Course report 2025

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: 9,495

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 8,923

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	3,173	35.6	35.6	77
B	1,913	21.4	57.0	65
C	1,548	17.3	74.3	54
D	1,155	12.9	87.3	42
No award	1,134	12.7	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 1

Overall, question paper 1 performed as expected, presenting an appropriate level of challenge.

The most popular questions in each section were as follows:

- Section 1, Democracy in Scotland and the United Kingdom, question 1(c)
- Section 2A, Social inequality, question 2(a)
- Section 2B, Crime and the law, question 2(c)
- Section 3C, World powers, question 3(a)
- Section 3D, World issues, question 3(d)

Question paper 2

Questions 1 and 2 performed as intended and candidate responses were in line with previous years.

As in previous years, question 3 was challenging for many candidates who provided generic, undeveloped answers that did not demonstrate the required justifications or understanding of the sources.

Assignment

The assignment task and the marking instructions were unchanged.

Overall, candidate performance in the assignment improved in 2025.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1

Question 1(b)

Most candidates demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of Brexit and could explain both advantages and disadvantages for the UK. Most candidates provided examples that were relevant and up to date.

Question 2(a)

Many candidates were well prepared for this question and were able to provide details of various causes of health inequality. Many candidates considered factors such as poverty, gender and lifestyle. Most candidates went further than simply describing the causes of ill health, managing to link these to socio-economic inequality.

Question 2(b)

Many candidates performed well in this question, considering a wide range of policies from all sections of government. Candidates could include any area of policy including health and social welfare. Many candidates effectively discussed UK-wide examples and specific Scottish examples. Policies included National Minimum Wage, National Living Wage, Universal Credit, free school meals, Minimum Unit Pricing, free prescriptions, PIPs, sugar tax, winter fuel payments and The Baby Box. Overall, candidates were well prepared for this question and gained high marks.

Question 2(c)

Many candidates performed well in this question, successfully discussing various nature versus nurture theories. Many candidates considered genetic issues and the impact of socio-economic inequality. Some candidates referenced theorists and theories such as Merton, Marx, Durkheim, broken windows theory, warrior gene and social learning theory. Many candidates considered social issues such as poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, and peer pressure.

Question 3(a)

Most candidates provided responses on the USA, with some focusing on China and a few on South Africa or Brazil. Candidates who presented knowledge and analysis of the US system of checks and balances were especially effective. Some candidates provided dated examples, especially for China and South Africa.

Question 3(d)

As in previous years, underdevelopment in Africa was by far the most popular choice of world issue. Although a small number of candidates completed this question, some produced responses that achieved high marks. These candidates included appropriate details of various policies, explaining and analysing their international impact.

Question paper 2

Question 1 — source conclusions

Conclusion 1: most candidates identified the impact of armed conflict on children in Somalia as being negative. The best responses identified three pieces of source evidence to support their conclusion or provided two pieces of evidence with some accurate evaluation.

Conclusion 2: most candidates successfully identified that armed conflict was a leading cause of undernourishment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many candidates successfully used evidence to support this view from sources A and C.

Conclusion 3: most candidates found this bullet point to be the most challenging part of the question. Many candidates managed to achieve 1 or 2 marks using sources B and D. Conclusions arguing for both the success and failure of the UN were acceptable. Candidates could use evidence to support both conclusions.

Overall conclusion: most candidates concluded correctly that Chad was the Sub-Saharan African country most like Somalia, gaining 2 marks for a successful comparison using a combination of sources A, C and D.

Question 2 — source objectivity

Many candidates provided appropriate evidence from within and between the sources to support and oppose the view. Most candidates made it clear which way they were arguing and successfully linked evidence, comparing healthcare in the UK to healthcare in other countries. Most candidates achieved high marks from the 8 marks available.

A few candidates managed to successfully provide an overall conclusion on the extent to which the problems facing healthcare in the UK are worse than in other countries. Judgements such as, ‘It is largely accurate because …’, gained marks if supported by source evidence.

Question 3 — source reliability

Source A: some candidates correctly identified that Alcohol Focus Scotland would be experts in their field and that they may be one-sided or biased in their approach to the issue.

Source B: some candidates correctly identified the date as a negative of this source and crucially explained that ‘many things will have changed in twelve years’. A few candidates highlighted the positive aspect that the credentials of the named

journalists could be checked. A few candidates identified bias as a negative for newspapers and provided appropriate development.

Source C: some candidates correctly explained that IPSOS was reliable due to its professional expertise or its need to protect its good reputation.

Overall judgement: most candidates chose source C as the most reliable source on the grounds that it was more up to date than source B, gaining 1 mark.

Assignment

Most candidates demonstrated a good level of knowledge concerning the background to their issue and managed to effectively frame their options. Many candidates gained most, if not all, knowledge marks for the background and framing of their issue by opening with an introductory section sometimes titled ‘background and framing’ or ‘background to the issue’. Although no specific structure for the assignment is specified, most candidates started this way.

Many candidates gained high marks for analysis and synthesis through effective source use. Sources were referenced and the information developed and used as argument or judgement, rather than simply repeated.

Most candidates successfully took the approach of identifying a social problem and then discussing potential solutions.

As in previous years, candidates gained high marks for structure.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

Many candidates described and analysed various options for governing Scotland including Independence, Devo Max and Federalism. Knowledge of these theoretical

options was often confused and repetitive. Many candidates gave examples that were very dated and therefore irrelevant.

Question 1(c)

Many candidates covered areas such as age, media and social class at length. Many candidates produced responses that were often very generic, dated and inaccurate. Some candidates spent time describing social media but could not link this to voting behaviour.

Question 2(d)

Only a few candidates completed this question. Many candidates who did attempt it answered it as an ‘impact of crime on victims, offenders and their families’ question rather than as impact on ‘wider society’.

Question 3(c)

Many candidates were unable to give detailed and up-to-date responses on the impact of their world issue on the wider international community. For example, some candidates answering on the issue of African underdevelopment often simply described and discussed the impact of poverty on individual African countries. A few candidates tried to turn the question into a ‘causes’ question.

Question 3(d)

Some candidates answered this question well, however some found it difficult to pinpoint the actions of individual governments that had an international impact, instead describing several governments’ domestic policies. For example, attempts by individual governments to tackle LGBTQI issues within their own borders gained no marks.

Question paper 2

Question 1 — source conclusions

Some candidates provided two pieces of source evidence to support their conclusions, gaining 2 marks. They then tried to provide an evaluative comment in order to gain a third mark. This was often unsuccessful as their attempted evaluation was no more than a rewording of their initial conclusion, or a basic explanation of the evidence already presented.

Question 2 — source objectivity

Many candidates did not gain the 2 marks available for their overall judgement on the extent of the statement's accuracy. Many candidates argued that the statement was completely accurate and did not include any quantitative judgement, so did not gain any marks. A few candidates did not provide an overall judgement at all.

Question 3 — source reliability

Some responses to this question were overly generic. Many candidates did not provide the degree of explanation required at Higher level. A few candidates incorrectly argued that there is a cut-off point at which sources cease to be reliable, for example 'Source A is within the five-year limit that is acceptable in Modern Studies'.

Many candidates argued that sources A and C were not 'up to date and still accurate'. They were both two years old and very likely to be inaccurate.

Some candidates saw that source B was 12 years old but did not explain that this would make the information unreliable as events will have made it inaccurate.

Overall judgement: most candidates chose source C as the most reliable but did not provide a valid, active comparison with the other two sources.

Assignment

A few candidates chose a research topic that may have been more suited to Geography, History, RMPS, Biology or Chemistry. Topics such as ‘town planning’, ‘global warming’, ‘renewable energy’ and ‘assisted dying’ contain some elements of Modern Studies, but some candidates were unable to restrict their discussion to social, economic or political considerations.

Some candidates only included web addresses on their research sheets. A lack of direct referencing of the research sheet then made it impossible for markers to award analysis and synthesis marks.

Some candidates simply copied or reproduced memorised information from their sources without providing any creditworthy comment, analysis or synthesis. Some candidates referenced their sources at the end of a page or longer section in their report, suggesting that everything they had included was taken from their sources, therefore making knowledge marks impossible to achieve.

Some candidates gained their 5 background and framing knowledge marks in an introductory section but did not include any knowledge worthy content thereafter. The bulk of their report consisted of source use. A few candidates used their sources effectively in this introduction, gaining analysis and synthesis marks rather than knowledge.

A few candidates did not evaluate the usefulness and reliability of their sources.

Some candidates who attempted to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of their sources, answered in very generic terms without making specific reference to the sources they used in their research.

A few candidates approached the assignment in an ‘essay’ style format, for example, ‘What is the main cause of ill health in the UK?’ While this approach can be successful, it often leads to lower marks in source evaluation, structure and decisions or conclusions.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1

You should continue to provide candidates with up-to-date examples with which to illustrate points. You are advised to check the accuracy of teaching or revision resources acquired online. Resource sharing forums can often contain outdated or incorrect material.

You should encourage candidates to avoid generic story-type answers using only broad generalisations and stereotypes. For example, you should encourage candidates to use real statistics about identified African countries and their development issues rather than broad ‘in Africa’ comments.

You should make sure that the international issues topic sufficiently relates to the five bullet points of mandatory content detailed in the course specification.

For world issues, you should make sure candidates understand the requirements of potential questions. If studying African underdevelopment or poverty for example, the ‘wider international community’ refers to how the world outside Africa is affected by African underdevelopment or poverty. The actions of individual governments to tackle a world issue must have an impact internationally and not just domestically, for example, Russian policy to tackle LGBTQI issues solely in Russia is not creditworthy in a world issues question.

You should remind candidates that evaluative comments in question paper 1 responses should be judgements that provide an overall answer to the question. Often candidates produce ‘mini conclusions’ after each point but these (and overall conclusions at the end of an essay) must be more than just a repetitive summary of the main body of the essay.

Question paper 2

In the conclusions question, you should advise candidates to give three pieces of source evidence when supporting a conclusion in order to gain the 3 marks available. Many candidates gave two pieces of relevant evidence but did not give a creditworthy piece of evaluation or analysis, therefore gaining only 2 marks.

You should remind candidates that their overall judgement in the 'objectivity' question should contain a quantitative statement to show the extent of the statement's accuracy. Vague phrases such as 'partly' or 'to an extent' will only gain partial marks. Absolute statements will gain no marks.

You should encourage candidates to expand their points and explanations in the 'reliability' question. Candidates should provide an explanation of why an aspect of a source deems it to be reliable or unreliable.

You should remind candidates that their responses in the 'reliability' question should be specific to the three sources in the paper and not generic, for example, 'newspapers are always biased so this one will be biased as well'.

You should stress that answers concerning the age of the sources are not always as straightforward as 'old' is always unreliable and 'recent' is always reliable. Candidates should not be under the impression that any source published within a certain timeframe is reliable. A relatively recent source may still be out of date as the information within the source may be obsolete.

Assignment

Research sheet material should be clearly attributed (including dates and authors), and candidates should not include information intended as background knowledge.

Candidates must add analysis and comment to information taken from their research sheets. Simply quoting from the research sheet or giving memorised information from the research sheet without comment or analysis will gain no marks.

You should discourage candidates from studying topics that cover elements of History, RMPS and Geography, for example climate change, as some candidates can struggle to restrict their discussion to social, economic or political considerations.

You should be aware that candidates who take an ‘essay’ type approach to the assignment often gain lower marks for structure, in reaching a decision, and in source evaluation.

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.