

Improving Performance in Higher Modern Studies

Essay Questions: Preparing Candidates, Setting and Assessing

Preparing Candidates

The Higher Modern Studies Paper 1 essay questions demand that candidates both describe and analyse political and international issues in unfamiliar and demanding contexts. The candidate's extended response should consequently feature five essential features:

- Integration of the skills of knowledge and understanding and analysis
- Appropriate terminology
- Up-to-date exemplification
- Balanced and informed argument
- A coherent and logical structure

Candidates should be made aware of the wording style of the essay questions designed to generate the above.

To what extent can Parliament control the powers of the Prime Minister?

Assess the importance of party unity in achieving electoral success.

Critically examine the effects of social and economic reform in China.

Foreign aid is no guarantee of development. **Discuss.**

Examine the effectiveness of international responses to threats to global security.

Unfamiliar and demanding contexts indeed, and perhaps not advisable as a starting point in your induction! However you should not wait until after your candidates have written their first essay before advising them of both the wording style of the essay questions and their demands. To this end you might approach a discussion of the demands of the different wording styles through such questions as:

To what extent can having a big garden help sell a house?

Assess the importance of iPod compatibility in buying MP3 speakers.

Critically examine the effects of music downloads on the music industry.

Mobile phones are offensive weapons. **Discuss.**

Examine the effectiveness of (a school policy of your choice)

Each stem asks candidates to do broadly similar things including using evidence and analysis to reach a balanced conclusion. There are subtle differences of emphasis and these are dealt with in Appendix 1.

At this point you, but possibly not your candidates, will be familiar with the format of the Higher Modern Studies paper 1 Marking Instructions. For example **Question A1 (2007)**

The distribution of reserved and devolved powers means that the most important decisions for Scotland continue to be made at Westminster.

Discuss.

“Pass” and better answers should feature developed, exemplified knowledge and understanding of:

The reserved and devolved powers

Decisions arising from these made in Westminster and Holyrood respectively

And

Balanced comment on /analysis of the perceived “importance” of these decisions for Scotland

For the purposes of internal assessment (NABs), candidates are given a not too dissimilar advice box as to what their answer should feature. However in the external assessment, no such assistance is given. The challenge for candidates is to **answer the question set**. In this respect, A good start to an answer is crucial. Best introductions succinctly point the way ahead. It is important that the candidate addresses the issue head on and, in particular does not attempt to deliver a pre-prepared answer regardless of the question (“turning the question”). The following introductions indicate an intention to tackle the question set:

Devolution has created a Scottish Parliament with the power to make decisions on many important aspects of Scottish life but Westminster still has the reserved powers and is sometimes seen as using them to Scotland’s disadvantage

[QA1 2007: The distribution of reserved and devolved powers means that the most important decisions for Scotland continue to be made at Westminster. Discuss.] .

Social and economic inequalities continue to exist in the UK. Despite government attempts to reduce them there are social class, gender and race related health and wealth inequalities.

[QB6 2007: To what extent do social and economic inequalities continue to exist in the UK?]

To a limited extent, South Africa is becoming a one party state or an “elected dictatorship” even though it has all the trappings of a highly democratic country.

[QC7 2007: Its political system has all the features of a democracy but South Africa has become a one party state. Discuss.]

Conclusions should be succinct – as demonstrated by the following.

In conclusion, although decisions on the reserved matters have to be made in Westminster, the Scottish Parliament has used the reserved powers to make many important decisions that have helped bring Scottish solutions to Scottish problems.

[QA1 2007]

Many inequalities still exist in the UK today. In an attempt to tackle these problems government has introduced a number of policies some of which have been more successful than others. [QB6 2007]

Fears have been expressed that the ANC has too much control of South Africa and is making it into a one party state. However the people have shown in three elections that the ANC is the party they want to run South Africa and to date the ANC has allowed South Africa's democratic institutions to flourish although not always easily accepting criticism. [QC7 2007]

Conclusions should avoid being wordy repetitions of what has gone before, as here:

Therefore, the growing Hispanic population has been recognised by politicians and more has been done to guarantee their votes. This is because they can swing the votes in states such as California and Florida, in result influencing the outcomes of elections in the USA. Blacks do not make as much of a change at the moment, but by the Black Middle Class and younger generations of Blacks participating more in politics, politicians can see that in the future Blacks will definitely influence the outcomes at elections and have started to campaign towards these specific groups.

[From response to QC9 2007: To what extent do ethnic minorities influence the outcome of elections in the USA?]

One of the essentials for a “pass” and better answer, irrespective of either the study theme or the wording style of the question is the requirement for **balance**. Candidates should be encouraged to signal this balance through the use of: “however there is evidence to suggest”; “to some extent this is the case but”; “on the other hand”. There is no need for this balance to be exact (assessment items should not be interpreted as being essentially “for” and “against” statements.

Question C11 (2007)

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

Foreign aid alone is no guarantee of development.

Discuss.

“Pass” and better answers should feature developed, exemplified knowledge and understanding with reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa) of:

The contribution of sources/forms of foreign aid to the development needs of African countries

Factors that may limit the impact of foreign aid on development

And

Balanced comment on /analysis of the suggestion that foreign aid alone is no guarantee of development

The following answer is exceedingly thin on balance:

Foreign aid alone is indeed no guarantee of development in Africa. For many reasons aid (1) does not get to where it is needed. There are many reasons why aid is not effective for development. If there is a civil war on in the country then in many cases, trucks carrying food aid are often hi-jacked or destroyed, meaning that aid does not get to where it is needed (2). This means that those without food cannot work the fields etc. So cannot provide for themselves, resulting in continuing poverty. Another reason is that the work of many non-governmental organizations only focus on a certain problem or people. Save the Children in Mozambique worked to cure and help 13 million children who were suffering from malaria. This helped many children get back to work or school and buy and secure a good future for their families. However Save the Children and others like it only focus on certain issues so cannot really contribute to the wider scheme of things. In conclusion I can say that much more has to be done, to work with the government of the countries to work to stop the problems of its people.

This answer is a clear fail, being awarded 4/15 marks.

Even had the missed opportunities (1) and (2) for development and exemplification been fully exploited, through reference to both the different sources/forms of aid, and, conflict situations in African countries, with the addition of other factors that may limit the impact of foreign aid on development, the isolated, - *helped many children get back to work or school and buy and secure a good future for their families* – would not have been enough for this answer to pass.

Appendix 2 features a copy of this answer – without the (1) and (2) to allow for use in the way suggested for the next exemplar.

The other essential is the requirement for **developed and exemplified knowledge and understanding**.

Question A4 (2007)

The Additional Member System gives voters more choice and better representation than does First Past The Post.

Discuss.

“Pass” and better answers should feature developed, exemplified knowledge and understanding of:

The main voter “choice” and “representation” features of the AMS

The main voter “choice” and “representation” features of FPTP

And

Balanced comment on /analysis of whether the AMS or FPTP gives voters more choice and better representation

The additional member system gives voters more choice and better representation than First Past The Post (FPTP), because it is a Proportional Representation (PR) system.

FPTP is very simple to use and it produces a quick clear result, but party choice is very limited and minority parties lose out. AMS is proportional so every vote counts which benefits smaller parties* and encourages higher turnout with the better representation* of these parties in parliament. This means that a rainbow parliament with many different views* can be created like Holyrood.*

However, FPTP allows voters to select candidates whilst AMS only allows people to select parties. Therefore people could be electing a candidate that they dislike under AMS. This goes against the view that AMS gives more choice than FPT.*

AMS also often requires a “king-maker”, such as the Lib Dems, to create a majority parliament. This means that a party who little amount of people voted for could be put in a position of power. This could also include unwanted policies by these king-maker parties. FPTP, however, produces a quick result often with a one party majority, which better represents the public’s political views.*

To conclude, AMS is more proportional than FPTP and includes a wider range of opinions and greater party choice. However FPTP creates a strong government and greater candidate choice where no “king maker” is required.*

Although a neatly structured, balanced response, the above is a very limited answer with lots of missed opportunities (*) for further development and exemplification. There are errors, and inaccurate assumptions (which have deliberately not been highlighted), as well as some confusion as to the extent of party/candidate choice afforded by FPTP. Mark: 7/15

Appendix 3 features a copy of this article without the asterisks.

- Issue a copy of the answer to your candidates.
- Instruct them to underscore errors and inaccuracies, give it a mark and be prepared to justify their decision.
- Explain the mark awarded
- Ask them to use it as a starter to write a better answer.

Five pointers to a good answer

- Integration of the skills of knowledge and understanding and analysis
- Appropriate terminology
- Up-to-date exemplification
- Balanced and informed argument
- A coherent and logical structure

Remind candidates of the need for selectivity. They will go into the external examination packed full of KU – much of which they will not use.

Setting

- a) In setting assessment items you must always ensure that your questions allow for balance and, of course can be answered.
- b) As long as you use the recommended wording style you are unlikely to go wrong. However be careful with “Discuss” questions. It is very easy to find yourself setting a basic “describe” question as in:
Inequalities are as great within different racial groups as they are between them.
Discuss.
- c) Avoid combining two of the styles as in:
To what extent have changes within the UN improved its effectiveness in dealing with threats to international peace and security?
- d) Questions in the public domain (even NABs) may be transformed into new, equally suitable assessment items.

Assess the importance of party unity in achieving electoral success. (2007), could be re-worded as:

To what extent does party unity contribute to electoral success?

Foreign aid is no guarantee of development. Discuss. (2007), could be re-worded as:
Critically examine the effects of foreign aid on development.

Assessing

- a) Ensure that candidates are aware of best practice before they tackle each NAB.
- b) The time allowance for a NAB in these units is a maximum of 35 minutes. In the external examination candidates get 22.5 minutes per response. Try to work towards 22.5 minute timed responses.
- c) Candidates frequently produce lengthy, typed responses as homework assignments that gain full marks. Tell them that you are going to give them a timed essay for which all they need to revise is the content of their full-marker. Alter the wording style of the question and only give them 22.5 minutes.
- d) Never be tempted (perhaps because you have included NABs in your prelim) to allow candidates extra time.
- e) If you do include NABs in your prelim you must remove the candidate advice box.
- f) Try to find a way to give candidates who display an acute time management problem in their Paper 1 prelim a re-sit (with, of course differently worded question).
- g) Do not confine your assessment to “from scratch” essay writing. Use the A4, C11 exemplar (above) approach – just ensure that you de-personalise and remove any annotations from any responses you use. With this approach you are monitoring your candidates’ appreciation of The Big Five of extended response writing - as well as their KU of study theme content.
- h) When either administering NABS or practising timed essays, you might consider answering the question at the same time as your candidates. There is no better way of realising what can be done in 22.5 minutes (even when you know the question in advance!)

Appendix 1 Question stems

These are provided for teacher reference. Candidates may find actual examples more helpful. Conclusions to questions using these stems are shown in italics.

Assess the impact/importance/influence of...

Candidates should address the impact etc of the given factor in causing or influencing an event or development, examine other factors that also had an influence, support this with exemplification, and provide balanced comment on the importance of the given factor relative to others.

Although the Parliament has seen some increase in its powers the Council of Ministers remains the most important decision making institution in the EU as many member states are reluctant to give up sovereignty. In practice this power is modified by the influence of the Commission.

Assess the effectiveness of...

Candidates should address the aims of the given development/policy, and then use exemplification to illustrate both the aspects where the aims were fulfilled and those areas where they were partially or not fulfilled, and provide balanced comment on the degree to which the measure was effective.

The effectiveness of UN peacekeeping has been limited. In practice it can only intervene when resources are made available and with the approval of the USA and other permanent members of the Security Council.

Critically examine the view that...

Candidates should address the given view, all or parts of which may be contentious, analyse the aspects which are valid and which are not, with supporting exemplification, and provide balanced comment on the degree to which the view is valid.

The glass ceiling still exists but it is now cracked if not completely broken. Although there is still evidence of both direct and indirect gender discrimination progress is apparent in social, economic and political fields.

“Statement.” Discuss

Candidates should challenge each aspect of the statement, giving a balanced treatment of each in terms of argument and supporting exemplification, and provide a balanced view on the statement.

AMS does provide better representation than FPTP as there is a wider range of parties in the Scottish Parliament. Women are better represented in the SP than in the House of Commons although few ethnic minority MSPs have been elected so far. However voters' choices are limited compared to some other systems.

Critically examine the effects of...

Candidates should address both the positive and negative effects of the given development, supporting analysis with evidence, and provide balanced comment on the degree of benefit of the development.

Means testing benefits allows taxpayers' money to be targeted at those in most need and keep public spending under control. However it require extra administration and leads to lower take up rates than universal benefits.

Critically examine the role of/part played by...

Candidates should define and describe the role of the institution(s)/body within the larger given issue, analyse both particular aspects and the overall place of the factor, supporting this with exemplification, refer to other factors and conclude with a balanced view of the nature and importance of its role.

Within the Scottish Parliament cross party committees are very effective in holding the administration to account while they have stronger powers than committees in the Westminster parliament. However they are headed by convenors appointed by the administration and their members usually follow their party line.

To what extent...

Candidates should address this as a ‘for and against’ question, citing and supporting ways that exemplify, for example, progress has

been made, as well as ways in which it has not; comment will be quantitative rather than qualitative.

In conclusion social class and related factors such as occupation and family background still have a major influence on voting behaviour though it is not as overwhelming as it once was. The media, especially TV, are increasingly influential among younger voters. However significant numbers of these younger voters abstain suggesting disillusion with the political process.

Appendix 2

Foreign aid alone is indeed no guarantee of development in Africa. For many reasons aid does not get to where it is needed. There are many reasons why aid is not effective for development. If there is a civil war on in the country then in many cases, trucks carrying food aid are often hijacked or destroyed, meaning that aid does not get to where it is needed). This means that those without food cannot work the fields etc. So cannot provide for themselves, resulting in continuing poverty. Another reason is that the work of many non-governmental organizations only focus on a certain problem or people. Save the Children in Mozambique worked to cure and help 13 million children who were suffering from malaria. This helped many children get back to work or school and buy and secure a good future for their families. However Save the Children and others like it only focus on certain issues so cannot really contribute to the wider scheme of things.

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