



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

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

Presentations remained significantly above 3000. Just under one third of candidates were presented in S4, with just over half being presented in S5. Overall, the quality of answers from candidates presented in S4 was higher than those presented in S5 and S6. Where presentation groups were larger, results tended to be better. Overall, performance in this year's examination was better than last year.

Section A, study theme 1 (Government and Decision Making in Scotland) remains the more popular option. In Section B (Social Issues in the UK), Crime and the Law is answered more frequently than Equality in Society: Wealth and Health in the UK. In Section C (International Issues), the USA was by far the most popular option. South Africa and China are reasonably popular topics, with only a few centres teaching Brazil. The European Union is taught in only a few centres.

The format of the question paper was unchanged, compared with previous years, and the optional questions were broadly comparable, with no significant difference in overall performance between options. Evaluating remains stronger than Knowledge and Understanding, and the knowledge demonstrated in social issues topics is generally good. It is important that centres teach up-to-date contexts so that candidates can provide contemporary and accurate exemplification in their answers.

The full range of marks was awarded, with the vast majority of candidates making a good attempt at the paper. Many candidates produced excellent answers across all sections of the paper.

Most candidates completed the paper, but those who failed to answer all questions — and in particular did not answer the last question — were significantly disadvantaged.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Questions 1(a) and 2(a) were straightforward and mainstream questions that were generally done well, with some candidates providing relevant and recent exemplification.

Question 3(a) and 4(a): Most candidates showed good knowledge and understanding in these straightforward questions.

Questions 3(b) and 4(b) gave the opportunity for more extended answers, and those candidates who read the question carefully and answered as intended scored high marks.

Question 3(c) and 4(c) produced many good answers, with most candidates able to make good use of all the sources, both written and statistical.

Questions 5(c), 6(c), 7(c), 8(c) and 9(c) were generally well done with all sources accessible and used successfully.

In spite of it being the last question in the paper, questions 5(d), 6(d), 7(d), 8(d) and 9(d) were generally well done. Those candidates who had been well prepared to use the bullet point prompts as headings, synthesise information from across the sources, and draw conclusions, scored well.

Question 7(a) in the USA study theme was well answered. Although attempted by a relatively small number of candidates, the Knowledge and Understanding displayed in the European Union and Development in Brazil study themes was of a high standard, demonstrating good teaching and learning with the use of up-to-date and detailed exemplification.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Questions 1(b) and 2(b) provided the opportunity for candidates to provide up-to-date exemplification of majority government (in Scotland) and coalition government (in the UK). Unfortunately, relatively few candidates were able to give recent, relevant exemplification for this question. Some candidates seemed confused about the meaning of these terms.

Questions 1(c) and 2(c) were disappointing. In question 1(c) in particular, candidates made relatively poor use of the statistical information. Many candidates find this a demanding type of question to answer. Many will use the phrase 'The view of ... is selective in the use of facts because ...' frequently throughout the answer, but do not appear to be clear that the evidence they give is in fact selective or is supporting the view. Candidates will also use only one piece of evidence to indicate selectivity, without attempting to synthesise it with evidence from other sources or from within the same source.

Some centres seem to have attempted to prepare candidates to answer this type of question adopting an overly formulaic and wordy approach. This is often at the expense of making use of the evidence in the sources and, as a result, scores few marks and may cause problems for candidates in completing the paper.

While the decision-making questions in social issues are generally well done, some candidates would score more marks by making more extensive use of the evidence in the sources, linking evidence across the sources and ensuring that they provide reasons for rejecting the other option.

In Knowledge and Understanding questions, as always, it is important to read the question carefully. Some candidates do not score as well as they might if they attempt to give explanations in questions which only require descriptions or give descriptions when explanations are required. For example, in this year's exam, descriptions of alternative punishments were given when explanations of why they are used were required; descriptions of why health is poor were given, rather than explanations of health inequalities; explanations of the effectiveness of pressure group methods were given rather than

descriptions. When describing pressure groups in study theme 1A, candidates should give recent examples of pressure groups that are either Scottish or attempt to influence the Scottish Government.

In International Issues, many answers continue to be vague and dated and lack any recent knowledge of the country studied. This was especially noticeable in the case of Question 7(b) where many candidates believed that Medicare and Medicaid were examples of recent changes to health care.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Fewer candidates failed to answer all the questions in the paper. However, it is important to prepare candidates for the examination by ensuring they are aware that either a question in Section A or Section C will contain four parts. A prelim exam that closely replicates the structure and demands of the final exam, and an opportunity to study past papers, are examples of good practice. Support for centres is available on the SQA's Understanding Standards website:

http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/markers_ccc/mark_main.jsp?pContentID=11202&p_applic=CCC&p_service=Content.show&

Answering Knowledge and Understanding questions

- ◆ Answers that consist of a list points will gain few marks. Candidates should develop the points made with detailed descriptions or explanations and exemplification.
- ◆ Use the number of marks allocated to each question as a guide to how much to write. Writing longer answers than required will not gain additional marks, and may cause difficulties in completing the paper.
- ◆ Be aware of the difference between 'describe' and 'explain' questions, and answer accordingly.
- ◆ Answer 'in detail'. In order to do this, candidates must provide additional description and explanation supported, where appropriate, by recent examples.
- ◆ Answer the questions as set. Fewer marks will be awarded if a candidate attempts to 'turn' the question.
- ◆ Where a question is in two parts, make sure that both parts are attempted. It is not necessary to have an equal number of points for each part in order to achieve full marks.
- ◆ Demonstrate specific knowledge. In International Issues, full marks will only be achieved if candidates demonstrate knowledge of the country studied that is both relevant and up-to-date.

Answering Evaluating questions

- ◆ Make full use of the sources by linking evidence within sources and between different sources to provide detailed arguments. The use of a single piece of evidence from a source, no matter how long, will only gain one mark. To gain more marks, evidence should be linked with evidence either from the same source or other sources.
- ◆ When explaining 'selectivity in the use of facts' and giving reasons 'to support and oppose', it must be made clear whether the evidence being used in the answer is showing selectivity or not, and whether the evidence is supporting or opposing the view.
- ◆ Candidates need to develop skills in the interpretation and use of statistical sources. Generally, statistical evidence requires some interpretation to indicate its significance for the question and how it links to other evidence given. It is usually not enough to give figures without any context. Great care must be taken when using figures close to 50% and claiming this to be a majority — candidates should make reference to other figures to put them in context or give an explanation.
- ◆ It is good practice for candidates to have a structured format for answers to organise the evidence contained in the sources; but an overly structured approach where, for example, the viewpoint is repeated several times throughout an answer, is unnecessary and time consuming.
- ◆ Many candidates lose valuable time and gain no additional marks by quoting a piece of written information from the source and then paraphrasing the quotation. This is generally unnecessary. Some evidence may have to be explained or put in context, particularly statistical evidence, which may have to be interpreted, but this should be brief.
- ◆ It is good practice to use a report style format in the decision-making exercise, but the format often adopted at Higher may not always be the most suitable for Intermediate 2. Candidates must provide evidence to explain why they rejected the other option; otherwise they will be unable to score full marks.
- ◆ In the decision-making question, when providing supporting arguments for the option chosen, only evidence drawn from the sources will be credited; no marks will be given for the candidate's own opinions.
- ◆ For full marks, selective use of facts questions must contain balance. It is not enough to only provide evidence that disagrees with the view, ie shows selectivity. Evidence must also be given to show where evidence from the sources supports the view, ie to show the viewpoint is not selective. Candidates must use the viewpoint and make clear in what way the evidence they are giving is showing selectivity. Similarly, in questions where evidence is given to support and oppose a point of view, it is important that candidates refer to the point of view in the answer.

- ◆ To score well in conclusions questions, the bullet points must be used to organise the evidence and should be used as headings. An overall judgement related to the bullet point, based upon the evidence used must be given. The conclusion may be given at the beginning or the end of the explanation. Conclusions should be based upon linked pieces of evidence drawn from across the sources.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2011	3427
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	3334
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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 70				
A	27.8%	27.8%	928	49
B	23.4%	51.2%	780	42
C	25.7%	77.0%	858	35
D	7.6%	84.6%	255	31
No award	15.4%	100.0%	513	-

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.