

Principal Assessor Report 2003

Assessment Panel:

Modern Studies

Qualification area:

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

Modern Studies: Intermediate 1 and 2

Statistical information: update

Intermediate 1

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	189

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	220

General comments re entry numbers

The number of entries has shown an increase over last year although overall numbers remain small.

Intermediate 2

Number of entries in 2002 (final)	1227
Pre appeal	1220

Number of entries in 2003	
Pre appeal	1342

General comments re entry numbers

The number of entries has shown a further increase. More than 90% of entries are from candidates at the S5/6 stage.

Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Intermediate 1

	Mark/60	%
A	42	70
B	35	58
C	29	48

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Grade boundaries are close to the *a priori* scores and remain unchanged from previous years.

Intermediate 2

	Mark/70	%
A	49	70
B	41	59
C	33	47

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Grade boundaries are close to the *a priori* scores. The grade boundary to achieve a C pass was lowered by two marks in comparison with previous years to take account of the difficulty some candidates had in answering two LO1 questions on International Issues.

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 candidate performance

Intermediate 1

General comments

Only a small number of candidates were clearly struggling with the demands of Intermediate 1 level. Only one candidate scored less than 10 marks in the paper. At the other end of the scale eight candidates achieved 50 marks or over, indicating that centres had largely entered candidates for the appropriate level.

Although the paper is large with a high degree of choice in questions, most candidates managed to handle the demands of the paper indicating that centres are giving candidates experience of past papers.

All study themes were attempted by some candidates, although some topics are considerably more popular than others. Study Theme 2 was more popular in the Political Issues section. Both Study Themes 4 and 5 were chosen by most candidates in Social Issues, while in International Issues, South Africa was by far the most popular topic.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Throughout all sections of the paper, candidates performed well in LO2 (evaluating) type questions. Many candidates are skilled at answering LO2 type questions and made good use of the sources provided. In Social Issues, answers in the options type question have improved with more candidates following instructions to link their chosen option with the factfile information. Knowledge in the Crime and the Law study theme was generally better than in other study themes.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Candidates tended to perform less well in LO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) type questions. Many candidates were unable to provide more than very superficial answers to LO1 type questions. Answers were not developed through explanation or exemplification. In some cases, candidates were unable to demonstrate any real knowledge of parts of their chosen study themes.

Intermediate 2

General comments

Less than 1% of candidates scored fewer than 10 marks in the paper while fewer than 3% achieved more than 60 marks, indicating that in most cases candidates were presented at the correct level of the examination. However the level of no awards does indicate that a significant number of candidates would be better presented at Intermediate 1 level. There were only a few candidates who could have been entered profitably at Higher rather than Intermediate level.

Overall, LO2 questions are better done than LO1 questions. The knowledge demonstrated by candidates is generally best in Section B (Social Issues).

A number of candidates failed to complete the paper; it is not clear whether this is due to lack of time or inability to answer the International Issues questions. There was less evidence of rubric violations with fewer candidates attempting more than one question from each section. It did appear, however, that in some centres there were candidates who appeared to be attempting study themes different from the majority of their presentation group — this may indicate a range of study themes taught in the centre or may indicate they are confused about the topics to be answered in the exam. The choice of topics is similar to Intermediate 1.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

LO2 questions requiring candidates to give arguments for and against and to provide evidence of selective use of facts were generally well done. Some candidates could improve their answers by making greater use of the sources and including more detail in their answers. Those answers requiring conclusions to be drawn have improved. The introduction of bullet points and the instruction to draw conclusions from within and between sources does seem to have improved responses to this type of question. There were fewer answers, which merely repeated the information in the sources and made a series of low-level conclusions. The decision making activity in Social Issues is generally done well with many candidates providing answers in the form of a report.

Knowledge and Understanding in Crime and the Law and in some parts of Health and Wealth was often good. In the International Issues section, knowledge of Brazil was often good.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

The Knowledge and Understanding candidates have is often limited leading to answers which lack detail in explanation or exemplification. Candidates often find it difficult to deal with the specific nature of some of the LO1 questions in the paper. Candidates often fail to address the question being asked.

In Political Issues, there is confusion between the role of MPs, MSPs and councillors. Many candidates were unable to go beyond a listing of the functions of the Scottish Parliament and local councils while many were unable to differentiate between the Scottish and UK Parliaments.

In some parts of the Social Issues section of the paper, answers can be vague and stereotyped. In Study Theme 5, candidates found it difficult to answer with any detail on the Criminal Justice System. In Study Theme 4 most candidates were unable to go beyond either a description of either Residential Care or Private Medical Care, rather than address the questions asked.

In the International Issues section, knowledge is generally poorer than in the UK sections. In particular, candidates often struggled with the specific nature of some of the questions in this section, especially those requiring detailed knowledge of the Common Agricultural Policy and Political Issues in South Africa. Answers which required a comparison in lifestyle were often superficial and stereotyped. Answers on China have improved although many lack up to date knowledge. Many answers on South Africa are too historical, not going beyond the Apartheid era.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Candidates need to be briefed about time management and experience of a prelim type examination would familiarise them with the demands of the full paper. A significant number of candidates failed to complete the paper. Candidates may be spending too long on Sections A and B, giving them insufficient time to complete the International Issues questions.

Centres should continue to strive to make candidates aware of the difference between ‘describe’ and ‘explain’ type questions. At both levels, but in particular at Intermediate 2, candidates should provide more detail in their answers rather than list-type answers.

Centres should be aware that the knowledge required to answer LO1 type questions is often quite specific and contemporary. Vague and generalised answers, which rely on out of date examples, will gain few marks. In questions on South Africa, answers that describe the Apartheid era will gain few marks.

It is expected that candidates are aware of the distinction between the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament, the role of MSPs and MPs.

In conclusions-type questions, it is important that centres train their candidates to use the bullet points to provide structure to their answer and encourage the candidates to attempt to synthesise by comparing information across the sources.

In the decision making activity in Social Issues, many candidates answer in the form of a report. This is a good practice. However it should be noted that the sections candidates choose to include in their report do not necessarily correspond to the demands of the question. For example candidates may include a section on arguments against their chosen option which is not required and may waste candidates’ time.