

Principal Assessor Report 2005

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 resulted entries in 2004	347
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	387
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

The number of entries shows a slight increase. The percentage of candidates being presented at the end of S4 shows a further increase. Just under 40% of candidates are drawn from S3/4 with almost 60% from S5/6.

Intermediate 2

Number of resulted entries in 2004	1,624
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	1,757
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

The number of entries shows a further increase. The percentage of candidates being presented at the end of S4 has increased. Just under a quarter of candidates are drawn from S3/4 with 70% from S5/6 and just under 5% from FE.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Intermediate 1

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 60	-	-	-	-
A	14.2	14.2	55	42
B	22.7	37.0	88	35
C	19.4	56.3	75	29
D	6.2	62.5	24	26
No award	37.5	100.0	145	-

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

Grade boundaries have been returned to the previous levels following the 2 mark reduction made last year in the light of items not functioning as expected. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of candidates gaining awards at A and B and a slight reduction in C grades and 'No awards'.

Intermediate 2

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 70	-	-	-	-
A	21.3	21.3	374	49
B	24.2	45.5	426	41
C	22.9	68.5	403	34
D	10.2	78.7	180	30
No award	21.3	100.0	374	-

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

The percentage of candidates gaining awards at Upper A, Lower A and B have all increased; as a result there has been a slight drop in the percentage of C grades. There has been a fall in the number of 'No awards'. The increased number of awards is a result both of efforts to make the paper more accessible and the changed cohort, with an increased proportion of S4 candidates. Grade boundaries have remained the same as last year. It is hoped that grade boundaries will be returned to the a priori level next year.

Comments on candidate performance

Intermediate 1

General comments

The level of entry was appropriate for most candidates. The paper produced a wide range of marks; only a few candidates could have been better presented at a higher level.

Presentation groups tend to be small.

As has been the case in the past, there is a significant difference between LO1 answers and LO2 answers, with performance in the latter being much stronger. UK topics are also generally better done than International study themes. Answers requiring knowledge and understanding are generally weak and in some study themes the knowledge being asked for seems non-existent. Many candidates either leave answers blank or write whatever knowledge they have rather than what has been asked for.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

LO2 questions are generally done very well with most candidates producing full answers making good use of the sources provided. It is important that candidates use the sources and do not answer from their own knowledge, particularly in the decision making task in the Social Issues section of the paper.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

LO1 questions are often poorly done. Many candidates lack specific knowledge about particular parts of the Course they have studied. Answers are often brief, not going beyond basic lists. In many cases there is little development of answers with little or no explanation, detail or exemplification. Knowledge in Section C, International Issues, is the weakest area. Many candidates omit questions entirely or produce answers that bear no resemblance to the question asked.

Intermediate 2

General comments

The paper produced a wide range of marks although, in the main, candidates seem to have been presented at the correct level. A number achieved very few marks and would have been better presented at a lower level.

There are significant differences between centres. Some centres seem to prepare their candidates very well for the exam and many candidates are achieving high marks. In other cases the overall quality of centre presentations is poor. Where small groups or individuals are presented the results are often poor.

The changes made to the mark allocation of LO1 questions aimed to make the paper more accessible. In Section A, two LO1 questions at 4 marks and 6 marks each should have benefited candidates unable to achieve full marks in 8 mark questions. This change does result in a wider sampling of the knowledge of the relevant Study Theme. Some candidates in a number of centres appear to have omitted question (d) in Section A; since in the past there has only ever been three questions in each section, some candidates may have moved straight on to Section B after question (c), not expecting an additional question.

Overall, LO2 questions continue to be better done than LO1 questions. The knowledge and understanding candidates have is often limited, leading to answers which lack detail in explanation or exemplification, answers can be vague and stereotyped. Candidates sometimes find it difficult to deal with the specific nature of some of the LO1 questions in the paper, although this varies by topic and centre. Candidates sometimes fail to address the question being asked, preferring to use the limited knowledge they have irrespective of the question. While in the International Issues section, knowledge is generally poorer than in the UK sections. The knowledge demonstrated by candidates is generally better in Section B (Social Issues) especially in the Crime and the Law study theme.

LO1(b) questions which required candidates to give explanations are more demanding than LO1(a) questions which require descriptions. Many candidates appear to have now understood this distinction and the quality of these answers improved in Sections A and B.

LO2 questions requiring candidates to give arguments for and against a point of view are generally well done, although candidates could make greater use of the evidence to support or oppose the point being made, generally these questions contain a large amount of information which can be utilised if candidates choose to do so and score high marks. Some candidates are synthesising information from across the sources, although this is good practice, it is not required for full marks. A few candidates made no reference to the viewpoint at all in these questions, making it very difficult to award marks since it was not possible to show if the evidence was being used to support or oppose the view. Questions requiring candidates to show selectivity in the use of facts are reasonably well done, however many candidates have not yet realised that to achieve full marks, selectivity in the use of facts requires candidates to show evidence which demonstrates selectivity, not merely evidence which disagrees with the view given.

Conclusions type questions are still less well done than the other types of LO2 question. The bullet points are helpful and do encourage better answers with fuller conclusions rather than a series of basic, minimal conclusions. Good candidates will use the bullet points, draw together information from across the sources and make a clear conclusion either at the start of the explanation or at the end. Poorer candidates attempt to draw simple conclusions from single sources. Weak candidates merely re-write the sources with no real conclusions being drawn.

In general, candidates could improve their answers by making greater use of the sources with more detail in their answers. In particular they should explain the relevance and significance of evidence being used, rather than merely expecting the evidence to speak for itself. They should relate evidence to the viewpoint given. It is important that centres train their candidates to use the bullet points, in conclusion questions, to provide structure to their answer and encourage the candidates to attempt to synthesise by comparing information across the sources.

A smaller number of candidates failed to complete the paper than in previous years indicating that attempts to reduce the length of sources and better time management on the part of candidates are correcting this problem. In some cases candidates displayed a lack of knowledge with gaps throughout the paper. There was less evidence of rubric violations with fewer candidates attempting more than one question from each section.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

LO2 questions are generally well done with candidates producing full and detailed answers drawn from the sources. The Decision Making Activity in the Social Issues section is generally very well done.

Good knowledge was displayed in Crime and the Law study theme.

Knowledge in UK study themes are generally better than in International study themes.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

LO1 questions (knowledge based) are generally less well done than LO2 type questions (source based, evaluating skills).

Knowledge in International study themes is weaker than in UK study themes.

Responses to conclusions type questions, although improved, remain weaker than other LO2 type questions.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Candidates should be made familiar with the format of the question papers. At Intermediate 1 there continues to be a high proportion of rubric violations and candidates appearing to choose the wrong study theme to answer. At Intermediate 2, centres should continue to stress the importance of time management. The change in mark allocation to LO1 questions should also be noted and pointed out to candidates. Candidates should be advised that there may be four questions in one study theme rather than only three as previously. Centres should note this change when producing prelim examinations.

Knowledge questions can be specific and should use recent and contemporary knowledge and exemplification. Vague and stereotypical answers and answers which are too historical will gain little credit.

Although LO2 answers are generally good, centres should encourage candidates to:

- Make full use of the sources provided and support answers with evidence from the sources. Where sources are statistical candidates should make reference to the figures. Candidates should put evidence into context and indicate its significance.
- Where questions require candidates to give evidence to support or oppose a point of view, ensure that candidates make reference to the viewpoint and indicate if the evidence being given is in support or is opposed to the viewpoint, otherwise it is difficult to allocate marks.
- Where questions require candidates to show selectivity in the use of facts, candidates cannot gain full marks by only giving evidence that contradicts the view. Balance is required in the answer, so candidates should also show evidence that shows the view can be supported from the sources.
- In questions that require conclusions to be drawn, candidates must make use of the bullet points. Conclusions which are supported by detailed evidence from the sources and relate to the bullet points will gain more credit than simplistic conclusions which do not go much beyond repetition of the sources.
- In decision making questions candidates are required to give reasons why they did not choose the other option in order to achieve full marks.
- In all LO2 questions, answers which show interaction within and between the sources will be credited highly.