



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Higher

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

As in the past few years, candidate performance has remained strong. Feedback from examiners and markers suggested that most candidates were entered at the correct level and few had difficulty accessing questions, and that most questions were mainstream and appropriate. Candidate performance and feedback from markers confirmed that this year's instrument of assessment allowed candidates to fairly demonstrate their skills and knowledge whilst at the same time maintained the national standard.

Paper 1

- ◆ As in 2012, 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. Some 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 (although this could not be confirmed with regard to Paper 1 Questions A3 and C10). 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 had 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 to questions. Although these candidates inevitably attract some credit when what they have written focuses on the question asked, too often time is wasted.
- ◆ Questions A4, B5 and C9 were the questions most frequently attempted by candidates. The vast majority of candidates preferred B5 to B6 (performance in B5 was also better than B6). Questions A1, A2, C7, C8 and C11 were well represented within scripts. 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 were 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. There was agreement amongst the wider exam team that this DME elicited the best sustained candidate response for several years.
- ◆ 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 and there were many full mark responses to these.
- ◆ 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, 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 scripts were 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. Few candidates 'turned the question', as centres are increasingly training their candidates to 'answer the question asked'. There were also fewer 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 B5, C7 (South Africa) and C8 (China) were particularly well done this year. Few candidates struggled with these questions, with several markers commenting positively on performance in their Marker Reports.
- ◆ Up-to-date date exemplification was evident across all questions. The quality of exemplification was in some cases, outstanding, especially in relation to the above Study Themes.

- ◆ 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 (Question 5). The general standard of DME remains high and is an area of strength in Higher Modern Studies.
- ◆ Very few candidates failed to include relevant and accurate background knowledge in their DME.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Question A1: The additional powers the Scottish Parliament has been given will allow it to better deliver 'Scottish solutions to Scottish problems'. Discuss.

- ◆ Failure to refer to the 'additional powers' aspect of the question resulting in dated responses and exemplification.
- ◆ The 'bigger picture' of the debate surrounding independence and the independence referendum vote in 2014.

Question A2: Assess the importance of the Cabinet in decision making in UK Central Government.

- ◆ Lack of awareness of the Cabinet.
- ◆ Minimal comment on the role of the UK Cabinet within government.
- ◆ Confusing the Cabinet with Select Committees or similar.

Question A3: To what extent do the party leaders influence their parties' policies?

- ◆ Very few candidates completed.
- ◆ A handful of candidates attempting in error.

Question A4: Critically examine the view that the Additional Member System (AMS) leads to fairer representation than First Past the Post (FPTP).

- ◆ In a few cases, confusion between AMS and STV.
- ◆ 'Turning' the question to for and against AMS or FPTP as opposed to keeping the focus on 'better representation'.
- ◆ Questionable or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ Inaccurate claims in respect of AMS 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.

Question B5: Critically examine the view that individual lifestyle choices are the main factor preventing good health.

- ◆ Stereotypical responses with regard to different groups and their lifestyle choices, eg gym membership or smoking patterns in different socio-economic groups.
- ◆ Questionable or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ Not always picking up on the other factors, eg poverty, that influence health or the way in which different factors, eg poverty and lifestyle choices, are inter-related.
- ◆ Lack of reference to government reports or similar, eg Equally Well 2008/2010.

Question B6: To what extent have government policies reduced poverty in the UK?

- ◆ 'Turning' the question into a collectivist/individualist discussion
- ◆ Highly questionable or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ Very dated responses with little or no mention of recent (2010 UK Government) changes to work and benefits or work programmes.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment that addresses the question

Question C7: To what extent have South African government policies reduced social and economic inequalities?

- ◆ Detailed description of social and economic problems only.
- ◆ Not addressing government policies to reduce inequalities.
- ◆ References to policies that have been replaced by others for a number of years.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which addresses the question.

Question C8: To what extent have Chinese government policies reduced social and economic inequalities?

- ◆ Little or no real knowledge of government policies to reduce inequalities.
- ◆ Very dated descriptions of social and economic change.
- ◆ Relatively little consideration of the impact of government policies on reducing inequality.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment that addresses the question.

Question C9: To what extent do ethnic minorities influence the outcome of elections?

- ◆ Failure to appreciate that although there has been an increase in the importance of ethnic minorities in electoral terms, nationally Whites remain in the majority.
- ◆ Little appreciation of the other factors that influence minority voters apart from ethnicity.
- ◆ Highly questionable or inaccurate statistics.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment that addresses the question.

Question C10: To what extent is there disagreement within the EU over social and economic issues?

- ◆ Very few centres completed.
- ◆ Dated responses, eg in terms of CAP.

Question C11: With reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa): Conflict is the main reason for a lack of development in African countries. Discuss.

- ◆ Little or almost no discussion of conflict as a factor affecting development.
- ◆ Simply going 'round the houses' in terms of reciting the factors that affect development.

- ◆ No real attempt to quantify the damage conflict can have on development or the way in which states free from conflict have seen massive rises in a range of measures that evidence progress in their development.
- ◆ On occasion, questionable or inaccurate statistics.

Question C12: Assess the effectiveness of the UN in dealing with threats to international peace and security.

- ◆ Confusion with regard to the UN and NATO.
- ◆ Little understanding of the UN Security Council and its role.
- ◆ Failure to provide a balanced answer that recognises where the UN has had success in dealing with threats to peace and international security.

Paper 2

- ◆ ‘To what extent’ questions. A few candidates failing to give the full quote, or only providing it to support or oppose part of the quote.
- ◆ In a few instances, misinterpretation of relatively straightforward sources. One or two markers commented that in Question 4 (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

Understanding Standards materials published provides 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.

The 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 structure their responses better. One possible approach is the Point, Explain, Example, Balance (PEEB) structure whereby candidates make, explain and exemplify a number of 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.

Paper 2

Understanding Standards materials published – as above

The ‘to what extent’ 3 mark questions — these 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 a 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') that 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.

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 2012	8184
Number of resulted entries in 2013	8027

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	27.7%	27.7%	2224	63
B	28.8%	56.5%	2314	54
C	25.6%	82.1%	2052	45
D	6.7%	88.8%	540	40
No award	11.2%	100.0%	897	-

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.