



Course report 2025

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 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: 12,962

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 12,543

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 | 4,508 | 35.9 | 35.9 | 70 |
| B | 2,486 | 19.8 | 55.8 | 58 |
| C | 2,085 | 16.6 | 72.4 | 47 |
| D | 1,831 | 14.6 | 87.0 | 35 |
| No award | 1,633 | 13.0 | 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 was accessible for the majority of the candidates, however, a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

As in previous years, the most popular parts of the question paper were Section 1 — Part A, Section 2 — Part D, and Section 3 — Part E, with most centres studying the USA as their world power.

While overall the question paper performed as expected, candidates found a few of the 4- and 6-mark ‘knowledge’ questions challenging. A few candidates did not fully understand the questions and therefore gave incorrect answers.

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 ‘describe’ questions but did not go on to attempt the 6- or 8-mark ‘explain’ questions.

The 8-mark ‘knowledge’ questions are the clear discriminator questions in the paper and performance in them was mixed. Most candidates chose to answer the question on the influence of world powers or the causes of international conflicts and issues.

Overall, most candidates performed well in the source evaluation questions. However, a few candidates struggled with certain elements of these questions.

Grade boundary decisions recognised that a few candidates had found certain elements of the question paper challenging and adjustments were made accordingly.

Assignment

The assignment was accessible for the majority of candidates, with candidate performance overall being very good. However, a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

Most candidates selected topics or issues appropriate for Modern Studies however a few did not fall within the parameters of the subject and therefore placed these candidates at a disadvantage given they could not access all marks available.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Areas that candidates performed well in and areas that candidates found demanding

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

Questions 1 and 4

These were straightforward ‘describe’ questions covering a core part of the course. However, they proved to be very challenging for candidates with many not able to achieve the 4 marks available. Candidates struggled to describe two ways that MSPs or MPs represent their constituents in the Scottish or UK Parliament, with many describing the work MSPs or MPs do in their own constituencies.

Questions 2 and 5

Most candidates were able to explain, in some way, why the First Minister (FM) or the Prime Minister (PM) is very powerful. Most candidates who answered this well, referred to the power of the appointment, the role of the FM or PM on the international stage, and being leader of the largest party in the Scottish Parliament or House of Commons, with the power these features can bring. However, a few candidates were unable to explain why this made the FM or PM powerful and simply described the powers that they have.

Questions 3 and 6

Some candidates gave excellent answers to these questions and were able to give one advantage and one disadvantage of the respective electoral system. However, some candidates only gave either advantages or disadvantages, which prevented them from accessing the full range of marks available. Some candidates also gave more than one advantage or disadvantage, which they are not penalised for,

however it suggests that candidates may not fully understand the requirements of a 6-mark 'explain' question.

Question 7

Many candidates performed well in this question, justifying their decision with clear evidence from all sources. Many candidates were able to link the evidence clearly within and between sources.

However, some candidates found this question challenging in relation to interpreting certain parts of the evidence that could have been used to reject the other option. This was evident when considering the information in source 3 where Kiera McAulay says 'It is for these reasons that the majority of the general public in every nation of the UK support a ban on second jobs', which is rebutted by the nations of the UK surveys in source 2. The bar graph highlights that the majority of the general public in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales support a ban on second jobs however England does not and therefore this should have been used as a rejection of option 1.

Similarly, often candidates did not take account of conflicting evidence between the viewpoint in source 3 and source 1 whereby Zac Faichney in source 3 says that 'It is clear that MPs don't earn a lot of money from their second jobs', which is countered by source 1, which states that 'Some MPs have received millions of pounds through second jobs and have become very wealthy as a result'. This point should have been used as a rejection of option 2.

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

Questions 8 and 11

Many candidates were able to access the full range of marks available in these questions given the wide nature of the question. Candidates gave varied responses in relation to the respective questions with some excellent examples in question 11 relating to an increase in drug and knife crime as well as the impact of the extensive prison population.

Questions 9 and 12

Many candidates did not perform well in these questions with many not referencing the consequences of social and economic inequality or crime on wider society, instead focusing on other factors such as individuals and communities.

In question 12, some candidates gave answers that were incorrect in relation to a particular consequence of crime on wider society being that there is a 'fear of men' among women. The idea that crime creates a 'fear of men' among women would be refuted because this is a generic, sweeping statement and the examples given to back this statement up may link more to the ideas of lack of trust in the police force or fear among individuals. Markers observed this answer in a high number of candidate responses.

Question 10

Candidates often found it difficult to explain why the private sector has been successful in tackling social and economic inequalities, with a few candidates not attempting this question.

Question 13

Many candidates were able to give full explanations in relation to why prisons are an effective punishment, suitably supported with relevant, up-to-date examples.

Question 14

Many candidates were able to access a high number of marks in this question. Candidates were able to provide evidence that both supported and opposed the given viewpoint and structured their answer appropriately, making it clear where they were supporting or opposing the viewpoint. Candidates who accessed high marks referred to all three sources in their answer as well as making links within and between the sources.

However, some candidates 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.

Section 3: Parts E and F — International Issues

Question 15

Most candidates were able to describe two ways that the government had attempted to tackle social and/or economic issues with relevant, up-to-date examples.

Questions 17 and 20

The two most popular options for candidates were questions 17(b) and 20(a). In question 17(b), candidates benefited from the open nature of 'influence' and were able to explain why world powers have an influence in relation to political, economic and military influence. Those candidates who answered question 20(a) took a similar approach and were able to discuss a range of causes of international conflicts and issues. Some candidates answered these questions very well, with relevant, up-to-date examples.

Question 17(a), while not as popular as 17(b), proved to be accessible for some candidates. Some candidates gave excellent responses to this question and explained, in detail, why underrepresentation in politics is an issue.

Question 18

Some candidates discussed more than one international organisation rather than describing how one had attempted to tackle the international conflict or issue they had studied. This prevented these candidates from accessing the full range of marks available.

Question 19

Candidates answered this question well and gave well-developed descriptions relating to the conflict or issue that they had studied.

Question 21

Candidates who performed well in this question were able to make insightful conclusions based on the bullet point prompts. These answers were well structured, with candidates making a clear conclusion and giving two pieces of evidence to support their conclusion with evaluative terminology. Successful candidates were able to comment on the progress towards gender equality in the House of

Commons, compare female representation in the Canadian Parliament to other countries, and comment on opinions on measures to increase female representation in the House of Commons.

However, some candidates found bullet point 4 challenging and misunderstood the prompt. Some candidates attempted to compare the information on female representation in provincial and territorial legislatures to the data provided on other countries rather than looking at it in relation to Canada as a whole.

Assignment

Areas that candidates performed well in

Section A

Although no marks are awarded in this section, most candidates used it appropriately to identify their chosen topic and set out their intentions for their research. There are no specific criteria for this section, however most candidates took the approach of stating a hypothesis alongside two or three clear aims. This approach worked well for candidates as it gave them a clear focus in terms of structure, especially when undertaking findings in section C and conclusions in section D.

Section B

Many candidates performed very well in this section. Candidates who did well were clearly able to identify and discuss two relevant methods of research that they had used to carry out their assignment, with these two methods evident on their research sheet. These candidates were able to outline the key strengths and weaknesses of each method, relating this back to their own research as well as identifying possible alternative methods of research for going forward.

Candidates who performed well discussed research methods such as specific websites they had used, interviews with relevant professionals relating to their

chosen topic of research, as well as surveys they had created as part of the research process. Candidates who performed well in this section used their research sheet simply as a prompt and were not overly reliant on this for specific information.

Section C

Most candidates completed this section well. Most candidates outlined clear findings, often relating these findings back to the original aims that they had identified in section A.

Candidates who performed well also ensured they made clear reference to their research sheet and the methods of research that they used to gather these findings.

Section D

Many candidates were able to access the full range of marks available by giving clear, insightful conclusions. Most candidates who had completed a survey were able to support these conclusions with data they had gathered during the research process.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Section A

A few candidates chose topics or issues that did not fully align with Modern Studies, which prevented them from accessing the full range of marks available.

Section B

A few candidates did not include a research sheet, which prevented them accessing the marks available for this section. The research sheet is required in order to access the full range of marks in both sections B and C. The research sheet also allows the marker to gain a full understanding of the types of research that the candidate has carried out.

A few candidates gave very generic descriptions of research methods rather than discussing the specific methods they had used. This was more evident from those candidates who discussed 'the internet' or had used class textbooks. Furthermore, a few candidates discussed different methods of research to those on the research sheet, which prevented them from accessing the marks available.

Section C

Some candidates did not access the full range of marks in this section due to copying directly from the research sheet or not referring to the methods of research they used when carrying out the assignment.

Section D

Some candidates did not perform well in this section because they did not make any specific conclusions or they simply repeated information from their findings sections. A few candidates did not attempt this section.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

You should ensure that you are familiar with the National 5 course specification, which is available on our website. This details the mandatory content of the course, which forms the basis of what is assessed in the question paper. You should ensure that candidates are presented at the correct level.

You should emphasise the importance of expanding knowledge answers using specific 'real world' current examples. In relation to this, you should consider the conflict or issue you teach in the world issues section, ensuring that candidates have ample, up-to-date and relevant examples to work with.

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

You should remind candidates 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.

In source evaluation questions you should encourage candidates to compare statistics, show changes over time, show differences between ethnic groups, genders, and countries, and to make evaluative comments such as 'significant increase or decrease' and 'showing similarities or differences' when analysing information. 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 clearly 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.

You should ensure that candidates understand the requirements of the ‘options’ question in relation to part (iii) — ‘Explain why you did not choose the other option’. This can often confuse candidates and they consequently give incorrect or irrelevant evidence. The requirements for this question have not changed in recent years and you should encourage candidates to look within and between sources for conflicting evidence to support their rejection of the other option.

You are advised to check the accuracy of any teaching or revision resources acquired online. Resource sharing forums can often contain outdated or incorrect material. This year, a high number of candidates made incorrect references in their answers to question 12, with feedback suggesting that this could relate to information contained in teaching and revision resources.

Further information to support you is available on the Understanding Standards section of our website, where we have provided exemplar materials and audio presentations.

Assignment

You should ensure that candidates are prepared appropriately for the assignment, with relevant time given to both the research and production of evidence stages.

You should give reasonable assistance on the types of topic or issue that would be suitable and guide candidates on the availability and accessibility of potential methods of research. It is important that you ensure candidates understand that some topics such as the death penalty, euthanasia, and the legalisation of cannabis can often result in them being unable to access the full range of marks available. This occurs when candidates approach it from a moral and/or philosophical perspective that is more suited to RMPS. Similarly, you should discourage candidates from researching topics that could be considered historical.

You should encourage candidates to consider their own research when producing their evidence and to refer to this throughout their assignment. Candidates who

perform well are able to evaluate the effectiveness of their chosen methods, commenting on their specific strengths and weaknesses. Candidates should also refer to their own research when presenting their findings in order to access the full range of marks available. In terms of conclusions, you should encourage candidates to use evaluative terminology to reach a well-supported conclusion, rather than simply repeating a finding.

You should ensure that candidates include their research sheet with their assignment in order to access the full range of marks available. You should remind candidates that the research sheet should be a maximum of two sides of A4. However, it is worth noting that candidates who include a wide range of evidence on their research sheet are more inclined to copy this into their assignment, which in turn will prevent them from access the full range of marks available.

Further information to support you is available on the Understanding Standards section of our website, where we have provided exemplar materials and audio presentations.

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](#).