



## External Assessment Report 2009

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Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Intermediate 1 and 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

### Intermediate 2

In Section A, Study Theme 1 - Government and Decision Making in Scotland remains the most popular topic. In Section B, Social Issues in the UK, responses were evenly split between Wealth and Health and Crime and the Law. In Section C, International Issues, the USA was by far the most popular option with only a few centres appearing to teach South Africa and Brazil; China is reasonably popular but the European Union is rarely taught.

The format of the exam and style of questions should have been familiar with no significant changes to this year's paper. An additional notice was added at the beginning of each section to remind candidates that all parts of each question should be completed. It is gratifying that the number not completing all four parts of questions 1 and 2 has declined although there are still a significant number of candidates who disadvantage themselves by apparently still not realising that there are four parts to one section in the paper. The team continue to be aware that the paper is lengthy and make every effort to reduce the length of sources in evaluating questions while allowing candidates sufficient evidence to make developed arguments.

The standard of response is variable and appears to be affected by the stage at which candidates are presented with many excellent responses from candidates presented in S4. The size of presentation group also seems to have an effect upon the quality of the responses with larger presentation groups often containing many high quality answers, where presentation groups are small responses are much more variable.

Overall Knowledge and Understanding is weaker than Evaluating Skills. Too many Knowledge and Understanding answers are undeveloped and do not give sufficient detail or relevant exemplification.

### Intermediate 1

The breakdown of topics is similar to that in Intermediate 2. There were no changes to the format of the paper which should have been familiar to candidates. A number of candidates continue to make rubric violations by answering more than one Study Theme from the same section and omitting other Study Themes.

Presentation groups tend to be small. As in previous years, most candidates produce excellent answers to Evaluating questions but Knowledge and Understanding answers are very limited.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Intermediate 2

The knowledge and understanding demonstrated in both Social Issues was the strongest across the paper, with many candidates showing an excellent knowledge in the Crime and the Law study theme in particular. Knowledge and understanding in the Political Issues section was satisfactory. Apart from some excellent knowledge displayed in the Brazilian study theme, knowledge in the International topics was weakest.

Many candidates produced very good responses to the decision making exercise in Social Issues. Those questions which require candidates to give reasons to support and reasons to oppose a point of view and those which require evidence to be used to show selectivity in the use of facts were generally well done. A number of centres are clearly teaching a structured approach to tackle these questions and this is good practice as long as it is not at the expense of using sufficient evidence from the sources.

## **Intermediate 1**

Most candidates show excellent skills of evaluating across all types of source based questions.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Intermediate 2**

The knowledge and understanding demonstrated by many candidates is often very limited, lacking in detail and recent and relevant exemplification. It is in Social Issues that Knowledge and Understanding is strongest but some candidates adopt the approach of writing 'everything they know' about the topic resulting in answers which lack focus although still managing to score relatively high marks. It is in International Issues that knowledge is weakest. While few centres seem to now cover South Africa and Brazil, there is much evidence of good teaching. Knowledge and understanding of China is satisfactory and there are fewer dated and exaggerated answers. The knowledge demonstrated in the USA questions was very disappointing. Although the past year has been dominated by political change in the USA, too many candidates failed to include any specific US examples and those that did were limited and of poor quality. Some answers actually made UK references in their answers. In question 7(b) there were too many generalised answers attempting to explain the causes of crime without any reference to the specific wording of the question or reference to the USA. Many answers were exaggerated, stereotypical and often linked crime with race and ethnic origin in a simplistic way.

It is gratifying to note that there has been a fall in the number of candidates who use information from the sources without any link to the viewpoint or fail to comment upon its significance. Many candidates are using a structured format to answer evaluating questions which is good practice. However, in too many cases, this produces long and wordy answers which make insufficient use of the evidence in the sources. Some candidates will quote the viewpoint; give a single piece of evidence from a source followed by a paraphrasing of the evidence and a repetition of the viewpoint. This time consuming approach is likely to be awarded a single mark. Sources are generally designed to allow synthesis of information within or between sources to produce more detailed arguments and candidates should be encouraged to do this in order to score high marks.

In the decision making exercise, although often well done, any introduction should be brief and to the point. Many candidates are still failing to score full marks due to a failure to give detailed reasons why they did not support the other option.

Conclusions questions are the weakest. Too many answers merely repeat information from the sources without reaching any conclusions or apparently making any reference to the bullet points given.

### **Intermediate 1**

Knowledge and understanding is weaker than evaluating skills across all study themes. Knowledge is most limited in International Issues where many candidates only make limited points without any explanation or exemplification. In the USA study theme, answers were often generalised and failed to make any specific reference to US examples.

A number of candidates have used ellipsis in some evaluating questions. As a result, answers which attempt to demonstrate differences, prove exaggeration or support for a point of view do not do so. This practice should be discouraged, candidates should write quotations and evidence in full.

## **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 in Intermediate 1 they should answer all five parts of the question in the study theme chosen and that in Intermediate 2, one question will contain four parts.

## **Answering Knowledge and Understanding questions.**

Answers which only list points will gain few marks. Candidates should: -

- Provide additional description and explanation of basic points made.
- Answer the questions set; few marks will be awarded if a candidate gives a prepared answer without addressing the specific point of the question.
- Give relevant exemplification which is accurate and recent. Exemplification should be from recent years i.e. examples from before 2000 are unlikely to be credited.
- In International Issues, it is essential that candidates demonstrate specific knowledge of the country studied.
- Candidates should have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the topics studied to avoid simplistic, exaggerated and stereotypical answers.

## **Answering Evaluating questions.**

It is good practice for candidates to have a structured format for answers in order to organise the evidence contained in the sources. Candidates should: -

- Make full use of the sources by linking evidence within sources and between different sources in order to provide detailed arguments.
- Use a report style format in the decision making exercise.
- Use the bullet points in conclusions questions to organise the evidence used and give an overall judgement related to the bullet point, based upon the evidence used. Conclusions should be based upon several pieces of evidence drawn from across the sources.
- Make reference to the viewpoint in answers and indicate whether the evidence used is supporting or opposing the view or demonstrates selectivity in the use of facts.
- Develop skills in the interpretation and use of statistical sources.
- Avoid the use of ellipsis.

Centres are reminded that a document containing advice on Improving Performance in Intermediate 2 Modern Studies is available on the SQA website.

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files/ImprovingPerformanceatIntermediate2.pdf>

Material will be added to the Understanding Standards Website to support teachers in the preparation of candidates in Intermediate 2 Modern Studies.

<http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/>

## **Intermediate 1**

### **Statistical information: update on Courses**

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2008</b>	584
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2009</b>	682
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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 -				
A	27.4%	27.4%	187	42
B	25.4%	52.8%	173	36
C	19.5%	72.3%	133	30
D	5.6%	77.9%	38	27
No award	22.1%	100.0%	151	-

## **Intermediate 2**

### **Statistical information: update on Courses**

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2008</b>	2369
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2009</b>	2591
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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 -				
A	23.9%	23.9%	619	49
B	21.2%	45.0%	548	42
C	24.3%	69.3%	629	35
D	8.8%	78.1%	228	-
No award	21.9%	100.0%	567	-

## 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.