



Course report 2024

Higher Economics

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 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 891

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 925

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	412	Percentage	44.5	Cumulative percentage	44.5	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	140	Percentage	15.1	Cumulative percentage	59.7	Minimum mark required	72
C	Number of candidates	149	Percentage	16.1	Cumulative percentage	75.8	Minimum mark required	60
D	Number of candidates	105	Percentage	11.4	Cumulative percentage	87.1	Minimum mark required	48
No award	Number of candidates	119	Percentage	12.9	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

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 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. Following the removal of modifications, this paper assessed the full range of the course.

Feedback from centres suggested that the paper offered the appropriate level of demand and allowed the candidates to use the subject knowledge and skills they had developed throughout the course. Well-prepared candidates had the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills across the whole course.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected with most candidates achieving high marks; the average mark improved from 2023.

Most candidates produced assignments using the correct structure and followed the guidelines allowing them to attain high marks in the introduction, research, application and understanding, and structure categories.

The marks candidates achieved for analysis and evaluation of findings have improved on previous years. Candidates who chose suitable economic issues and provided useful findings, linked to their economic theory, were able to achieve high marks.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1(b): most candidates were able to achieve full marks for describing the advantages of economic growth.

Question 1(f): most candidates were able to apply their economic knowledge to the situation of an ageing population and achieved full marks.

Question 2(b): most candidates were able to demonstrate their understanding of the key economic concept of productivity by successfully describing two ways it can be improved.

Question 3(a): most candidates were able to describe why the basic economic problem of scarcity can never be solved.

Question 3(d): most candidates were able to accurately draw a fully labelled market diagram.

Question 4(a): many candidates were able to explain the effects of unemployment on both individuals and firms.

Question 5(a): more candidates were able to describe the theory of comparative advantage without using a table or numerical examples which enabled them to gain higher marks than in previous years.

Question 5(b)(i) and 5(b)(ii): many candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of types of trade barriers imposed and the reasons for doing so.

Assignment

Introduction: most candidates scored high marks as they gave a suitable purpose for the assignment which included more detail than the title. They provided concise background information which included a piece of relevant data.

Research: most candidates scored highly as they explained the suitability of at least two of their research sources.

Structure: almost every candidate received the available mark for the structure as they used the appropriate headings, font size, and line spacing.

Application and understanding: most candidates achieved high marks for this section as they applied suitable theory to at least two viewpoints.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(c): some candidates were unable to explain the factor that made the demand for natural gas price inelastic. Candidates found the application of the theory more demanding than anticipated.

Question 1(e): some candidates explained supply side policies targeted at reducing unemployment whereas the question was specifically aimed at encouraging people to return to work.

Question 3(b): many candidates were not able to describe the allocation of resources in a market economy. Candidates generally focused on the price mechanism and not on the what, how and for whom questions.

Question 3(c)(ii): most candidates were unable to describe competitive supply. Candidates did not realise it was products produced from the same resources.

Question 5(e): some candidates explained the reasons for assisting developing economies; however, the question was looking for a description of the types of assistance.

Assignment

Analysis and evaluation: some candidates did not access the full range of marks in this section. This was because they did not link their analysis and evaluation to the theoretical points they made in the previous section. Some candidates continue to use theoretical sources as their findings, for example revision websites such as Investopedia and Economics Help. This did not allow them to move on from the theory they provided in the previous section.

Some candidates continue to paraphrase their findings rather than quoting them, making it difficult for markers to identify where a candidate's own analysis starts. Some candidates did not source their findings correctly or did not source them at all, making it unclear where each finding was from. Some candidate's findings were word-for-word repetition of points they made in the previous section so did not receive further marks.

Conclusions and recommendations: some candidates did not access the full range of marks in this section because they did not make enough justified conclusions and recommendations and/or did not develop their justifications by bringing together several points they had made in previous sections.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lectures should encourage candidates to use the information provided in the stimulus material when answering the data response questions. This can give some useful background for answering the questions.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to ensure that they have a sound understanding of all topics in the course. Core economic theory such as competitive supply and resource allocation remain a valuable part of the course's assessable content.

To fully prepare for the question paper, centres should assess candidates across a range of topics from all three areas of the course. This can also provide evidence for potential exceptional circumstance applications.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should continue to encourage candidates to frame their title as a question. Candidates should also be encouraged to choose a relatively current topic where they will be able to find good up-to-date economic findings to support their theory.

Introduction: some candidates continue to give very long and detailed titles which can make it challenging to obtain the purpose mark in the introduction as the purpose may be a direct repeat of the title.

Research: candidates should not repeat a reason for a source being suitable (for example, up to date or reliable) even with a different justification. They should only use each reason once.

Application and understanding: many candidates use subheadings such as 'Individuals', 'Firms', and 'Government' when writing this section. This can be a good layout, but candidates must ensure that the points they make relate to the appropriate subheadings they use.

Analysis and evaluation: candidates should clearly show findings using quotes and data so that markers can differentiate between their research findings and their own analysis and evaluation of their findings. Candidates should ensure their analysis and evaluation are not a direct repeat of theoretical points they made in the previous section.

Candidates should avoid theoretical findings (such as those from revision websites including Investopedia and Tutor2u.net) to ensure they do not repeat the theoretical points made in the previous section. Findings should be from sources like news articles and government websites. This allows candidates to analyse and evaluate whether their applied theory is backed up or contradicted by their findings.

Conclusions and recommendations: candidates' conclusions should bring together several points they made earlier in the assignment rather than directly repeat an earlier point.

Appendix: 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.

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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).