Course Report 2016

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	National 5

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the Course assessment

Component 1: Question paper
The National 5 Modern Studies Question Paper has a total of 60 marks (75% of the overall Course total) and is completed in 1 hour 45 minutes.

The question paper proved to be accessible to the majority of candidates. Overall, both skills-based questions and knowledge-based questions were answered to a very good standard by candidates. However, there was evidence of some candidates being presented at the wrong level, with an increased number gaining fewer than 20 marks.

The question paper has three sections, each allowing candidate choice. The most commonly chosen options were Part A, Part D and Part E. Candidate performance in Section 1 and 2 showed little difference between the two optional 'Parts'. In Section 3, candidates performed better in Part E than in Part F.

Very few candidates attempted all six parts of the paper, and only a small number completed both options in any of the sections. However, there are still a small number of candidates who are answering the knowledge questions in a different part to the skills question and are losing marks as a result.

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 has 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 one hour.

The assignment proved to be very accessible for candidates. The majority of candidates performed well.

Changes had been made to the assignment at the beginning of the session and the research topic/issue section was no longer worth any marks. Candidates still took 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 was worth 10 marks in total, and 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 the 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, could not be awarded the full range of marks available because information had been copied from the research evidence sheet.

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. 'Explain' questions were less well done.

In the skills questions, candidates performed better in the Selective in the Use of Facts question, and were generally clear in the evidence that they were presenting to support or oppose the viewpoint.

Component 2: Assignment
Overall, candidates performed well in the assignment. The vast majority chose a relevant Modern Studies topic to research, but there was continued evidence that candidates are still selecting topics that would be more suited to a History or RMPS assignment which disadvantaged them.

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 significant number of candidates who gained no credit here because they had directly copied from their research sheet and had not added any information beyond that.

Part D was completed well by a number of candidates. However, there was evidence that candidates struggled in drawing conclusions based on their research. A number of candidates simply repeated findings, whilst others gained no marks because they had directly copied from research sheets.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1
Part A – Question 2 and Part B – Question 5: Candidate performance in these questions was extremely variable, with many candidates giving very vague answers in an attempt to explain the advantages and disadvantages of the specific electoral system being examined.

Section 2
Part D – Question 11: A large number of candidates misinterpreted the question and answered this in relation to the 'Causes of Crime', which prevented them from accessing the full range of marks available.

Section 3
Part E – Question 14: Candidates were often unable to explain why the world power they had studied had the ability to influence other countries. Many candidates simply described the influence that their chosen world power had on others.

Part E – Question 15: Many candidates did not read the prompt 'effects of changing population structure' carefully, and simply gave a conclusion and evidence about the changing population structure, which limited the number of marks they could achieve.

Part F – Question 17: Candidates had difficulty explaining why organisations had been successful/ unsuccessful and simply described what organisations had done in an attempt to tackle conflicts and issues.

In the skills questions, conclusions questions are where candidates were weakest. Centres should pay clear attention to the General Marking Principles applied to the conclusions question. These appear prior to the detailed marking instructions provided. In the Option Choice question, candidates often confused themselves when attempting to explain why they did not choose the other option.

Component 2: Assignment

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 continue to make 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 (sections C and D) and wrote very similar answers for both. Candidates who scored best provided points of knowledge that related clearly to their chosen topic and linked well to the research evidence, whilst being able to make detailed conclusions based on their finding.

A number of candidates were unable to access all the marks available because they had copied from their 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.

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 skills questions.

In their skills answers, candidates should always explicitly state 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 giving a more structured response.

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.

Centres should ensure that they are entirely familiar with the Course Assessment Specification and 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, although support from the teacher is helpful to ensure that an appropriate topic is chosen, and that they should not use exactly in the same way, the same resources as everyone else in their class.

Topics must clearly address a relevant, 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, eg murder of James Bulger
- ♦ Euthanasia
- ♦ Animal Rights ⎫ candidates almost always approach in a manner
- ♦ Death Penalty ⎭ more appropriate for RMPS
- ♦ Corruption in Sport

Research evidence is intended to provide evidence 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 and, 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 a detailed knowledge of their topic. Candidates who achieved most marks provided points of knowledge which did not directly answer their Aims or seek to prove/disprove their Hypothesis in the findings section. 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 in order to access the full range of marks available.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	11524

Number of resulted entries in 2016	11594

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	33.6%	33.6%	3898	56
B	22.1%	55.7%	2558	48
C	18.6%	74.3%	2159	40
D	7.6%	81.9%	882	36
No award	18.1%	-	2097	-

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.