



## Course Report 2018

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

## Summary of the course assessment

### Component 1: question paper

The 2018 Advanced Higher Modern Studies question paper had a total of 90 marks and had two parts. Part A required candidates to answer two 30-mark extended-response questions from a choice of three. Part B contained two mandatory 15-mark questions: one research methods question and one source-stimulus question.

Section 1: political issues was the second most common area of study. Within this, 'power and influence' (Question 1) and 'living political ideas' (Question 2) were the most commonly-attempted questions.

Section 2: law and order remains the most popular area of study. Within this, 'understanding criminal behaviour' (Question 7) and 'responses by society to crime' (Question 8) were the most commonly-attempted questions by candidates.

Section 3: social inequality was not delivered by any centre. However, a small number of candidates incorrectly attempted questions from this section along with questions from other sections of the question paper.

The question paper performed in line with expectations, and feedback from the marking team and from practitioners suggested that the question paper was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand.

### Extended-responses (Questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

Similar structure and framing of the extended-response questions allowed candidates to access the questions and apply their knowledge to analyse, synthesise and evaluate the statements within the questions, while also attempting to make international comparisons. Direction within questions to include 'reference to the UK/Scotland and any other country/countries' supported candidates in adopting a comparative approach. The quality of the comparative analysis and evaluation differentiated candidates.

### Research methods (Questions 4, 9 and 14)

Questions 4, 9 and 14 across all three sections referred to the same research methods — surveys and official statistics. Candidates were familiar with both, which allowed them to draw on their knowledge and understanding to critically evaluate each. The quality of analysis, evaluation and the overall conclusion differentiated candidates.

### Source-based questions (Questions 5, 10 and 15)

Source questions across the three sections were all from the polling company Ipsos MORI, ensuring the level of difficulty of question for candidates was similar, irrespective of their area of study. Source content allowed candidates to analyse, evaluate and comment on key aspects of validity and/or reliability including provenance, sampling approaches, recording approaches, source evidence, source omissions and contemporaneity. The quality of analysis, evaluation and the overall conclusion differentiated candidates.

## **Component 2: project–dissertation**

This part of the course assessment had a total of 50 marks and consisted of a 5,000 word maximum project–dissertation undertaken by candidates. The project–dissertation performed as expected.

Most candidates used titles from the Advanced Higher Modern Studies ‘approved list of dissertations’ document available on the Advanced Higher Modern Studies subject page. Candidates who developed their own dissertation titles produced insightful dissertations on contemporary issues.

Most candidates are familiar with the project–dissertation’s assessment criteria and develop an approach that fits with this. In presenting their findings, almost all candidates’ project–dissertations attempt to:

- ◆ justify an appropriate, complex, contemporary political or social issue for research
- ◆ evaluate research methodology
- ◆ use a wide range of sources of information
- ◆ analyse the issue
- ◆ evaluate arguments and evidence
- ◆ synthesise information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence
- ◆ organise, present and reference findings using appropriate conventions

## Section 2: comments on candidate performance

### Areas in which candidates performed well

#### Component 1: question paper

Most candidates displayed good political and social knowledge and understanding of the issues raised in the extended-response questions. Very few candidates were unprepared for the question paper.

#### Extended-responses (Questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

Across the assessable criteria for the 30-mark extended response, strong candidates produced high-quality answers containing the following features:

- ◆ **Analysis:** responses identified and analysed key factors which were developed and related to the question throughout the main body of the response. Contemporary supporting evidence was presented in support of analysis and evaluation with the source or origin attributed. Analysis of key issues integrated evidence from an international comparator to compare, contrast, analyse and evaluate the issue in relation to the UK/Scotland and other countries. High-quality responses also contained reference to ideas and/or theories or the academic arguments of others.
- ◆ **Comparison:** answers compared the UK/Scotland with a relevant comparator country or countries throughout the essay. Evaluative and overall conclusions commented on the extent of difference/similarity between the UK/Scotland and the comparator country or countries cited.
- ◆ **Evaluation:** responses provided implicit as well as explicit conclusions and considered and evaluated alternative views or theories in relation to the question. Overall conclusions were justified and included a reason for rejecting or accepting alternative arguments.
- ◆ **Synthesising information to structure and sustain lines of argument:** answers had a clear line of argument that flowed from an organised and logical sequence of ideas. A developed conclusion, rather than a summary, was offered which directly addressed the question and offered a judgement based on the evidence presented.

#### Research methods (Questions 4, 9 and 14)

Candidate performance was broadly in line with that of 2017. Most candidates correctly interpreted that the question required a comparison of the stated methods to reach an overall conclusion on which was most suitable. Strong candidates' responses often analysed an alternative method(s) to those stated in the question. High-quality answers also contained the following features:

- ◆ **Analysis:** quality analysis detailing knowledge of the benefits and limitation of using surveys and official statistics in research. High-quality analysis of surveys and official statistics which included supporting evidence from candidates' own knowledge, research experience or case studies of academic research. Examples of candidates' own use of this method as well as references to Survey Monkey, YouGov, Ipsos MORI and other polling organisations was relevant and highly credited. Analysis of approaches to

conducting surveys, for example, online, by telephone or face-to-face, was also relevant and credible. Examples of official statistics referenced and analysed included Office for National Statistics (ONS), National Records of Scotland, UK and Scottish Government Statistics amongst others.

- ◆ **Evaluation:** responses which gained high marks considered the effectiveness of the research methods in relation to the scenario outlined in the question. High-quality responses also commented on ethical issues related to one or more of the research methods raised in their response. Common ethical issues commented on in relation to surveys included honesty, trust and anonymity. For full marks it was not necessary to refer to an alternative research method(s), however, many candidates referred to overt and covert participation, observation, focus groups or interviews in their answers.
- ◆ **Conclusion:** quality conclusions offered a clear judgement outlining candidates' preferred method in relation to the issue. Justification for preferring one method and reasons for rejecting the other method(s) was clearly and succinctly made.

### Source-based questions (Questions 5, 10 and 15)

Although this was the question in which many candidates achieved low marks, high-quality answers contained the following key features:

- ◆ **Analysis of a source:** detailed knowledge of aspects of the source which affected its trustworthiness including provenance, source evidence, methodology, recording approach or date of publication. Balanced analysis considering strengths and weaknesses of the source, and detailed explanation of how this affected its' trustworthiness, were also made.
- ◆ **Evaluation of trustworthiness:** use of supporting evidence drawn from the source and candidates' own knowledge of social science research. Reference to alternative approaches that would increase the trustworthiness of the source.
- ◆ **Conclusion:** a clear conclusion stemming from a coherent line of argument leading to a balanced overall judgement on the extent to which the source was trustworthy.

### Component 2: project–dissertation

In the project–dissertation, high quality responses contained the following features across the assessable criteria:

- ◆ **Justifying an appropriate, complex, contemporary political or social issue:** titles, hypotheses and aims were logical, linked and supported analysis and evaluation of a contemporary Modern Studies issue. Candidates explained the contemporary political or social relevance of the issue and its local, national and/or global significance and referred to up-to-date issues or events related to the issue. The introduction justified the aims and outlined the line of argument and coverage to come.
- ◆ **Evaluating research methodology:** quality responses offered a balanced evaluation of a select range of methods used by the candidate. High-quality analysis and evaluation commented on the strengths and weaknesses of the methods, made comment on ethical issues and considerations surrounding candidates' selected methodologies and commented on ways in which the use of one of their methods could be improved upon.

- ◆ **Using a wide range of sources of information:** high-quality project-dissertations employed a wide and varied range of primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources of information were accurately referenced, academically evidenced in the appendices, and integrated into the main body of the dissertation.
- ◆ **Analysing the issue:** analysis of key issues lead to evaluative comments, which were supported by contemporary evidence, case studies, statistics, theories or examples.
- ◆ **Evaluating arguments and evidence:** quality project-dissertations included implicit and explicit evaluations and conclusions. Arguments which supported the stated hypothesis as well as alternative views were presented and evaluated, with it being clear which arguments were accepted and which were discounted.
- ◆ **Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence:** candidates who produced high-quality project-dissertations made evaluations or conclusions consistently within chapters, at the end of each chapter, and in their overall conclusion. Points raised within aims and/or chapters built towards and linked to the overall conclusion.
- ◆ **Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions:** candidates who achieved high or full marks in this element presented a well-organised bibliography, which presented source types in a clear and logical manner. References were consistent and in the style of footnotes or parenthetical citations. Appendices included detail on the origin and provenance of the primary or secondary information. Information from appendices was used and referenced in the main body of the project-dissertation.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Component 1: question paper

#### Extended-responses (Questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

Some candidates fail to refer to an international comparator(s) or make only cursory reference to another country, as in previous years. Coverage focused solely on the UK/Scotland is awarded a maximum of 5 out of the 8 marks available in the ‘analysis’ element and 0 marks for the ‘comparison’ element. Weaker responses by candidates describe rather than analyse the issue, tend to lack supporting evidence, and often present a one-sided interpretation of the issue. Difficulties in answering extended-response questions are clearly often because of candidates’ limited understanding of the issue. This leads to unprepared candidates trying to turn the question to fit a pre-prepared answer rather than answering the question set.

Common weaknesses shown by candidates in relation to specific extended-response questions were as follows:

#### ◆ **Question 1 — power and influence**

*‘The media is now the dominant influence on the political process.’ Discuss.*

Weaker responses by candidates to this question narrowly focused on the media’s influence on voting behaviour and failed to consider wider aspects of the political process such as policy and legislation. One-sided responses which argued the media was wholly influential and failed to consider alternative views, considering limitations of the media’s

influence, were limited in the mark that they could be awarded. Failure to discuss other influences on the political process, for example, that of pressure groups, was also a common feature of these weaker responses.

◆ **Question 2 — living political ideas**

*'The age of ideologically driven parties is over.'* Discuss.

Some candidates' coverage in their responses to this question was too historical and focused solely on UK and US political parties from the Thatcher, Reagan, Bush or Blair era. Such responses lacked analysis and evaluation of political parties' contemporary ideological policies and position which limited the mark that could be awarded.

◆ **Question 3 — political structures**

*'The Executive dominates all branches of government.'* Discuss.

Some candidates' analysis narrowly focused on Executive and Legislative relationships. Failure to analyse or evaluate the Executive's relationship with the judicial branch of government lead to narrower and weaker responses.

◆ **Question 6 — understanding the criminal justice system**

*'Putting privacy concerns above public safety is unacceptable.'* Discuss.

Several candidates mistakenly answered this question when it was clear that they had not studied this topic as part of their course. Weak answers discussed privacy issues and public safety in isolation and failed to consider the broader consequences of national security responses in relation to human rights and civil liberties. Some candidates failed to support analysis with concrete, contemporary examples.

◆ **Question 7 — understanding criminal behaviour**

*'Criminals are the product of their environment.'* Discuss.

Many answers simply described a list of theories or causes of crime and failed to engage with the question by discussing 'environment' in any meaningful way. Poor responses also lacked critical analysis, direct reference to supporting or contradictory evidence and failed to consider any international contexts.

◆ **Question 8 — responses by society to crime**

*'The best response to criminal behaviour is to be tough.'* Discuss.

Weak candidate responses often lacked balanced analysis of the issue and simply described problems of prisons and benefits of non-custodial approaches. Weaker responses failed to acknowledge the positive role prison plays in tackling criminal behaviour or the limitations of non-custodial approaches.

**Research methods (Questions 4, 9 and 14)**

Many candidates simply described advantages and disadvantages of the stated methods and lacked development or supporting exemplification. This approach lacked consideration of the scenario outlined in the question and limited the marks awarded. Weak responses also failed to comment on ethical issues associated with one or more of the research methods discussed. The poorest responses failed to offer any overall conclusion and were awarded 0 of the 3 marks in this element.

### Source-based questions (questions 5, 10 and 15)

Weak responses by candidates simply described source content and inferred the strengths and weaknesses of the source rather than discuss them in detail. Weak responses also lacked supporting evidence from the candidate's own knowledge of social science research. The poorest responses failed to offer any overall conclusion and were awarded 0 marks out of the 3 marks available for this element of the question.

### Component 2: project–dissertation

Areas of difficulty or poor candidate performance across the dissertation assessable elements included aspects of the following in relation to the assessable criteria:

- ◆ **Justifying an appropriate, complex, contemporary political or social issues:** weak dissertations had poorly constructed hypotheses and aims. Introductions which failed to explain and justify the wider relevance of candidates' issues and sub-issues were also a common feature of dissertations which performed poorly in this element.
- ◆ **Evaluating research methodology:** for many candidates the research methodology element remains the weakest component of their dissertation. Weak responses described how a vast range of methods were used and simply describe the advantages and disadvantages of these. A sizeable number of candidates failed to discuss ethical issues associated with their research or potential changes they could have made to improve their research.
- ◆ **Using a wide range of sources of information:** most candidates consulted an adequate number of sources and used a range of appropriate methods of gathering information. However, the weakest dissertations were based on research gathered from a limited number of websites, as in previous years.
- ◆ **Analysing the issue:** some candidates continue to adopt a weak polemic approach to their hypothesis, rather than dispassionately assessing their research evidence in a balanced manner. This approach fails to acknowledge or analyse alternative viewpoints and theories and reduces the scope for gaining marks.
- ◆ **Evaluating arguments and evidence:** weaker candidate responses failed to offer implicit or explicit evaluations in the main body of chapters and the dissertation. Points made were descriptive and failed to reference supporting evidence, arguments, examples or theories. This approach is awarded very little or no credit.
- ◆ **Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence:** weaker candidates' dissertations contained large sections drawn from, or based on, single sources of information. Poorly-organised dissertations also lacked a coherent flow with aims and/or chapters which were unrelated to each other or which failed to address the title or hypothesis. This often resulted from poor planning.
- ◆ **Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions:** a minority of candidates failed to use academic referencing conventions, for example, the Harvard or Oxford style. Weak bibliographies showed a limited range of sources and simply listed website URLs. Many candidates did not include any appendices or did not reference information from their appendices. No marks are awarded for any of these approaches.



- ◆ **Exceeding the maximum word count (5,000 words with 10% toleration):** a small number of candidates incurred a penalty for exceeding the maximum word allowance, as in previous years.

## **Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates**

Teachers and lecturers should ensure all candidates have access to, and are familiar with, the relevant supporting documentation for Advanced Higher Modern Studies. Teachers and lecturers should also ensure that all candidates are fully informed and familiar with the assessable criteria used for the range of question types across the question paper and the project-dissertation.

### **Component 1: question paper**

#### **Extended-responses**

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that teaching and course coverage involves adequate coverage of an international comparator country or countries. Careful consideration should be given by centres as to how courses are constructed to support candidates in adapting to this comparative element.

Candidates should be encouraged to 'do something' with their knowledge by applying it to the question set. Candidates should focus on answering the questions and avoid attempting to turn the question to pre-prepared essay responses.

Extended-responses should address alternative sides of the argument with in-depth analysis and synthesis, drawing a variety of information together in support of points. Candidates should be supported and encouraged to use contemporary evidence or exemplification to support analysis and evaluation in extended-responses. Any conclusion should justify the candidates' judgement and give reasons for rejecting alternative viewpoints rather than summarise previous points explored in the main body.

#### **Research methods questions**

Teachers and lecturers should aim to prepare candidates adequately by ensuring that the key research methods outlined in the course assessment specification are covered in their courses. Candidates should have the opportunity to practically apply methods as part of their project-dissertation research or as part of the course to gain greater insight into the benefits, limitations and considerations that must be given to their use. Any study of research methods should aim to familiarise candidates with examples of application in academic studies, as this will support candidates' ability to offer exemplification in their question paper responses.

#### **Source-based questions**

Teachers and lecturers can support candidates by ensuring they are familiar with the assessable criteria for the source-based questions and that they have ample opportunity to practise answering these types of questions. Assessing sources of complex political or social information should form a routine part of any course.

Candidates should be discouraged from simply describing the source content or research methodology. Overall conclusions offering a clear judgement on the extent of the sources' trustworthiness must be made.

## Component 2: project–dissertation

Teachers and lecturers can assist candidates in the planning stage by ensuring they adopt an appropriate hypothesis and aims. Many centres make use of the ‘approved list of dissertations’ document available on the Advanced Higher Modern Studies subject page to support this process. However, it is perfectly valid for candidates to adapt or modify these as it relates to their issue of study. Candidates should also be supported to select their own dissertation titles if they wish to do so. Where centres are unsure about the hypothesis, title, or aims candidates have developed themselves, they can submit an Advanced Higher Modern Studies ‘alternative titles for dissertations’ form, also available on the subject page.

Teachers and lecturers should discourage candidates from framing aims using the stem ‘To find out...’. Candidates should be directed to use questions or stems such as:

- ◆ To what extent...?
- ◆ To analyse...
- ◆ To examine...
- ◆ To examine the extent to which...

Candidates should avoid simply describing their use of research methods and instead be directed to provide an evaluation of a select range of methods they used. Candidates should comment on benefits and limitations of the selected methods, comment on ethical issues of at least one method, and discuss ways in which their use of at least one method could have been improved on.

Candidates should aim to use a wide and varied range of sources of information. Secondary resources can involve a wide range of sources and may include academic texts, journals, newspapers, websites, documentaries and other audio or visual sources. Primary research is not mandatory for the dissertation, but it can enhance research and offer further insight or perspectives on issues.

Candidates should be directed to discuss and critically evaluate alternative views and theories as part of their dissertation.

Candidates should avoid summary conclusions and instead offer a conclusion to their dissertation which makes and supports a balanced and considered judgement on the issue.

Centres should adopt a ‘house’ style of referencing which supports candidates taking a consistent approach. Candidates can be directed to dissertation exemplification on the Modern Studies section on SQA’s Understanding Standards website to see a range and quality of approaches to this.

Appendices are crucial evidence of the candidate’s research process. For example, interview transcripts, letters and/or e-mails sent and received, and survey results can be included. Candidates who only conduct secondary research should be encouraged to include appendices also, for example, statistical or graphical information that they analyse, evaluate and integrate into the main body of their dissertation. Teachers and lecturers should advise candidates that the marks available for appendices are only awarded if evidence from them is referenced and used in the main body of the dissertation.

Teachers and lecturers should inform candidates that dissertations must be within the maximum word count (5,000 words plus 10% toleration) and ensure proofreading of dissertations is undertaken before final submission.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to produce their final dissertations using the following conventions:

- ◆ size 12 font
- ◆ 1.5 line spacing
- ◆ single-side printing
- ◆ a word count per chapter included
- ◆ an overall word count included

## Grade boundary and statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	861
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	841
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### 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	24.9%	24.9%	209	98
B	28.4%	53.3%	239	84
C	24.9%	78.1%	209	70
D	9.8%	87.9%	82	63
No award	12.1%	-	102	-

## **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 which allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and 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 Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.