



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

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 2200 candidates. This was accompanied by a major change in the stage of presentation profile, with candidates presented in S4 falling to 16.6% 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 last year.

Section A, Study Theme 1, Government and Decision Making in Scotland, remains the more popular option. In Section B (Social Issues in the UK) more candidates answer the Equality in Society: Wealth and Health in the UK context. In Section C, International Issues, the USA remains by far the most popular option.

The format of the question paper was unchanged from previous years, and the optional questions were broadly comparable with no significant difference in performance between options. Performance in evaluating questions remains stronger than in Knowledge and Understanding questions. Knowledge and understanding demonstrated in social issues topics is generally good. It is important that centres teach up-to-date contexts so that candidates can provide contemporary and accurate exemplification in their answers.

The full range of marks was awarded, with the vast majority of candidates making a good attempt at the paper. Many candidates produced excellent answers across all sections. Most candidates completed the paper. There was a slight fall in the number of very high-scoring candidates, but only a small proportion scored fewer than 25 marks. The great majority of candidates were presented at the correct level.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

- ◆ Question 1(b): Most candidates had a good understanding of pressure group methods.
- ◆ Question 1(d) and Question 2(d): Candidates generally find this to be a straightforward type of question.
- ◆ Question 2(b): Most candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of participation in the political system.
- ◆ Question 3(a) and Question 4(a): Candidates generally demonstrated a good knowledge of government health policies and the role of the police.
- ◆ Question 4(b): Candidates showed a good understanding of the arguments around the legal age for buying alcohol.
- ◆ Question 9: Although attempted by few candidates, answers referring to Brazil tended to be of a high standard with up-to-date and relevant exemplification.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

- ◆ Question 1(a): In spite of this being a mainstream question, many candidates seem unaware of the ways councils raise money. Many candidates referred to a range of fundraising type events.
- ◆ Question 1(c): Some candidates fail to use the bullet point prompts as headings and as a result produce disorganised answers or use insufficient information to reach a valid conclusion. Many were unable to distinguish between 'candidates' and 'elected councillors'.
- ◆ Question 2(b): Many candidates were unable to give detailed arguments for and against increasing the National Minimum Wage.
- ◆ Section C. Question (c): Many candidates remain unsure how to tackle the 'selective in the use of facts' question, producing confused answers.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

### General

Most candidates completed the paper, and relatively few committed rubric violations, although some lost time by attempting both questions in Section A. It is important that candidates are familiar with the format of the question paper and only answer one question from each section.

### Answering Knowledge and Understanding questions

- ◆ Candidates need to be aware of the difference between 'describe' and 'explain' questions and answer accordingly.
- ◆ Answer 'in detail'. To do this, candidates must make a point and provide additional description and explanation, supported, where appropriate, by recent examples.
- ◆ Answers that consist of a list of undeveloped points will gain few marks. Candidates should develop the points made with detailed explanations and exemplification.
- ◆ Use the number of marks allocated to each question as a guide to how much to write. Writing longer answers than required will not gain additional marks and may cause problems in completing the paper.
- ◆ Answer the questions as set. Fewer marks will be awarded if a candidate attempts to 'turn' the question.
- ◆ Where a question is in two parts, make sure that both parts are attempted. It is not necessary to have an equal number of points for each part to achieve full marks.
- ◆ Candidates should give reasonably recent exemplification; too many answers still refer to the Snowdrop Campaign formed after the Dunblane shootings (1996) as an example of a

pressure group, the election of 1992 when discussing bias in the press, and the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 as an example of lack of human rights in China.

- ◆ Demonstrate specific knowledge. In International Issues, full marks will only be achieved if candidates demonstrate specific knowledge of the country studied which is both accurate and up-to-date.
- ◆ Candidates should avoid overly stereotypical and exaggerated descriptions and explanations, particularly when referring to international issues.

### **Answering Evaluating questions**

- ◆ Make full use of the sources, and gain more marks, by linking evidence within a source and between different sources to provide detailed arguments. The use of a single piece of evidence from a source, no matter how long, will only gain one mark.
- ◆ Many candidates lose valuable time, and gain no additional marks, by quoting a piece of written information from the source and then paraphrasing the quotation. This is generally unnecessary. Some evidence may have to be explained or put in context — particularly statistical evidence, which may have to be interpreted — but this should be brief.
- ◆ When explaining ‘selectivity in the use of facts’ and giving reasons ‘to support and oppose’, it must be made clear whether the evidence being used in the answer is showing selectivity or not, and whether the evidence is supporting or opposing the view.
- ◆ Candidates need to develop skills in the interpretation and use of statistical sources. Generally, statistical evidence requires some interpretation to indicate its significance for the question and how it links to other evidence given. It is usually not enough to give figures without any context. Great care must be taken when using figures close to 50% and claiming this to be a majority — candidates should make reference to other figures to put them in context or give an explanation.
- ◆ While it is good practice for candidates to have a structured format for answers to organise the evidence contained in the sources, an overly-structured approach where, for example, the viewpoint is repeated several times throughout an answer, is unnecessary and time-consuming.
- ◆ It is good practice to use a report-style format in the decision-making question. However, the format often adopted at Higher may not always be the most suitable for Intermediate 2. Candidates must provide evidence to explain why they rejected the other option; otherwise they will be unable to score full marks. In this type of question it is useful to check that the evidence given does in fact support the option chosen.
- ◆ In the decision-making question, when providing supporting arguments for the option chosen, only evidence drawn from the sources will be credited. As in other evaluating questions, candidates will be credited for linking evidence both from within and between sources.

- ◆ For full marks, selective use of facts questions must contain balance. It is not enough only to provide evidence that 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 viewpoint is not selective. Candidates must use the viewpoint and make clear in what way the evidence they are giving is showing selectivity. Similarly, in questions where evidence is given to support and oppose a point of view, it is important that candidates refer to the point of view in the answer.
- ◆ To score well in conclusions questions, the bullet points must be used to organise the evidence and should be used as headings. An overall judgement related to the bullet point, based upon the evidence used, must be given. The conclusion may be given at the beginning or the end of the explanation. Conclusions should be based upon several pieces of evidence drawn from across the sources. It is not enough to come to a judgment based upon only one piece of evidence.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	3676
Number of resulted entries in 2014	2461

## 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	28.1%	28.1%	692	49
B	23.4%	51.5%	576	42
C	24.3%	75.8%	598	35
D	6.7%	82.5%	164	31
No award	17.5%	-	431	-

## 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.