Course report 2025

Advanced Higher 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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,116

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 923

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	320	34.7	34.7	98
B	202	21.9	56.6	84
C	197	21.3	77.9	70
D	119	12.9	90.8	56
No award	85	9.2	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

In this report:

- ‘most’ means greater than or equal to 70%
- ‘many’ means 50% to 69%
- ‘some’ means 25% to 49%
- ‘a few’ means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed in line with expectations, with feedback suggesting it was fair and accessible for candidates. Most candidates completed the two required parts of the question paper in the allocated time. Overall, candidate performance in the question paper this year was higher than last year.

Project–dissertation

The project–dissertation performed as expected, with most candidates performing better in the dissertation than in the question paper. Most candidates chose a title from the 'Advanced Higher Modern Studies Approved List of Dissertations' document or developed their own appropriate dissertation title. The latter approach often produced insightful dissertations on contemporary issues and is to be encouraged.

Most candidates were familiar with the assessment criteria for the project–dissertation and developed an approach and structure to fit this, for example:

- an introduction justifying the political or social issue for research
- a discrete chapter evaluating research methodologies
- two or three chapters that draw on a wide and varied range of sources of information to analyse and evaluate the issue, arguments and evidence
- an overall conclusion
- an appendix or appendices showing evidence of primary research and/or statistical information
- a bibliography

Overall, candidate performance in the project–dissertation this year was higher than last year.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Part A — extended-response questions (questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

- Question 1 — Power and influence — ‘The best electoral systems ensure a strong stable government.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates gave high-quality responses focused on a comparative analysis of at least two electoral systems, and their ability to provide stable government. They then analysed these in relation to themes, such as fairness, representation, choice, proportionality, efficiency, accountability or legitimacy, among others.
- Question 2 — Political ideology — ‘Traditional conservatism has no contemporary relevance.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates gave high-quality responses that demonstrated clear understanding of the political philosophy of ‘traditional conservatism’. For example, a belief in continuity, order, respect for established institutions and traditions, a sceptical view of human nature, and a preference for gradual change rather than radical reform. These candidates went on to analyse and evaluate the extent to which these values are still dominant within centre-right parties or the political culture of the countries analysed. Additionally, they often then analysed alternative political philosophies, often arguing these were more relevant than traditional conservative values.

- Question 3 — Political structures — ‘No one branch of government is more powerful than the others.’ Discuss…

  Many candidates gave high-quality responses, mainly drawing on comparisons between the UK and US, analysing power dynamics between the executive in relation to both the legislative and judicial branches of government. These candidates examined key factors that affect these power dynamics including legal or constitutional frameworks, the independence of each branch of government, party systems and control, powers of the purse, and patronage and appointment systems.
- Question 6 — Understanding the criminal justice system — ‘Equality within the criminal justice system has not yet been achieved.’ Discuss . . .

  A few candidates gave high-quality responses that demonstrated full engagement with the question, offering analysis and evaluation of key issues. For example, disparities in policing and stop-and-search usage, inequalities in charging and prosecution decisions, sentencing disparities, access to rehabilitation within the prison system, differences in the treatment of women and ethnic minorities, and underlying structural injustices.
- Question 7 — Understanding criminal behaviour — ‘Definitions, measurements and perceptions of crime are not fixed.’ Discuss . . .

  Some candidates gave high-quality responses that fully engaged with all three aspects of this question in relation to ‘definitions’, ‘measurements’ and ‘perceptions’ of crime, and considered the alternative perspectives to this question — that aspects of crime may also be ‘fixed’. Most of these candidates approached the question by either analysing the argument that certain acts are universally recognised as crimes across time and place or analysing the view that perceptions of crime are ‘fixed’ in the public’s consciousness.
- Question 8 — Responses by society to crime — ‘Early intervention remains the best strategy to reduce future crime.’ Discuss . . .

  Some candidates gave high-quality responses that demonstrated a clear understanding of early intervention approaches and analysed these in depth. They then compared these approaches with alternative approaches including multi-agency approaches, policing strategies, custodial responses or non-custodial responses.

- Question 11 — Understanding social inequality — ‘Definitions, measurements and perceptions of inequality are not fixed.’ Discuss . . .
  A few candidates gave high-quality responses that demonstrated clear engagement with all three key aspects of this question in relation to ‘definitions’, ‘measurements’ and ‘perceptions’ of inequality, and considered alternative perspectives to this question — that aspects of inequality may also be ‘fixed’. Most of these candidates approached the question by analysing the argument that there are agreed and fixed definitions and means of measuring poverty within countries and at an international level, and that there are fixed perceptions of poverty in relation to certain social groups being more affected by poverty than others.
- Question 12 — The impact of social inequality — ‘At a national level, inequalities in housing have the greatest impact.’ Discuss . . .
  A few candidates analysed and evaluated the impact of inequality on housing before going on to analyse the impact of inequality on other factors, such as healthcare, welfare or unemployment. This approach allowed candidates to reach a judgement on whether or not housing was the most significantly affected area.
- Question 13 — Responses to social inequality — ‘Overcoming inequality requires a collectivist approach.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates gave quality responses that critically evaluated collectivist approaches to tackling inequality across a number of countries. These candidates balanced and contrasted this evaluation with analysis of the merits and limitations of individualist approaches to tackle inequality.

Part B — research method questions (questions 4, 9 and 14)

Some candidates gave high-quality responses that demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the benefits and limitations of focus groups, and at least one other research method. Analysis and evaluation of these included accurate analysis of the methods’ effectiveness in respect of the given scenario supported by relevant evidence, consideration of ethical issues, and concluded with a justified preference.

Part B — source evaluation questions (questions 5, 10 and 15)

Some candidates gave high-quality responses that identified, analysed and evaluated several key factors relating to the strengths, weaknesses and trustworthiness of the given source. They referred to relevant knowledge of social science research evidence and reached a conclusion that quantifiably justified the extent to which the source was trustworthy.

Project–dissertation

Some candidates produced high-quality dissertations developed around hypotheses that invited balanced analysis and evaluation of the issues. They chose a topic that was relevant and included an introduction that referred to local, national, or global events, introduced differing perspectives on the issue, and focused on two chapters in an in-depth manner.

Some candidates analysed and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of at least two different research methods, considered related ethical issues, and suggested ways their use of these methods could be improved.

Some candidates' research drew from a wide and varied range of both primary and secondary sources. Candidates clearly documented primary research, and consistently and correctly referenced all sources.

Some candidates supported their dissertation analysis with up-to-date evidence, including case studies, data, theories, or examples. Candidates also showed awareness of alternative theories and perspectives. This made it clear which arguments they found convincing and explained why, offering reasons for accepting or rejecting particular views. Strong dissertations followed a clear line of reasoning. Candidates developed conclusions within each chapter, which contributed to a final overall judgement. In their conclusions, candidates considered different viewpoints and reached a clear and justified position on the original hypothesis.

Most dissertations were highly organised with candidates using a consistent referencing style throughout and including well-organised appendices and bibliographies.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Part A — extended-response questions (questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

- Question 1 — Power and influence — ‘The best electoral systems ensure a strong stable government.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates focused solely on the UK or Scottish electoral systems and lacked contemporary statistical evidence from recent UK, Scottish or international electoral contexts. Some candidates analysed irrelevant issues, for example, referenda and their results, or failed to apply analysis of these issues to the question appropriately.
- Question 2 — Political ideology — ‘Traditional conservatism has no contemporary relevance.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates did not interpret the question appropriately or analyse the key values of traditional conservatism. These candidates were unable to directly address the question set and focused instead on another ideology or combination of alternative ideologies that were not in the question, for example liberalism or socialism.
- Question 7 — Understanding criminal behaviour — ‘Definitions, measurements and perceptions of crime are not fixed.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates did not engage with one or more of the three key aspects of this question, for example, omitting to analyse either ‘definitions’, ‘measurements’ or ‘perceptions’ of crime. Some candidates only analysed issues that supported the statement in question and did not consider alternative perspectives to this question, including that aspects of crime may be ‘fixed’.
- Question 8 — Responses by society to crime — ‘Early intervention remains the best strategy to reduce future crime.’ Discuss . . .
  A few candidates did not understand what ‘early intervention’ strategies were. These candidates went on to only analyse alternative approaches such as policing strategies, custodial responses or non-custodial responses, which fell

outwith the ‘early intervention’ framework, and therefore they were unable to answer the question set.

- Question 11 — Understanding social inequality — ‘Definitions, measurements and perceptions of inequality are not fixed.’ Discuss . . .
  Some candidates were unable to engage with one or more of the three key aspects of this question, for example, omitting to analyse either ‘definitions’, ‘measurements’ or ‘perceptions’ of inequality. Some candidates only analysed issues that supported the statement in question and did not consider alternative perspectives to this question — that aspects of inequality may be ‘fixed’.
- Question 12 — The impact of social inequality — ‘At a national level, inequalities in housing have the greatest impact.’ Discuss . . .
  Most candidates were unable to adequately address this question. They either focused solely on the factor in question or did not address this at all, only analysing alternative factors impacted by inequality.
- Question 13 — Responses to social inequality — ‘Overcoming inequality requires a collectivist approach.’ Discuss . . .
  Most candidates did not adequately address this question. They adopted a descriptive approach that simply described collectivist and individualist approaches and lacked supporting evidence or data.

Part B — research method questions (questions 4, 9 and 14)

Some candidates did not acknowledge the scenario in their responses, which meant they could gain a maximum of 2 marks for evaluation and 2 marks for analysis. A few candidates did not include a conclusion and therefore missed out on up to 3 marks. Some candidates did not include any relevant evidence and could therefore only gain a maximum of 3 marks for analysis.

Part B — source evaluation questions (questions 5, 10 and 15)

Some candidates did not include any knowledge of research approaches and only used and drew on evidence from the source and therefore could not access the full range of marks that could be awarded for evaluation. Some candidates did not outline additional research they could carry out to assess the trustworthiness of the

source or consider alternative approaches that would increase the source's trustworthiness. A few candidates did not include a conclusion and therefore missed out on up to 3 marks.

Project–dissertation

A few candidates developed their dissertations around poorly constructed hypotheses. In these cases, the aims and sub-issues were either unrelated or worded in a way that encouraged a descriptive response.

A few candidates' dissertations were based solely on information drawn from a limited range of websites, reducing the variety, depth, validity and reliability of the evidence their dissertations were based on.

A few candidates continued to approach their issue from a one-sided perspective, focused solely on trying to prove their hypothesis correct. This prevented objective analysis of the issue and limited the marks they could achieve.

A few candidates did not provide evaluative comments or sub-conclusions, making it difficult to establish a coherent line of argument. Additionally, a few candidates only provided brief final conclusions that summarised earlier points. These conclusions did not engage meaningfully with the original hypothesis, nor offer a clear or reasoned judgement.

A few candidates did not include appendices, an academic level bibliography or referencing system.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

You should ensure all candidates are fully familiar with all relevant supporting documentation for Advanced Higher Modern Studies. You should also ensure candidates are familiar with the Advanced Higher Modern Studies assessable criteria used for the question paper and project–dissertation.

Question paper

Extended-responses

You should ensure that course coverage complies with the course specification to adequately support candidates. You should continue to direct candidates to focus on answering the questions set in the question paper and avoid attempting to turn the questions or provide pre-prepared responses.

Research methods questions

You should prepare candidates adequately by ensuring that all key research methods are covered. You should ensure candidates are aware of the terms validity and reliability in relation to research, and ensure they apply these terms accurately. To maximise marks, candidates must be able to analyse issues and make evaluative comments that are related specifically to the research scenario in the question.

Source-based questions

You should encourage candidates to critically analyse and evaluate sources. You should discourage candidates from simply describing source content or research methodology. Candidates should critically evaluate the source in relation to factors including currency, authority, accuracy, relevance, and purpose, as well as any methodological approaches used or referred to in the source.

Project–dissertation

You can assist candidates in the planning stage of the project–dissertation by ensuring they adopt appropriate hypotheses and aims. To support this process, you may wish to make use of the 'Advanced Higher Modern Studies Approved List of Dissertations' document available on the Advanced Higher Modern Studies subject page on our website. However, candidates can adapt or modify these.

You should direct candidates to use stems such as 'To what extent …?', 'To analyse ...', 'To examine ...', and 'To examine the extent to which ...', when formulating their aims and chapter titles. We strongly advise candidates to adopt a two aim or chapter approach, as it gives them a chance to go into more depth on chosen areas.

Candidates should provide a detailed evaluation of at least two research methods used in the production of their project–dissertation. Analysis and evaluation should comment on benefits and limitations of methods, ethical issues related to one method, and ways in which the use of one method could have been improved on.

Candidates should aim to use a wide and varied range of sources of information. Where appropriate, you should encourage candidates to carry out primary research.

Candidates should critically evaluate alternative views and theories as part of their dissertation.

Candidates should offer a conclusion to their dissertation that makes and supports a quantified judgement of the issue.

Candidates should adopt a consistent, academic style of referencing.

Appendices should include interview transcripts, letters or emails sent and received, survey results and other resources. Candidates should include details on the provenance of appendix evidence.

You should ensure candidates' dissertations are within the maximum word count and should support candidates by proofreading dissertations before final submission.

You should encourage candidates to produce their dissertations using the following conventions:

- size 12 font
- 1.5 line spacing
- single-sided printing
- include word count per page and chapter
- include an overall word count

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy.