



Course report 2019

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1

The 2019 Higher Modern Studies question paper 1 had a duration of 1 hour and 45 minutes and had a total of 52 marks. The question paper had three sections and candidates were required to answer one question from each section. In total, candidates were expected to answer two 20-mark questions and one 12-mark question.

Question paper 1 largely performed as expected. Feedback from teachers and lecturers indicated it was positively received by centres, and was fair and accessible for candidates. The majority of candidates understood what was required, and completed the three required sections in the allocated time.

Question paper 2

The 2019 Higher Modern Studies question paper 2 had a duration of 1 hour and 15 minutes and had a total of 28 marks. The question paper had three source-based questions and candidates were required to answer all three.

Question paper 2 performed in line with expectations. Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers suggested it was appropriately demanding and largely in line with previous source questions.

Assignment

The assignment had a total of 30 marks. Candidates were required to write a report under controlled conditions, based on their own individual research on a modern studies topic of their choice. Candidates could take up to two sides of A4 paper containing their 'specified resources' into the 'write-up' to assist them. Centres are growing more confident in their presentation of the assignment. Overall, candidates performed well in the assignment, with the average mark being at its highest since its introduction.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

Most of the candidates who completed this question demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the governance issue and the main social, economic and political arguments surrounding it. Most considered options such as independence, devo-max, federalism and maintaining the status quo. Candidates were well-prepared and used relevant, contemporary examples. Analysis of the arguments was of a high quality.

Question 1(b)

Most candidates showed a good grasp of the ways in which either the UK Parliament and/or the Scottish Parliament can hold their respective governments to account. An increasing number of candidates successfully combined information from both parliaments in their response, providing insightful comparisons. Answers often considered Prime Minister's/First Minister's questions, committee structures and procedures, debates, private members' bills, and the House of Lords. Many candidates successfully discussed the limitations of such factors.

Question 2(a)

A large majority of candidates restricted their response to a single group, as specified in the question. A large number of candidates gave good responses based on either gender inequality or on child poverty. Some candidates defined their 'group' in very broad terms, for example 'the poor' or 'the low paid'. Candidates who did this could then effectively discuss poor children, poor women and poor ethnic minorities, for example. Only a small number of candidates wrote about more than one distinct group.

Question 2(b)

The majority of candidates displayed detailed knowledge and understanding of a wide range of policies from all sections of government. Candidates could include any area of policy including health and social welfare. In many cases candidates were able to provide UK-wide examples, as well as specific Scottish examples in their responses. Overall, candidates were well prepared for this question and gained high marks.

Question 2(d)

Although this question was completed by a relatively small number of candidates, most did show appropriate knowledge of various non-custodial sentencing options such as Community Payback Orders (CPOs) or Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs). Candidate evaluation of these options usually consisted of a comparison with other non-custodial options or with custodial sentences, and usually focused on reconviction rates, and financial and social costs. Overall, candidates were well prepared for this question and gained high marks.

Question 3(b)

Many candidates completed this question to a high standard. Knowledge and understanding of political, economic and military influence was often detailed and up to date. Candidates who had studied the USA or China achieved particularly high marks. Social and cultural

influences were awarded marks and most candidates discussed these as part of a wider response. Fewer candidates tried to build an entire response on any one 'category' of influence such as 'cultural'.

Question paper 2

Question 1

Most candidates completed this question to a high standard. Most were able to provide insightful conclusions regarding the links between Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) and crime and health. A minority could not identify a 'socio-economic' group in the first bullet point, answering mistakenly on gender.

A small number of candidates failed to provide any credit-worthy conclusions and simply grouped evidence under each of the three headings. A second small group of candidates provided what seemed to be 'formulaic', vague conclusions which they tried to fit to the question. These were difficult to justify from the sources and usually resulted in a simplistic 'grouping' of evidence. A third small group appeared to misinterpret the second and third bullet points and tried to prove a link between alcohol consumption and crime and poor health.

Many candidates coped well with the overall conclusion. They focused on the 'extent' of changes and provided evaluative comment, rather than simply repeating previously-stated information from the three bullet points.

Question 2

This question proved to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates. Most candidates selected appropriate evidence from the sources, synthesised (both within and between sources) and successfully supported and opposed the statement. Many candidates achieved the 8 marks available for this.

Candidates who simply stated that the statement was either totally correct or totally incorrect could not be awarded the 2 marks available for their overall judgement. A quantitative statement in their overall judgement is required. Candidates who gave a vague statement such as 'partly incorrect' or 'correct to a certain extent' may have achieved 1 mark.

Question 3

Centres had prepared candidates thoroughly for this new style of question and the vast majority coped well.

Source A — most candidates successfully argued that the large sample size and prestige of the polling company added to reliability. The fact that it was from an 'international' polling company was not relevant.

A large number also stated that as the poll was carried out in 2011 it was very likely to be out of date, reducing reliability.

Some candidates who referred to the date, failed to expand on why this added to the source's unreliability, simply stating that it was 'out of date'. Basic expansion of this point such as 'as it was published in 2011' or 'and the views of the public will have changed by now' would have secured a mark.

Source B — many candidates successfully pointed out that a political campaign is usually biased although a small number believed that the word ‘official’ guaranteed honesty and reliability. The date was also considered in the same ways as outlined in Source A. Some candidates successfully pointed out that as the figure on the bus was un-attributed, it could not be relied on.

Source C — the date and political party bias were again both highlighted as part of many candidate responses. Some correctly pointed out that as the statistics were from a real election they would be reliable as they could easily be checked. Only a small number of candidates pointed out that although the election statistics may be reliable, the graph presenting them was distorted and designed to mislead.

The vast majority of candidates attempted an overall decision regarding which source was the most reliable. Candidates could pick any of the three sources as the most reliable as long as they justified their choice, and their responses contained an active comparison. A significant number of candidates failed to compare when trying to justify their choice.

Assignment

The majority of candidates demonstrated a good level of knowledge concerning the background to their issue and managed to effectively frame their options. Often candidates gained most, if not all, knowledge marks for ‘background and framing’ of their issue in an introductory section. This was sometimes titled ‘background and framing’ or ‘background to the issue’. Although this approach is not mandatory, it remains almost universal and was very effective.

Most candidates adopted a variation of the ‘DME’ structure commonly used for the old Higher Modern Studies: Paper 2. This included an introduction. Candidates went on to set out their options, often presented as solutions to a social problem. This ‘problem with solutions’ approach can be very successful but it is not mandatory.

Some candidates approached the assignment in an essay-like format, tackling a question, for example ‘Which type of electoral system would create the fairest representation after a UK General Election?’ or ‘Which factor influences voting behaviour the most in Scotland?’ This approach was also very successful.

Most assignments set out, under specific headings, the main arguments for and against the options and combined background knowledge with references to source material included in their two A4 research sheets. Centres are clearly growing in confidence in presenting the assignment. ‘Structure’ marks have continued to improve as a result.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1

Question 1(c)

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. Although outsider and insider groups, and violent or direct action were regularly referenced, exemplification was very often dated.

Question 2(c)

Many candidates gave very generic answers to this question. The impacts of crime on the victims were often divided into categories such as physical impact, psychological impact and financial impact. This provided a solid framework for answering the question but candidates usually failed to provide any specific examples or statistics. Many also tried to 'turn the question' and expand their responses by describing the impact of crime on the perpetrators.

Question 3(a)

Candidates answered with reference mainly to the USA, China or South Africa.

Candidates answering on the USA were relatively well prepared and displayed some good knowledge of the 'separation of powers' within the US Federal Government.

Many candidates spent large parts of their responses describing the role and powers of the Executive and/or President, Legislature and Judiciary but failed to address the relative ability of each branch to dominate. Some good recent exemplification was provided regarding the actions of President Trump.

Candidates answering on China concentrated on the powers of the Communist party and very often did not consider any other political actors. Very little up-to-date exemplification was displayed regarding China.

Candidates who answered on South Africa displayed very basic knowledge of the powers of the legislative, executive or judicial branches of government. Few considered the role of the Provincial Governments in checking the powers of the ANC or the President. Exemplification in South Africa responses tended to be very dated, often referring back to Apartheid in some detail.

Question 3(c)

Many candidates were able to give detailed and up-to-date answers on the impact of their chosen world issue on the 'wider international community'. Political, social and economic impacts were covered effectively. The most successful responses were on terrorism and the Syrian crisis.

Candidates answering on African development or African poverty were sometimes able to give detailed knowledge and analysis of the impact of this issue on the wider world but too often simply discussed the impact of poverty on individual African countries themselves. Candidates focusing on Africa seemed poorly prepared to answer this question.

Question 3(d)

Many candidates who had studied issues such as terrorism or the Syrian crisis were able to provide accurate and up-to-date responses on how individual countries had tried to take action to tackle the international issue, for example the actions of the USA or Russia in Syria.

Many candidates who had studied African poverty or lack of development, failed to address the international issue effectively in their responses. Many simply described how individual African countries tried to improve, for example education, health and housing within their own borders. Such responses contained little or no international element and so attracted few marks.

Assignment

A small, but growing, number of candidates chose a research topic that may have been more suited to geography, RMPS, chemistry or biology. Topics such as 'fracking', 'global warming' and 'plastic pollution' may well contain some elements of modern studies but some candidates were unable to restrict their discussion to social, economic or political considerations and spent a lot of time on the structure of rocks, the likelihood of earthquakes and the effects of plastic bags on marine wildlife. Such topics should be approached with caution.

Some candidates continue to only include web addresses or newspaper names, with a single quote from each on their research sheets. The quotes are then linked together with little or no added analysis or evaluative comment. However, this type of 'planning' is becoming less common.

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 of candidates 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. Dates, authors and publishers were regularly omitted by candidates, making it impossible to judge their attempts to evaluate their sources.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1

Centres should continue to emphasise the importance of analysis/evaluation and up-to-date exemplification in both the 20 and 12-mark extended-response questions.

They should also encourage candidates to pay close attention to the specific wording of the questions. This is especially important in centres teaching African poverty and lack of development. For example, candidates must be sure to answer on the international issue and not simply on a series of domestic issues. The work of single African countries was sometimes worthy of marks when there was an international element to their action. Other international issues such as Syria are marked in the same way.

Question paper 2

Centres should 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'. Candidates should be discouraged from using phrases such as 'accurate to a certain extent' as these do not fully answer the question. Candidates who argue that the statement is 'fully' accurate or inaccurate will continue to receive no marks for this final part of the response.

In 'conclusions' questions candidates should be encouraged to consider the bullet points carefully and should try not to provide pre-learned, generic or simplistic conclusions. Linking evidence from different parts of the sources and evaluating and synthesising the information remains vital in achieving a high mark.

In the reliability question, candidates should be encouraged to make specific reference to the sources provided. If a source is old, then candidates should explain why this impacts reliability rather than a very brief simplistic response such as 'Source A is out of date'. Rather than saying 'Political parties are biased', candidates should expand this by referring to the source and explaining why or how the source in question is biased.

In deciding which source in reliability questions is most reliable, candidates should be encouraged to include an active comparison rather than just stating the positive attributes of their chosen source.

Assignment

Centres should continue to emphasise to candidates that their research sheets should not be used as a plan. Source material should be clearly attributed on the research sheets (including dates and authors), 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 and synthesis.

Centres should stress to their candidates that 2 marks are available for an evaluation of the reliability and usefulness of a source or sources. The source or sources referred to **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 achieve no marks. Notes taken from written, audio and visual sources are acceptable, but centres must ensure that candidates add analysis and comment to these notes. Simply joining a series of quotes or notes together should be avoided. 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.

When reaching a decision (often but not only in a conclusion at the end of the report), centres should remind candidates to give evidence and reasons why they rejected alternative options, as well as evidence and reasons in favour of their preferred option.

Candidates should be cautious around the choice of topic for the assignment. Topics such as environmental campaigning, pollution and the death penalty have proven problematic in recent years. Centres must make sure that the focus of these topics is social, economic and/or political. Centres should also be aware that candidates should be given a free choice of topics.

Centres are also reminded that the write-up should be in controlled conditions, lasting 90 minutes and in a single sitting. Candidates should only have access to their two A4 research sheets during this time.

Centres must ensure that resource sheets, research sheets or processed information sheets are submitted for each candidate for the 2019-20 session. These sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's assignment. A penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the subject page of the SQA website.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	9334
Number of resulted entries in 2019	8653

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	34.0%	34.0%	2946	77
B	22.4%	56.4%	1936	66
C	19.6%	76.0%	1695	55
D	12.9%	88.9%	1115	44
No award	11.1%	-	961	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.