

## Principal Assessor Report 2005

**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 2004	7,733
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	7,396
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### General comments re resulted entry numbers

There was a noticeable reduction.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 80	-	-	-	-
A	23.8	23.8	1,759	57
B	26.7	50.5	1,973	48
C	25.5	76.0	1,886	40
D	6.9	82.9	510	36
No award	17.1	100.0	1,268	-

### 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 arrangements evolve and change.

### Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

A decrease in 'No awards' suggests that candidates were presented at a more appropriate level; this may have contributed to the overall fall in presentation numbers.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

Candidates who took advantage of the thorough preparation and excellent advice of their teachers/lecturers wrote well structured, developed and exemplified quality responses to both papers.

There continues to be evidence of candidates being presented at the wrong level.

#### Paper 1

- Study Theme 12 is growing in popularity but Study Themes 4, 7 and 9 remain the most popular choices for candidates and each part (a & b) of these, and, indeed, all other Study Theme questions in Sections A and C attracting significant numbers, evidenced full-mark responses.
- Many candidates performed inconsistently, both within and between Study Themes.
- A minority of candidates violated the rubric of the paper by attempting more questions from a particular section than asked for.
- Some candidates wrote a conclusion to in their responses to part (a) of questions. Frequently, this ‘conclusion’ was, in essence, little more than a summary (albeit as much as a page in length) that gained little, if any, extra credit.
- There was a tendency to ‘turn the question’. The most notable, but not the only, example of this practice was in relation to C9b that asked candidates to **discuss** the statement “*Ethnic minorities are under-represented in the US political system*”. A significant number of candidates answered solely in terms of ethnic minority political progress – perhaps a prelim generated ‘déjà vu’?
- The use of more contemporary exemplification continues to be an issue. For obvious reasons, candidates could and often did, gain full marks for responses to A4 without election 2005 exemplification. However, it is disappointing to find C12 exemplification confined to the Sudan of the 1980s.

#### Paper 2

- Markers reported fewer candidates gaining full marks in the EV component of the paper. Both DMEs featured one question that required the use of three sources as well as two further ‘to what extent’ (see areas in which candidates experienced difficulty) questions.
- There is an unwelcome tendency for candidates to feature the ‘first .....last’ words of ‘views’ and ‘exaggerated’ statements: this is not acceptable; quotes or sentences should be written out in full.
- The majority of candidates stick with a structured, report style (as requested), but there appears to be an unwelcome trend away from this towards essay-style ‘for’ and ‘against’ responses.
- A minority of candidates tackled the Task before the EV questions (see feedback).
- There were very few candidates who failed each of the EV and the Task components of the paper.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

### Paper 1

- Irrespective of the Study Theme, candidates display good to excellent knowledge and understanding of the issue being examined in the LO1 style (a) part of the questions.
- Centres responded positively to the recommendation in last year's report (and printed requirement in this year's paper) that responses to C12 should feature exemplification from specific countries in Africa.
- Some responses to A4 featured excellent exemplification from the 2005 election.

### Paper 2

- Continues to feature excellent, full-mark responses for both the EV and Task components of the paper.
- Evidence abounds of candidates being well schooled in properly structured, annotated, synthesised, report style writing, including rebuttal of arguments against the recommendation.
- Most candidates successfully embraced the “skills” element of the Task component in each of DM1 (despite the double negative) and DM2 and used the information given on the Working Time Directive (DM1) and Foundation Hospitals (DM2) to their advantage, as well as picking up on the relevant background knowledge signposts that featured in the written and statistical source materials.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

### Paper 1

- Candidates tended to score less well in their LO2 style (b) part responses, particularly to those questions that featured ‘role’ and ‘to what extent’ in the stem.
- The turning of questions to fall into line with candidate hopes/expectations has already been alluded to. Other examples included C7 (a) – often answered in terms of the ANC's response to the legacy of apartheid and C8 (b) – similarly ‘turned’, in this case, from the issue of political reform to that of human rights.
- Answers to the Section B (Social Issues) Study Theme questions were the least likely of the LO1 style responses to gain full marks, and the most likely to be written at Standard Grade or Intermediate level.
- Markers expressed concern at the number of, otherwise able, candidates who did not comprehend the term “food aid” as used in C12 (b).

### Paper 2

- A significant number of candidates omitted the balance necessary in their responses to achieve full marks in the ‘to what extent’ EV questions.
- The ‘use of background knowledge’ in the Task calls for more than the odd “from my own background knowledge (followed by anecdotal evidence)” style insertions.
- Weak candidates continued to paraphrase the sources in isolation.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

Centres are encouraged to continue the excellent practice – well exemplified in this year’s responses – that emphasises the requirement on candidates to:

#### Paper 1

- Be familiar with the implications of the different styles (‘Discuss’, ‘To what extent’ etc.) and vocabulary (‘part played’, ‘role’, etc) of questions.
- Focus on answering the question exactly as worded.
- Use recent exemplification.

#### Paper 2

- Answer the EV questions first. The consequent first reading of the source material, allows for some degree of familiarisation with the theme, the argument, and relevant background knowledge issues.
- Write out exemplars of exaggeration, selectivity and contrasting views in full.
- Use a report style in response to the Task, and, where possible, feature “Source’ and “background knowledge” annotations in the margin.
- Integrate “background knowledge” into the report: avoid a stand-alone “background knowledge” section.
- Feature “comment on (rebuttal of) arguments which may be presented by those who oppose your recommendation.”