



Course Report 2018

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

The 2018 Higher Modern Studies question paper had a duration of 2 hours and 15 minutes and had a total of 60 marks (two-thirds of the overall course total).

The question paper had three sections containing a mixture of essay-style and source-based questions. Each candidate had a choice of essay-style questions in each section. The source-based questions were mandatory for all candidates.

The most commonly-completed options were: section 1 question 1(b), section 2 question 3(a), and section 3 question 5(a).

Overall, the question paper was slightly more accessible than in the previous year. This is reflected in the decision to increase the grade boundaries for all grades by 1 mark.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment had a total of 30 marks (one-third of the overall course total).

Candidates were required to write a report under controlled conditions (90 minutes), based on their own individual research on a modern studies topic of their choice. Candidates could take two sides of A4 paper containing their 'specified resources' into the 'write-up' to assist them.

Overall, candidates performed well in the assignment.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 1(a)

Most candidates who completed this question demonstrated a very good knowledge of the main social, economic and political arguments surrounding Brexit. Most covered issues such as sovereignty, migration and trade. Candidates were well-prepared and used relevant, contemporary examples. Analysis of the arguments on both sides of the debate was of high quality.

Question 2

This question was accessible to the vast majority of candidates. Most candidates identified and evaluated evidence to both support and oppose the statement. Many candidates reached an overall judgement regarding the degree of accuracy of the statement and backed this up with source evidence.

Although many candidates performed well in this question, many failed to include a quantitative statement in their overall judgement. Candidates who simply stated that the statement was either totally correct or totally incorrect could not be awarded the 2 marks available.

Many candidates evaluated the reliability of the source material effectively. A large number attempted this in a very vague, basic way and as a result did not gain marks.

Question 5(b)

Many candidates showed very good knowledge of political participation in their world power, especially in responses which focused on China, South Africa and, to a lesser extent, the USA. The skills of analysis and evaluation displayed were often of a high order.

Although many candidates provided high scoring responses on the USA, a significant number tried to 'flip' the question to fit a response they had pre-prepared for a different question. Many candidates tried to make their 'powers of the President' answer fit the question. Such responses gained few marks.

Question 5(c)

In this question candidates showed very good knowledge and an ability to effectively discuss the causes of their chosen world issue. Candidates were very well-prepared for this question.

Question 5(d)

Most candidates showed good knowledge of attempts to resolve the issue. Most responses included reference to specific UN agencies, NGOs and government initiatives. Candidates were very well-prepared for this question. As with question 5(c), the main issues covered continued to be under-development in Africa, terrorism and the Syrian crisis.

Component 2: assignment

Candidates continued to show a good level of knowledge concerning the background to their issue and managed to frame their options well. Often candidates gained most, if not all, knowledge marks for 'background and framing' of their issue in an introductory section. This was sometimes titled 'background and framing' or 'background to the issue'. Although this approach is not mandatory, it has become almost universal and has proven to be very effective.

Most candidates adopted a variation of the 'DME' structure commonly used for the old Higher Modern Studies: Paper 2. This includes an introduction. Candidates go on to set out their options, often presented as solutions to a social problem. A decision is often stated at this point but this is not mandatory. The remainder of the report sets out, under specific headings, the main arguments for and against the options and combines background knowledge with references to source material included in their two A4 research sheets.

Centres are clearly growing in confidence in presenting the assignment. 'Structure' marks have improved as a result.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Question 1(b)

Although this question was completed by a large majority of candidates, many did not score highly. A very large number of candidates provided pre-prepared responses covering everything they knew about voting behaviour. Although some of this material could be awarded marks, candidates often presented it in a way which did not meet the specific demands of the question, for example, a focus on the media. Many candidates wasted time in the examination writing extensive sections on factors such as gender, social class and age. Such sections gained few marks. The most successful candidates focused solely on the influence of the media or linked different factors, such as age, to the media. Some candidates successfully demonstrated the importance of different types of media in influencing different age groups in the 2017 General Election.

Question 3(a)

A significant number of candidates referred to several groups in their response rather than only one group, as specified in the question. A large number of candidates gave good responses based on either gender inequality or on child poverty. Some responses were very simplistic in nature and many candidates showed a misunderstanding of the 'gender pay gap'.

Question 3(b)

Very few candidates showed a firm understanding of the collectivist/individualist debate over the provision of welfare services in the UK. Many candidates unsuccessfully attempted to 'flip' the question to match a pre-prepared response on the success or otherwise of government social policy in tackling inequality.

Question 4

A large number of candidates managed to gain high marks for their answers to the two specific bullet points in the question. Most managed to formulate two valid conclusions and provide appropriate source evidence to support them. Marks for the second of the two bullet points were higher than those for the first.

A small minority failed to provide any conclusions and simply re-stated all the source evidence that they could find from the sources which related to either living conditions or safety. As this did not include appropriate analytical or evaluative comment, it gained 0 marks.

A large number of candidates had difficulty with the overall conclusion concerning the 'extent' of overcrowding in prisons. Many of these candidates simply combined their responses to the two specific bullet points, in the process repeating a lot of the same information in the same context. As a result these candidates were not able to score more than 6 marks.

Question 5(a)

This question allowed candidates to bring in the wide range of knowledge they had about all the types of inequality that exist within the world power they had studied. Many answers

were very descriptive in nature and struggled to provide appropriate analytical or evaluative comment.

Many candidates who had studied the USA tried to provide a pre-prepared response on government policies aimed at tackling inequality. Although this may have gained some marks, it was unlikely to score highly. Answers focusing on the USA were often stereotypical in nature.

The strongest responses were those which considered a wide range of inequalities such as health, education, crime and income.

Component 2: assignment

Although overall knowledge marks remain consistent, many candidates still do not score highly for knowledge 'in support of analysis' in the main body of their report. Most knowledge marks are gained for 'background and framing'.

Many candidates produced very useful research sheets but did not use them effectively in the report. A large number of candidates' research sheets contained only URLs, with no other information. In this circumstance it is very difficult for markers to award analysis/synthesis marks unless the candidate makes specific reference to their research sheets. Candidates may well have remembered significant information from a specific source but unless a reference is made, the marker has no option but to credit this as knowledge. This can result in individual candidates achieving the maximum mark for knowledge while missing out on what could potentially be more analysis/synthesis marks.

Many sources were simply given as 'the BBC' or 'the Guardian'. Best practice would be to include author, publication dates and full titles.

While outright copying from the research sheets is now less common, some candidates still included such a significant amount of words on their research sheets that they found it difficult to gain knowledge marks. Almost everything that could be said on the issue was included on the research sheets.

The inclusion of a very detailed plan, which only needs to be 'fleshed out' with neutral language by the candidate, was also less common.

The number of candidates who failed to evaluate the reliability of their sources increased. Many others continued to provide only a very generic evaluation such as 'the internet is unreliable' or 'newspapers are often biased'.

A significantly large number of candidates still neglected the conclusion/decision marks. The actual decision was often given in a very brief paragraph offering very little justification or reasons for the rejection of other options.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Relevant, up-to-date exemplification is important in both 12-mark and 20-mark responses. These help many candidates to achieve the highest marks.

Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that their responses need to fit the demands of the specific question being asked. Pre-prepared responses do not always do this and instead result in candidates using up a great deal of time during the question paper to gain only a few marks. Memorising set essays in the hope that the exact question will be asked in the question paper appears to be a growing trend. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to revise topics but be ready to adapt their knowledge to fit the question.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to demand developed and insightful conclusions in the 'conclusions' source question. The overall conclusion in this question should not be a re-worded summary of the answer given for the two bullet points. Candidates should be directed to read this part of the question carefully. Although the same evidence can be used, the overall conclusion should provide an evaluative judgement which is relevant to the wording of the question. This advice is valid for the new question paper 2 in 2019.

In the 2019 question paper 2, an overall judgement on the extent of accuracy of the statement will still be required in the 'accuracy' source question. Candidates should be instructed to include a 'quantitative' judgement, for example, 'largely accurate' and support this with the most convincing evidence. Statements which suggest that the statement is totally accurate or totally inaccurate will gain 0 marks. Judgements such as 'accurate to a certain extent' should be discouraged as they are too vague.

Component 2: assignment

Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that they should make direct reference to their research sheets throughout their report. Sources should be clearly attributed (author, date published, title, name of publication) and any information intended as knowledge should not be included.

Research sheets which only include URLs are acceptable but often disadvantage candidates and force them to rely too heavily on memory. Research sheets should include information that is of use to the candidate and which provides evidence of research.

Candidates should be encouraged to include points of knowledge throughout their report to support their argument and analysis.

When evaluating the reliability of sources, candidates should refer to sources which are on their research sheets. They should be encouraged to avoid vague comments about 'the Internet' or 'newspapers'. They should instead focus on the specific website or newspaper article they have used and included on their research sheets.

If referring to a source's date of publication or authorship when commenting on reliability, candidates should be advised that these details should be included on the research sheets. Many candidates include a 'date accessed' for their sources of evidence. Although this provides proof of research it does not assist their evaluation of reliability.

Candidates should be advised that knowledge marks can be awarded in the main body of the report. Knowledge in support of their analysis is neglected by many candidates.

Centres are urged to be cautious if candidates wish to merge their assignment topics with a topic they are studying in another subject. Teachers and lecturers should be confident that the topics chosen contain enough potential modern studies argument to access full marks. Topics which stray into RMPS, geography or history do not generally receive high marks as much of the knowledge, analysis and evaluation is focused on non-modern studies issues.

Centres should ensure that they are fully aware of the guidelines regarding the write-up of the assignment.

Candidates are expected to use the research sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they **must** submit it with their evidence. The research sheet is not assessed formally. However it is important that teachers/lecturers ensure that candidates know how to use and submit research sheet(s) which are reviewed during the marking process.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	9319
Number of resulted entries in 2018	9334

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	31.8%	31.8%	2971	64
B	23.0%	54.8%	2147	55
C	21.1%	75.9%	1965	46
D	7.5%	83.4%	699	41
No award	16.6%	-	1552	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary).

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.