



Course report 2024

National 5 Philosophy

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: 253

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 263

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	70	Percentage	26.6	Cumulative percentage	26.6	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	46	Percentage	17.5	Cumulative percentage	44.1	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	34	Percentage	12.9	Cumulative percentage	57.0	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	35	Percentage	13.3	Cumulative percentage	70.3	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	78	Percentage	29.7	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. Feedback from markers indicated that the paper was fair and gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding they had gained through the course.

In the knowledge and doubt section, a few candidates did not attempt any of the general epistemology questions.

There were no adjustments to grade boundaries for this part of the assessment.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected.

A few candidates were not clear about what constitutes appropriate use of their resource sheet.

There were no adjustments to grade boundaries for this part of the assessment.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

In previous years, candidates have performed better on questions about Descartes than they have on questions about Hume. However, this year there was not a marked difference in candidate performance between the Descartes and Hume questions.

Assignment

The assignment returned this year as the modifications were removed.

Approaches to the assignment varied enormously across centres. In some centres, all candidates chose from the same section of the course; whilst in others, all candidates chose a topic that is not covered in the course content.

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Arguments in action

On the whole, candidates performed best in the arguments in action section. In questions 1(a)(i), 1(a)(ii), 1(a)(iii) and 1(a)(v), many candidates were able to distinguish commands, exclamations, statements and arguments. Many candidates demonstrated, in question 1(c)(i), the ability to put the argument into standard form. Most candidates were able to identify the fallacies in questions 1(d)(i), 1(d)(iv) and 1(d)(vii).

Knowledge and doubt

Many candidates gave good descriptions of Descartes' dreaming argument and his cogito. Many candidates gave a good description of Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas.

Moral philosophy

Most candidates achieved at least 1 mark for stating the purpose of the hedonic calculus in question 3(a), and many candidates also gained at least 2 marks for explaining problems with it in question 3(b).

Most candidates scored full marks on question 3(c), about the difference between higher and lower pleasures.

Assignment

Candidates tended to perform best in the description of their chosen philosophical problem or issue, with many candidates gaining full marks for this part of the assessment. In general, candidates performed best when they were motivated by a genuine interest in their assignment topic.

Areas candidates found demanding

Question paper

Arguments in action

Some candidates were not able to recognise that the sentence in question 1(a)(iv) was a statement. Punctuation alone is not a reliable indicator of an exclamation.

In question 1(d), some candidates were not able to describe the fallacies accurately. Some candidates did not refer to the arguments to explain why they were fallacies.

Knowledge and doubt

A few candidates did not achieve any marks in questions 2 (a)-(f), which asked about general epistemology. As noted earlier, a few candidates did not respond to these questions at all.

Only a few candidates were able to access marks for describing criticisms of Descartes' dreaming argument and his cogito.

Many candidates did not score more than 2 marks out of the 6 available for question 2(j), which asked them to describe how Hume thinks we use the imagination to create complex ideas. Many candidates did not access any marks for question 2(j)(ii), in which they were asked to explain why Hume used the idea of God to show that all ideas come from experience.

Moral philosophy

Some candidates did not gain any marks for applying two factors of the hedonic calculus to the scenario in question 3(d)(i). This was generally because the points considered were irrelevant to the factors they mentioned.

A few candidates were not prepared to answer questions on a moral theory other than Utilitarianism and were awarded no marks at all for question 3(e). Some achieved no marks for describing criticisms of their other moral theory in question 3(f).

Assignment

Many candidates did not gain more than 2 marks for either analysis or explaining criticisms but gave much more description than they could be credited for.

Some candidates did not access any marks for presenting their ideas in a logical sequence.

A few candidates chose philosophical questions that involved the application of a moral theory to a moral issue, such as abortion. Unfortunately, the issue often served as a distraction and candidates tried to come up with their own way of addressing the problem instead of describing, analysing, and explaining criticisms of philosophical responses to it.

Resource sheets were sometimes used inappropriately, with candidates copying sections of text wholesale.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers 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 on the [National 5 Philosophy subject page](#).

Candidates should be able to explain the error that is made in each of the fallacies. They must also be able to identify the precise mistake that is made when they are presented with particular instances of fallacious arguments. They should be directed to the glossary in the course specification to familiarise themselves with the level of detail that is expected.

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 should be able to explain criticisms of the philosophical theories they study. In the knowledge and doubt section, 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.

Candidates should be aware that the term 'criticisms' can be understood to refer to either strengths, weaknesses or both. Teachers and lecturers should discuss criticisms with their candidates to prepare them for this aspect of the question paper. Examples of the types of criticisms that candidates might discuss can be found in the 'Knowledge and doubt additional support notes'. The support notes can be found on the [Higher Philosophy subject page](#) on SQA's website, under the 'Course support' heading.

The 'National 5 Philosophy model questions' resource demonstrates different approaches to answering questions on criticisms. This resource can be found under the 'Course Support' heading on the National 5 Philosophy subject page.

Moral philosophy

In responding to questions about criticisms of moral theories, candidates are required to do more than simply state — for example — that Utilitarianism faces a difficulty in predicting consequences. They should be able to explain the criticism and offer example(s) that illustrate the problem. Candidates may also gain marks for responding to criticisms.

Candidates should be prepared to answer questions on a moral 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

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to take some care over choosing an appropriate philosophical question or claim for their assignment. As in previous years, a few candidates chose questions that may have been more appropriate in Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies or Modern Studies and were not able to access all of the available marks because of this.

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

The assignment expects candidates to engage in description, analysis and criticisms in the context of a coherent piece of writing. Failure to cover all of these areas will mean a loss of marks. In particular, failure to cover criticisms will mean an immediate loss of 6 marks. However good the description might be, candidates should be aware that a maximum of 6 marks can be awarded for describing responses to their philosophical question or claim.

Candidates might be encouraged to practice the following: making relevant connections between concepts; explaining possible implications or consequences of a theory or position; and 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.

Teachers and lecturers should also encourage candidates to consider and explain problems with the philosophical theories they encounter in the course. This will help them to understand what they must do to get marks for explaining criticisms of the responses relating to their claim or question.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates are aware 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 that is copied from the resource sheet. Although no marks are awarded for the resource sheet itself, markers scrutinise them carefully and potential malpractice is investigated. A penalty of 20% of the maximum mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the *Coursework for External Assessment* document and the coursework assessment task on the subject page of SQA's website.

While it is acceptable for teachers and lecturers to give generic advice to the whole class, teaching the assignment as a whole-class exercise with all candidates doing the same topic is unacceptable. The individual nature of the task will be reflected in the content of the resource sheet. SQA will carry out an investigation if all the candidates from the same centre submit resource sheets with similar content.

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](#).