



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	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

Paper 1

The majority of candidates were reported as being entered at the correct level. There were very few weak candidates.

Markers and examiners noted that there were marginally fewer top answers than in past years. Nonetheless, there were several full mark (60/60) responses to the whole paper.

Most candidates answered four questions but there were more candidates providing only three responses compared to last year.

Questions A4, B5 and C9 were the most popular choice of questions. Few candidates attempted A3, B6 or C10.

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 prepared their candidates thoroughly for this paper. This is to be commended.

Most candidates completed the short evaluating questions very well.

Few candidates failed to score at least half marks in the Decision Making Exercise (DME).

There were a pleasing number of full mark responses (30/30).

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Most candidates provided structured, developed, exemplified and balanced responses.

Many responses to questions A1 and A4 had integrated, accurate and up-to-date exemplification from the Scottish Parliament elections of May 2011. Given the proximity of the election to the date of the exam this was especially pleasing.

Questions C7 (South Africa) and C8 (China) were particularly well done this year. There were also many structured, detailed and well exemplified responses to questions A4 (Voting Behaviour), B5 (Social Inequalities) and C11 (Politics of Development).

Paper 2

The short evaluating questions were well answered with many candidates attracting full marks.

Fewer candidates than in the past failed to provide the full quote or both sides of a 'To what extent...' question (questions 1 and 4).

The majority of candidates produced appropriately structured (report-style) responses to the DME. The general standard of DME remains high and is an area of strength within Higher Modern Studies.

Few candidates failed to include relevant and accurate background knowledge in their DME.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Question A1: 'To what extent do Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) influence decision making in the Scottish Government?'

- ◆ Lack of understanding of the role of MSPs in holding the Scottish Government to account.
- ◆ Turning the question to discuss devolved/reserved matters.

Question A2: 'Some groups outside Parliament have more influence on decision making in Central Government than others.' Discuss.

- ◆ Focusing only on pressure groups when there are other external sources of influence on Central Government, eg the media.

Question A3: 'Political parties elect their leaders differently but the choice of leader is crucial to electoral success.' Discuss.

- ◆ Only dealing with the latter half of the question. To pass, candidates needed to describe the ways in which different parties elect their leaders, before going on to assess the influence of the leader to electoral success.

Question A4: 'Some factors affecting voting behaviour are more important than others.' Discuss.

- ◆ Describing the different factors affecting voting behaviour without addressing the importance of one factor compared to another or to the past.
- ◆ Exemplification from elections that happened more than ten years ago when there are more recent examples available.
- ◆ Inaccurate use of statistics.

- ◆ Lack of insightful conclusions of a qualitative or quantitative nature, eg despite the impact of dealignment, some studies claim as much as 40% of people continue to vote according to their class.
- ◆ The highest scoring candidates recognise that the factors affecting voting behaviour are interlinked, eg class and geographic location.

Question B5: 'Poverty is the most important factor that affects health.' Discuss.

- ◆ Describing the different factors affecting health without addressing the main thrust of the question that poverty is the most important factor affecting health.
- ◆ Too few examples of government reports etc, on the links between poverty and ill health. Dated exemplification and/or inaccurate use of statistics.
- ◆ Little recognition that the factors that affect health are interlinked, eg poverty is linked to income which impacts on housing and lifestyle choices.
- ◆ Stereotyping. Although it is important to stress the differences between, for example, the wealthiest and poorest in society, it is equally important that candidates understand they are dealing with the extremes for illustrative purposes. Centres should encourage candidates to routinely qualify their comments in relation to stated social and economic inequalities.

Question B6: 'Health and welfare provision should be the responsibility of government.' Discuss.

- ◆ Very few candidate responses despite the question's centrality to the Study Theme.
- ◆ Limited understanding of the individualist/collectivist debate.

Question C7: Assess the effectiveness of government policies to reduce social and economic inequalities in South Africa.

- ◆ Candidates from a few centres only comparing black and white South Africans and not within and between different groups or regions.

Question C8: 'To what extent has social and economic change benefited the people of China?'

- ◆ Turning the question to discuss political as opposed to social and economic change.
- ◆ Not addressing fully the impact of change both positive and negative.

Question C9: 'Assess the effectiveness of government policies to reduce social and economic inequalities in the USA.'

- ◆ Little knowledge of USA government policies to reduce social and economic inequalities.
- ◆ Lack of appreciation of the way in which affirmative action operates today as opposed to thirty or forty years ago.
- ◆ Dated exemplification/too few references to USA healthcare reforms etc.
- ◆ Little discussion of prevailing view in USA that it is not the government's responsibility to reduce social inequality.

Question C10: 'There is little disagreement within the EU over social and economic policies.' Discuss.

- ◆ Only a small number of responses. Up-to-date exemplification would have improved some responses, eg in relation to the CAP/CFP as it operates today.

Question C11: 'Education and health care are the most important factors in achieving successful development in Africa.' Discuss.

- ◆ Almost all candidates made reference to a specific African country although markers commented that in a number of cases the examples provided were vague and generalised.
- ◆ Inaccurate or random use of statistics.

Question C12: 'The UN must reform to be more effective when dealing with threats to international peace and security.' Discuss.

- ◆ Little reference to the debate over reform of the UN.
- ◆ Little balanced comment on the effectiveness of the UN in dealing with threats to international peace and security.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Advice is in line with previous External Assessment Reports.

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

Paper 1

SQA's Understanding Standards website provides graded, marked and annotated 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 past SQA exam paper Marking Instructions.

Centres with the best, most consistent performance train candidates to answer the question set in a structured and balanced manner. 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 gave extremely long, rambling answers. Although some of these answers were very knowledgeable, they often lacked focus or **structure**. Irrelevance and/or repetition wastes valuable exam time. In preparing for the exam, it is 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 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.

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

See Understanding Standards — as above.

The 'to what extent' three 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 a giving a concise reason to explain the exaggeration also demonstrates good practice.

A few centres encourage candidates to provide a paragraph of relevant 'stand alone' background knowledge at the beginning of the report. Although not 'wrong', this does not represent best practice. The synthesising of a range of information is highly creditworthy.

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.

NB: Some candidates give 'background opinion' (eg 'I think that ...') as background knowledge. This type of example does not represent background knowledge and is not creditworthy.

A number of centres encourage candidates to include a 'stand alone' rebuttal section in the latter half of the report. Experience suggests this does not constitute best practice as many candidates end up repeating the arguments that oppose their recommendation before providing a rebuttal. This is not the best use of the limited time available.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	7,366
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	7,673
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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	22.5%	22.5%	1,730	62
B	25.9%	48.5%	1,990	53
C	28.2%	76.7%	2,167	44
D	7.9%	84.6%	603	39
No award	15.4%	100.0%	1,183	—

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.