Course Report 2017

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	National 5

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 2017 National 5 Modern Studies question paper had a total of 60 marks (75% of the overall course total) and was completed in 1 hour 45 minutes.

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

The 8-mark knowledge question proved challenging to some candidates. This question was a clear discriminatory question.

A small number of candidates also struggled with certain elements of the source evaluation questions. In such cases, they made conclusions that were not relevant to the prompts given, and often did not make conclusions at all, simply providing source evidence that they thought related to the prompts given.

A number of candidates also found it difficult to explain why they did not choose the other option in the option choice question, which led to some confused answers. Candidates did, however, perform better in the source evaluation question – 'selective in the use of facts'. It appears that centres are encouraging candidates to use the prompts of 'support' and 'oppose', which clearly avoids confusion for the candidates.

Very few candidates attempted all six parts of the paper, and only a small number completed both options in any of the sections.

There was little evidence that candidates had experienced difficulty in completing the question paper within the allotted time, indicating that changes made in previous years to the time allocated continue to be successful.

Component 2: assignment

The National 5 Modern Studies assignment had a total of 20 marks (25% of the overall course total). The assignment consisted of a written report, based on the individual research of the candidate and written up under supervision in 1 hour.

The assignment proved to be very accessible for candidates. The majority performed well and had been effectively prepared and advised by centres.

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

The research methods section continues to be worth 10 marks in total, and many candidates scored highly, though some responses were generic in nature and made little or no specific reference to their own research. This often prevented the candidate from accessing the full range of marks.

The research findings and research conclusions sections were sometimes copied from research evidence sheets and were awarded no 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, were sometimes unable to gain credit due to copying.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Responses to knowledge questions requiring candidates to 'describe' were handled well across all three sections. The majority of candidates were able to give the two descriptions required, many with relevant exemplification.

Candidates performed well in Questions 1 and Question 4, and clearly understood the terminology of 'political rights'. Most candidates used the example of voting, but a range of other political rights were given, ranging from joining a political party or a pressure group to standing as a candidate or organising a protest.

In Questions 7 and 10, a number of candidates gave clear description and exemplification on the consequences of social inequality or crime on communities, demonstrating that centres had clear understanding of the course assessment specification.

'Explain' questions proved more challenging to candidates on the whole, but a number of candidates performed well in Questions 8 and 11. The candidates were able to provide clear explanations with exemplification and analysis, with some candidates being able to access the maximum four marks for one explanation.

Skills questions were generally well handled and showed that candidates had been well prepared. Many candidates had a clear structure to their answer, which helped in the marking process. In the 'selective in the use of facts' question, candidates are clearly stating when the evidence is 'supporting' or 'opposing' the viewpoint. This is to be encouraged. Likewise, candidates are clearly stating the option they have chosen in the decision making question as well as the relevant prompt in the conclusions question. This allows makers to allocate marks accordingly.

Component 2: assignment

Overall, candidates performed well in the assignment. The vast majority chose a relevant Modern Studies topic to research, though there was continued evidence that candidates are selecting topics that would be more suited to a History or RMPS assignment.

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, but there were still a number who gained no credit here 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, whilst others gained no marks due to directly copying from research sheets.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Section 1

Part A, Question 2 & Part B, Question 5 (8 marks): A large number of candidates were unable to access the marks in this question as a result of simply describing election campaign methods.

Part A, Question 3 – Conclusions source question (8 marks): Candidates found it difficult to draw a conclusion in relation to prompt two, which meant they were unable to access the full range of marks available. Most candidates did, however, manage to organise the correct source evidence under the heading, and were awarded the 1 mark available.

Section 2

Part C, Question 7 & Part D, Question 10 (6 marks): Some candidates did not appear to have been prepared well for the consequences of social inequalities/crime on communities. A number of candidates gave a generic answer, answered in relation to consequence on individuals or (in Question 10) gave an answer relating to alternatives to prison, ie community sentencing – CPOs/electronic tagging.

Section 3

Part E, Question 13 (4 marks): Candidates often appeared unfamiliar with the wording 'socio-economic', which is taken from the course assessment specification.

Part F, Question 17 (6 marks): Candidates simply described what UN agencies/charities/ NGOs etc 'do' to solve an international issue or conflict, rather than explaining 'why' they do it. This is a common issue in 'explain' questions, and it seems that some candidates do not appreciate the difference between a 'describe' and an 'explain' question.

There are still a small number of candidates who are answering the knowledge questions in a different part to the skills question, and are unable to access the full range of marks as a result.

Component 2: assignment

The main reasons why candidates failed to attract marks in the assignment were: copying from research evidence sheets, inappropriate topics, and generic answers that did not refer to their own research.

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.

Research methods

A number of candidates made 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'. While this did attract some credit, candidates should have referred to 'their survey' specifically.

In this section, a small number of candidates did not gain credit 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/Research conclusions

Many candidates confused these two sections and wrote very similar answers for both. The candidates who scored best provided points of knowledge that related clearly to their chosen topic and linked well to the research evidence provided, whilst being able to make detailed conclusions based on their finding.

A number of candidates were unable to access the marks available due to copying from research evidence sheets.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

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'/'maximum of three reasons', writing more should be avoided — only the best two/three points in the answer will gain credit.

Centres should also aim to ensure that candidates are presented at the correct level. In session 2017–18, the question paper will now be worth 80 marks and will be completed within 2 hours and 20 minutes.

Candidates should be encouraged to compare statistics, show changes over time, show differences between ethnic groups/genders/countries etc, and to make evaluative comments such as 'significant increase/decrease', 'showing similarities/differences' etc when analysing information in source evaluation questions. This will also allow candidates to gain further credit for evaluation/use of evaluative terminology, and will help 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 marks to be allocated accordingly.

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

Attention should be made to the conclusions question, as this is where candidates are weakest. Centres should pay clear attention to the general marking principles applied to this question (they appear at the beginning of the marking instructions).

Centres should ensure that they are entirely familiar with the course specification document for the 2017–18 session to ensure that the mandatory content has been delivered to candidates.

Component 2: 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 and contemporary Modern Studies issue. Candidates would be best advised not to combine Modern Studies topics with their assignments in other subjects to avoid using irrelevant or historical information. Examples of such topics include:

♦ Accounts/descriptions of historical crimes/criminals
♦ Euthanasia
♦ Animal rights
♦ Death penalty
♦ Corruption in sport

– candidates almost always approach this topic in a manner more appropriate for RMPS

Research evidence is intended to show that the candidate has carried out their own research. Candidates should therefore be discouraged from using the two A4 sheets as a plan. Furthermore, centres should emphasise to candidates that direct copying from the evidence sheets will attract no credit — 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/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 so they can access the full range of marks available.

Centres also should ensure that candidates discuss the actual research methods they have used when completing their assignment. Generic descriptions of research methods must be avoided. From session 2017–18, no marks will be awarded for generic descriptions of research methods. Marks will only be allocated to candidates who specifically discuss the methods they have used and that are evident on the research sheet.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and

equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	11594

Number of resulted entries in 2017	12385

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	32.1%	32.1%	3980	56
B	22.7%	54.8%	2810	48
C	21.2%	76.0%	2625	40
D	7.4%	83.5%	922	36
No award	16.5%	-	2048	-

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.