



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

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

The number of presentations decreased significantly, to just over 400 candidates. This was accompanied by a major change in the stage of presentation profile, with candidates presented in S4 falling to 16% and over 80% of candidates being presented in S5/S6. In spite of this, overall performance in this year's examination was of a similar standard to previous years.

In both Section A and Section B, each of the study themes were answered by significant numbers of candidates. In Section C, International Issues, the USA was by far the most popular option.

The format of the question paper was unchanged from previous years, and the optional questions were comparable in their level of demand. Performance in evaluating questions remains significantly stronger than in Knowledge and Understanding questions. Knowledge demonstrated in Social Issues Study Themes is generally good, and generally weaker in Political Issues and International Issues. Some candidates demonstrate little knowledge across the paper, and often answers are basic without any significant explanation or exemplification.

Almost the full range of marks was awarded, with relatively few candidates unable to make a reasonable attempt at the paper. Very few candidates scored fewer than 15 marks in the paper. Few candidates failed to complete the paper due to lack of time, and the number of rubric violations was lower than in previous years, although some candidates seem unfamiliar with the layout of the paper and answer more than one question from the same section. Fewer candidates achieved the very highest marks. Most candidates appeared to have been presented at the correct level.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Evaluating questions: generally candidates do very well in most types of evaluating questions.
- ◆ Candidates generally do well in source-based questions where they are required to identify differences, make a decision, identify and explain exaggeration and support/oppose a point of view.
- ◆ Knowledge and Understanding in Section B: Social Issues in the United Kingdom was answered better than either of the other sections.
- ◆ Those questions that provided a degree of scaffolding eg 'Give one reason... AND Give one reason...' were generally helpful for candidates and encouraged fuller answers.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

- ◆ Overall, Knowledge and Understanding is weak, particularly in sections A and C.
- ◆ Descriptions are often limited and explanations weak.
- ◆ Candidates often fail to distinguish between 'describe' and 'explain' questions, and while this may be credited in part, it often involves candidates turning the question and failing to address the question asked.
- ◆ There is a lack of relevant and recent knowledge. In some cases, Knowledge and Understanding in an international context is vague and fails to make any specific reference to the country studied.
- ◆ Of the source-based questions, candidates find the 'conclusions' questions the most demanding and often do little more than repeat information from the source without providing even a basic conclusion on the bullet point prompt provided.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **General**

To reduce the number of rubric violations, prepare candidates by giving them the opportunity to see past papers. Make sure candidates know in advance which study themes they should attempt in the final exam.

Encourage candidates to attempt all the questions in their three chosen study themes. The most common reason for scoring low marks is the omission of questions.

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

- ◆ Answers that only list basic points will gain few marks. Candidates should develop the points made, with limited descriptions or explanations, and with recent examples.
- ◆ All questions are worth four marks, so two points need to be made to gain full marks.
- ◆ Prepare candidates by making clear the difference between 'describe' and 'explain' questions, and encourage them to answer accordingly.
- ◆ In International Issues, make sure relevant and recent examples from the country studied are given.
- ◆ If the question has a graphic, encourage candidates to use it to support their answer.

### **Answering Evaluating questions**

- ◆ In the decision-making question in Social Issues, a piece of evidence must be linked from the factfile to one of the points in the option for two marks. Two reasons must be given for full marks.

- ◆ When two sources are given in a question, both must be used for full marks.
- ◆ In support/oppose questions, candidates must make reference to the view in their answer.
- ◆ In exaggeration questions, candidates should quote each example of exaggeration in full then give the evidence to show it is exaggerated.
- ◆ In conclusions questions, it is not sufficient to merely repeat the information shown. Candidates should make some kind of judgement which is supported by evidence from the source.
- ◆ When statistical information is given in the source, candidates should quote figures from the source when supporting an argument or conclusion.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	1124
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	418
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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 60				
A	23.9%	23.9%	100	42
B	21.5%	45.5%	90	36
C	21.5%	67.0%	90	30
D	6.9%	73.9%	29	27
No award	26.1%	-	109	-

## 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.