



Course report 2019

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	National 5

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The most commonly-answered options in each section were: Democracy in Scotland; Crime and the law; and World powers.

Overall, the question paper proved to be accessible to the majority of candidates, however there was evidence of some candidates being presented at the wrong level.

Assignment

The assignment proved to be very accessible for candidates with the majority performing well.

Part A — ‘research topic/issue’ section

Although this first section is worth 0 marks, candidates still took the opportunity to use this section to identify their topic/issue, with many going on to state their aims for the assignment.

Part B — ‘research methods’ section

This section of the assignment continues to be worth 10 marks in total and many candidates achieved high marks, though some responses were still generic in nature and made little or no specific reference to candidates’ own research. This often prevented them from accessing the full range of marks.

Part C — ‘research findings’ and Part D ‘research conclusions’ sections

In these sections candidates sometimes copied from research evidence sheets and were awarded 0 marks if there was no further analysis of information. Some candidates confused these sections and repeated their responses.

Most candidates used the research evidence sheets appropriately. A minority used these as a plan and, as a result, sometimes were unable to gain marks due to copying.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Section 1: Parts A and B — Democracy in Scotland and the United Kingdom

Candidates performed well in this section of the question paper. The questions proved to be accessible for the majority of candidates, with questions requiring candidates to ‘describe’ performing well. The question requiring ‘explanation’ performed as intended with the more able candidates giving a detailed explanation in relation to the reasons why political parties use the media during election campaigns.

Section 3: Part E — Question 16

Many candidates were able to explain, in detail, the reasons why some people experience social and economic issues, and gave detailed, up-to-date exemplification relating to the world power they had studied. This highlighted that candidates understood the meaning of ‘social’ and ‘economic’, with a number of candidates differentiating the two in their response.

Section 3: Part F — Question 18

The vast majority of candidates who attempted this question performed well. They were able to describe, accurately, the impact that the international conflict or issue had on the people directly involved. Candidates had clearly studied relevant, up-to-date conflicts or issues. However, a number of candidates used historical exemplification in relation to both conflicts and issues, which should be avoided.

Source evaluation questions (questions 7, 14 and 21) were completed to a high standard. Candidates are demonstrating that they are suitably equipped to meet the demands of all three source-based questions.

‘Conclusions’ question — the majority of candidates were able to make a relevant conclusion in relation to the prompt given and supported this with appropriate evidence, with many candidates linking evidence within and between sources. A high number of candidates were also able to make evaluative comments in relation to their conclusions, either as a separate sentence or within the body of the answer.

‘Support and oppose’ question — the vast majority of candidates appeared well-prepared for this question and had a clear structure to their answer. Many candidates used the simple method of pairing two pieces of evidence together to either support or oppose the view, gaining 2 marks, and repeating this method up to five times to access the full range of marks available. Candidates should be reminded that this question no longer asks for a discussion about whether the viewpoint is selective.

‘Decision making’ question — the majority of candidates clearly stated which option they had selected and then went on to give relevant evidence to support this, linking evidence within and between sources. The majority of candidates demonstrated a clear structure to their answer, giving reasons to support their choice and then went on to give reasons why they had rejected the other option. Some candidates misinterpreted the latter part of this question and went on to give evidence as to why they should have selected the other option.

Assignment

Overall, candidates performed well in the assignment. The vast majority chose a relevant modern studies topic to research, however there was continued evidence that candidates are still selecting topics that would be more suited to history or RMPS assignments.

Part B was completed relatively well, with many candidates successfully analysing the effectiveness of the research methods they had selected, and providing appropriate evidence of their research methods, both primary and secondary.

Part C was completed very well by most candidates, however there were still a number of candidates who gained 0 marks due to directly copying from their research sheet.

Part D was completed well by a number of candidates, however there was evidence that candidates struggled in relation to drawing conclusions based on their research. A number of candidates simply repeated findings while others gained 0 marks due to directly copying from their research sheet.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 2: Parts C and D — Social Issues in the United Kingdom

The 'describe' questions in this section proved challenging to some candidates. There was evidence that some candidates did not fully understand the questions and therefore gave an incorrect answer. There was also evidence that some candidates attempted to apply pre-prepared answers to certain questions, rather than applying knowledge to a given question.

The 8-mark knowledge questions also proved challenging to some candidates. These questions were clear discriminatory questions. However, some candidates either answered it incorrectly or attempted it by giving descriptions rather than explanations. For example, some discussed the role of the government in tackling social and economic inequalities rather than the private sector, while other candidates described the powers of the different Scottish courts rather than explaining why these are effective in tackling crime.

Questions 9 and 12

Many candidates were unable to apply the knowledge they had acquired to highlight that inequality or crime is a problem in Scotland and/or the UK. These were very open questions and allowed for a range of responses, however, some candidates did not attempt these questions at all.

Question 11

Many candidates did not seem prepared for 'biological causes of crime'. A large number of candidates either did not attempt this question or gave an answer that related to social and economic causes of crime.

Section 3: Part E — Question 15

A large number of candidates did not answer the question correctly; they simply described the power and scale of the military in the world power they had studied. Only a small number of candidates were able to describe the influence the military has on other countries.

Section 3: Part E — Question 17

A number of candidates were not prepared for this question and gave a pre-prepared answer that highlighted why some groups were less likely to participate in politics.

Source evaluation questions

A small number of candidates struggled with certain elements of the source evaluation questions. Candidates continue to make conclusions that are not relevant to the prompts given and often do not make conclusions at all, simply providing source evidence that they think relates to the prompts given.

A number of candidates also found it difficult to explain why they did not choose the other option in the 'options' question which led to some very confused answers.

In the 'support and oppose' question, a very small number of candidates attempted to address this question in the style of 'selective in the use of facts'.

Assignment

Research topic/issue

Some candidates could not access the full range of marks in the assignment as a result of the topic/issue they had chosen. Some topics were too historical, geographical or scientific. Some others focused on issues that would have been better suited to RMPS or Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

Research methods

A number of candidates continue to make little or no specific reference to their own research. Many provided what appeared to be memorised list-type answers of advantages and disadvantages of 'generic' research methods such as 'surveys' or 'the internet'. Candidates should have referred to their own survey specifically or the individual websites they had accessed.

In this section a small number of candidates did not gain marks as they copied their answers from their research evidence sheets. Furthermore, those candidates who did not provide the research evidence sheet could not access the full range of marks available.

Research findings and Research conclusions

Some candidates confused these two sections and wrote very similar answers for both. Candidates who achieved the highest marks provided points of knowledge that related clearly to their chosen topic and linked well to the research evidence provided, while being able to make detailed conclusions based on their findings. A number of candidates were unable to access the marks available due to copying from research evidence sheets.

In general, the main reasons why candidates were unable to gain marks in the assignment were copying from research evidence sheets, inappropriate topics, and generic answers that did not refer to their own research.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should ensure that they are familiar with the National 5 course specification and that candidates are presented at the appropriate level.

Centres should re-emphasise the importance of expanding knowledge answers using specific 'real world' current examples. Candidates should be reminded that when knowledge questions ask for 'two ways' or 'a maximum of three reasons', writing more should be avoided as only the best two or three points in the answer will gain marks.

When analysing information in source evaluation questions, candidates should be encouraged to compare statistics, show changes over time, show differences between ethnic groups, genders or countries; and to make evaluative comments such as 'significant increase or decrease' and 'showing similarities or differences'. This will also allow candidates to gain further marks for evaluation or use of evaluative terminology, and will help to prepare them further for the transition to Higher.

Candidates should always explicitly state in their source evaluation answer which option they have chosen, which of the bullet-pointed conclusions they are addressing, and whether they are supporting or opposing a point of view. This will support the candidate in terms of giving a more structured response, allowing for marks to be allocated accordingly.

In the 'support and oppose' source evaluation question, centres should ensure that they are no longer teaching this in the style of 'selective in the use of facts'.

Centres should also ensure that candidates understand the requirements of the 'options' source evaluation question in relation to part (iii) ('Explain why you did not choose the other option.') It was evident that this often confused candidates and they gave incorrect or irrelevant evidence.

Assignment

Centres should emphasise that candidates must choose their own topic for research without being directed, and that they should not use exactly the same resources as everyone else in their class.

Topics must clearly address a relevant, contemporary modern studies issue. Candidates are advised not to combine modern studies topics with their assignments in other subjects in order to avoid using irrelevant or historical information. Topics that should be avoided in respect of this include:

- ◆ accounts or descriptions of historical crimes or criminals, for example, the murder of James Bulger
 - ◆ euthanasia
 - ◆ animal rights
 - ◆ death penalty
 - ◆ corruption in sport
- } candidates almost always approach these topics in a manner more appropriate for RMPS

- ◆ social media — the focus is normally related to topics that are discussed within PSHE

Research evidence is intended to provide evidence that the candidate has carried out their own research. Candidates should therefore be discouraged from using the two A4 research sheets as a plan. Furthermore, centres should emphasise to candidates that direct copying from the research evidence sheets will not gain marks and where research evidence is not identified, full marks cannot be achieved. Any 'coded' research evidence will also be treated as direct copying.

Candidates who have used the hypothesis and aims approach should be encouraged to address these in the 'conclusions' section of their report. Furthermore, candidates who have carried out a survey should be able to make detailed, well-supported conclusions from their research. This could be used in the conclusions section to access the full range of marks.

Centres should advise candidates to use the 'findings' section of the report to demonstrate knowledge of their topic which may not directly answer their aims, or prove or disprove their hypothesis. Candidates should also be reminded that they must make at least one direct link in their findings to the research methods discussed in Section B in order to access the full range of marks available.

Centres should ensure that candidates discuss the actual research methods they have used when completing their assignment. Generic descriptions of research methods must be avoided as 0 marks will be awarded. Marks will only be allocated to candidates who specifically discuss the methods they have used, and that are evident on the research sheet.

Centres must ensure that resource sheets, research sheets or processed information sheets are submitted for each candidate for the 2019-20 session. These sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's assignment. A penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the subject page of the SQA website.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	11867
Number of resulted entries in 2019	11967

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	30.0%	30.0%	3588	70
B	22.6%	52.6%	2707	60
C	20.8%	73.4%	2490	50
D	14.4%	87.8%	1723	40
No award	12.2%	-	1459	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.