

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Modern Studies

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

Modern Studies — Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)	7,759
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Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)	7,733
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General comments re entry numbers

Entries were broadly similar to last year, if slightly down.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

A	22.0%
B	23.6%
C	27.0%
D	9.4%
No awards	18.0%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

The number of Upper A and A passes has increased and this is evidence of centres whose candidates are very well prepared. At this other end, there were candidates whose entry at Higher was inappropriate; these candidates would have been better served by entry for Intermediate 2.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	22.0	22	1,693	57
B	23.6	45.6	1,826	48
C	27.0	72.6	2,087	39
D	9.4	82	728	
No award	18.0	100	1,399	

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as syllabuses evolve and change

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The difficult items that led to a reduction in grade cut-offs in 2003 were not replicated in 2004 (despite adverse comments in the press about the item on Foundation Hospitals). The cut-offs were restored to the 2002 levels, without significant effects on the pattern of awards.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Prior to the statistical evidence being available, the examination team noted that there seemed to be more high quality candidates than last year but that the poorer candidates were much poorer. The statistical evidence subsequently confirmed these impressions. Some possible reasons for this pattern will be addressed in this report.

The feedback on the paper from both teachers and pupils was very positive — it was agreed that the paper was fair and accessible. There was criticism of Question B6(c) from a few teachers; the ways in which health care is provided and consumed is a central topic in this section and, therefore, the question was legitimate and topical.

Events which took place in the 1960s and 1970s are neither topical nor appropriate and yet many candidates still used examples from these times especially in Questions C7 and C9. Also, in Section A, many candidates gave examples from elections in the early 1980s and 1990s and seem to know little or nothing of the latest elections. In Question B6(a), many candidates were weak on government responses to inequalities in health and gave dated answers including information on the Black report and the usual Drumchapel and Bearsden comparison. These can be relevant but in this instance were not. There are excellent textbooks in use but, when necessary, teachers must update information. It is not safe to rely solely on textbooks. Candidates require information and exemplification from the 21st century. Modern Studies is a dynamic subject.

In Section A, the majority of candidates attempted either Questions A1 or A4. There is evidence from the responses that many candidates are either choosing to concentrate on only one syllabus area or are being advised so to do. They have, therefore, no ‘fall-back’ position when one part of the question has either not been taught or has not been revised by the candidate. This was most evident in Question A1 — many candidates who opted for this could not answer part (a). In A4, a significant number of candidates wrote that FPTP is the method used to elect the Scottish Parliament and scored no marks. Perhaps this could have been avoided if ‘AMS’ had been included in the wording of the question but by this stage candidates really ought to know this.

In Section B, candidates often appear to have prepared responses and attempt to turn the question. For example B6(a) became an answer on the causes/evidence of inequalities in health and B6(b) elicited responses on the arguments for and against private health care.

Paper 2 produces some excellent results. Almost all candidates use a report style and when this is not the case, there is evidence that this is a centre issue. There is increased use of relevant background knowledge but there is a little concern that some candidates are using too much generic background information and failing to relate it to the subject matter. Another slight concern is the increased number of candidates who have so much background that they forget to use the sources and the report, as a result, reads like a long, subjective essay. Candidates should be advised not to invent background information, nor should they give over lengthy narratives of videos they have seen or family experiences they have witnessed. The distribution of marks between the evaluating questions and the report continues to be perceived as an issue. There is still a one third/two third breakdown in the number of candidates attempting DM1 and DM2.

In both papers there is evidence of candidates being presented at the wrong level, perhaps for understandable reasons given that the Higher and Intermediate syllabuses do not articulate well. This is currently under review.

There are more centres teaching syllabus areas 2, 10 and 12 but syllabus area 3 is taught by very few centres.

Candidates should be encouraged to recall statistics correctly or not use them at all. There are many wild guesses at eg the number of ethnic minority Congressmen/women, voter turnout or prison population. When in doubt, leave it out. There is a continuing need to teach candidates how to respond to the wording of

questions ‘evidence of’ is not the same as ‘reasons for’.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Paper 1:

In syllabus area 1, there were many excellent answers to A1(b), A4(b) and A2. There continues to be a growing number of centres teaching C10 and C11 and their candidates are producing good to excellent answers. C12 is also increasingly taught and there are fewer candidates giving generic answers — many more candidates are able to identify agencies and specific countries. C8 is not taught by many centres but there were some very good responses to C8(b).

Paper 2:

This is a skills-based paper and candidates are well taught – the high marks for this paper are evidence of this. There are very few candidates who fail either the Evaluation Questions or the report. There is good report style and all of the rubric is addressed — with the exception in some instances of the rebuttal to arguments against the recommendation. Candidates used background information appropriately and there were almost no multi-coloured reports!

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In Section A, there were many candidates who did not have any recent information on reforms to the Houses of Parliament. This was very disappointing, as was the large number of candidates who answered A4(a) as FPTP.

There are still too many historical answers in C8(b) — Tiananmen Square has a place, as does the ‘One Child’ policy, but recent initiatives are more relevant. In C9, there are too many candidates who know about Martin Luther King and Jesse (or Jessie as some would have it) Jackson and do not have any recent information on political, social or economic progress. They are still in the second last decade of the last century. Candidates confused ‘participation in the political system’ with ‘progress’ but since much of the evidence was correct, they were credited for this.

Candidates are still experiencing some difficulty in C12 in relating their answers to specific examples from specific countries — a change in the wording of the introduction to the question will alleviate this problem and will be introduced in 2005. Some candidates, but fewer than before, do not know their NGOs from their UNOs. There are fewer who think that India is in Africa.

Section B elicited the weakest responses. Candidates have difficulty in addressing the question, often seeming to try to fit a learned response into the given question. They must be enabled to understand the key words — ‘evidence of’, ‘reasons for’, ‘responses to’ etc. It may be that candidates are not preparing themselves so well for this section because it is no longer examined internally and perhaps, also, because they have had less practice in essay writing in this section.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

It is essential that information is constantly updated. The examination does not require evidence from today's news but candidates are disadvantaged when they do not use recent exemplification. There are answers which are quite wrong if the information is not updated eg in commenting on the influence of social class, gender and the media in A4, or when giving political, social or economic examples in questions such as C7, C8 and C9. Candidates should be taught how to use statistics wisely and discouraged from guessing statistics when they cannot remember them. Centres should make only judicious use of events prior to 'recent' — summarising, as background, eg Conservative health reforms, Apartheid, the civil rights movement in the USA — and concentrate on the latter half of last decade of the 20th century and on this century. We teach **Modern Studies**.

There are, still, centres whose candidates waste precious time and sacrifice style by over-lengthy introductions — eg 'in this essay I will examine...and then I will draw a conclusion...'. Conclusions at the end of essays are seldom conclusions — they are almost always summaries of previous information. Conclusions can be integrated and many candidates have been taught how to do this but, it is not helpful to the style of the essay if they highlight the 'buzz-words' such as 'therefore', 'and so', 'however' as some centres seem to be suggesting to them. Conclusions are irrelevant in part (a) 'describe' answers. It is impossible to give a conclusion to such questions.

More centres are making use of the opportunities offered by the SQA to avoid disadvantaging candidates. There are not many candidates whose writing is very difficult to read but some centres have transcriptions of scripts which are perfectly readable and the same centre has no transcription of a candidate whose writing is very difficult to read.

There is overwhelming evidence of effective teaching and learning in the majority of centres.