



Course report 2023

National 5 Modern Studies

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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 13,656

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 13,747

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	4,561	Percentage	33.2	Cumulative percentage	33.2	Minimum mark required	56
B	Number of candidates	3,054	Percentage	22.2	Cumulative percentage	55.4	Minimum mark required	47
C	Number of candidates	2,629	Percentage	19.1	Cumulative percentage	74.5	Minimum mark required	38
D	Number of candidates	1,769	Percentage	12.9	Cumulative percentage	87.4	Minimum mark required	29
No award	Number of candidates	1,734	Percentage	12.6	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper was accessible for the majority of candidates, however there was evidence that suggests a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

While overall the question paper performed as expected, a number of knowledge and understanding questions proved challenging for candidates. There was evidence that a few candidates did not fully understand the questions and therefore gave incorrect answers. This was especially evident among candidates who may have been presented at the wrong level.

The 8-mark knowledge questions are the clear discriminatory questions in the paper and performance in them was mixed. Candidates were evidently more familiar with what makes the First Minister or Prime Minister more powerful than why the media is influential within a democracy.

Most candidates performed well in the source evaluation questions. However, a few candidates struggled with certain elements of these questions. They made conclusions that were not relevant to the prompts given and often did not make conclusions at all, instead providing source evidence that they thought related to the prompts given. A few candidates also found it difficult to explain why they did not choose the other option in the 'options' question, which led to some very confused answers.

Candidates performed best in the 'support and oppose' source question, however there were candidates who attempted to make evaluative conclusions at the end of each paragraph, often repeating what they already stated from the source evidence. This does not gain any further marks and may take up valuable time for some candidates.

A few candidates did not follow the rubric of the question paper and attempted all sections. Centres should ensure that candidates are prepared and fully understand the demands of the question paper — attempting all sections clearly hindered these candidates as it stopped them giving their full time and attention to the sections they had studied.

A few candidates did not attempt some of the knowledge questions across the question paper, rather focusing on the source evaluation questions. These candidates may have been struggling with the full demand of National 5 as they were able to attempt the more straightforward 4- and 6-mark 'description' questions but did not go on to attempt the more demanding 6- or 8-mark 'explain' questions.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022–23

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Section 1: Parts A and B — Democracy in Scotland and the United Kingdom

Candidate performance was mixed in this section of the question paper. A number of candidates appeared to be very well prepared, with evidence of some excellent practice and high-quality answers, which were given full marks. While questions proved to be accessible for most candidates, the 'describe' questions proved challenging for a few candidates, which led to them underperforming in this section.

Questions 1 and 4

Some candidates appeared to find these questions challenging and either did not answer them or simply gave what appeared to be a pre-prepared answer, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral system in question, rather than describing the features.

Questions 2 and 5

Some candidates managed these questions well, giving two detailed descriptions of how individuals participate in an election campaign, with some candidates accessing the 6 marks available. These candidates were able to describe methods of participation including canvassing, leafleting, displaying posters, and accessing a range of media, as well as giving accurate exemplification to support their answer. However, some candidates gave inaccurate responses, appearing very unclear that voting does not take place during the campaign.

Questions 3(a) and 6(a)

Some candidates simply described how political parties use traditional media and/or social media during an election campaign rather than explaining why the media is influential in a democracy. There was, however, evidence that some candidates clearly understood this question and gave well-developed answers.

Questions 3(b) and 6(b)

These questions were answered better than 3(a) and 6(a) (optionality). It was evident that some candidates were able to demonstrate their knowledge in relation to why the First Minister or Prime Minister is powerful, with detailed and accurate exemplification.

Section 2: Parts C and D — Social Issues in the United Kingdom

Part C

The 'explain' questions proved challenging for the less well-prepared candidates. However, question 8 was accessible for those who answered it, with candidates giving detailed descriptions of the consequences of inequality on individuals.

Question 10

A few candidates gave excellent answers to this question and were able to explain why the voluntary sector has been successful in tackling social and economic inequality. However, some candidates simply described what the voluntary sector does.

Part D

Most candidates attempted this part of section 2 with many candidates performing exceptionally well across all three questions.

Question 11

Many candidates who attempted this question accessed all the marks available, providing very detailed descriptions of the consequences of crime on victims, along with up-to-date and relevant exemplification.

Question 13

Candidate responses to this question were very mixed, from a few exceptionally detailed explanations involving resourcing, police numbers, and trust and respect to some very poor, inaccurate answers. These candidates made limited reference to why the police are not effective, simply giving evidence that demonstrated there are still high crime rates. Other candidates attempted to answer the question in relation to the ineffectiveness of the prison system. A few candidates chose not to attempt this question at all.

Section 3: Parts E and F— International Issues

Part E

Question 15

Candidates answered this question well, clearly understanding the military influence of the world power they had studied and how that could impact on other countries. Candidates, no matter which world power studied, were able to accurately describe the influence demonstrated.

Question 16

This question performed very well. Again, no matter which world power studied, candidates were able to access the full range of marks available.

Question 17

Some candidates found this question challenging and only commented on social or economic success rather than tackling both. However, some candidates were able to access the full range of marks available by discussing social and economic success in a combined manner, for example the impact on education in the USA as a result of taxation and how that differs depending on geographical location.

Part F

Questions 19 and 20

Candidates performed well in these questions, correctly identifying social causes of the international conflict or issue they had studied, as well as being able to explain the impact of the conflict or issue they had studied on those directly affected. In particular, candidates who had studied terrorism or underdevelopment in Africa were able to give detailed descriptions

and explanations, with relevant, up-to-date examples. Candidates who had studied issues such as the nuclear threat found this more challenging and were often unable to give current exemplification to support their answer.

Source evaluation questions

Questions 7, 14 and 21 were completed to a high standard with the questions performing as intended. Most candidates demonstrated that they could meet the demands of all three source-based questions and made clear attempts to complete each of them. 'A' grade candidates were able to give accurate and developed points with evaluation and analysis, especially in the conclusions question, which will prepare them well for the move to Higher. Weaker candidates were still able to access a number of marks available, which clearly supported their success overall. A small number of candidates completed the 'support and oppose' question in the format of a table, which is to be avoided.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should ensure that they are familiar with the National 5 course specification, which is available on SQA's website. This details the mandatory content of the course, which forms the basis of what is assessed in the question paper. Centres should also aim to ensure that candidates are presented at the correct level.

Centres should re-emphasise the importance of expanding knowledge answers using specific 'real world' current examples. In relation to this, centres should consider the conflict or issue they teach in the world issue section ensuring candidates are making reference to the relevant and up-to-date exemplification. For example, some candidates are still making reference to Hiroshima in terms of the nuclear threat when there is clearly more up-to-date exemplification available.

In the international issues section, it is imperative that candidates state clearly the world power or international conflict or issue they have studied.

Candidates should be reminded that when knowledge questions ask, for example, for 'two ways' or 'a maximum of three reasons', writing more should be avoided as only the best two or three points in the answer will gain marks.

Candidates should be encouraged to compare statistics, show changes over time, show differences between ethnic groups, genders, countries; and to make evaluative comments such as 'significant increase or decrease' and 'showing similarities or differences' when analysing information in source evaluation questions. This will also allow candidates to gain further marks for evaluation or using evaluative terminology and will help to 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 the 'options' question in relation to part (iii) — 'Explain why you did not choose the other option'. It was evident that this often confused candidates and they consequently gave incorrect or irrelevant evidence.

Centres should avoid instructing candidates to answer source evaluation questions in the format of a table. Modern Studies is a language-based subject where continuous prose is expected. While some candidates will write their answer in a single sentence construct, this should be discouraged, with candidates being encouraged to link information within and between sources.

Further information to support centres can be found in the Understanding Standards section of SQA's website, where exemplar materials and audio presentations are available.

Additional candidate exemplars and commentaries from the 2023 question paper will be made available during this session.

Understanding Standards events will be held during session 2023–24.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty 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 on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).