

Course report 2026

Advanced Higher Modern Studies, SCQF level 7

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 923

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 1,140

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	416	36.5	36.5	98
B	278	24.4	60.9	84
C	215	18.9	79.7	70
D	114	10.0	89.7	56
No award	117	10.3	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected 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.

Project–dissertation

The project–dissertation performed as expected. Most candidates chose a title from the '[Advanced Higher Modern Studies approved list of dissertations](#)' document or developed their own appropriate dissertation title. Candidates who developed their own titles often produced insightful dissertations on contemporary issues, and centres should encourage and support this approach.

Most candidates were familiar with the assessment criteria for the project–dissertation and developed a structural approach that allowed them to access the full range of marks across all sections.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

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

Most candidates achieved high marks by focusing on a comparative analysis between the UK/Scotland and other international jurisdictions.

- Question 1 — Power and influence — ‘Smaller political parties have too much influence on policy making.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of how electoral systems dictate the influence of smaller parties. They successfully explored the impact of two-party systems, the dominance of major parties, and the rising influence of populist movements.

- Question 2 — Political ideology — ‘Nationalism’s influence on contemporary political issues is in decline.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of the electoral performance and limitations of specific nationalist movements. They contrasted these limitations with the global resurgence of populist, right-wing, and security-driven ethno-nationalism.

- Question 3 — Political structures — ‘Differing levels of government are naturally in conflict with each other.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of how different levels of government naturally clash over power and politics. They compared the UK/Scottish Parliaments, US federal/state systems, and national governments in the EU or other supra-national bodies. Candidates’ analysis demonstrated how different levels of government often cooperate in economic matters to get things done.

- Question 6 — Understanding the criminal justice system — ‘Civil liberties are at risk in the criminal justice system.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of how modern legislation, surveillance, and police powers can threaten individual civil liberties. They contrasted these risks with judicial safeguards, human rights frameworks, and the fundamental right to a fair trial and other legal rights.

- Question 7 — Understanding criminal behaviour — ‘Psychological theories of crime have little contemporary relevance.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of the limitations of classical psychological theories, such as ACEs, maternal deprivation or personality traits, in explaining modern criminal behaviour. They contrasted these psychological theories with contemporary developments in biosocial criminology, neuro-science, sociological and environmental influences on crime.

- Question 8 — Responses by society to crime — ‘Deterrence is the most important function of punishment.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of the importance of deterrence as a function of punishment. They contrasted these deterrence theories with rehabilitation, retributivism, denunciation and incapacitation as theories of punishment.

- Question 11 — Understanding social inequality — ‘Functionalism best explains social inequality today.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of classical functionalist theories (including Durkheim, Parsons, and Spencer) and their contemporary relevance to social stratification. Candidates achieved high marks for using strong contemporary evidence such as income disparities and educational attainment gaps to effectively evaluate functionalism against alternative perspectives like individualism and Marxism.

- Question 12 — The impact of social inequality — ‘The impact of inequality in society is most easily seen at the local level.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of how social inequality is evident through localised issues including postcode poverty, stereotyping, and varying access to public services. Candidates achieved high marks for using strong contemporary data on local employment, consumer spending, and child poverty to effectively evaluate whether inequality is most visible at the local level or through broader national trends.

- Question 13 — Responses to social inequality — ‘The Government has failed at reducing inequality in society.’ Discuss . . .

Candidates who performed well provided a balanced analysis of the effectiveness of government interventions, evaluating key sectors like welfare reform for example, Universal Credit, healthcare provision, and the educational attainment gap. They used strong contemporary data including poverty rates, the Gini coefficient, and educational statistics to reach a justified conclusion on whether state-led policies have succeeded or failed to reduce systemic inequality.

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

Some candidates gave high-quality responses that achieved high marks. Candidates demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the benefits and limitations of unstructured interviews alongside surveys, analysing them directly in connection to the presented scenario. Candidates achieved high marks by providing a balanced analysis of the methods’ effectiveness, successfully weighing the depth, flexibility, and rapport of interviews against the anonymity, reach, and quantifiable data of surveys. They included ethical considerations (such as confidentiality and researcher safety), real-life examples of the methods in use, and concluded with a well-reasoned, justified preference of which method best suited the scenario in question.

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

Some candidates gave high-quality responses that achieved high marks by identifying, analysing, and evaluating several key factors relating to the strengths, weaknesses, and overall trustworthiness of the given source (such as publication reputation, author credentials, and the adapted nature of the data). Some candidates

achieved top marks by providing a detailed conclusion with a quantifiably justified overall judgement on the exact extent to which the source was trustworthy.

Project–dissertation

Most candidates performed better in the project–dissertation than they did in the question paper. Most candidates produced high-quality dissertations developed around hypotheses that allowed balanced analysis and evaluation of the issues. They chose a topic that was contemporary and relevant and developed a hypothesis statement that could be used to judge the extent to which it was supported by researched evidence.

- In section A, most candidates included an introduction that justified their issue for research. This referred to relevant local, national, or global events or evidence and introduced differing perspectives on the issue they explored.
- In section B, most candidates analysed and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of at least two different research methods they used.
- In section C, most candidates used a range and variety of relevant information that supported their line of argument and concluding remarks.
- In section D, most candidates' analysis included relevant, contemporary supporting evidence, linked analytical comments to evaluative comments and considered an alternative argument(s).
- In section E, most candidates made reasoned points of evaluation and related these to their line of argument. Their evaluation also considered and reached a judgement on alternative argument(s) or evidence.
- In section F, many candidates linked evidence from their research to reach well-developed conclusions. They made conclusions consistently across their work — within chapters, at the end of each chapter and in their final conclusion.
- In section G, most candidates' dissertations were highly organised. They used a consistent referencing style and included well-organised appendices and bibliographies. Candidates used data from their research to support their analysis, evaluation and conclusions.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

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

Candidates who did not perform well often took a one-sided approach without providing the balanced analysis required. Many candidates relied on limited or outdated evidence and therefore achieved lower marks. These responses did not adequately compare and contrast the situation in the UK/Scotland with relevant international examples.

- Question 1 — Power and influence — ‘Smaller political parties have too much influence on policy making.’ Discuss . . .

Some candidates achieved low marks because their responses lacked a balanced approach. They often agreed with the view expressed in the question and only provided evidence that argued that ‘smaller political parties have too much influence’, or that they have influence without judging whether this influence is ‘too much’.

- Question 2 — Political ideology — ‘Nationalism’s influence on contemporary political issues is in decline.’ Discuss . . .

Some candidates achieved low marks because their responses lacked a balanced approach. They tended to disagree with the view expressed and did not consider evidence or arguments that nationalism is in decline.

- Question 3 — Political structures — ‘Differing levels of government are naturally in conflict with each other.’ Discuss . . .

Some candidates achieved low marks because their responses only wrote about political fights between different levels of government. They did not analyse how different levels of government work together and how rules and conventions require cooperation on many government matters.

- Question 6 — Understanding the criminal justice system — ‘Civil liberties are at risk in the criminal justice system.’ Discuss . . .

Some candidates achieved low marks because their responses focused too heavily on describing police powers and/or surveillance concerns and did not provide a sophisticated contrast with the legal safeguards, human rights frameworks, or the right to a fair trial that protect civil liberties.

- Question 7 — Understanding criminal behaviour — ‘Psychological theories of crime have little contemporary relevance.’ Discuss . . .

A few candidates missed out on higher marks because their answers did not analyse psychological theories or explanations of crime. Instead, they focused solely on physiological and sociological theories and explanations and therefore did not engage with the key factor.

- Question 8 — Responses by society to crime — ‘Deterrence is the most important function of punishment.’ Discuss . . .

A few candidates achieved low marks because they focused on other functions of punishment, such as rehabilitation, incapacitation, retributivism or denunciation. They did not engage with the function and effectiveness of ‘deterrence’.

- Question 11 — Understanding social inequality — ‘Functionalism best explains social inequality today.’ Discuss . . .

Many candidates achieved low marks because they were highly descriptive in covering functionalism, rather than analysing its contemporary relevance to modern society. Candidates who did not perform well took a one-sided approach, without evaluating alternative perspectives like Marxism or individualism and lacked contemporary evidence to back up their claims.

- Question 12 — The impact of social inequality — ‘The impact of inequality in society is most easily seen at the local level.’ Discuss . . .

Some candidates achieved low marks because they described or listed local problems using vague generalisations, rather than specific, contemporary data to analyse the issues. Their responses were one-sided and did not consider whether social inequality is more visible through national data, trends or impacts.

- Question 13 — Responses to social inequality — ‘The Government has failed at reducing inequality in society.’ Discuss . . .

Many candidates achieved low marks because they gave largely descriptive outlines of government policies, rather than analysing how effective these interventions were at tackling inequality. Candidates who did not perform well relied on one-sided claims and lacked factual, contemporary data.

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

Some candidates achieved low marks because they wrote generic answers and did not link their responses to the specific research scenario provided, limiting both their analysis and evaluation marks to a maximum of 2 marks. Many candidates did not include any relevant evidence, which limited their analysis marks to 3 marks. Some candidates also missed out on up to 3 potential marks by not including a final conclusion.

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

A few candidates achieved low marks because they listed points about the source and did not make developed points about strengths or weaknesses. They did not show any external knowledge about social science research, how they might carry out additional research or ways they would improve the source. They did not give a quantifiable comment on the extent to which the source was trustworthy.

Project–dissertation

A few candidates produced low-quality dissertations, developed around an approach that set out to prove rather than test their hypothesis, without considering alternative perspectives. Their approaches were often based on limited research of a narrow range of sources of information.

- In section A, many candidates did not consider any alternative perspectives or viewpoints in their introduction. This limited the marks they could achieve in this section to 5 marks, even if they clearly outlined what they were going to cover in their aims or the chapters that followed. Most candidates did not include any evaluation of the extent to which their issue was relevant in a wider context in

their introduction. This prevented candidates from gaining full marks for this section.

- In section B, in their research methods evaluation, some candidates did not comment on ethical issues in relation to any of their chosen methodologies. Most candidates did not evaluate any specific potential changes they would make to their research to improve its validity, reliability or ethical soundness.
- In section C, some candidates did not reference their use of evidence from their sources accurately or consistently throughout their dissertation. Many candidates did not use their research evidence convincingly to support their line of argument.
- In section D, many candidates did not consistently link analytical comments to evaluative comments or make analytical comments on an alternative argument(s). This indicated a lack of depth in their understanding of the issue and limited the marks they could achieve to 5 marks in this section.
- In section E, a few candidates did not consider or evaluate alternative arguments and evidence. This approach limited the marks they could achieve to 4 marks in this section.
- In section F, some candidates did not link their line of argument to their overall conclusion. Their overall conclusion did not consider or reach a judgement on alternative viewpoint(s).
- In section G, some candidates did not gain the 'appendices' mark. This was either because they did not include an appendix or because they did not include any details of the provenance of the data in their appendices, such as where it came from, who it involved and/or the date(s) the research was carried out.

Preparing candidates for assessment

You must ensure candidates are fully familiar with the Advanced Higher Modern Studies Course Specification and the assessment criteria used for both the question paper and the project–dissertation.

Question paper

Extended responses

You must cover the full content for the section chosen for study to adequately support candidates. You should encourage candidates to focus on answering the exact question set and avoid using pre-prepared responses. Candidates must look at counter-arguments to their points, presenting an answer that analyses different views rather than taking a one-sided approach.

Research method questions

You should cover all key research methods from the course specification. You should ensure candidates are aware that they must understand and accurately apply the terms validity and reliability. To maximise marks, candidates must directly link their analysis and evaluative comments to the research scenario in the question.

Source evaluation questions

You should encourage candidates to critically analyse and evaluate sources rather than describing their content or methodology. Candidates should critically evaluate the source by focusing on factors such as currency, authority, accuracy, relevance, and purpose, alongside any research methods used in the source.

Project–dissertation

Planning and aims

You can assist candidates in the planning stage by ensuring they have appropriate hypotheses and aims. You can use our ‘Advanced Higher Modern Studies approved list of dissertations’ to support this, however candidates can adapt or modify these titles.

You should direct candidates to use analytical stems such as 'To what extent...?' or 'To examine the extent to which...', or 'Statement. Discuss', for their aims and chapter titles.

We advise candidates to use a two-aim or two-chapter approach to allow sufficient depth of analysis.

Research and evidence

Candidates must provide a detailed evaluation of at least two research methods used in their dissertation. This evaluation must cover the benefits and limitations, and ethical issues for at least one method, and specific potential areas for improvement.

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

Candidates must include appendices, for example interview transcripts, email correspondence, and survey results, including details on the provenance of appendix evidence.

Analysis, conclusions, and style

Candidates must critically evaluate alternative views and theories throughout.

Their final conclusion must feature a quantified, supported judgement on the issue.

Candidates must use a consistent, academic style of referencing.

Word count and formatting conventions

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

You should ensure candidates 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