



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Modern Studies
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate performance remained strong this year although presentations dropped by around 50% as a result of dual running. Feedback from examiners and markers suggested little evidence of inappropriate presentation.

A very small number of candidates had difficulty in accessing the papers. Feedback suggested that all questions were accessible, mainstream and appropriate for a Higher level examination. The papers allowed candidates to demonstrate their skills and knowledge whilst at the same time maintained the national standard.

Paper 1

- ◆ As in 2014, the majority of candidates were reported as being entered at the correct level. Continuing the recent trend, centres presented fewer marginal candidates.
- ◆ Markers were, in the main, pleased with the responses they encountered across questions and within most centres. A few centres were praised by markers for the outstanding quality of responses. No centres were highlighted by markers as having candidates whose performance was consistently poor.
- ◆ There were full-mark responses to all questions. Several candidates scored full marks for Paper 1, with one securing full marks in both papers.
- ◆ Most candidates answered the required four questions. Most candidates were able to complete four essays in the time available. Time management did not appear to be an issue for the vast majority of candidates.
- ◆ Questions A4, B5 and C9 were the questions most frequently attempted by candidates. Questions A1, A2, B6, C7, C8 and C11 were well represented within scripts. Very few candidates attempted A3 or C10. The number of candidates attempting C12 was relatively small.
- ◆ Most centres appear to cover only four Study Themes. A minority of centres, however, do five Study Themes or have different Higher groups that undertake different Study Themes.

Paper 2

- ◆ Overall, responses to Paper 2 were good. Some markers commented, however, that the overall quality of Paper 2 responses had dipped slightly in comparison to previous years.
- ◆ The vast majority of centres prepare their candidates thoroughly for this paper. This is to be commended.
- ◆ Most candidates completed the short evaluating questions very well. There were many full mark responses to the short evaluating questions.
- ◆ Far more candidates supported the recommendation than rejected the recommendation.
- ◆ The structuring of reports remains good to very good. Few candidates fail to develop a distinct 'report style'. Referencing of Sources and background knowledge improves the structure of reports.

- ◆ Few candidates failed to score at least half marks in the DME. There were, as in previous years, a pleasing number of full-mark responses.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

- ◆ Most candidates developed a structured approach in writing their response. Candidates generally answered the questions as they were asked and didn't attempt to 'turn' the questions in their favour.
- ◆ Few candidates provided purely descriptive responses. Centres are evidently succeeding in training candidates to adopt an analytical approach to essay writing.
- ◆ Questions A4 (Voting behaviour), B5 (Poverty), C8 (China) and C9 (USA) were particularly well done this year. Few candidates struggled with these questions, with several markers and examiners commenting positively.
- ◆ Up-to-date exemplification was evident across many questions. The quality of exemplification was in some cases, outstanding, especially in relation to the China and USA questions mentioned above.
- ◆ Few candidates answered C11 but most of those that did displayed excellent knowledge of aid projects in Africa.

Paper 2

- ◆ The short evaluating questions were well answered, with many candidates achieving full marks.
- ◆ Few candidates failed to provide the full quote or both sides of a 'To what extent...' question (Questions 2 and 4).
- ◆ In question 4 it was decided by the team that a section of Victor Brown's quote was not required in order to fully answer the question (ie 'would cost thousands of jobs'). Candidates who only provided the first part of the quote, concerning public opinion, and the final part, concerning the places where low paid workers are employed, were given full credit.
- ◆ The majority of candidates produced appropriately structured (report-style) responses to the DME (Q5). The general standard of DME was high and this is clearly an area of strength within Higher Modern Studies.
- ◆ Very few candidates failed to include any relevant and accurate background knowledge in their DME, although the quality of background knowledge remains variable and is one of a number of key discriminators for this paper.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

QA1. The Scottish Parliament needs additional powers if it is to be more effective in governing Scotland. Discuss.

- ◆ Many descriptive answers that concentrated mainly on the devolved and reserved powers held at the moment by the UK and Scottish Parliaments.

- ◆ Little effective analysis/consideration of the arguments surrounding further changes to the Scottish Parliament's powers eg further devolution or Independence, or a return to direct government from Westminster.

QA2. The Cabinet has the most important decision making role in UK Central Government. Discuss.

- ◆ Some candidates tried to 'turn' this question into a question on the role of the Prime Minister or the role of the Parliament. This may have been worthy of some credit.
- ◆ Much of the exemplification for this question was dated, concerning the Thatcher and Blair cabinets.

QA3. Critically examine the view that party leaders in the UK have the greatest influence on the policies their parties adopt.

Very few candidates attempted this, so no general conclusions can be drawn.

QA4. Across the UK, voters are influenced by many factors. However, some factors are more important than others. Discuss.

- ◆ This question was completed by many candidates in a very descriptive style. Candidates addressed influencing factors in isolation rather than by trying to show their inter-relationships.
- ◆ Questionable, dated or inaccurate statistics and examples were often given.
- ◆ Inaccurate analysis was often given with regard to the voting behaviour of women, ethnic minority groups or young people. The analysis of Social Class was often very simplistic.

QB5. To what extent is poverty the most important factor affecting health?

- ◆ This question was completed by many candidates in a very descriptive style. Candidates addressed factors affecting health in isolation rather than by trying to show their inter-relationships.
- ◆ Questionable, dated or inaccurate statistics.

QB6. It is right that government should take responsibility for health and welfare. Discuss.

- ◆ Overly historical references to the formation of the Welfare State and the National Health Service.
- ◆ Highly questionable, random or inaccurate statistics. Little reference to the individualist ideology of the most recent UK Conservative and Coalition Governments and their policies.

QC7. Democracy in South Africa is threatened by the continuing strength of the African National Congress. Discuss.

- ◆ Tendency to focus on voting/elections as the only criteria for the evaluation of democracy. Little mention of the media, judiciary etc.

QC8. Critically examine the view that there is no effective political opposition to the Communist Party in China.

- ◆ Simplistic analysis of the 'other' parties in China.
- ◆ Dated descriptions of political protest.
- ◆ In a minority of centres, 'turning the question' towards economic reform and social inequality.

QC9. To what extent are there effective checks on the powers of the US President?

- ◆ Descriptive answers detailing the 'checks' that exist on the powers of the President. Limited in trying to evaluate the effectiveness of these 'checks'.
- ◆ Some evidence of 'turning the question' towards the political participation of certain minority groups.

QC10. Assess the effectiveness of the European Parliament in the European Union's decision making process.

Very few candidates attempted this, so no general conclusions can be drawn.

QC11. With reference to specific African countries (excluding the Republic of South Africa): To what extent is foreign aid important in promoting development in Africa?

- ◆ In a number of centres, and despite best advice in previous EARs, candidates continue to go 'round the houses' in terms of reciting the various factors that affect development eg war/corruption
- ◆ On occasion, highly questionable, inaccurate and dated statistics.
- ◆ No overall evaluative comment which addresses the question.

QC 12. Assess the UN's effectiveness in dealing with recent threats to international peace and security.

- ◆ Confusion with regard to the UN and NATO.
- ◆ Dated exemplification mostly from the 20th century.
- ◆ Answers focused heavily on the UN's failures, ignoring their successes.

Paper 2

- ◆ In 'To what extent' questions, a few candidates failed to give the full quote or only provided responses to support or oppose part of the quote.
- ◆ Several markers commented that candidates misunderstood SOURCE C3 (Survey) and lost marks in questions 2 and 4. SQA item analysis supports this observation.
- ◆ Several markers pointed out that some candidates appear to waste time continually claiming 'BK' in the margin when nothing relevant or credit-worthy was included.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres should continue to prioritise the teaching of higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Essay writing skills and the skills learned in the Decision

Making Exercise (eg to link evidence from different sources to form an argument and the ability to appreciate, criticise and counter opposing points of view) are key to success in the new Higher Modern Studies.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	8929
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	4698
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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 - 90				
A	30.3%	30.3%	1425	63
B	25.3%	55.7%	1190	54
C	22.7%	78.4%	1066	45
D	7.6%	86.0%	357	40
No award	14.0%	-	660	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.