



Course Report 2016

Subject	Philosophy
Level	National 5

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Notional cut off scores (50% - C/60% - B/70% - A) were agreed at the Awarding meeting. The question paper sampled specific areas of the Course Assessment Specification in depth — for example, areas of the content of Descartes' Meditation I in Knowledge and Doubt, and Higher and Lower Pleasures in Moral Philosophy. No issues were raised by practioners regarding the performance of the question paper.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed as expected. The marking instructions had been reviewed previously and further clarified at the markers' meeting to the benefit of the candidates. Again, no issues were raised by practitioners regarding the performance of the assignment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Candidates performed well in the following questions in the Arguments in Action section:

Q1(a) (i) Give **one** example of a statement.

Q1(a) (ii) Give **one** example of an argument.

Q1(a) (iii) Explain **two** differences between statements and arguments.

These straightforward questions are concerned with the basics of Arguments in Action, so it would have been concerning if candidates hadn't performed well in these questions.

Candidates performed well in the following question in the Knowledge and Doubt section:

Q2(b) Why does Descartes say we should not trust our senses? This question required awareness of Descartes' senses' argument, and the majority of candidates were able to make two clear points in their answers.

Component 2: Assignment

18 out of the available 30 marks related to recall of relevant knowledge with understanding. Candidates tended to perform well in this area, with the average mark being 12.6 out of 18.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Candidates found the following questions demanding in the **Arguments in Action** section:

Q1(c) (i) What is a slippery slope fallacy? Candidates' responses tended to be very imprecise and, in many cases, could have been describing several other fallacies. Very few candidates gave clear explanations of a slippery slope fallacy.

Candidates found the following questions demanding in the **knowledge and doubt** section:

Q2(d) What role does the evil genius play in helping Descartes achieve his aims? Some candidates achieved full marks in this question but many candidates struggled to address 'the role of the evil genius' in terms of analysing how the evil genius fits into the whole picture.

Q2(f) Evaluate Descartes' cogito. Many candidates showed little awareness of what it means to evaluate in terms of strengths and/or weaknesses.

Candidates found the following questions demanding in the **Moral Philosophy** section:

Q3(a) (i) Why did Mill develop his distinction between higher and lower pleasures? A significant number of candidates showed little awareness of Mill's modification of Bentham's quantitative approach to pleasure. Some candidates wrongly described how Mill's motivation was to develop a moral philosophy for animal rights.

Q3(a) (iii) State two criticisms of Mill's higher and lower pleasures. A significant number of candidates showed little awareness of what it means to evaluate in terms of strengths and/or weaknesses. Further, many candidates misunderstood Mill's position on higher and lower pleasures.

Component 2: assignment

12 out of the available 30 marks related to analysis and evaluation. Candidates tended to find this area demanding with the average mark being 6.06 out of 12.

As in previous years, candidates made this component more demanding for themselves by choosing questions or claims which are not philosophical in nature. This resulted in candidates being unable to access the full range of available marks.

Some candidates also complicated the assignment task by plagiarising the words of others. This is a significant problem and again candidates penalised themselves in a number of ways, including compromising their own integrity.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Candidates must be fully prepared on all areas of the mandatory content of the course as listed in the Course Assessment Specification. Candidates should read the Course Assessment Specification for themselves and use it as a revision tool — for instance, making up questions and marking instructions.

Support notes and resources found on the internet must be accurate in terms of what Descartes, Hume, Bentham and Mill actually said.

Candidates should know that the question paper will sample from the mandatory content as specified in the Course Assessment Specification and there will be no predictable pattern in the way this is done — for instance, Descartes and Hume might both be questioned in any one year, or just one of them.

Candidates should have a clear grasp of all the concepts in the Course Assessment Specification. While they are not expected to engage with original texts, they are expected to show understanding of all the listed concepts.

Candidates should be fully aware of what their optional moral theory is. Some candidates write about the mandatory moral theory, when asked about the optional theory.

Candidates should understand what it means to evaluate. The Course Assessment Specification clearly sets out:

- ◆ Candidates should know the strengths and weakness of Descartes and Hume.
- ◆ Common criticisms of Utilitarianism: evil pleasures; difficulty of predicting consequences; tyranny of the majority.
- ◆ At least three common criticisms of the optional moral theory.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates must be familiar with the most up-to-date advice and documentation.

Ensure that candidates have chosen a **philosophical** question or claim. This is most important — candidates disadvantage themselves if their title sits more appropriately in another discipline.

Make sure that candidates understand that the best assignments will read as a ‘holistic whole’ rather than a series of disconnected sections.

It is important that candidates know how to use sources without plagiarising them.

The assignment should give candidates an opportunity for personalisation and choice in preparing their own assignment and ideally not taught as a whole class exercise with everyone doing the same assignment.

Candidates should adhere to the recommended word count as they will be penalised if they exceed this.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	239
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	300
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	28.7%	28.7%	86	56
B	17.7%	46.3%	53	48
C	20.0%	66.3%	60	40
D	7.3%	73.7%	22	36
No award	26.3%	-	79	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.