



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Intermediate 2

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

There was a further significant increase in the number of candidates in this year's examination, taking the total number to just over 3,400. About one third of candidates were presented in S4 with just over half being presented in S5. Overall, the quality of answers from candidates presented in S4 was higher than those presented in S5 and S6. Where presentation groups are larger, results tend to be better.

Section A, study theme 1 — Government and Decision Making in Scotland, remains the more popular topic. In Section B — Social Issues in the UK, Crime and the Law is answered more frequently than Wealth and Health in the UK. In Section C — International Issues, the USA was by far the most popular topic; South Africa and China are reasonably popular topics with only a few centres teaching Brazil; the European Union is rarely taught.

The format of the question paper was unchanged, compared with previous years and the optional questions were broadly comparable. Overall, performance in this year's examination was poorer than last year. Evaluating remains stronger than knowledge and understanding across the paper. The knowledge demonstrated in social issues topics is generally good. There has been some improvement in the use of contemporary exemplification in some international topics but knowledge of the UK and Scottish political systems is often lacking and dated while knowledge of the USA is often superficial and stereotypical.

The full range of marks was awarded with relatively few candidates unable to make a reasonable attempt at the paper. Most candidates completed the paper.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Question 1 (c) and 2 (c): Many candidates answered this question well, particularly where they adopted a structured approach using the bullet points given as headings to organise their evidence and draw conclusions.

Question 1 (d) and 2 (d): Many candidates answered this question well, particularly where they took the opportunities to synthesise the information in the sources.

Question 3 (a) and 4 (a): Most candidates showed good Knowledge and Understanding in these straightforward questions.

Question 3 (b) and 4 (b): Many good answers with most candidates taking the opportunity to address both sides of the issue referred to in the question.

Question 3 (c) and 4 (c): Many good answers with most candidates able to make good use of the sources, in particular the written ones.

Question 5 (c), 6 (c), 7 (c), 8 (c) and 9 (c): Generally well done with all sources accessible and used successfully.

Question 6 (a) and 6 (b): Some improvement in the use of recent Knowledge and Understanding of China to provide up-to-date exemplification.

Question 9 (a) and 9 (b): Although attempted by a relatively small number of candidates, the Knowledge and Understanding displayed in the study theme 'Development in Brazil' is generally of a high standard, demonstrating good teaching and learning with the use of up-to-date and detailed exemplification.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Question 1 (a): This straightforward question was poorly done by many candidates who focused on 'fundraising activities' instead of the expected sources of funds for local councils.

Question 1 (b): Few candidates were able to give recent, relevant exemplification for this question in spite of the issue being one which has been the focus of much discussion in recent years and months.

Question 1 (c): Relatively poor use of the information in Source 2.

Question 1 (d): Relatively poor use of the statistical information in Source 2 compared to the written information.

Question 2 (b): Many candidates appeared unaware of changes made to the House of Lords in recent years with too many candidates still making reference to out-of-date knowledge.

Question 2 (c): Relatively poor use of the information in Source 2.

Question 3 (c): Relatively poor use of the information in Source 2. Many candidates used their own views on the topic to determine their choice of option at the expense of using the evidence in the source and as a result, scored fewer marks.

Question 4 (b): Many candidates attempted to turn the question to a more general one on arguments for, and against, prison rather than the more specific topic of spending on prison as asked. However, in spite of this, most candidates still managed to score reasonable marks.

Question 7 (a) and 7 (b): It is disappointing that so many answers on the USA continue to lack detailed and contemporary Knowledge and Understanding. Little knowledge of current government policies was shown by most candidates. In Question 7 (b): too many answers were vague, giving little specific knowledge from the USA; and stereotypical and exaggerated answers in their portrayal of ethnic minorities.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Fewer candidates than last year failed to answer all the questions in the paper; however it is important to prepare candidates for the examination by ensuring they are aware that in Intermediate 2, either a question in Section A or Section C will contain four parts. A prelim exam which closely replicates the structure and demands of the final exam and an opportunity to study past papers are examples of good practice. Support for centres is available on SQA's Understanding Standards website:

www.understandingstandards.org.uk/markers_ccc/mark_main.jsp?pContentID=11202&p_applc=CCC&p_service=Content.show&

Answering Knowledge and Understanding questions

Answers which only list 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.

Be aware of the difference between 'describe' and 'explain' questions and answer accordingly.

Answer 'in detail'. In order to do this, candidates must provide additional description and explanation supported, where appropriate, by recent examples (post-2000).

Answer the questions set; fewer marks will be awarded if a candidate attempts to 'turn' the question.

Where a question asks for both sides of an issue to be addressed make sure that points for and against are given; it is not necessary to have an equal number of points for each side of the issue in order to achieve full marks.

Demonstrate specific knowledge. In International Issues, full marks will only be achieved if candidates demonstrate specific knowledge of the country studied.

Avoid simplistic, exaggerated and stereotypical answers.

Answering Evaluating questions

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 good practice for candidates to have a structured format for answers in order to organise the evidence contained in the sources; however an overly structured approach where, for example, the viewpoint is repeated several times throughout an answer is unnecessary and time consuming.

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 — this should be brief.

Make full use of the sources by synthesising evidence within sources and between different sources in order to provide detailed arguments. The use of a single piece of evidence from a source, no matter how long, will only gain one mark. In order to gain more marks, evidence should be linked with evidence either from within the same source or other sources.

It is good practice to use a report style format in the decision making exercise, 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 the decision making question, when providing supporting arguments for the option chosen, only evidence drawn from the sources will be credited; no marks will be given for the candidate's own opinions.

For full marks, selective use of facts questions must contain balance. It is not enough to only provide evidence which 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. In questions where evidence is required to support and oppose a point of view, it is important that candidates refer to the point of view in the answer and indicate whether the evidence used is supporting or opposing the viewpoint.

To score well in conclusions questions, the bullet points must be used to organise the evidence and give an overall judgement related to the bullet point based upon the evidence used. Conclusions should be based upon several pieces of evidence drawn from across the sources.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	3,031
------------------------------------	-------

Number of resulted entries in 2011	3,427
------------------------------------	-------

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	27.7%	27.7%	948	46
B	21.4%	49.1%	734	39
C	21.6%	70.7%	740	32
D	9.5%	80.2%	327	28
No award	19.8%	100.0%	678	—

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.