

Research and Information Services

MONITORING STANDARDS REPORT



Comparison of Modern Studies Higher 2005 and 2002

Introduction

The three members of the monitoring standards team were asked to review Higher Modern Studies in 2002 and 2005 to determine the maintenance of standards in relation to the syllabus across the period.

To achieve this objective, the team examined the syllabus, assessment instruments, question papers, marking instructions and exam scripts, in order to compare the differences and similarities between 2002 and 2005.

This might be one of the few occasions in which the syllabus, assessment procedures and question papers were both similar and settled between 2002 and 2005. Previous monitoring reports dealt with considerable syllabus change, with the introduction of new study themes, the dropping of some study themes and new ways of dealing with Paper 2.

In this period, the study themes and types of questions asked were stable, and there was very clear comparability in relation to the contents of Paper 1 and Paper 2. When it came to Paper 2, the Decision-Making Tasks were identical in the nature of the skills being assessed and very similar in relation to both the style and variety of questions used.

1 Syllabus

1.1 General approach to the Syllabus

The syllabus in 2005 was entirely comparable with that of 2002. Whilst major changes to the syllabus were implemented before 2002 and will be implemented in future, this was a period of continuity with no identifiable syllabus change. The only identifiable differences were in the wording of questions set to test out different parts of the syllabus and ensure that the whole of the syllabus was examined across the years. These points will be dealt with under 2.1.

1.2.1 Additions to the current syllabus

The two years examined here were not from a period of syllabus change, but one of continuity. The emphasis for the examiners was therefore to produce consistently accessible mainstream questions that examined the syllabus rather than have to deal with additions/deletions to the existing syllabus arrangements.

1.2.2 Comment on any missing elements in current syllabus and why these were dropped

No elements of the current syllabus were dropped between 2002 and 2005.

1.2.3 Which parts of the syllabus or approach have changed?

The syllabus in 2005 was the same as that in 2002, as was the approach.

1.2.4 Level of demand

As there has been no alteration to the syllabus content between 2002 and 2005, the level of demand has been consistent. Having said that, some parts of the syllabus continue to be more popular than others. In Paper 1 Section A, Study Themes 1 (Decision Making in Central Government) and 4 (The Electoral System, Voting and Political Attitudes) continue to have a high uptake. There was little, if any, evidence of Study Theme 3 (Political Parties and Their Policies – including the Scottish dimension) finding favour with candidates.

Also, Study Theme 6 (Healthcare in the UK) was overwhelmingly more popular than Study Theme 5 (Income and Wealth in the UK) in both the 2002 and 2005 papers. In section C, the evidence suggested the most popular topics to be Study Themes 9 (Ethnic Minorities in the USA), 7 (South Africa) and 12 (The Politics of Food) The latter topic was seen to have shown an increase in popularity between the years sampled.

1.3.1 Is the depth of the more recent syllabus greater or otherwise than the earlier year?

The depth of the syllabus was consistent between 2002 and 2005.

1.3.2 Is the breadth of the more recent syllabus greater or otherwise than the earlier year?

The breadth of the syllabus was consistent between 2002 and 2005.

2 Assessment Instruments

2.1 Are there trends or gradual changes to the structure of the question paper, questions or marking instructions?

There were some minor changes to Paper 1 in 2005 compared to 2002. For example in section C, Study Theme 12 (The Politics of Food), the question asked candidates to provide exemplification of specific countries in Africa rather than just produce generic answers on Africa that didn't mention any particular countries (which was the case in 2002). The marking instructions for this question in 2005 also, for the first time, set a maximum of six marks to be awarded for candidate responses that gave no such country exemplification.

In Paper 1, section C, Study Theme 10, (The European Union), candidates were given a choice (in the Outcome 2 part of the question) between discussing the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy or the single currency. This was not, however, a new departure. The syllabus arrangements are such that centres are given a choice between studying **either** the CAP and CFP **or** moves towards European integration. Consequently when either is examined, the other must be given as an option.

In relation to marking instructions, there were more explicit marking instructions on question 4 of Paper 2 (Decisionmaking Exercise 2, Healthcare in the UK) in 2005 to provide more description and points to follow for markers. Similarly, whilst in Paper 1 Study Theme C12 question (b) there were limited marking instructions in 2002, there were more detailed instructions for markers come 2005.

In Paper 2, there was comparable weight between 2002 and 2005 in relation to the evidence presented to candidates, the balance of questions (in terms of the nature of questions asked and the assessment grade) and the types of skills being tested.

2.2 Papers which appear in almost the same format across the years

The question papers were in identical formats in 2002 and 2005. Paper 1 featured the same number of questions and provided candidates with identical instructions regarding choice in relation to the 12 Study Themes. Paper 2 featured a choice between two different Decision Making exercises. Paper 1 asked candidates to answer 3 questions, one from section A, B and C in an essay style format in a time allocation of 1 hour 25 minutes worth a total of 50 marks. Paper 2 asked candidates to assess evidence (opinion statements and statistics), answer some interpretive questions about the evidence (worth 10 marks) then produce a report recommending or rejecting a particular policy proposal (worth 20 marks). The time allocation for paper 2 was 1 hour 20 minutes across both years.

2.2.1 Do candidates perform to the same standard in these questions or sections, over both years?

The monitoring team was unable to detect any changes in performance that could be related to the nature and content of either the syllabus arrangements or the assessment instrument. However, consideration was given to the possible effects of the reduction in internal assessments within the Higher in 2002 and 2005. This reduction had taken place at the time of the 2000-2001 session and it was felt made candidates less prepared for some of the Study Themes in Paper 1. In addition, whereas, in Sections A and C, candidate responses were clearly comparable – at times showing improvement – some of those for Section B displayed a tendency to include material from Standard Grade. This tendency was seen most clearly in Study Theme 5 (Income and Wealth in the UK) and sometimes occurs when a candidate who is poorly prepared for Study Theme 6 (Healthcare in the UK) attempts Study Theme 5 based on their Standard Grade knowledge.

2.3.1 Is the syllabus coverage in the most recent QP more extensive/comparable/less extensive than in the earlier year

The syllabus coverage in the 2005 question paper was entirely comparable with 2002. There was balance in the question paper between the different political and socio-economic content of the syllabus and every Study Theme was covered in the exam paper and balanced out between Paper 1 and Paper 2.

2.4.1 Are the questions/Marking Instructions of the more recent QP more demanding/comparable/less demanding than in the earlier year?

The questions and marking instructions were comparable across 2002 and 2005.

3 Scripts

3.1 Are A grade scripts in earlier year better/comparable/not so good as A grade scripts in the more recent year?

The A grade scripts were comparable across 2002 and 2005. The monitoring team marked the sample of scripts sent to them and were happy with the Grade boundaries and the comparability of the scripts across the two different years for both Paper 1 and Paper 2.

3.2 Are C grade scripts in earlier year better/comparable/not so good as C grade scripts in the more recent year?

The C grade scripts were comparable across 2002 and 2005.

In relation to the Grade boundaries it was noted that in 2002 candidates who scored just below the C/Fail interface were awarded a compensatory award at Intermediate 2 band A, whereas by 2005 this had been replaced by a band D award.