theory would give them in response to the scenario.

Assignment

Candidates who considered how followers of a moral theory would respond to moral issues such as euthanasia or abortion tended not to score high marks. Few assignments focused on these topics.

Only a few candidates gained 4 or more marks for explaining criticisms of responses to their chosen philosophical question or claim.

Many candidates gained 0 marks for presenting their ideas in a logical sequence.

For a few candidates, we could not award marks because their resource sheet was not appropriate, for example where they included copied content.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should ensure that candidates are fully prepared to answer questions on all aspects of the mandatory course content, which is listed in the course specification.

Advise candidates to read questions carefully, and to make at least as many points in their answer to a question as there are marks available for it.

Candidates should be aware that the term ‘criticisms’ can refer to strengths, weaknesses, or both. You should discuss criticisms with candidates to prepare them for this aspect of the question paper. You can find examples of the types of criticisms that candidates might discuss in the ‘Knowledge and doubt additional support notes’ on the Higher Philosophy subject page on our website, under ‘Course support’.

The ‘National 5 Philosophy model questions’ resource demonstrates different approaches to answering questions on criticisms. You can find this resource on the National 5 Philosophy subject page on our website, under ‘Course support’.

Arguments in action

Candidates should be able to explain the error in each of the fallacies and identify the precise mistake in particular fallacious arguments. Direct them to the glossary in the course specification, to familiarise themselves with the level of detail expected.

Knowledge and doubt

In bilevel classes it is particularly important that National 5 candidates are prepared to answer questions on general epistemology, which is not included in the ‘Knowledge and doubt’ section of the Higher Philosophy course.

Candidates must be familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of Descartes’ and Hume’s arguments and be able to explain these. Candidates may also gain marks for responding to criticisms.

Moral philosophy

In responding to questions about criticisms of moral theories, candidates must do more than simply state, for example, that utilitarianism faces a difficulty in predicting consequences. They should explain the criticism and offer an example or examples that illustrate the problem. Candidates may also gain marks for responding to criticisms.

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on a theory other than utilitarianism. They should be as familiar with this theory, criticisms of it, and how to apply it to scenarios, as they are with utilitarianism. When candidates see the term 'other moral theory' or 'another moral theory' in a question, they should know what to write about.

Assignment

You can give generic advice to the whole class, but you must not teach the assignment as a whole-class exercise with all candidates doing the same topic. The content of the resource sheet reflects the individual nature of the task. We will carry out an investigation if all candidates from the same centre submit resource sheets with similar content.

You should encourage candidates to choose an appropriate philosophical question or claim for their assignment. As noted earlier, candidates should avoid topics such as euthanasia or abortion, unless there is a clear philosophical response to analyse and evaluate.

At the beginning of the research process, it is worth cross-checking the marking instructions against the proposed title to ensure the chosen topic allows candidates to access all the available marks. You should give candidates a copy of the marking instructions.

The assignment task expects candidates to engage in description, analysis and criticisms in the context of a coherent piece of writing. If a candidate does not cover each area, they will not access the marks allocated to each area. Irrespective of how good and extensive their description might be, candidates should be aware that they

can gain a maximum of 6 marks for describing responses to their philosophical question or claim.

In the taught parts of the course, encourage candidates to practise:

- making relevant connections between concepts
- explaining possible implications or consequences of a theory or position
- considering different interpretations of concepts

This will help candidates to understand what they must do to get analysis marks in their assignment. Labelling a section of the assignment 'Analysis' is not sufficient to make it analysis.

Encourage candidates to consider and explain problems with the philosophical theories they encounter in the taught parts of the course. This helps them to understand what they must do to obtain marks for explaining criticisms of the responses relating to their claim or question.

Candidates should be aware of what constitutes an appropriate use of their resource sheet. Candidates whose resource sheets contain a mini version of their assignment, or a coded version of it, put themselves at a disadvantage. No marks can be awarded for any material copied from the resource sheet. You can find further information on the National 5 Philosophy subject page on our website, under 'Coursework'.