



Course Report 2016

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It 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.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the Course assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The Higher Modern Studies question paper has a total of 60 marks (two-thirds of the course assessment's total) and lasts for 135 minutes.

The question paper contained a mixture of source-based questions, essay-style questions and extended response questions. The question paper has three sections, each allowing candidate choice. The most commonly completed options were: Section 1 – Question 2(a), Section 2 – Question 3 Part A (b) and Section 3 – Question 5 Part A (a).

Source questions appeared in Sections 1 and 2. These questions are mandatory for all pupils.

Although the question paper performed satisfactorily for the majority of candidates, many found question 1 difficult to access. Certain candidates failed to appreciate the complexities of the bullet points and as a result missed out part of the question. As a result of this, the boundary for a grade C was adjusted.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment has a total of 30 marks (one-third of the Course assessment's total). The assignment consists of a written report, based on the individual research of the candidate and written up, under controlled conditions, in 90 minutes.

The assignment continues to be challenging for some candidates. However, many performed well.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 2 (a)

Most candidates appeared to be well prepared for an electoral systems question and were able to focus their responses on the representation of the electorate, as specified in the question.

Question 2 (b)

Most candidates focused their response on pressure groups and their campaign methods, although some did consider other forms of participation such as voting or standing for election.

Question 3A (a)

Many candidates had good, up-to-date knowledge of a wide range of government policy covering a variety of social inequalities. Some structured their responses around types of inequality and considered a range of policies introduced in each area (eg education), while others structured their responses around a variety of individual policies.

Question 3A (b)

Many candidates showed good knowledge of Scottish health issues and gave good examples concerning lifestyle choices such as smoking, alcohol, poor diet. The most successful candidates also considered the impact of social class and poverty on ill-health.

Question 3B (c)

Although this question was completed by only a small proportion of candidates, they did show good knowledge and understanding of several policies and provided exemplification of success and failure.

Question 3B (d)

A wide range of 'causes' were considered. Many candidates went beyond a simplistic analysis of 'causes' such as 'drugs' or 'poverty' and structured their response around academic theories.

Question 4

The majority of candidates were able to provide relevant source evidence to both support and oppose the given view.

Question 5 (b)

Candidates displayed good knowledge of the political system in their chosen world power and were often able to make evaluative comments on its effectiveness in representing the population. Responses tended to achieve higher marks when considering the political systems in China and South Africa.

Question 5 (c)

The majority of candidates displayed very good knowledge of their world issue and confined their answer to the impact of this issue on individuals and groups of people. Those considering poverty or the lack of development in Africa answered well.

Question 5 (d)

The majority of candidates were well prepared for this question and could differentiate between the actions of distinct international organisations. Many candidates managed to focus largely on an evaluation of success or failure and were able to provide supporting evidence and argument.

Component 2: Assignment

A greatly increased number of candidates provided detailed knowledge of the background to their topic and of the alternative courses of action being considered. The best responses continue to integrate knowledge with source evidence to support/oppose alternative options. Source information was often analysed and evaluated effectively.

The vast majority of candidates did attempt to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of their source materials. Some provided a clear evaluation, making a comparative judgement

between two specific sources of evidence used in making their decision. Some provided an analysis of two separate sources used in their research.

A structure similar to that often used in the old Higher paper 2 was the most common approach, and this proved effective for many. Appropriate headings and sections were used by most. Most were able to make some reference to their research sheets. The use of social science terminology has improved.

A statement of the candidate's recommendation/decision near the start of the assignment did seem to allow a clear and consistent line of argument to be followed throughout. The vast majority of candidates were able to make a clear decision between their alternative options and to support this with some source evidence and/or knowledge.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1

Many candidates found the first bullet point demanding, often providing a conclusion and evidence concerning the turnout of different age groups that did not address the full scope of the bullet point. Many candidates either missed out an overall conclusion on turnout in the UK or simply repeated points already made in their answer.

Question 2 (a)

A significant number of candidates analysed more than one electoral system without comparison and could not be credited for their full response.

Question 2 (b)

Some responses simply described the actions of pressure groups or described different types of pressure groups with little analysis of their influence on government decision making.

Question 3A (a)

Candidates often provided information on very dated policies. In many cases no specific policies were ever mentioned; the response concentrating on increased/decreased levels of social inequality.

Question 3A (b)

Many candidates provided descriptive details of various lifestyle choices, such as smoking and drinking alcohol, without ever analysing or evaluating the extent to which they, as opposed to other societal factors, could be blamed for ill-health.

Question 3B (c)

In some cases, no specific policies were ever mentioned; the response concentrating on increased/decreased levels of crime. Many candidates wrongly asserted that crime was 'at an all-time high' or that crime was 'ever increasing'.

Question 3B (d)

In some cases, candidates provided overly simplistic responses which just stated causal links without evidence or argument, eg 'poor people commit crime'

Question 4

Many candidates failed to make a specific judgement on the extent to which the view could be considered accurate, instead using vague statements such as 'accurate to a certain extent'.

Question 5A (a)

A significant number of candidates evaluated government success concerning more than one socio-economic issue, so could not be credited for their full answer.

Question 5A (b)

Some candidates tried to 'manipulate' their response to fit the question they were hoping would be asked, rather than the actual question.

Component 2: Assignment

Overall, many candidates still find the assignment challenging.

A small number of candidates chose a research topic that may have been more suited to History, Geography or RMPS. Some candidates included a great deal of information on their research sheets, which seems to hamper them in their 'write-up'. Knowledge was often included on research sheets under its own heading. A growing number of candidates included notes on their research sheets with no specific sources mentioned.

Many candidates included web addresses or newspaper names, with a single quote from each. These were placed in order on the research sheets (forming a plan) and then linked together using neutral language. This usually did not allow the candidate to display the skills of analysis and evaluation.

While the vast majority of candidates attempted to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of their sources, many of those who did attempt to do this, answered in very generic terms without making specific reference to their sources. A large number made broad comments about 'the internet' or 'newspapers'. Some comments referred to sources that did not appear on the research sheets and were awarded no marks.

Many candidates did not achieve full marks for the structure of their report as a plan of some kind was included on their research sheets.

Some conclusions/decisions were very brief and only supported by the most simplistic evidence.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Centres should continue to emphasise the importance of analysis/evaluation and up-to-date exemplification in both the 12-mark extended answer questions and in the 20-mark essays. They should also encourage candidates to pay close attention to the specific wording of the

questions, and to discourage them from simply writing everything they know about a topic. For example, when a question asks for analysis of a single electoral system, no credit can be given for separate coverage of a second or third system unless there is an element of comparison included as part of the analysis.

Centres should also remind all candidates that their overall judgement as to the degree of accuracy in source questions should include a quantitative comment such as 'very accurate' or 'highly inaccurate' etc. Candidates should be discouraged from using phrases such as 'accurate to a certain extent' as these do not fully answer the question.

Component 2: Assignment

Centres should emphasise to candidates that their research sheets should not be used as a plan. Source material should be clearly attributed on the research sheets, and information intended as background knowledge should not be included.

Centres should continue to ensure that candidates include background knowledge in their report, which helps frame the topic and the alternative decisions to be considered, as well as knowledge that supports the use of source material during analysis/synthesis.

Centres should stress to their candidates that two marks are available for an evaluation of the reliability and usefulness of the sources, which must be included on the research sheets. This should focus on the actual sources used by the candidate and shouldn't be generic in nature.

Centres should emphasise to candidates that direct copying from the research sheets will attract no credit. Notes taken from written/audio/visual sources are perfectly acceptable, but centres must ensure that candidates add analysis, comment etc to these notes. Simply joining a series of quotes/notes together should be avoided.

Centres should remind candidates to give evidence/reasons why they rejected alternative options, as well as evidence/reasons in favour of their preferred option.

The research sheets should include evidence from the sources used in the candidate's research, for example, survey results, extract from newspaper article, questions asked and answers received during an interview, reply to an e-mail, statistics, tables and graphs from a website etc.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	4796
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	9851
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	31.0%	31.0%	3058	63
B	21.1%	52.2%	2083	53
C	21.3%	73.5%	2102	43
D	7.7%	81.3%	763	38
No award	18.7%	-	1845	0

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will 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.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings 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.
- ◆ 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, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this 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.
- ◆ 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.