



Course report 2022

Subject	Philosophy
Level	Higher

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	750
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	24.7	Cumulative percentage	24.7	Number of candidates	185	Minimum mark required	70
B	Percentage	20.0	Cumulative percentage	44.7	Number of candidates	150	Minimum mark required	58
C	Percentage	21.3	Cumulative percentage	66.0	Number of candidates	160	Minimum mark required	46
D	Percentage	17.9	Cumulative percentage	83.9	Number of candidates	135	Minimum mark required	34
No award	Percentage	16.1	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	120	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

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 page of [SQA's website](https://sqa.my/).

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The question papers performed largely in line with expectations. Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicates that they were positively received by centres and were fair papers, in line with the course specification.

Modifications and revision support provided some insight into the content that would be sampled and allowed candidates to focus their revision. The spread of marks achieved by candidates reflects the range we would expect to see across the two papers; however, performance was significantly lower than expected. Grade boundaries were lowered to take account of this.

Question paper 1

Question paper 1 performed in line with expectations. Essay questions allowed differentiation by outcome. The marking for essays is holistic and takes the candidates' knowledge and understanding of the content as well as their skills of analysis and evaluation into consideration. The scaffolding in each question continued to help weaker candidates to show their skills and knowledge in response to the questions asked. In the 'Knowledge and doubt' section, question 1 was the most popular choice. In the 'Moral philosophy' section, more candidates answered question 3 than question 4.

Question paper 2

Question paper 2 performed as expected. However, in the 'Arguments in action' section, questions 1(c) and 11 were more challenging than anticipated, and the grade boundaries were lowered to take account of this.

In the 'Knowledge and doubt' section, questions 13, 14 and 15 on Descartes were the most popular choice, rather than questions 16, 17, and 18 on Hume.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper 1

Candidates performed best in essay questions 2 and 4, which were the Hume essay and Kant quotation essay respectively. Average marks for these essays were slightly above that of the Descartes and Kant scenario questions. The essays were of similar difficulty, and the difference in average marks was small.

In question 1, the Descartes essay, most candidates were good at describing the main aims of the meditations and the purpose of the method of doubt. Most candidates also effectively described the doubts raised by Descartes in Meditation 1. Some showed precise knowledge of the text, with awareness of the connection between the arguments and the conclusions that Descartes drew from each doubt raised. However, some candidates found it challenging to explain the conclusions Descartes drew from the doubts he raised with accuracy and precision. For example, many recognised that the mistrust of the senses led to doubts about the senses, but some did not explain that this did not lead Descartes to doubt the senses completely.

Candidates were usually good at describing the dreaming argument and its conclusions, and stronger candidates were able to accurately explain the types of knowledge that remained after these doubts. Some candidates were unable to clearly explain the Deceiving God argument, and the difference between this doubt and the role that the evil demon plays for Descartes.

In question 2, the Hume essay, most candidates were able to provide a clear description of Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas. They often described the distinction between internal and external impressions and the four processes of the imagination with good use of examples. Good essays showed knowledge of the arguments presented by Hume to support his distinction between impressions and ideas and the copy principle.

Some candidates failed to describe any of Hume's arguments and simply described some key features of his theory. This made it difficult for them to achieve the top marks, because their response did not answer the question asked.

Many candidates were able to present common criticisms of Hume's thinking as described in section 2 of his Enquiry. Some candidates showed good knowledge of the missing shade of blue counterexample, although articulating accurately why it was problematic for Hume proved more of a challenge.

Many candidates could present criticisms or challenges to Hume's theory in a superficial way, but were not always able to explain clearly why they challenged his philosophy, or make a personal judgement about these criticisms and how they affected his theory. In general, essays that achieved marks in the highest mark range did this most successfully.

In both Kant essays, questions 3 and 4, most candidates were good at describing the general principles of Kant's philosophy. Most candidates focused their description on the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative and some were able to competently explain the process of working out what moral duties arose from applying the formulations. Most candidates were able to provide some common criticisms of Kantian ethics in their essays,

although this was often superficial and did not show deep understanding of why this was a criticism of Kantian ethics. The best essays showed the ability to apply Kantian ethics to the specific scenario or quotation and evaluate based on this application.

In scenario essays, to fully answer the question, candidates must apply the moral theory to the situation and many candidates struggled to do this successfully. In both questions 3 and 4, most candidates showed an understanding of the absolute nature of Kantian ethics and could articulate some of the foundations of the theory, including the 'sovereignty of reason' and the 'good will'. They often showed knowledge of the first two formulations of the 'Categorical Imperative', but many did not demonstrate a full grasp of the first formulation, or how it should be applied in moral decision making. In particular, candidates struggled to demonstrate how the 'contradiction in conception' and 'contradiction in the will' related to the formulation of 'perfect duties' and 'imperfect duties', according to Kant. Equally, candidates did not often show how the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative might be applied to form perfect or imperfect duties.

Question paper 2

Section 1: Arguments in action

Question 1 on defining the features of an argument was a very straightforward question and most candidates gained this mark. In question 2, many candidates achieved both marks for presenting the argument in standard form. Where candidates did not get the second mark, this was usually due to them not rewriting the conclusion to be a standalone statement, changing the pronoun 'it' to 'my car', as was required.

Whilst most candidates were able to identify a conclusion indicator in question 3(b), many did not manage to correctly identify a premise indicator for question 3(a). A significant number of candidates incorrectly claimed that 'if' was a premise indicator.

Candidates performed well on questions 4 and 5 on argument diagrams. Many candidates gained 2 marks for each of these questions.

Question 6 on the acceptability and sufficiency of the premises in the argument provided was done particularly well. Many candidates could explain why the premise in the argument was acceptable for question 6(a) and most candidates could explain why the premise was or was not sufficient to establish the conclusion for question 6(b).

Questions 7(a) and 7(b) proved challenging for many candidates. They could not accurately describe the key feature of inductive arguments or explain why the argument provided was deductive. Question 7(a) should have been a straightforward question, as it asked for basic recall of key definitions, but many candidates did not gain the mark. On the other hand, question 7(b) was challenging, as expected, and many candidates were unable to pick up the mark.

At first appearance, the question 7 argument has some similarities to an inductive argument; however, the conclusion is certain based on the premises, and therefore clearly deductive.

Question 8 proved difficult for many candidates. Those that did not achieve the mark tended not to give a precise enough description of the function of counterexamples, often missing out the fact that the counterexample showed universal claims to be false.

Question 9 assessed knowledge and understanding of both validity and ambiguity. Questions 9(a) and 9(c) proved difficult, and many candidates gave definitions of validity that were inaccurate, imprecise or simply wrong.

Question 9(c) was intended to be more challenging, as it required application of the concept of validity to the argument provided. Few candidates gained this mark. However, most candidates successfully explained the ambiguity in question 9(b).

Question 10(a) proved difficult for many candidates. A common mistake was to simply define an analogy, rather than an analogical argument. Most candidates gained 1 or 2 marks for question 10(b), which suggests many candidates understood the purpose of the analogies in arguments, but could not always define this type of argument with precision.

Question 11 was an A type question, differentiating by outcome. This was certainly the case with a fair spread of marks, but some candidates struggled to give even the simplest description of a slippery slope argument. In particular, candidates often seemed to suggest that slippery slopes were simply any conditional statement where the consequent was a much worse outcome than the antecedent. The examples given were often highly dubious or were not even arguments, but simply a series of extended conditionals.

Questions 12(a) and 12(b) proved difficult for candidates. Candidate responses suggest that they find it more difficult to recognise and explain the formal fallacies than the informal fallacies when confronted with them in a previously unseen argument.

Section 2: Knowledge and doubt

Descartes

Most candidates were able to state the claim the Cogito referred to for question 13. They found it more challenging to explain how the Cogito was reached by Descartes, as this required more precise reference to the text. They also found it more difficult to evaluate the Cogito effectively.

Hume

Many candidates were able to correctly state what Hume's claim about knowledge of cause and effect was. It proved more difficult for them to explain how the example of billiard balls tells us about knowledge of cause and effect. As with the Descartes questions, this requires more precise reference to the course text. Candidates found it particularly difficult to evaluate Hume's view of knowledge about cause and effect, with many who attempted this question not gaining any marks for their answer.

Section 3: Moral philosophy

Most candidates gained marks for questions 19 and 20 on the hedonic calculus, however many did not get the 2 marks available for question 21, which asked them to distinguish

between act and rule utilitarianism. Of those that picked up 1 mark, most candidates could explain act utilitarianism, but many were unclear on what exactly rule utilitarianism was.

Candidates tended to equate rule utilitarianism with deontological ethics, claiming that it involved following rules to do the right thing. Few recognised that rule utilitarianism aims to achieve the greatest happiness, but by following rules that will maximise happiness.

Question 22 also proved difficult, as it required candidates to make a comparison between act and rule utilitarianism in the course of their evaluation.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

As always, it is important to ensure familiarity with the most up-to-date advice and documentation. The course specification remains the main source of information for teachers about the requirements of the Higher Philosophy course. Teachers and lecturers know their candidates and can use their discretion to judge what resources will be most useful to prepare them.

Further support can also be found in the course support section of the Higher Philosophy subject page on [SQA's website](#). Higher Philosophy model questions can be found on the [Understanding Standards](#) website.

Question paper 1

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates are fully prepared on all areas of the course, in line with the course specification. For the 2022–23 exam diet, candidates will have a choice between answering an essay on Descartes or Hume.

As this paper is essay-based, candidates will benefit from essay writing practice as they develop knowledge and understanding of the course. Candidates should be encouraged to answer the question that is being asked, and not just learn a generic essay response.

Candidates should find that the scaffolding of suggested content for the essay questions provides a useful guide as to the kind of content they might include in their essay. It is not, however, intended to provide an essay plan. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use these as a guide only.

Candidates can approach essays in a variety of ways, and they should not feel constrained to include everything identified, nor to exclude content not referred to. There may be many appropriate ways to answer the question asked.

In the context of an exam, it is unlikely that candidates will be able to include all relevant content to address a particular question. Candidates would benefit from practising planning essays, as well as writing them. They might look at how to select the most important content for different essay questions. This is a difficult skill and responses suggest that candidates find it particularly challenging in the context of their Higher Philosophy essays.

Candidates who gain high essay marks tend to be clear about what they intend to write in their essays from the start. This suggests they have taken time to think about their essay plan before they started writing it, or they may have prepared similar essays prior to the exam.

Candidates who achieve the highest marks in essays can explain the philosophies studied fully and in depth. Evaluative comments in essays should be more than a list of strengths or weaknesses. An essay in the highest band will likely engage in a form of conversational critique, considering possible rebuttals to points of criticism and providing personal judgements on the quality of critical points made.

In the 'Knowledge and doubt' section, candidates that do well show that they are familiar with the course text, and they understand the narrative provided by the philosophers. This usually allows them to engage more critically with philosophies studied in their essays.

Candidates should be able to explain the various theories and arguments, paying particular attention to where fine distinctions are required. For the 'Moral philosophy' section, candidates should show knowledge and understanding of the moral philosophies studied.

Teachers and lecturers may find it helpful to provide opportunities for candidates to practise applying the moral theories to different moral issues and scenarios, as well as evaluating them.

In quotation questions where a scenario is not provided, candidates do well when they use their own examples to demonstrate how the moral theory is applied and used in real-life situations.

Question paper 2

There is usually no choice of questions to answer in this paper, but for the 2022–23 exam diet candidates will have a choice between answering questions on Descartes or Hume for the 'Knowledge and doubt' section.

Question paper 2 is made up of short- and sometimes extended-answer questions. These types of questions require candidates to demonstrate precision and accuracy in describing and explaining philosophical ideas and arguments. Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates are familiar with all the content identified in the course specification. It may be helpful to provide candidates with a glossary of key terms.

Regular testing of definitions is likely to be useful for candidates, helping them to develop the precision required for answering many questions in this paper. Teachers and lecturers may want to provide candidates with opportunities to practise answering questions across all areas of the course, as well as across the skill sets, to ensure they are fully prepared for this paper.

Appendix 1: 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 including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

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 2022. 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 revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 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 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).