



Course Report 2015

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	New 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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The question paper has a total of 60 marks (two thirds of the Course assessment's total) and lasts for 135 minutes.

The question paper contains 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 1 (a), Section 2: Question 3 Part A (a) and Section 3: Question 5 Part A (a).

Source questions appeared in Section 2 and 3. These questions are mandatory for all pupils.

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 supervision in 90 minutes.

The assignment proved to be very challenging for some candidates. Many performed well, and had been effectively prepared and advised by centres.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Very few candidates attempted to answer more than one essay/extended response question from each section.

There was some evidence of poor time management by candidates affecting marks in Section 3.

In Section 1, the vast majority of candidates completed question 1(a).

A significant majority completed question 3(a) in Section 2, with over 90% of candidates completing the Social Inequality in the United Kingdom option.

In the International Issues section, over 80% of candidates completed the World Powers option. Marks in Section 3 were lower than in Sections 1 and 2. Candidates often provided very little by way of specific exemplification either about the World Power or the World Issue they had studied.

Source questions were, on the whole, completed well by most candidates.

Component 2: Assignment

- ◆ The vast majority chose a relevant Modern Studies topic to research but failed to provide enough detailed knowledge of the topic to achieve the 10 marks available.
- ◆ Candidates often failed to make specific reference to their research evidence and often used their sources very simplistically. Some candidates had very little information on their research sheets and they did not demonstrate analysis or synthesis of the material.
- ◆ Many candidates did not attempt to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of their sources and gained no marks for this. Many of those who did attempt to do this answered in very generic terms without making specific reference to their sources.

- ◆ Most candidates presented their assignment in the style of a report with appropriate sections and headings. Many followed the structure often used in Paper 2 of the existing Higher which proved a successful approach.
- ◆ There was no significant difference in the numbers who considered three alternatives from the start of their report and those who considered two. There was no significant difference in the attainment of each of these groups.
- ◆ Most candidates achieved at least two marks for their conclusions. A decision was usually made and supported by some evidence. Some candidates supported their decision with detailed evidence and also gave reasons for the rejection of alternatives.
- ◆ Candidates constructed their two A4 research sheets in a wide variety of ways. Many relied too heavily on evidence sheets and this resulted in candidates not sufficiently demonstrating analysis of the evidence.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1 (a): This question was attempted by over 90% of all candidates. It was completed well with an average mark of almost 12 out of 20. Most candidates appeared to be well prepared for a voting behaviour question, and were able to identify many influential factors. Most candidates were able to attempt an evaluation of the relative importance of these factors. The Scottish Independence referendum was often used to exemplify points.

Question 2: Most candidates used the sources well in this question. Evidence was accurately provided to show both support for, and opposition to, the view. Candidates often synthesised information from the three sources to form a coherent argument.

Question 3 (B) (d): The small minority of candidates who completed this question provided good knowledge of community-based sentences and evaluation of their effectiveness.

Question 4: The conclusions question was completed well by the majority of candidates. Most were able to provide conclusions relevant to the bullet points in the question and backed these with appropriate source evidence.

Question 5 (B) (d): Candidates showed good knowledge of the main causes of their 'issue' and were able to analyse their relative importance. Candidates were also able to consider opposing points of view and to consider the consequences of the 'issue' on individuals and groups.

Component 2: Assignment

Some candidates provided detailed knowledge of the background to their topic and to the alternative courses of action being considered. The best responses successfully integrated knowledge with source evidence to support/oppose alternative options.

Some candidates used their source materials well to support their knowledge and their analysis of the alternatives. Source information was analysed and evaluated effectively.

Many 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.

Most candidates presented their assignment in the style of a report with appropriate sections and headings. A structure similar to that often used in Paper 2 of the existing Higher was successfully used by many candidates. Most candidates made some effort to refer directly to their source evidence. Many candidates were able to use appropriate social science terminology.

Candidates who stated their decision near the start of their report seemed to be able to hold a logical and consistent line of argument throughout. Candidates who did not state their decision near the start of their report were more likely to lose focus and become confused. The vast majority of candidates were able to make a clear decision between their alternative options and to support this with evidence.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1 (a): Many candidates could only provide very dated exemplification, eg the 1992 General Election, and newspaper headlines from that era.

Question 1 (b): This question was completed by a small minority of the candidates. Many candidates simply described different ways that Scottish and UK citizens could participate. Different levels of participation, eg turnout rates at elections, were rarely considered. The relative effectiveness of different types of participation in influencing decision making was usually overlooked.

Question 2: A large majority of candidates made no attempt to evaluate the reliability of the sources in the question.

Question 3 (A) (a): Candidates tended to provide generic, stereotypical answers concerning disadvantaged groups.

Question 3 (A) (b) Candidates tended to provide descriptive details of various benefits but failed to evaluate their effectiveness.

Question 3 (B) (a): Candidates tended to describe the effects of crime on victims and did not consider the effects on criminals, families of victims, communities etc.

Question 3 (B) (b) Candidates tended to provide descriptive details of prison sentences but failed to evaluate their effectiveness.

Question 4: Some candidates failed to differentiate between the statistics which referred to the whole of the EU and those which referred to the Eurozone only, (Source A). This often led to confusion when giving an overall conclusion on the impact of the recession on the whole EU.

Question 5 (A) (a): Some candidates displayed very little credit-worthy knowledge of the world power they had studied.

Question 5 (A) (b): Many candidates concentrated on describing the causes of the social issue in question rather than its impact on the world power.

Some candidates did not manage their time well in the exam. Some appeared to rush their responses in Section 3, resulting in lower marks for the extended response questions in this section.

Component 2: Assignment

Overall, many candidates found the Assignment challenging.

- ◆ A small number of candidates chose a research topic which did not relate well to a modern studies issue. Some candidates had over 2,000 words on their research sheets, making knowledge marks difficult to gain. Knowledge was often included on research sheets under its own heading.
- ◆ Candidates often failed to make specific reference to their research evidence and often used their sources very simplistically. Many candidates included web addresses (up to 25) with a single quote from each. These were placed in order on the resource sheets (forming a plan) and then linked together using neutral language. This did not allow candidates to sufficiently demonstrate analysis of their research evidence.
- ◆ Many candidates did not attempt to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of their sources and gained no marks for this section. 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' without referring to the actual

sources they had used in their research.

Many answers were simplistic and factually inaccurate, eg comments on the political bias of certain newspapers.

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

Candidates who only included web links or newspaper names had difficulty in attracting analysis/synthesis marks as they could not demonstrate these skills.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Presenting centres should re-emphasise the importance of analysis/evaluation in both the 12 mark extended answer questions and in the 20 mark essays. They should also ensure that candidates have recent examples with which to enhance their responses.

Centres should remind all candidates that two marks are available in 'objectivity' questions for an evaluation of the reliability of the sources. It is possible to achieve full marks without this evaluation but its inclusion would help many candidates.

Component 2: Assignment

Research sheets are intended to provide source evidence that the candidate can use to help them demonstrate analysis and synthesis in the write-up of their report. Candidates should be encouraged to include background knowledge 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 are included on the research sheets. This should focus on the actual sources used by the candidate and should not be generic in nature.

Centres should emphasise to candidates that direct copying from the source 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.

Centres should remind all candidates that research evidence taken into the write-up of the assignment should consist of no more than two A4 sheets.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	4796

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	24.0%	24.0%	1153	63
B	21.8%	45.9%	1047	53
C	22.4%	68.3%	1074	43
D	10.0%	78.3%	479	38
No award	21.7%	-	1043	-

The majority of Course assessment performed at the required SCQF level, however the C grade boundary was lowered by 2 marks to take account of issues identified in relation to the Assignment.

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.