



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>Modern Studies</b>
Level	<b>Advanced Higher</b>

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

A total of 126 centres presented candidates for Advanced Higher Modern Studies in 2011 — an increase of 19 from 2010 and candidate numbers also rose notably (to 801)

The mean mark in the examination was 54.7 — a slight decrease from 2010 (55.6). The mean dissertation mark (29.5) was up slightly on the previous year (29.2).

99% of candidates were in S6. Many centres still over estimate their candidates' performance, however this is an area that shows more concurrency this examination diet. The over-estimation is mostly due to the fact that dissertations are not normally included in centre estimates which tend to be based solely on preliminary examinations.

The 'Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies' report is on SQA's website. This should be read carefully and, if appropriate, shared with candidates. It can be found at:

[www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/NQModernStudiesImprovingPerformanceAdvHigher.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/NQModernStudiesImprovingPerformanceAdvHigher.pdf)

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Dissertation

An increasing number of candidates produced high quality dissertations. The standard is improving year on year. The 'Improving Performance' document and the materials on the Understanding Standards website should help maintain the high standard. Comments in previous external assessment reports (EAR) are still current. See below.

Successful candidates had:

- ◆ chosen their topics carefully and ensured they were based on the study theme and contexts they were studying
- ◆ submitted their hypothesis to SQA for approval (by 1st November)
- ◆ planned their dissertations carefully
- ◆ chosen an appropriately focused hypothesis that ensured good quality in-depth research
- ◆ chosen a hypothesis that was based on a current issue
- ◆ chosen aims that linked directly to the hypothesis and lent themselves to analysis and synthesis rather than description
- ◆ used a suitable selection of primary and secondary sources/research methods — the results of which were well integrated into the dissertation
- ◆ read appropriate academic texts — not necessarily books but, for example, government reports
- ◆ attributed evidence clearly by means of consistent referencing and a bibliography
- ◆ researched, analysed and synthesised information and related it directly to the hypothesis
- ◆ used current and detailed exemplification

- ◆ drew sophisticated conclusions that directly tested the hypothesis
- ◆ fully but succinctly described, justified and evaluated the research methods used in relation to gathering information linked to the hypothesis
- ◆ written between 4,500 and 5,000 words in the main body of the dissertation
- ◆ provided full, numbered appendices that included correspondence, interviews carried out, survey questions and results and anything else relevant to the research
- ◆ had proof read their dissertation
- ◆ used size 12 font with double line spacing and a word count on each page

## **Essays**

A majority of candidates displayed good social, economic and political knowledge and understanding of the issues raised by the essay questions. In Study Theme 1: Comparative Politics and Research Methods, all four contexts were answered to a high standard. Generally, candidates who did this study theme produced more sophisticated answers than those who answered study themes 2 and 3.

In Study Theme 2: Law and Order and Research Methods, the most popular questions were Contexts B and D. Many candidates brought their dissertation research into their answers and this is commended as good practice.

Very few centres attempted Study Theme 3: European Union and Research Methods.

A number of candidates produced high quality essays. These candidates had:

- ◆ answered the question that was set and did not attempt a pre-prepared answer
- ◆ planned their answers before writing them
- ◆ structured their answers with a focused introduction, analysis, synthesis and conclusions that directly related to the question set
- ◆ developed points
- ◆ analysed the issue in depth and ensured that all sides of the argument were covered, ie gave a balanced answer
- ◆ used relevant and current exemplification that was often referenced
- ◆ used appropriate quotations, for example, from academics
- ◆ compared and contrasted the UK (including Scotland) with the USA in Comparative Politics essays
- ◆ developed conclusions that directly related to the question set and attempted to reach a decision based on the evidence in their essay. Had implicit as well as explicit conclusions
- ◆ engaged with the question in a manner that suggested they really understood the issue
- ◆ stuck to the time limit of one hour suggested for each essay

## Research Methods

A number of candidates produced high quality answers but there was a disappointingly large number who displayed little knowledge and understanding about research methods.

In Question 5 (a) the better candidates had:

- ◆ chosen an appropriate sample type, such as random sampling and gave reasons as to why they would choose that type and linked it to the question, ie about people's views on the Scottish Parliament
- ◆ developed points they were making
- ◆ focused their answers
- ◆ addressed the actual question that was set

In Question 5 (b) the better candidates had:

- ◆ discussed the merits of focus groups over individual interviews when carrying out social science research
- ◆ developed points they were making
- ◆ used real and relevant examples that were integrated into their answer

In Question 6 (a) the better candidates had:

- ◆ clearly understood what is meant by valid and reliable and constantly linked the points they were making to validity and reliability
- ◆ developed points they were making
- ◆ directly referred to the source
- ◆ focused their answers
- ◆ came to an overall conclusion as to the extent that valid and reliable conclusions could be made from the source

In Question 6 (b) the better candidates had:

- ◆ genuinely discussed the merits of open and closed questions
- ◆ used specific research examples to exemplify their answer
- ◆ focused their answers
- ◆ developed points they were making

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Dissertations**

Poor planning generally led to a poor quality dissertation. Note the mark allocation for the dissertation: 10 marks are given for the planning stage; 25 marks for analysis, synthesis and exemplification; and 10 marks for conclusions that address the hypothesis.

Hypotheses can be submitted to SQA for approval before 1st November. Several hypotheses were so broad that it is difficult to test them in any depth. Aims/research questions must relate to the hypothesis. Aims should ensure that analysis and argument is possible. Too much description is not good practice.

Often there was lack of appropriate sources used; an overuse, in many cases, of general internet sites such as Wikipedia and BBC News.

Where candidates had 'cut and pasted' to a large extent, this worked to the detriment of their own analysis and synthesis. For more information on plagiarism, the 'Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies' document should be consulted.

There was lack of attribution of evidence by means of consistent referencing and a bibliography.

Many candidates did not have sophisticated conclusions that related directly to the testing of the hypothesis.

Several candidates had not described, justified and evaluated the research methods used in relation to gathering suitable information linked to the hypothesis. Often the evaluation was generic. For example, what was good/bad about using the internet rather than an evaluation of a specific site they had used for the dissertation.

There were still a number of dissertations that contained far fewer than 5,000 words and several were below 4,000. These candidates disadvantaged themselves in that full research and analysis and synthesis can be difficult to achieve in so few words.

Fully numbered appendices that included correspondence, interviews carried out, survey questions and results and anything else relevant to the research were lacking in many dissertations.

There was evidence of surveys and questionnaires in which it was quite obvious that the candidate had rushed the product and the process and hence the results were often rather dubious.

There was also evidence of research in the appendices that was not used in the dissertation and vice versa.

Candidates shared the same research with no acknowledgement of whether the research was carried out by one candidate or indeed a number of them.

Several candidates had obviously not proof read their dissertation.

The word count on each page was missing in some cases, leading to a danger of a penalty being imposed.

## **Essays**

Candidates who used a pre-prepared answer rather than answer the question that was set tended to perform poorly. This was particularly the case in Study Theme 2: Section A: Question 4: The Penal System and, to a lesser extent, in Question 2: The Causes and Effects of Crime in the UK.

Law and Order Question 2: The Causes and Effects of Crime in the UK, many candidates did not address the part of the question that was about the impact of the crimes. It is crucial that all parts of questions are answered.

Often candidates from the same centre used a formulaic approach to an answer. This tends to restrict candidates' responses.

Specific, relevant and current exemplification was often lacking.

## **Research methods**

Some candidates listed points. To get a good mark, candidates need to develop three or four points depending on the mark allocation. In general, up to 3 marks can be awarded for a well developed point.

An understanding of what makes a source valid and reliable is often lacking.

In Question 6 (a), the source must be overtly used in the answer. Some candidates did not do this. Also, the majority of candidates did not evaluate the extent to which valid and reliable conclusions could be drawn from the source. This led to a loss of marks.

Candidates should give specific research examples in the Research Methods section.

In question 5 (a), many candidates did not seem to know about samples. Many candidates lost marks in this section as they seemed to have little knowledge and understanding of research methods.

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

### **General**

Dissertation hypotheses can be submitted to SQA by 1 November using the approval form on the AH Modern Studies subject page on SQA's website. Advice will be given to the centre as to the suitability of the hypotheses.

Centres that recognise, from candidate performance in NABs and prelims, that they have marginal candidates should pay particular attention to advice on how to answer exam questions and how to complete a dissertation.

This advice can be found in previous External Assessment Reports (EAR), in the document 'Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies' and in Understanding Standards, all of which are available on SQA's website.

### **Dissertations**

Centres can assist candidates if they:

- ◆ take time at the planning stage to discuss appropriate hypotheses, clarify aims and methods
- ◆ ensure the number of aims is not excessive; around three or four aims with a maximum of one that is descriptive is advised
- ◆ start early and give firm deadlines to the candidates ensuring, as far as possible, that they are adhered to
- ◆ stress that synthesis and balanced analysis are crucial and candidates may need to practise these skills
- ◆ ensure that research methods are described, evaluated and justified as a natural part of the process of carrying out the dissertation research
- ◆ use the mark check sheet for the dissertation that is available on SQA's website — particularly noting the breakdown of marks for the dissertation: 10 marks — planning sections; 25 marks — analysis, synthesis and exemplification; 10 marks — conclusions that address the hypothesis: total = 45 marks

### **Examination**

Candidates will improve their performance when:

- ◆ essays answer the whole question that is set in the paper
- ◆ essays address both sides of the argument with in-depth analysis and synthesis
- ◆ essays have relevant, current and in-depth exemplification
- ◆ conclusion(s) relate to the question set
- ◆ research methods answers display depth of knowledge with relevant and specific exemplification. It is worth centres refreshing their understanding of the section on Research Methods in the 2009 Arrangements Document
- ◆ they are fully prepared for the research methods questions because these are not predictable

These points are explained in more detail in the document 'Improving performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies':

[www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/NQModernStudiesImprovingPerformanceAdvHigher.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/NQModernStudiesImprovingPerformanceAdvHigher.pdf)

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	688
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	801
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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 135				
A	30.8%	30.8%	247	94
B	29.6%	60.4%	237	80
C	25.3%	85.8%	203	67
D	7.4%	93.1%	59	60
No award	6.9%	100.0%	55	—

## **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.