



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate performance, both quantitatively and qualitatively, was appreciably better than recent years. Feedback from examiners and markers suggest that both papers were pitched at the correct level. Few candidates struggled to answer four questions in Paper 1 or found Paper 2 inaccessible. Questions were generally seen as unambiguous, mainstream and a fair test of candidates' abilities.

Paper 1

- ◆ The majority of candidates were reported as being entered at the correct level. The trend in recent years has been for centres to present fewer marginal or weak candidates.
- ◆ Several markers, some with over 20 years marking experience, commented that the quality of some of the responses was amongst the best they had encountered. The extent of explanation, depth of understanding and quality of exemplification were excellent from a number of different centres.
- ◆ There were full mark responses to all questions.
- ◆ Only a small percentage of candidates failed to answer four questions. Very few candidates appear to have a problem completing four essays in the time available. Candidates' time management is an area that has improved noticeably in recent years.
- ◆ Questions A4 and C9 were the questions most frequently attempted by candidates. More candidates preferred B6 to B5. Questions A1, A2, C7, C8 and C11 were well represented within scripts. Few candidates attempted A3 or C10. The number of candidates attempting C12 appeared lower than in previous years.
- ◆ Most centres appear to cover only four Study Themes. A minority of centres, however, do five Study Themes or have different Higher groups that undertake different Study Themes.
- ◆ There has been an increase in the number of candidates who have special arrangements for the examination, including transcription. In some cases, there appeared little requirement for a candidate's script to be transcribed. However, for a small number of candidates, their script was extremely difficult to read and yet no transcription was available to the marker.

Paper 2

- ◆ Overall, responses to Paper 2 were good to very good. Most markers commented positively on the paper and the responses given by candidates.
- ◆ The vast majority of centres prepare their candidates thoroughly for this paper. This is to be commended.

- ◆ Most candidates completed the short evaluating questions very well.
- ◆ There was a fairly even split between those favouring and those opposing the recommendation.
- ◆ The structuring of reports continues to improve. Few candidates fail to develop a distinct 'report style'. Referencing of Sources and background knowledge improves the structure of reports.
- ◆ Few candidates failed to score at least half marks in the DME. There were, as in previous years, several full mark responses.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

- ◆ Most candidates developed a structured approach in writing their response. Few candidates 'turned the question' as centres are increasingly training their candidates to 'answer the question asked'. There were also fewer very long, 'rambling' responses.
- ◆ Few candidates provided purely descriptive responses. Centres are clearly succeeding in training candidates to adopt an analytical approach to essay writing.
- ◆ Questions A1 (Devolved Decision Making), C7 (South Africa), C8 (China) and C9 (USA) were particularly well done this year. Few candidates struggled with these questions. Markers commented positively on the performance in their Marker Reports.
- ◆ Up-to-date date exemplification was evident across all questions. The quality of exemplification was in some cases, outstanding, especially in relation to the above three International Issues Study Themes.
- ◆ Fewer responses had lengthy introductions that attract little credit. Similarly, there were fewer responses that ended with a conclusion which simply restated most of what had been said beforehand.

Paper 2

- ◆ The short evaluating questions were well answered, with many candidates gaining full marks.
- ◆ Fewer candidates than in the past failed to provide the full quote or both sides of a 'To what extent...' question (Questions 1 and 4).
- ◆ The majority of candidates produced appropriately structured (report-style) responses to the DME (Q5). The general standard of DME remains high and is an area of strength within Higher Modern Studies.

- ◆ Very few candidates failed to include **relevant and accurate** background knowledge in their DME.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Question A1: In carrying out its functions, local government in Scotland has come into conflict with the Scottish Government. Discuss.

- ◆ Misunderstanding of the relationship between the Scottish government and local government.
- ◆ The 'bigger picture' where there is widespread cooperation between the two levels of government.

Question A2: To what extent is the UK Parliament effective in controlling the powers of the Prime Minister?

- ◆ Describing the wider powers of the Prime Minister rather than those directly limited by the UK Parliament.
- ◆ Dated exemplification.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which re-addressed the question.

Question A3: Critically examine the view that there are few policy differences between the main political parties.

- ◆ A handful of candidates attempting in error.
- ◆ The setters decided to widen the marking instructions for this question beyond the stated four study areas of taxation, education, Europe and law and order. This decision was taken to allow candidates to be credited for points made that were current, accurate and relevant, although full marks could be gained with reference to only the prescribed study areas.

Question A4: To what extent is the media the most important factor affecting voting behaviour?

- ◆ Describing the different factors affecting voting behaviour without particular attention to the stated factor (ie the media).
- ◆ Little or no appreciation of 'new media' and its impact on voting behaviour.
- ◆ Too many historical examples. Exemplification from elections that happened more than ten years ago when there are more recent examples available.
- ◆ Lack of insightful conclusions of a qualitative or quantitative nature.

Question B5: The UK's Welfare State continues to meet its aims. Discuss.

- ◆ Little appreciation of or reference to the aims of the Welfare State.
- ◆ Description of Welfare State provision with little evaluative comment.
- ◆ Lengthy historical introductions.

Question B6: Critically examine the view that Government has failed to reduce gender or race inequalities in the UK.

- ◆ Confusion with regard to different Acts of Parliament.
- ◆ Questionable statistical exemplification.
- ◆ Answering on both gender **and** race. One or two candidates still achieved full marks though they wrote about gender and race, although this cost these candidates time later in the paper.

Question C7: The political strength of the African National Congress does not threaten democracy in South Africa. Discuss.

- ◆ Confusion over the political strength of the ANC and other South African political parties.
- ◆ A minority of candidates failing to provide balance in their responses.
- ◆ In a few instances, questionable statistics.

Question C8: In China, democracy has been extended and human rights improved. Discuss.

- ◆ Not addressing the 'democracy' aspect of the question.
- ◆ References to China's economic development in recent years.
- ◆ A minority of candidates failing to provide balance in their responses.

Question C9: To what extent does Congress act as an effective check on the powers of the President?

- ◆ Misunderstanding the different checks on the powers of the US President.
- ◆ The highest-achieving candidates were specific in their understanding of the ways Congress limits powers of the President
- ◆ In a minority of instances, dated exemplification or lack of exemplification.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment that re-addressed the question.

Question C10: Assess the importance of the European Parliament in decision making within the European Union (EU).

- ◆ Confusion with regard to the decision making powers of the respective EU institutions.

Question C11: With reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa): assess the effectiveness of foreign aid in promoting development.

- ◆ Little discussion of aid directly but 'going round the houses' and describing the various factors affecting development in African countries.
- ◆ Little appreciation of the interconnected nature of the many factors affecting development.
- ◆ Although very few candidates failed to name an African country, questionable exemplification and statistics.

Question C12: International terrorism is seen by NATO as the main threat to global peace and security. Discuss.

- ◆ Descriptive responses to a range of international threats.
- ◆ Minimal discussion of NATO's primary role or continued involvement in Afghanistan.
- ◆ Little reference to other perceived threats to international peace and security.

Paper 2

- ◆ 'To what extent' questions. A few candidates failing to give the full quote or only providing evidence to support or oppose part of the quote.
- ◆ In a few instances, misinterpretation of relatively straightforward sources.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Centres should continue to make use of the Higher Modern Studies support available on SQA's website.

Paper 1

Understanding Standards provides graded, marked and commented-on exemplars for Paper 1 (and Paper 2), which may be used to increase candidate awareness of the standard required for top marks.

Centres should refer to the Higher Modern Studies Improving Candidate Performance guidelines and past SQA exam papers' and Marking Instructions.

Centres with the best performance train candidates to answer the question set. Candidates must draw on the knowledge they have to answer the question asked and not attempt to 'turn the question'.

In the exam a few candidates give extremely long, rambling answers. Although some of these answers are very knowledgeable, they often lack focus or structure. Irrelevance and/or repetition wastes valuable exam time. In preparing for the exam, it may be useful to discuss with candidates the boxed information in the Marking Instructions. This may help candidates better structure their responses. One possible approach is the Point, Explain, Example, Balance (PEEB) structure whereby candidates make, explain and exemplify a number or relevant points (satisfying the first bullet point in the box), before going on to provide evaluative/analytical comment (the second bullet point in the box).

Candidates should be discouraged from rewriting the question in the exam as this wastes time.

The use of accurate, relevant and up-to-date exemplification remains highly creditworthy.

It is not best practice for candidates to write long (often historical) introductions to answers. Equally, conclusions that simply repeat what has been said earlier in a response attract little credit.

Paper 2

See the comment about Understanding Standards under 'Paper 1'.

The 'to what extent' three-mark questions: these require candidates to give evidence both for **and** against a given view. The view should be quoted in full. The evidence to support or oppose the given view should be concisely written.

In the case of the 'exaggeration' questions, quoting the view in full and giving a concise reason to explain the exaggeration also demonstrates good practice.

Although the short evaluating questions are straightforward and usually completed well, candidates should still be given the opportunity to practice these as part of their coursework. For more marginal candidates, full marks in these questions will improve their overall chances of passing the exam.

Synthesis of the key arguments within Sources A and B with the Statistical Sources (C1-5) remains highly creditworthy. Candidates should aim to include information from all five Statistical Sources in their report. The highest-achieving candidates will also integrate background knowledge throughout the body of their report. The 'stand alone paragraph' of background knowledge will not attract much credit. Candidates should also be discouraged from including anecdotal information in reports or claiming as background knowledge information that is already in the Sources.

In 'identifying and commenting upon arguments against their recommendation', little credit is attached to simply restating and rebutting those parts of Sources A or B which the statistical sources show to be inaccurate or exaggerated. Best practice would be to encourage candidates to identify and comment on the 'key arguments' for/against a recommendation and rebut these with the statistical sources and relevant and accurate background information. Please note that the setters' aim with Sources A and B is to provide a valid argument for or against the recommendation within each paragraph. The highest-achieving candidates (everything else being equal) are invariably those who understand the key arguments, and synthesise these with the statistical sources and background knowledge in a structured and integrated way.

Sources A and B contain information (or 'coat-hangers') that has been included in the **expectation** that candidates will go on to develop using their own background knowledge. The best-performing candidates make use of these 'coat-hangers' as well as going on to include **relevant, up-to-date and accurate additional background knowledge**. One suggested learning and teaching approach is give future candidates the opportunity to review past SQA papers with the intention of identifying and developing these 'coat-hangers'. This type of activity invariably better prepares candidates for their final exam.

Finally, some centres encourage candidates to develop 'stand alone' rebuttals when commenting on arguments that oppose their recommendation. Although this approach is not 'wrong', experience suggests that some candidates often end up repeating themselves or, in the case of more marginal candidates, appear to become confused, which detracts from the quality of the finished report. However, where a rebuttal is synthesised with the arguments opposing a recommendation, the report undoubtedly reads better.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	7673
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	8184
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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 200				
A	29.3%	29.3%	2398	63
B	28.0%	57.3%	2288	54
C	24.6%	81.8%	2011	45
D	7.2%	89.1%	591	40
No award	10.9%	100.0%	896	-

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.