



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

For the past few years candidate performance has remained strong. Feedback from examiners and markers suggested that most candidates were entered at the correct level, very few had difficulty accessing questions and that all questions were accessible, mainstream and appropriate. The Setting Team are, once more, to be commended for constructing an instrument of assessment that allowed candidates to demonstrate their skills and knowledge whilst at the same time maintaining the national standard.

Paper 1

- ◆ As in 2013, the majority of candidates were reported as being entered at the correct level. The trend in recent years has been for centres to present fewer marginal or weak candidates.
- ◆ Markers were, in the main, pleased with the responses they encountered across questions and within most centres. A few centres were praised by markers for the outstanding quality of responses. Very few centres were highlighted by markers as having candidates whose performance was consistently poor.
- ◆ There were full-mark responses to all questions. Several candidates scored full marks for Paper 1, with three securing full marks in both papers.
- ◆ Most candidates answered four questions. Very few candidates appear to have a problem completing four essays in the time available. Time management has improved in recent years.
- ◆ A small number of candidates persist in 'writing all they know' by way of response. Although these candidates, inevitably, attract some credit, too often these types of answers contain irrelevances and time is wasted.
- ◆ Questions A4, B5 or B6 (more responses split evenly in 2014) and C9 were the questions most frequently attempted by candidates. Questions A1, A2, C7, C8 and C11 were well represented within scripts. Very few candidates attempted A3 or C10. The number of candidates attempting C12 remains relatively small.
- ◆ Most centres appear to cover only four Study Themes. A minority of centres, however, do five Study Themes or have different Higher groups that undertake different Study Themes.
- ◆ As noted in previous EARs, there has been an increase in the number of candidates who have special arrangements for the examination, including transcription. In some cases, there appeared little requirement for a candidate's script to be transcribed. However, for a small number of candidates, their script was extremely difficult to read and yet no transcription was available to the marker.

Paper 2

- ◆ Overall, responses to Paper 2 were good to very good. Most markers commented positively on the paper and the responses given by candidates.
- ◆ The vast majority of centres prepare their candidates thoroughly for this paper. This is to be commended.
- ◆ Most candidates completed the short evaluating questions very well. There were many full mark responses to the short evaluating questions.

- ◆ Evidence suggests far more candidates supported the recommendation than rejected the recommendation.
- ◆ The structuring of reports remains good to very good. Few candidates fail to develop a distinct 'report style'. Referencing of Sources and background knowledge improves the structure of reports.
- ◆ Few candidates failed to score at least half marks in the DME. There were, as in previous years, a pleasing number of full-mark responses.
- ◆ As noted above for Paper 1, there has been an increase in the number of candidates who have special arrangements for the examination, including transcription. In some cases, there appeared little requirement for a candidate's script to be transcribed. However, for a small number of candidates, their script was extremely difficult to read and yet no transcription was available to the marker.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

- ◆ Most candidates developed a structured approach in writing their response. Very few candidates 'turned the question', as centres are increasingly training their candidates to 'answer the question asked'. There were, also, very few very long 'rambling' responses.
- ◆ Few candidates provided purely descriptive responses. Centres are clearly succeeding in training candidates to adopt an analytical approach to essay writing.
- ◆ Questions A2 (Pressure Groups), B5 (Welfare State), B6 (Gender and/or Race) and C9 (USA) were particularly well done this year. Few candidates struggled with these questions, with several markers commenting positively on performance in Marker Reports.
- ◆ Up-to-date exemplification was evident across all questions. The quality of exemplification was in some cases, outstanding, especially in relation to the above Study Themes.
- ◆ Relatively few candidates completed C12 (Global Security), however, the most up-to-date exemplification in terms of Syria and the Ukraine crises was also particularly pleasing to note.
- ◆ Fewer responses had lengthy introductions that attract little credit. Similarly, there were fewer responses that ended with a conclusion which simply restated most of what had been said before.

Paper 2

- ◆ The short evaluating questions were well answered with many candidates attracting full marks.
- ◆ Few candidates failed to provide the full quote or both sides of a 'To what extent...' question (Questions 2 and 4).
- ◆ The majority of candidates produced appropriately structured (report-style) responses to the DME (Q5). The general standard of DME remains high and is an area of strength within Higher Modern Studies.
- ◆ Evidence suggests centres continue to improve the teaching of higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis. More and more centres now train candidates to link the written sources (A and B) with the statistical sources (C1–C5) and then with appropriate background knowledge as they 'build' the arguments to support

their recommendation. Equally, the skills involved in identify and rebutting opposing arguments in a logical and structured manner has also improved.

- ◆ Very few candidates failed to include relevant and accurate background knowledge in their DME although the quality of background knowledge remains variable and is one of a number of key discriminators for this paper.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

QA1. To what extent are Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) effective in holding the Scottish Government to account?

- ◆ Descriptive answers that concentrated mainly on the ways MSPs can hold Scottish Government to account as opposed to the *effectiveness* of MSPs in holding the Scottish Government to account.
- ◆ Misunderstanding the role and membership of Scottish Parliament committees.
- ◆ Not appreciating the type of government — minority or majority government — and the effect this has on decision making within Parliament.

QA2. Assess the effectiveness of pressure groups in influencing decision making in Central Government.

- ◆ A focus on insider and outside pressure at the expense of any other type of pressure group, eg cause or interest groups, etc.
- ◆ Descriptive answers that failed to address the *effectiveness* aspect of the question.

QA3. There are few policy differences between the main political parties. Discuss.

- ◆ Very few candidates attempted this, so no general conclusions can be drawn.

QA4. The Single Transferable Vote (STV) provides for fairer representation than First Past the Post. Discuss.

- ◆ In a number of centres, confusion between STV and AMS.
- ◆ Discussing STV in general terms or in terms of proportional representation (PR) systems rather than specifics.
- ◆ Questionable, dated or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ Inaccurate claims in respect of STV and FPTP with regard to the representation of women or minorities or minority parties that may in theory be the case but are not always evidenced in practice.
- ◆ Failure to focus on the 'better representation' aspect of the question and instead turning the question into a 'for and against' FPTP and STV.

QB5. To what extent does the Welfare State continue to meet its aims?

- ◆ Failing to state or explain the aims of today's Welfare State.
- ◆ Overly historical responses that did not consider the ways today's Welfare State aims have changed in the way it supports citizens in the 21st Century.
- ◆ Questionable, dated or inaccurate statistics.

QB6. Critically examine the view that government in the UK has failed to reduce gender and / or race inequalities.

- ◆ Overly historical approaches to legislation with no mention of the Equality Act 2010.
- ◆ Exclusive emphasis on policies such as the Minimum Wage and Tax Credits which were designed to help all poor groups including women and those from minority groups, although these groups may well have benefited disproportionately. In future, candidates should be encouraged to appropriately qualify their comments.
- ◆ Highly questionable, random or inaccurate statistics.

QC7. Critically examine the view that inequalities are greater within racial groups than between racial groups.

- ◆ Failing to address inequalities both within **and** between racial groups.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which addresses the question.

QC8. Critically examine the view that economic success has benefited all of the people of China.

- ◆ Little knowledge of China's economic success.
- ◆ Dated descriptions of social and economic policies and change.
- ◆ In a minority of centres, 'turning the question' towards human rights and democratic reform.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which addresses the question.

QC9. To what extent has immigration benefited the USA in recent years?

- ◆ Balanced answers that explain and exemplify both the benefits and problems created by both legal and illegal immigration.
- ◆ The inclusion of a range of factors beyond economic including cultural, geographic and political.
- ◆ The 'US immigration debate'.
- ◆ Dated exemplification and/or questionable or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which addresses the question.

QC10. To what extent has there been agreement between European Union members over reform of the Common Agricultural and Fisheries policies?

- ◆ Very few candidates attempted this, so no general conclusions can be drawn.

QC11. With reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa): *Trade is more important than foreign aid in promoting development in Africa.* Discuss.

- ◆ Minimal comment on the importance of trade as a factor promoting development.
- ◆ Little reference to the 'trade versus aid' debate.
- ◆ In a number of centres, and despite best advice in previous EARs, candidates continue to go 'round the houses' in terms of reciting the various factors that affect development.
- ◆ On occasion, highly questionable or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which addresses the question.

QC 12. Critically examine the view that NATO has an important part to play in achieving international peace and security.

- ◆ Confusion with regard to NATO and the UN.

- ◆ Dated exemplification with little from 21st Century.
- ◆ Failure to provide a balanced answer that recognises that NATO has had success / or achieved very little in dealing with threats to peace and international security

Paper 2

- ◆ In 'To what extent' questions, a few candidates failed to give the full quote or only provided responses to support or oppose part of the quote.
- ◆ In a few instances, misinterpretation of relatively straightforward sources. One or two markers commented that QC5 (survey) candidates made reference to the wrong survey question.
- ◆ Several markers praised candidates for their very good use of appropriate and relevant background knowledge. However, it was pointed out on one or more occasions that candidates in a few centres did not develop the information from Sources A or B, ie make use of the 'coat hangers' that invite candidates to give background information.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Centres should continue to make use of the Higher Modern Studies support available on the SQA's website.

Paper 1

SQA's Understanding Standards resources provide graded, marked and commented-on exemplars for Paper 1 (and Paper 2), which may be used to increase candidate awareness of the standard required for top marks.

Centres should refer to the 'Higher Modern Studies Improving Candidate Performance' guidelines, and to past SQA exam papers and 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 few 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 may be 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 rewriting the question in the exam as this wastes time.

The use of accurate, relevant and up-to-date exemplification remains highly creditworthy. Inaccurate or irrelevant statistics are bracketed off and attract no credit.

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.

Evidence suggests that some centres attempt to ‘question spot’ within a Study Theme. This is not good practice and does not encourage candidates to ‘think the question through’ before starting their response. Best preparation is to encourage candidates to ‘answer the question asked’ by applying a range of knowledge in a way that best answers the question.

Paper 2

The remarks on Understanding Standards materials for Paper 1 apply here, too.

The ‘to what extent’ 3-mark 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.

Although the short evaluating questions are straightforward and usually completed well, candidates should still be given the opportunity to practise these questions as part of their coursework. For more marginal candidates, full marks in these questions will improve their overall chances of passing the exam.

Synthesis of the key arguments within Sources A and B with the Statistical Sources (C1–5) remains highly creditworthy. Candidates should aim to include information from all five Statistical Sources in their report. The highest achieving candidates will also integrate background knowledge throughout the body of their report. The ‘stand alone paragraph’ of background knowledge will not attract much credit. Once more, candidates should also be discouraged from including anecdotal information in reports or claiming as background knowledge information that is already in the Sources.

In ‘identifying and commenting upon arguments against their recommendation’, little credit is attached to simply restating and rebutting those parts of Sources A or B which the statistical sources show to be inaccurate or exaggerated. Best practice would be to encourage candidates to identify and comment on the ‘key arguments’ for/against a recommendation and rebut these with the statistical sources and relevant and accurate background information. Please note that the Setters’ aim with Sources A and B is to provide a valid argument for or against the recommendation within each paragraph. The highest achieving candidates (everything else being equal) are invariably those who understand the key arguments and synthesise these with the statistical sources and background knowledge in a structured and integrated way.

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*. One suggested learning and teaching approach is to give future candidates the opportunity to review past SQA papers with the intention of identifying and developing these 'coat hangers'. This type of activity invariably better prepares candidates for their final exam. As with Paper 1, inaccurate or irrelevant statistics are bracketed off and attract no credit.

*One additional point to make in terms of background knowledge (BK) is that the highest-scoring candidates include BK that is not only well integrated and accurate but is **most** appropriate to the DME set. In 2014, a number of candidates cited, for example, the 'Five Giant Evils' or 'The Sick Man of Europe' as their main evidence of BK. However, with many other opportunities to develop BK, the candidate with 'marginal' BK will not attract the same credit as the candidate who includes BK that is central to the decision making task.

Finally, some centres encourage candidates to develop 'stand alone' rebuttals when commenting on arguments that oppose their recommendation. Although this approach is not 'wrong', experience suggests that some candidates often end up repeating themselves or, in the case of more marginal candidates, appear to become confused, which detracts from the quality of the finished report. However, where a rebuttal is synthesised with the arguments opposing a recommendation the report undoubtedly reads better.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	8027
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	8929
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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 90				
A	27.5%	27.5%	2458	63
B	26.6%	54.2%	2378	54
C	25.3%	79.4%	2258	45
D	7.4%	86.9%	662	40
No award	13.1%	-	1173	-

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.