Course report 2026

National 5 Modern Studies, SCQF level 5

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 didn't 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.

Copyright © Qualifications Scotland 2026

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 12,543

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 13,027

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

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	5,340	41.0	41.0	70
B	2,495	19.2	60.1	60
C	2,151	16.5	76.7	50
D	1,475	11.3	88.0	40
No award	1,566	12.0	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 was accessible for most candidates. However, a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

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.

Overall, the question paper performed as expected.

Assignment

The assignment was accessible for most candidates. However, a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

How candidates performed

Question paper

Areas where candidates did and did not perform well

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 and focused on the ‘source evaluation’ questions instead. These candidates may have been struggling with the full demand of National 5 as they attempted the more straightforward 4- and 6-mark ‘describe’ questions but did not attempt the more challenging 6- or 8-mark ‘explain’ questions.

The 8-mark ‘knowledge’ questions performed as intended. The ‘causes of social and economic inequality’ question and the ‘causes of crime’ question were the most popular choices, with candidates who chose the crime question performing better.

Overall, most candidates performed well in the ‘source evaluation’ questions.

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

Questions 1 and 4

Most candidates correctly described methods used by groups to gain influence in a democracy, with most candidates choosing to describe the methods used by pressure groups to gain influence. Many candidates gave relevant and up-to-date examples to support their description.

Questions 2 and 5

These were straightforward ‘explain’ questions covering a core part of the course — participation. Some candidates had difficulty answering these questions, with a few candidates not completing them. Candidates should have been well prepared for this type of question because we asked a similar style of question previously. Candidates who underperformed in these questions misinterpreted them by explaining why some people are ‘less’ likely to participate in politics, when the question asked why some people are ‘more’ likely to participate in politics.

Questions 3 and 6

Some candidates gave excellent answers to these questions and explained why committees or the House of Lords play an important role in their respective Parliaments. Some candidates gave high-quality responses with excellent examples relating to scrutiny of the respective governments and the work undertaken by committees and the House of Lords in passing bills. However, some candidates simply described the role of the committees or House of Lords without explaining their importance. A few candidates misinterpreted question 3 and referred to the work of individual MSPs, for example asking questions at First Minister’s Questions or taking part in debates.

Question 7

Candidates who performed well in this question made insightful conclusions based on the bullet point prompts. Candidates structured their answers well, making a clear conclusion and giving two pieces of evidence to support their conclusion with

evaluative terminology. Candidates who performed well commented on the electoral performance of both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, comparing results from 2019 to 2024. Many candidates recognised that the dominant political party in Scotland after the election was Labour and referenced the correct evidence from the sources. Some candidates had difficulty making a conclusion about the proportionality of the results of the election and either did not attempt the bullet point or used incorrect evidence.

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

Questions 8 and 11

Many candidates accessed the full range of marks available in these questions because of their wide scope. Candidates gave varied responses. Some candidates provided excellent examples in question 11, referencing the full range of criminal courts in the UK.

Questions 9 and 12

Many candidates performed well in these questions, with many candidates making clear reference to the consequences of social and economic inequality on families and the consequences of crime for the perpetrator. A few candidates, specifically in question 12, referred to the victim of crime and the consequences faced by them rather than the perpetrator.

Questions 10 and 13

The two most popular options were questions 10(a) and 13(a).

Questions 10(a) and 13(a)

Some candidates provided well-developed answers to these questions, supported with excellent examples, specifically in question 13(a). Examples were relevant and up to date, with very few candidates using hypothetical exemplification.

Questions 10(b) and 13(b)

Few candidates attempted these questions but those who did gave relevant and accurate explanations with examples. A few candidates gave a description of

government interventions and programmes but were unable to develop the answer further and explain why these interventions had been effective.

Question 14

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

Some candidates found it challenging to interpret evidence that could have been used to reject the other option and demonstrated this when considering the information about the zero-tolerance approach suggested by Graeme Mathieson. Source 2 clearly highlights that the majority of the public either disagreed or strongly disagreed with a strict zero-tolerance approach to recreational drugs.

Some candidates found it challenging to interpret evidence around the rebuttal of Ava Reid. Some candidates misinterpreted the data in source 2, which highlighted that the targeted resources should have been given to Glasgow City, Dundee City and Inverclyde and not the Scottish Borders and East Renfrewshire as stated. This was also the case with Ava Reid's priority to 'put pressure on the UK government to decriminalise certain drugs, as this policy has proven to a be a success wherever it has been implemented'. This was contradicted by source 3, which stated 'the decriminalisation of certain drugs remains an ongoing debate. While this policy has been viewed as a success in some countries, it has proved to be a failure elsewhere'.

Section 3: Parts E and F — International Issues

Question 15

Many candidates described two political representatives from the world power they had studied with accurate exemplification. A few candidates struggled to identify political representatives and instead discussed political rights and responsibilities, and a few candidates did not attempt the question.

Question 16

Some candidates accurately answered this question, clearly describing the political influence their world power had on other countries. Some candidates simply

discussed the military or economic influence asserted by the world power they had studied. However, those candidates who then linked this influence to gaining political influence achieved the available marks.

Question 17

Candidate performance was mixed in question 17. Many candidates gave clear and concise explanations of success relating to either social or economic success, with relevant examples and, for a few candidates, detailed analysis. However, a few candidates did not identify whether they were considering social or economic success, which limited their access to the marks available.

Question 18

Many candidates answered this question well, giving two clear descriptions of how the conflict or issue they had studied had affected other countries and their governments. This applied particularly to candidates who had studied terrorism or the conflict in Ukraine. A few candidates misunderstood the question and referred to the impact on those immediately affected.

Question 19

Candidates answered this question well and referenced several economic causes of the conflict or issue they had studied. This applied particularly to candidates who had studied terrorism as their international issue, with examples including poverty, youth unemployment and government corruption.

Question 20

Many candidates did not have a clear understanding of ‘bilateral attempts’ to resolve conflicts and issues. Some candidates chose not to answer and those who did had inconsistencies in their responses. Some candidates misinterpreted the question altogether while others gave answers relating to multilateral attempts or the work undertaken by different agencies.

Question 21

Many candidates accessed a high number of marks in this question. They provided evidence that both supported and opposed the given viewpoint and structured their

answer appropriately, making it clear where they supported or opposed 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.

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.

Assignment

Areas where candidates performed well

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. This section has no specific criteria, 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 clearly identified and discussed 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 outlined 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 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 ensured that they made clear reference to their research sheet and the methods of research that they used to gather these findings.

Section D

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

Areas where candidates did not perform well

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 from accessing the marks available for this section. The research sheet is required to access the full range of marks in both sections B and C. The research sheet also allows readers 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 used, particularly those candidates who discussed using ‘the internet’ or class textbooks. A few candidates discussed different methods of research from those on their 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.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should ensure that candidates are familiar with the National 5 course specification. 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 remind candidates of the importance of expanding knowledge answers using specific ‘real world’ current examples. 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 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 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 helps the candidate give a more structured response, allowing marks to be allocated accordingly.

You should ensure that candidates understand the requirements of the ‘options’ question in part (iii) — ‘Explain why you did not choose the other option’. This can

often confuse candidates and they then 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.

Further support is available on the Understanding Standards section of our website, including example 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 topics or issue that would be suitable and guide candidates on the availability and accessibility of potential methods of research. You should 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 happens 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 refer to this throughout their assignment. Candidates who performed well evaluated the effectiveness of their chosen methods, commenting on their specific strengths and weaknesses. Candidates should refer to their own research when presenting their findings to access the full range of marks available. Candidates should consider their methods of research and understand that using websites is one method of research. You should encourage candidates to use two different types of research methods while completing their assignment.

You should encourage candidates to use evaluative terminology to reach a well-supported conclusion, rather than simply repeating a finding.

You should ensure candidates include their research sheet with their assignment 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, some candidates who included a wide range of evidence on their research sheet often copied this into their assignment, which stopped them from accessing the full range of marks available.

Further support is available on the Understanding Standards section of our website, where example materials are available.