



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	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

The number of candidates increased significantly compared with last year to bring the total number of presentations to over 3000. Markers also noted an improved level of performance overall and this is reflected in the increased percentage of candidates gaining A–C passes. The full range of marks were awarded with some candidates scoring very high marks. Only a few candidates made very little of the paper and would have been better presented at a lower level.

Section A, study theme 1 — Government and Decision Making in Scotland, is significantly the more popular topic. In Section B — Social Issues in the UK, Crime and the Law is answered more frequently than 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 appearing to teach Brazil; however, the European Union is rarely taught.

The format of the exam and style of questions should now be very familiar to centres with no significant changes made to this year's paper. While the number of candidates failing to complete all four parts of the questions in Section C has declined, it is still a concern that a significant number of candidates do not complete the paper. That either Section A or Section C study themes will contain four parts is now well established, so time management must continue to be an important part of preparing candidates for the exam. Marginal candidates will have difficulty in passing and able candidates will not achieve the highest grades unless they complete the paper. The team is aware that the paper is lengthy and will continue to make efforts to reduce the length of sources in evaluating questions while still allowing candidates sufficient evidence to make developed arguments.

Overall, the quality of answers from candidates presented in S4 is high. Where larger groups are presented from centres, results are generally good.

As in previous years, Knowledge and Understanding is generally weaker than Evaluating Skills. Although there has been an improvement in knowledge and understanding, too many answers are undeveloped, do not give sufficient detail or relevant exemplification while some continue to give a simplistic and exaggerated view of international issues.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In both Social Issues study themes, strong Knowledge and Understanding was demonstrated, particularly in the Crime and the Law study theme. Markers reported improved Knowledge and Understanding from many centres in International Issues; knowledge and exemplification in the USA and Brazil was better than in previous years.

Many candidates produced very good responses to the decision making exercise in Social Issues, particularly when giving reasons to support their decision. Those questions which require candidates to give reasons to support and reasons to oppose a point of view were generally well done. A number of centres are clearly teaching a structured approach to

tackle evaluating questions. This is good practice as long as it is not too time consuming and at the expense of using sufficient evidence from the sources to support arguments.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Political Issues in the UK, although the team attempted to achieve parity of demand between Question 1 (a) and 1 (b), the use of the term 'reserved' seems to have confused some candidates attempting study theme 1B. Markers were instructed to show flexibility and credit candidates who demonstrated accurate Knowledge and Understanding of those matters upon which the UK Parliament makes decisions, whether reserved or not.

Some candidates attempt to 'turn' questions and as a result are unlikely to score full marks; for example in Question 1 (b) where rather than explaining the reasons for people getting involved in pressure groups, some candidates often described pressure group methods.

Many candidates do not show balance in their answers to 'Selective in the Use of Facts' type questions and as a result do not achieve full marks. Similarly, in the decision making question in Social Issues, some candidates do not give reasons for rejecting the other option. Additional advice has been given in the marking instructions to this type of question which can be downloaded from the SQA website.

In questions which require candidates to draw conclusions, those candidates who use the bullet points as headings to structure their evidence do well. However, many candidates merely select information from the sources without reaching any conclusion and will score few marks.

Generally in evaluating questions, written sources are used well but statistical sources are less well used. It is important that candidates interpret statistical evidence and link it to written evidence to make strong, synthesised arguments.

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 2, either a question in Section A or Section C will contain four parts. A prelim exam which 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 Understanding Standards website:

http://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/markers_ccc/mark_main.jsp;jsessionid=758D1158C26C04154C172A715C6DBB14?pContentID=11202&p_applic=CCC&p_service=Content.s how&

Answering Knowledge and Understanding questions.

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

- ◆ Be aware of the difference between 'describe' and 'explain' questions and answer accordingly.
- ◆ Answer 'in detail'. In order to do this they must provide additional description and explanation supported by recent examples (post-2000).
- ◆ Answer the questions set; few marks will be awarded if a candidate attempts to 'turn' the question and gives a prepared answer.
- ◆ Demonstrate specific knowledge. In International Issues, full marks will only be achieved if candidates demonstrate specific knowledge of the country studied.
- ◆ 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. Candidates must provide evidence to explain why they rejected the other option; additional advice on this matter is provided in the marking instructions.
- ◆ For full marks, selective use of facts questions must contain balance. It is not enough to only provide evidence which 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 view is not selective.
- ◆ 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. Generally, statistical evidence requires some interpretation to indicate whether it supports or opposes a view, is demonstrating selectivity or supports a decision or conclusion.
- ◆ 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. The following advice was given to markers to assist in marking this type of question. It is printed below as a guide to help prepare candidates.

Conclusions type questions — additional guidance to markers

Now that the use of prompts is well established in conclusions type questions and most candidates use the bullet points given to structure their answers, often in the form of headings, the team thought it would be useful to re-visit the marking instructions for this type of answer. It is hoped that this guidance will avoid the over crediting of answers which merely repeat large parts of the sources without reaching any conclusions. The following guidance may be helpful when marking conclusions type questions although it may not be possible to apply in all circumstances where markers will be expected to continue to use their own judgement.

3 mark conclusion

Candidate makes an original and insightful conclusion of their own which is supported by more than one piece of valid evidence drawn from 2 sources or from different parts of the same source. The conclusion will make a judgement and use evaluative terminology.

2 mark conclusion

Candidate uses a piece of evidence from the source as a conclusion, this conclusion will involve a judgement being made but will not be original to the candidate. For example, the candidate may quote a point directly from the source and use it as a conclusion. The conclusion will be supported by accurate and relevant evidence drawn from the sources. Even although the candidate makes no original conclusions under this approach it is still possible to achieve full marks if all four prompts are used.

1 mark conclusion

Candidate uses the prompts/headings to correctly organise information from the sources but does not reach any overall judgement or conclusion. Even although several pieces of evidence may be listed under the correct heading, limit this type of answer to one mark per heading.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	2591
Number of resulted entries in 2010	3031

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	32.6%	32.6%	989	49
B	23.2%	55.8%	702	42
C	22.7%	78.5%	688	35
D	5.9%	84.4%	180	31
No award	15.6%	100.0%	472	—

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.