

*Research and Information Services*

**MONITORING STANDARDS REPORT**



**Comparison of Modern Studies  
CSYS 1992, 1998 and AH 2004**

## Introduction

The group was asked to consider two key questions:

- ◆ Is the syllabus at its assessment instruments as demanding as before?
- ◆ Do candidates at a certain grade in 2004 perform as well as candidates in previous years?

To achieve this, the group analysed:

- ◆ The syllabus arrangements for three years
- ◆ The assessment instruments and associated marking instructions.
- ◆ Candidate scripts at various levels of achievement.

The group concluded that Advanced Higher Modern Studies (2004) was comparable to CSYS Modern Studies (1998 and 1992)

## Summary

### Syllabus

- ◆ Compared to previous years the general approach within the subject had not changed.
- ◆ Two elements have been added to the most recent paper:
  - Research methods questions.
  - Internal assessment interviews covering the dissertation process.

One element is missing from the most recent paper: a decision-making exercise.

- ◆ The most recent paper allows candidates to *potentially* study 2 or 3 contexts from 4 within a chosen study theme, whereas candidates in the older papers were required to cover the whole syllabus for a topic.
- ◆ The combined effect of these changes made the syllabus of the most recent paper *as a whole* no more demanding than the syllabus of the older papers.
- ◆ The *depth* of the more recent syllabus is comparable with the depth of the older syllabuses.
- ◆ The *breadth* of the more recent syllabus is greater than the breadth of the older syllabuses, due to the introduction of research methods questions, and the potential for undertaking a dissertation on any Higher or Advanced Higher topic.

### Assessment Instrument

- ◆ Although there have been a number of changes in the question papers, questions and marking instructions, these have not had a significant effect on the level of demand.
- ◆ Two key assessment instruments are essentially unchanged – essay questions (there is mixed evidence on whether or not essays are now harder) and the dissertation.

There is clear evidence that candidates in all years performed in the same way in these areas.

- ◆ The *coverage* of the more recent syllabus in the more recent question paper is comparable to the coverage in previous years' syllabuses.
- ◆ The questions and marking scheme of the more recent question paper are comparable to those of previous years.

## Scripts

The A, B, C and D graded scripts from the older years are comparative to the A, B, C and D graded scripts from the more recent year.

Overall, the 2004 Advanced Higher Modern Studies is comparable to 1998 and 1992 CSYS Modern Studies.

# Findings

## 1 Syllabus

A detailed comparison of the syllabus arrangements for 1992, 1998 and 2004 can be found in Appendix 1.

### 1.1 General approach

The general approach has not changed over the three years under consideration. The aim and rationale for the subject are essentially the same, although there is now a more explicit recognition of the key role that Modern Studies plays in education for citizenship.

#### 1.2.1 Elements added to the syllabus

A detailed analysis of research methods is included in the 2004 syllabus. This does not appear at all in 1998 or 1992.

Internal assessment takes place in 2004. The most obvious difference that this creates is that all candidates are required to justify their research methods before undertaking their dissertation and to evaluate the methods used afterwards.

Grade descriptors, advice on teaching and learning approaches and advice on teaching students with special needs all appeared in the 2004 syllabus, but not in the 1998 or 1992 syllabuses.

#### 1.2.2 Elements missing in the more recent syllabus

It is now possible to cover only 2 or 3 of the 4 specified contexts in a chosen study theme, whereas previously candidates had to cover all areas of their chosen topic. The decision-making exercise, which was part of the 1998 and 1992 syllabuses, has now gone.

#### 1.2.3 Has this changed the level of demand?

Some changes have made the most recent syllabus more demanding:

- ◆ The study and assessment of research methods.
- ◆ The inclusion of interviews before and after the dissertation.
- ◆ There is potentially less choice of essay questions (see *Section 2: assessment instrument*).

Some changes have made the syllabus less demanding:

- ◆ The removal of the decision-making exercise.
- ◆ The improved resourcing of the dissertation (see *Section 2: assessment instrument*).

It is not possible to directly compare these changes. To reach a definitive conclusion extensive research into the impact on individual candidates would be required. However, it was the view of the group that the changes have made the 2004 syllabus *no more or less* demanding than the 1998 and 1992 syllabuses.

### **1.3.1 Depth of coverage**

Some changes have given more depth to the most recent syllabus:

- ◆ The possibility of studying only 2 or 3 of the 4 contexts should result in a more detailed study of these areas.
- ◆ The study of research methods increases candidates' analysis of the dissertation process and understanding of research methods.
- ◆ The relative reduction in mark allocations for the dissertation (in 2004 it was  $\frac{1}{3}$  of marks, in 1998 and 1992 it was  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) emphasises the need for a deeper knowledge and understanding of the chosen study theme.

However, some changes have given less depth to the most recent syllabus:

- ◆ The study of research methods reduces the time available for developing knowledge and understanding of the chosen study theme.
- ◆ At CSYS candidates should have covered the whole of their chosen topic in depth. At Advanced Higher, the possibility of only now studying 2 or 3 of the contexts in a study theme potentially reduces the quantity of in-depth study in the most recent syllabus.

It is difficult to reach an overall conclusion on depth, because direct comparison of different effects is not possible. However, it is the view of the group that the depth of the more recent syllabus is, overall, *comparable* to the older syllabuses.

### **1.3.2 Breadth of the syllabus**

Some changes have given more breadth to the most recent syllabus:

- ◆ The study of research methods.

- ◆ The possibility of undertaking a dissertation on any Higher or Advanced Higher topic (see Assessment Instrument section).

One change has probably given less breadth to the most recent syllabus:

- The possibility of study 2 or 3 of the 4 contexts in a chosen study theme.

Overall, the group believes that the 2004 syllabus has *more* breadth than the 1998 or 1992 syllabuses.

## 2 Assessment Instrument

A detailed comparison of the assessment instruments for 1992, 1998 and 2004 can be found in Appendix 2.

### 2.1 Trends or practical changes

The key change in the structure of the most recent question paper is that the balance of questions is now different. Some of these changes make the question paper more demanding:

- ◆ There is a greater emphasis on the relatively difficult essay questions (44% of overall marks in 2004, 30% in 1998 and 1992). This increase in demand is explored further in *Section 3: scripts*.
- ◆ There is now potentially less choice of essay questions. Candidates may study only 2 or 3 of the 4 possible contexts in a study theme.
- ◆ The greater number of comparative questions in the 2004 paper's 'Politics' section makes this part of the most recent paper more difficult.

Some of these changes make the question paper less demanding:

- ◆ The inclusion of the relatively easy research method questions (further explored in *Section 3: scripts*).
- ◆ The low-mark questions for research methods.
- ◆ The disappearance of the relatively difficult decision-making exercise.

There are further changes to the questions which may or may not make the questions more demanding:

- ◆ There are now more anonymous stimulus quotations.
- ◆ All essays are now discursive.
- ◆ The questions are of comparable demand across study themes in 2004. This was not so across topics in 1998 and 1992.

It is not clear whether the reduced emphasis on the dissertation (33% of overall mark in 2004, 50% in 1998 and 1992) makes the paper more or less demanding.

It is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion on the cumulative effect of all these changes. There are persuasive arguments that might suggest any one of the changes might make the Assessment Instrument either more or less difficult. Overall, therefore, it is the view of the group that these changes have *not* had a significant impact on demand.

The marking instructions for the most recent paper are more:

- ◆ comprehensive
- ◆ specific
- ◆ detailed
- ◆ grade oriented

This will undoubtedly lead to more *consistent* marking of the most recent paper, but will not necessarily have a clear impact on degree of difficulty.

## **2.2 Repetition of papers, sections or type of tasks**

The essay questions were the same and the dissertation is essentially the same task, albeit with greater focus on research methods.

### **2.2.1 Do candidates perform the same way on these questions?**

Yes: there is clear evidence that this is the case (see *Section 3: scripts*)

### **2.3.1 Coverage of the syllabus by the question paper**

The possibility of students studying only 2 or 3 of the 4 possible contexts in a chosen study theme means that there is potentially less coverage in the 2004 examinations compared to the 1998 and 1992 examination.

The disappearance of the decision-making exercise means that the skills of report writing have been lost, although evaluation of sources remains in the Research Methods section.

The research methods questions in the 2004 examination mean there is more coverage in this examination. It also compels students to analyse the dissertation process properly.

It is the view of the group that the overall effect of these changes is that the coverage of the most recent syllabus is *comparable* to previous years.

### **2.4.1 Level of demand of questions and marking scheme**

On balance, the essay questions are slightly more demanding than in previous years, although not by a significant amount.

In areas where direct comparison is possible (Politics - 2004 study theme 1 and 1998 Topic 1 / 1992 Topic (a), Crime - 2004 study theme 2 and 1998 Topic 6) the 2004 questions are more demanding. However, some of the non-comparable topic areas in 1998 and 1992 were more demanding than 2004, whilst others were less demanding. (!)

The replacement of the decision-making exercise with research methods questions makes the 2004 paper less demanding than in previous years, although there is evidence that the decision-making exercise was marked in a very flexible way.

The increased support for the dissertation process does not significantly affect the demand of the task.

It is not possible in this particular subject to ascertain whether the increased focus of the marking schemes (see question 2.1) makes the paper more or less demanding. Less information on standards for markers could affect the grading of the paper in different ways. Without information about the markers' meeting and marker check, analysis is not worthwhile.

Overall, it was the opinion of the group that the sum of these factors means that the most recent paper was *comparable* in demand to previous years.

## 3 Scripts

### 3.1 A/B graded scripts

These are *comparable*, although a fully satisfactory analysis was not possible due to the factors detailed below.

### 3.2 C/D graded scripts

They are comparable, with the same qualification as 3.1

The group felt that the scripts were *clearly comparable*. However, there were some real difficulties in reaching this conclusion because of the following problems:

- ◆ The scripts were sampled on the basis of the total mark achieved. It was, however, impossible to compare the scripts with the same overall grade because each individual script had very different grades for individual elements of the assessment instruments (e.g. one 2004 'B' candidate might have gained that grade through achieving an A in the essay questions, a B in research methods and a C in the dissertation, whilst one 1998 'B' candidate might have gained that same grade by achieving a B in the essay questions, a C in the decision making exercises or an A in the dissertation).
- ◆ A lack of marks on all scripts did not allow the group to overcome the above problem through selective sampling of the individual elements of the assessment instruments.
- ◆ The group could not take into account marker variability. This will have been dealt with at marker check, but we had no knowledge of this process.

However, two points were very clear:

- ◆ 2004 candidates clearly achieved higher grades in the research methods questions than in the essay questions. Lack of marks on the 1998 and 1992 scripts made it impossible to confirm the group's view that the decision-making exercise was a harder task than the research methods questions.
- ◆ There was some evidence that the higher weighting of essay questions in 2004 disadvantaged C/D candidates.

Overall, Advanced Higher Modern Studies (2004) was comparable to CSYS Modern Studies (1998 and 1992).

## Appendix 1 – Syllabus Comparison

| Area                            | 2004   | 1998   | 1992   |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>General Approach</b>         | Clear attempts at uniformity between study themes. The trend is towards even greater uniformity.   | No clear uniformity between topics.  | As 1998  |
| <b>Rationale (key extracts)</b> | <p>Advanced Higher Modern Studies is concerned with developing the candidate's knowledge and understanding, evaluative and investigative skills in relation to Modern Studies topics. It also:</p> <p>Contributes to personal and social development, particularly addressing the rights and responsibilities of citizens.</p> <p>Encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.</p> <p>Contributes to a well-balanced individual curriculum.</p>  | Essentially the same, although minor amendments to wording   | As 1998, although no stated contribution to personal and social development.             |
| <b>Skills</b>                   | <p>The skills obtained are:</p> <p>Organising and analysing complex data.</p> <p>Adopting a structured approach to research of a contemporary topic.</p> <p>Constructing and sustaining lines of argument which reflect the complexity of the issues they address.</p> <p>Presenting conclusions in a clear way, while reflecting the complexity of the topic under consideration.</p> <p>Critical analysis of political and social science research, including evaluating evidence and detecting. . . and explaining a lack of objectivity.</p> <p>Participating in debate and discussion, through which attitudes of open-mindedness and toleration are developed.</p> | <p>As 2004, with various minor word changes. Key difference is:</p> <p>Adopting a structured approach to the <i>study</i> of contemporary issues and problems.</p> | No explicit mention of skills in the syllabus (although outlined in curriculum paper I5) |
| <b>Content</b>                  | Comparative Politics.  | Equivalent topics:<br><i>Political Parties and Elections in Britain, West</i>  | Equivalent topics<br>Political Parties and Elections in Britain,                         |

| Area  | 2004   | 1998   | 1992  |
|---|--|--|---|
|   | <p>Law and Order</p> <p>European Union</p> <p>Research Methods</p> <p>Practical Research (Dissertation)</p>  | <p><i>Germany and the USA. Government and Politics in Scotland.</i></p> <p>Law, Order and Society in Britain.</p> <p>No comparable area.</p> <p>Topics not appearing in 2004 syllabus.<br/><i>The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe – Political and Economic Change. Politics and Society in the Islamic World. Ethnicity, Regionalism and Nationalism Political, Social and Economic Change in Latin American Countries. Africa - Political and Economic Development. Women in Western Societies. Industrial Relations in a Changing Economy – the UK.</i></p> <p>No comparable area</p> <p>Dissertation</p> | <p>Germany and the United States.</p> <p>No comparable area, although aspects covered in:<br/><i>Urban Life in Developed Countries: Political, Social and Economic Responses, Impact of Modern Technology on Society</i></p> <p>No comparable area.</p> <p>Topics not appearing in the 2004 syllabus.<br/><i>Marxism – Leninism: The Soviet Union. Resurgent Islam. Ethnically Divided Societies and Nationalism. Energy: Resources, Politics and Issues. The Latin American Experience. Nation Building and Interventionism in Africa. Urban Life in Developed Countries: Political, Social and Economic Responses (see above). Impact of Modern Technology on Society (see above).</i></p> <p>No Comparable area<br/>Dissertation</p> |
| <p>Assessment</p> <p><i>Aims</i></p>                          | <p>Candidates are required to: Demonstrate the ability to retain and integrate knowledge, understanding and skills acquired in the units.<br/>Synthesise a large volume of complex information to produce a detailed and reasoned report on the conclusions of research findings.</p>                            | <p>Similar to 2004</p>   | <p>No explicit information on aims of assessment.</p>   |
| <p><i>External Examination</i></p> <p><i>Dissertation</i></p> | <p>3 hour paper (90 marks)<br/>2 Essay Questions (30 marks each). Candidates either have no choice, or a choice of 2 essays from 3 or 4 topics (dependent on schools approach).<br/>1 Research Methods Question (30 marks)<br/>15 marks on theory of research methods<br/>15 marks for analysis of a source.</p> | <p>Paper I 1½ hours (20 marks)<br/>Decision making exercise based on current issue.</p> <p>Paper II 2 hours (30 marks)<br/>2 Essay Questions (15 marks each) chosen from 5.</p> <p>Worth 50 marks</p> <p>Must not exceed 5000 words (but no penalty enforced)</p>  | <p>As 1998, although Decision-making Exercise is based on a fictional example.</p> <p>Furthermore ‘recent’ events are clearly defined as being within the last 10 years, and it is explicitly stated that candidates will not be penalised for holding strong opinions.</p>   |

| <b>Area</b>  | <b>2004</b>   | <b>1998</b>   | <b>1992</b>                   |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------|
|  | <p>Worth 45 marks</p> <p>4-5000 words – 10% penalty if over the word limit.</p> <p>Includes justification and evaluation of research methods (internal assessment).</p> | <p>Guidance included on how it is assessed.</p>     | <p>As 1998</p>                |
| Grade Descriptions                                   | <p>Provided for candidate work at Grades A and C</p>  | <p>Not provided</p>                                 | <p>Not provided</p>           |
| Advice on time allocations for Teaching and Learning | <p>80 hours for study time, including research methods.</p> <p>40 hours for dissertation.</p> <p>40 hours flexible time.</p>  | <p>Not provided</p>                                 | <p>Not provided</p>           |
| Advice on approaches to Teaching and Learning        | <p>Generic advice provided for all aspects.</p>   | <p>Advice relates primarily to the dissertation</p> | <p>As 1998</p>                |
| Internal Assessment                                  | <p>Candidates must complete an internal assessment for each part of the course.</p>   | <p>No internal assessment</p>                       | <p>No internal assessment</p> |
| Advise on Special Needs                              | <p>Provided</p>   | <p>Not provided</p>                                 | <p>Not provided</p>           |

## Appendix 2 – Assessment Instrument Comparisons

| Area        | 2004   | 1998   | 1992  |
|-------------|--|--|---|
| Coverage    | <p>Essay questions – Candidates can study either 2, 3 or 4 contexts from 4.</p> <p>Research methods – examination questions are drawn from all of the material studied.</p> <p>Dissertation – must be on a topic from any Higher or Advanced Higher study theme.</p>   | <p>Essay questions – Candidates need to study the whole topic area.</p> <p>Decision-making exercise – key skills are developed.</p> <p>Dissertation – must be on a topic from the chosen study theme.</p>  | As 1998   |
| Structure   | <p>Essay questions – 60 marks (44%).</p> <p>Research Method Questions – 30 marks (22%).</p> <p>Dissertation – 45 marks (33%).</p>  | <p>Essay questions – 30 marks (30%).</p> <p>Decision-making exercise – 20 marks (20%).</p> <p>Dissertation – 50 marks (50%).</p>   | As 1998   |
| Examination | <p>Essay Questions<br/>All essays from one study theme (chosen from three).<br/>1 hour per essay.<br/>2 questions from 2, 3 or 4 contexts studied.<br/>No choice within each context.<br/>All questions 30 marks.</p> <p>Research Methods<br/>1 hour for two questions.<br/>15 marks for each question.<br/>Each question split into questions of 4-10 marks.<br/>Q1 generic to all three study themes - demonstrates knowledge and understanding of research methods.<br/>Q2 analysis of a source relating to the chosen study theme. Source is also a stimulus to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the</p> | <p>Essay Questions<br/>All essays from one topic (chosen from ten).<br/>2 questions from 5, chosen from across the whole syllabus.<br/>All questions 15 marks.</p> <p>Decision-making exercise.<br/>1½ hours<br/>Generic real-life issue.<br/>Candidates write a report containing recommendations and justification, based on written and statistical sources.</p> <p>Dissertation<br/>50 marks available (50% of total).</p> | <p>Essay Questions<br/>As 1998, although topic areas different (see Appendix 1).</p> <p>Decision-making exercise.<br/>As 1998, although the issue is fictional.</p> <p>Dissertation<br/>As 1998</p> |

| Area            | 2004  | 1998   | 1992  |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
|                 | <p>strengths and weaknesses of research methods.</p> <p>Dissertation<br/>45 marks available (33% of total).</p>   |  |   |
| Question demand | <p>Essay Questions<br/>All discursive, encouraging an analytical response.</p> <p>Comparative Politics questions are all comparative across countries. Some of Law and Order and European Union questions are comparative.<br/>Two question styles:<br/>An anonymous stimulus quote before a question.<br/>A question without a stimulus quote.<br/>Questions are of comparable demand across contexts.</p> <p>Research Methods<br/>Q1 is descriptive and identical across study themes. There are different mark weightings across study themes.<br/>Q2 is different across study themes and there is inconsistency of demand.<br/>Some are descriptive, some are discursive.<br/>Q2 uses a variety of source types across study themes – complex and less complex / written, graphical or statistical.</p> <p>Dissertation<br/>Candidates penalised for exceeding 5000 word limit.</p> <p>There are 4 areas of greater support for the dissertation:<br/>The study of research methods.</p> | <p>Essay Questions<br/>Questions are descriptive or discursive. Candidate could potentially answer 2 descriptive questions.<br/>Overall there are a similar proportion of comparative questions in the paper, but they are less predictable across topics.<br/>The same two question styles, but there are significantly fewer stimulus quotes.</p> <p>The questions are not of comparable demand across topics. Questions on topics 6 and 9, for example, are significantly easier than questions on topic 5.</p> <p>Decision-making exercise<br/>A difficult task, which is not directly comparable with research methods. As a task, this exercise is harder than the research methods questions, but it is not possible to properly compare due to unobtainable information on 1998 marking standards.</p> <p>Dissertation<br/>No fixed penalty for exceeding 5000 word limit – less demanding than 2004.<br/>Less support than in 2004.</p> | <p>Essay Questions<br/>There are more discursive essays in 1992 than in 1998.</p> <p>As 1998</p> <p>As 1998</p> <p>The questions are more comparable across topics than in 1998, but are not as comparable across topics than in 2004.</p> <p>Decision-making exercise<br/>As 1998, but slightly harder due to the complex fictional topic.</p> <p>Dissertation<br/>As 1998</p> |

| Area                        | 2004   | 1998   | 1992  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
|                             | <p>The internal assessment process.</p> <p>The increased amount of published support materials.</p> <p>Greater access to Higher Education resources through the internet – particularly useful for geographically isolated schools.</p>  |  |   |
| <p>Marking Instructions</p> | <p>Essay Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Comprehensive, but flexible.</li> <li>◆ General points are followed by specific points for each question.</li> <li>◆ Markers are asked to reward ‘up-to-date exemplification’.</li> <li>◆ Clear advice on how to identify ‘high quality answers’.</li> </ul> <p>Research Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Specific advice which delineates the boundaries for mark allocations.</li> </ul> <p>Dissertation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Clear delineation of marking boundaries:</li> <li>◆ Aims/Methodology. . . . . 10 marks</li> <li>◆ Content/Analysis. . . . . 25 marks</li> <li>◆ Conclusions. . . . . 10 marks</li> <li>◆ Criteria for assessment is clear and relates to grade descriptors.</li> </ul> | <p>Essay Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Vague and non-specific.</li> <li>◆ No general points and only some specific points.</li> <li>◆ Focus is on differences between B and C candidates.</li> <li>◆ No. text advice about up-to-date exemplification.</li> <li>◆ Some of the marking advice for descriptive questions experts analysis, whereas some do not. There is great inconsistency in the advice for similar questions.</li> </ul> <p>Decision-making Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Vague instructions.</li> <li>◆ Focus in on A/B differences (inconsistent with focus on B/C differences in essay questions).</li> </ul> <p>Dissertation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Clear delineation of marking boundaries.</li> <li>◆ Methods. . . . . 15 marks</li> <li>◆ Content. . . . . 30 marks</li> <li>◆ Presentation. . . . . 5 marks</li> <li>◆ Criteria for assessment is stated but does not relate to grade descriptors.</li> </ul> | <p>Essay Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ As 1998, although there is less advice on analysis.</li> <li>◆ Many of the marking inconsistencies were impossible to read – photocopied from microfiche.</li> </ul> <p>Decision-making Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vague instructions (worse than 1998).</li> <li>● Little advice given relative to grades.</li> </ul> <p>Dissertation</p> <p>Marking scheme not provided.</p> |

