



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	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

Paper 1

- The overall response of candidates was frequently reported as being of a higher standard than in previous years.
- There was more evidence of balanced comment and analysis than in previous years.
- There were fewer really weak responses than in previous years.
- There was an improvement in time – management with markedly fewer candidates only completing 3 responses.
- The vast majority of candidates were reported as being presented at the appropriate level.

Paper 2

- The overall response of candidates was frequently reported as being ‘very high’ – a reflection of excellent centre preparation - with more candidates achieving top marks for the Decision Making Task than last year.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

- In their responses to the assessment items for each and every Study Theme, candidates exhibited an impressive breadth of knowledge and understanding.

Paper 2

- The EV questions [1 – 3] were particularly well done.
- The majority of candidates produced appropriately structured [*report-style*] responses to Q4.
- Most candidates included relevant background knowledge in their reports.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The following are indicative of approaches taken by candidates, which although worthy of some credit, did not sufficiently meet the demands of the assessment item to merit the award of a top mark.

Paper 1

QA1 ***Assess the impact of devolution on decision making for Scotland.***

- Not picking up on the ‘*for Scotland*’ aspect of the question.
- Restricting content to the decision making process **in** the Scottish Parliament with exemplification of its use of the devolved powers.

QA2 ***Backbench MPs have little influence on decision making in Central Government. Discuss.***

- Answering the question almost exclusively from the perspective of the powers of the Prime Minister.

QA3 To what extent are there ideological differences within and between the main political parties?

- Quite comprehensive descriptions of the policies of selected political parties with no attempt at an overview of any similarities/differences.
- Scant reference to differences within the parties.

QA4 Critically examine the view that the media is the most important influence on voting behaviour.

- Too much emphasis given to describing the part played by other factors without any substantive balanced comment on the degree to which the view is valid.
- Restricting media influence to the (almost obligatory?) 1992 Sun reference.
- Concentrating solely on voting behaviour in elections to the House of Commons.

QB5 Assess the impact of income on health.

- Stereotypical descriptions, featuring too many broad generalisations about diet and lifestyle.

QB6 Critically examine the success of recent government policies to reduce poverty.

- Despite good exemplification of recent government policies aimed at reducing poverty, giving mainly qualitative [efforts to reduce poverty have had a mixed success] comment with little or no quantitative [eg of 56 poverty indicators tracked by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2008, three quarters have stalled or are getting worse] comment.

QC7 Critically examine the view that inequalities exist only between different groups.

- An overlong introduction on the inequalities engendered by Apartheid followed by an evaluation of the success of BEE in reducing these.
- Not challenging the contentious part of the given view [only *between* different groups], thereby making no reference to inequalities within groups.

QC8 Critically examine the view that there is little demand for political reform [in China] because of greater social and economic freedom.

- Using an in-depth description of social and economic reform to justify why there is no ‘need’ for political reform without reference to the response of the CCP to any such demand.
- Focusing on the inequality generated by recent social and economic reform to justify the ‘need’ for political reform without reference to the response of the CCP to any such demand
- Describing the response of the CCP to any demand for political reform, together with CCP initiatives, without any reference to recent social and economic reform.

QC9 To what extent do ethnic minorities achieve the American Dream?

- An over-emphasis on the debate over immigration into the USA.

QC10 The Council of Ministers is the most important decision-making institution in the EU. Discuss.

- Descriptions of the composition and powers of the main EU institutions, lacking both a high standard of balanced comment/analysis and any substantive exemplification of actual decisions.

QC11 With reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa)

- **Assess the influence of Non Governmental Organisations on development.**
- No balanced comment on the importance of ‘the given factor’ [NGOs] relative to other contributing factors, [as demanded by the ‘assess the influence of’ question stem.]
- A sweeping reference to ‘African countries’ rather than specific exemplification.

QC12 Assess the effectiveness of the United Nations in dealing with threats to international peace and security.

- Focusing exclusively on military intervention as a UN response to threats to international peace and security with no mention of other responses available to the Organisation.
- An over-emphasis on the perceived need for procedural reform of the United Nations.

Paper 2

Q's 1 and 2(b): [the 'to what extent' 3 mark questions].

- Only giving a piece of evidence to support a selected part of the required 'view'.
- Only giving a piece of evidence that contradicts a selected part of the required 'view'
- Quoting the complete 'view' but only referring to either the supportive or the contradictory evidence
- Giving both the supportive and contradictory evidence but only quoting part of the required 'view'

Q4 The Decision Making Task

- Annotating information lifted from the sources as background knowledge.
- The use of questionable anecdotal background information.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres should continue to make use of these Higher Modern Studies pages on the SQA site:

- Improving Candidate Performance [which amongst other things features an explanation of the significance of the question stems].
- Past Paper Marking Instructions:
- For Paper 1, the boxed references which detail the requirements for *pass and better* answers for each question may be used to make candidates familiar with the demands of the various question stems.
- For Paper 2, particular use should be made of the section suggesting how background knowledge may be derived from the Source content.
- Understanding Standards:
Provides graded, marked and commented-on exemplars for each of Papers 1 and 2, which may be used to increase candidate awareness of the standard required for top marks.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	6802
Number of resulted entries in 2009	6768

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 90				
A	25.8%	25.8%	1743	63
B	26.7%	52.4%	1804	54
C	25.8%	78.2%	1745	45
D	7.8%	86.0%	529	40
No award	14.0%	100.0%	947	-

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.