



External Assessment Report 2010

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 majority of candidates were reported as being entered at the correct level.

Markers and examiners commented that the overall standard of responses was of a good to very good standard. There were several full mark responses.

A steadily increasing number of candidates demonstrated good essay technique as well as excellent subject-based knowledge.

Only a handful of candidates failed to answer four questions in Paper 1.

There were few very weak candidates who struggled to answer any or most of the questions in the paper.

Paper 2

Continuing the positive trend of the past few years, the overall response of candidates was very good with an increased number of candidates attracting full marks. Most centres are to be commended on the way they prepare candidates for the short evaluating questions and the Decision Making Exercise (DME).

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Feedback from markers and examiners was very positive. Although some questions were more popular and generally answered better than others, no question failed to attract top marks.

Paper 2

The short evaluating questions were very well answered with many candidates attracting full marks.

The majority of candidates produced appropriately structured (report-style) responses to the DME. The general standard of DMEs has been high for a number of years.

Only a small percentage of candidates failed to include relevant and accurate background knowledge in the report.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Question A1: With devolution there is no need for Scottish representation at Westminster. Discuss.

- ◆ Restricting responses to a discussion of the devolved and reserved powers.
- ◆ Little reference to the role of Scottish MPs in Westminster or the wider debate on Scotland's political future.

Question A2: Critically examine the view that the UK Parliament has little control over the Executive.

- ◆ Some candidates turned the question into a response on limits on the powers of the Prime Minister.
- ◆ Lack of understanding/explanation/exemplification with regard to the work of Parliament in controlling the Executive including committees, voting, the role of the House of Lords, etc.
- ◆ Confusing the Executive of the UK Parliament with the previously titled 'Scottish Executive'.

Question A3: To what extent do party members decide their party's policies?

- ◆ A few candidates interpreted this question as the extent to which MPs alone decide party policy as opposed to the party membership.
- ◆ In some instances exemplification was weak for this question.
- ◆ A number of candidates completed this question although it was clear the centre did not cover this study theme.

Question A4: The Single Transferable Vote electoral system provides for better representation than First Past the Post. Discuss.

- ◆ Turning the question into a for and against STV/FPTP answer.
- ◆ Generalised discussion of PR rather than STV as required in the question.
- ◆ Not picking up on the 'better representation' aspect of the question.
- ◆ Confusion between different electoral systems including AMS and the Party List.
- ◆ Lack of exemplification from the 2007 Scottish Local Government elections although there were many 'imaginative' references to the 2010 General Election.

Question B5: Individual lifestyle choices limit good health more than any other factor. Discuss.

- ◆ Repeated stereotyping. Although reports often make comparisons to show where inequality is greatest, candidate responses must be balanced to attract top marks. Centres need to address this issue.
- ◆ Few accurate references to government and/or other reports. Anecdotal or dubious exemplification.

Question B6: To what extent have government policies reduced gender and/or ethnic inequalities?

- ◆ Although this question was generally well done, some candidates demonstrated only limited knowledge of recent government policies or their impact on reducing inequalities.
- ◆ Some candidates gave detailed descriptions of a range of government policies aimed at reducing inequalities but they did not give full consideration to the extent to which inequalities have been reduced.

Question C7: To what extent is South Africa a multi-party democracy?

- ◆ A minority of candidates made unnecessary references to the Apartheid period or gave outdated election results.
- ◆ Lack of explanation of the features of the South African political system.

Question C8: Critically examine the view that there is little opposition to the Communist Party in China.

- ◆ A one-dimensional emphasis on 'political opposition', or the lack of, in responses.
- ◆ Mistaken view that there is little opposition solely because of repression.

Question C9: Assess the impact of recent immigration on the USA.

- ◆ A number of candidates concentrated only on the economic impact of immigration.
- ◆ References to Proposition 187 when there are other more up-to-date and relevant examples available.
- ◆ A few inaccurate responses where all minorities are treated as immigrants including Black Americans.
- ◆ A lack of balance whereby some candidates argued impact of immigration was all positive or all negative.

Question C10: Critically examine the view that the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies have benefited the member states of the European Union.

- ◆ Dated responses which would describe the CAP or CFP as it was several years ago.

Question C11: With reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa):

The United Nations Organisation (UNO) has been effective in promoting development. Discuss.

- ◆ A minority of candidates either did not know what the UNO was or thought it was an NGO or they were expecting a question on NGOs and simply replaced NGO with UNO making little or no reference to the different UNO agencies.
- ◆ In a number of responses the effectiveness of the UNO in promoting development was restricted to one cursory paragraph before the candidate went 'round the houses' in describing the range of factors generally which limit development.

- ◆ A few but thankfully decreasing number of candidates who simply refer to 'Africa' rather than specific countries.
- ◆ In a number of responses there was no balanced comment on the effectiveness of the UNO in promoting development.

Question 12: Assess the effectiveness of NATO in achieving international peace and security.

- ◆ Although there was good understanding of NATO's traditional collective security role, candidates often failed to refer to NATO's role in promoting engagement and diplomacy.
- ◆ There was confusion as the nature and extent of NATO involvement in different conflicts.
- ◆ Some candidates failed to provide any meaningful overall comment on the effectiveness of NATO in achieving international peace and security.

Paper 2

Short Evaluating Questions

Question 1 and Question 3 (the 'to what extent' 3 mark questions):

- ◆ In their responses, a small number of candidates quoted only part of the required view before giving evidence to support or oppose.
- ◆ There were a few candidates who fully quoted the view but only referred in their answer to either the supportive or contradictory evidence.
- ◆ A handful of candidates gave evidence to both support and oppose the given view without quoting the view.

Question 4 — The Decision Making Exercise

- ◆ Annotating information lifted from Sources A and/or B as background knowledge.
- ◆ The use of questionable anecdotal background information.
- ◆ Although few in number, not using a report-style including failure to indicate where arguments to support a recommendation end and comments on opposing arguments begin.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres should continue to make use of the Higher Modern Studies support available on the SQA's website: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/40656.html>.

Paper 1

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

Reference to the Higher MS Improving Candidate Performance guidelines.

Past SQA exam paper 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 number of 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 is 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 re-writing 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

Understanding Standards — as above.

The 'to what extent' 3 mark questions. These questions 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.

Sources A and B contain information (or 'coat-hangers') which 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.

Centres should note that in the 2011 examination, the statistical sources will be re-numbered C1–C5 (as opposed to, for example, Source C1a and C1b) and the questions 1–5 (as opposed, for example, to Question 2a and Question 2b). Note: The number of statistical sources and the number of questions remain the same. Question 5 will be the DME.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	6768
Number of resulted entries in 2010	7366

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	25.2%	25.2%	1854	63
B	26.3%	51.4%	1934	54
C	25.5%	76.9%	1877	45
D	7.8%	84.7%	571	40
No award	15.3%	100.0%	1130	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.