



Advanced Higher Modern Studies

Approved list of dissertations

Valid from session 2025–26 and until further notice

Contents

Introduction	1
Area of study 1: Political issues	2
Topic A: power and influence	2
Topic B: political ideology	4
Topic C: political structures	6
Area of study 2: Law and order	8
Topic A: understanding the criminal justice system.....	8
Topic B: understanding criminal behaviour	10
Topic C: responses by society to crime.....	12
Area of study 3: Social inequality	15
Topic A: understanding social inequality	15
Topic B: the impact of social inequality	16
Topic C: responses to social inequality	17

Introduction

The list of titles in this document relates to the project–dissertation for Advanced Higher Modern Studies. The list is not final or definitive but gives examples of suitable questions or hypothesis.

When candidates devise dissertation titles not listed in this document, centres can submit the proposed titles to SQA for feedback by 1 December. Further details are available on the [Modern Studies subject page](#) on SQA’s website. This service is advisory in nature.

There is no need for centres to seek approval for titles that merely refine the issue.

Area of study 1: Political issues

Topic A: power and influence

Influences on the political process, including interest groups and the media

Lobbying corrupts the political process.

Interest groups exert a positive influence on the democratic process.

Outsider groups exert greater influence than insider groups.

Direct action is a legitimate course of action.

Direct action is a threat to the values of democracy.

Interest groups have more significant influence in the USA than the UK.

When it comes to interest groups, size is all that matters.

The media plays a key role in the political process.

An independent media is necessary for democracy.

The influence of newspapers has declined in line with their circulation.

Social media is the most influential media format on elections.

Television is still king when it comes to influencing elections and voting behaviour.

The influence of social media on politics is over-exaggerated.

A political leader's greatest ally is the media.

Radical political movements that have grown via social media undermine democracy.

Social media is an echo chamber which only reinforces already-held political views.

Power and influence of political parties

Parties who adapt their ideological positions remain relevant.

Pragmatism is the defining feature of parties of government.

Third parties are ineffective and act only as a protest vote.

Third parties exert a disproportionate influence.

Single-issue parties have limited success.

The two-party system is under threat.

Political parties are inherently undemocratic.

Political parties are increasingly dominated by their leaders.

Grassroots members of political parties have limited influence.

Electoral systems and theories of voting behaviour

FPTP has no place in a modern democracy.

FPTP is a safeguard against tyranny of the majority.

PR systems are fairer and more representative of the will of the people.

Electronic voting would address the issue of low voter turnout.

Compulsory voting is necessary to legitimise election outcomes.

Age is now the key factor in determining voting outcomes.

Leadership is the most important factor in the electoral success of political parties.

Social class remains the key influence in determining voting behaviour.

The key issue in elections is the economy.

Only rational choice theory can adequately explain modern voting behaviour.

Topic B: political ideology

Political ideologies, including Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism and Nationalism

Liberty and equality are not compatible.

Inequality is the price of a strong, economic liberal democracy.

States that prioritise individual freedom above equality prosper.

There is no such thing as society, only individuals.

The interests of the state override the rights of the individual.

Citizens' rights are inalienable.

Human nature is intrinsically selfish.

Nationalism requires an enemy for it to thrive.

Contemporary relevance of ideology to political parties, including Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism and Nationalism

In the contemporary world there is no place for ideology.

Liberalism has undergone a resurgence in recent years.

Conservatism has undergone a resurgence in recent years.

Socialism has undergone a resurgence in recent years.

Nationalism has undergone a resurgence in recent years.

Conservatism has stolen the values of Nationalism and dressed them up as patriotism.

Marxism is a failed ideology.

Scottish nationalism is civic in nature.

Ethnic nationalism is the basis of modern nationalist parties.

Influence of ideology on contemporary political issues

Neo-liberal ideas now dominate politics.

Individualism has triumphed over collectivism in the realm of political ideas.

Economic events have led to a resurgence of socialist ideas and political parties.

Right-wing think tanks are more influential than their left-wing counterparts.

A smaller state means more freedom and choice.

The age of political consensus is over.

A collectivist welfare state is unaffordable and unsustainable.

Feminism's influence within political parties has increased in the 21st century.

The influence of the alt-right is exaggerated.

Environmentalism has had little influence on mainstream politics.

Neo-liberal values now dominate the global economy.

Topic C: political structures

Constitutions and political systems

A codified constitution is preferable to an uncoded constitution.

The original intent of the Constitution of the United States is no longer fit for purpose.

Unicameral parliamentary systems are more democratic.

Bicameral systems provide greater scrutiny of government.

A federated UK is the best way to maintain the Union.

Federalism is the best system of governing socially diverse, densely populated states.

Devolution threatens the union.

Committee oversight is more powerful in the US than in the UK system of government.

Relationships between branches of government

Legislative power trumps that of the executive.

The legislative branch finds it difficult to check executive power.

The judiciary is now the most effective check on executive power.

The US President is imperial.

The UK Prime Minister is presidential.

The powers of the UK Prime Minister are the envy of the President of the United States of America.

The Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) is all-powerful.

Relationships between levels of government

The powers granted to the Scottish Parliament are insufficient.

The Scottish independence referendum settled relations between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Relationships between Federal government and State governments in USA are adversarial by nature.

Brexit has not brought powers back to the UK from the EU.

The jurisdiction of the UK Supreme Court in Scottish affairs is questionable.

Supranational organisations represent a threat to the sovereignty of nation states.

Area of study 2: Law and order

Topic A: understanding the criminal justice system

Judicial frameworks

The UK is a police state.

Scotland's court system is effective in dealing with crime.

The courts are undermined by government guidelines on sentencing.

The UK Supreme Court threatens the independence of the Scottish criminal justice system.

Human rights, civil liberties and the criminal justice system

The values of the European Convention on Human Rights are compatible with the UK judicial framework.

A British bill of rights would better suit the UK and/or Scottish criminal justice system.

Civil liberties are under threat from the global war on terrorism.

Recent legislation has reduced the human rights of people in the UK.

Human rights are violated regularly by the Chinese state government.

Russian Government's treatment of political opposition contravenes international human rights.

Human rights legislation hinders the states' attempts to protect national security.

The European Convention on Human Rights has undermined the legal system in the UK.

The UK government has failed to enforce the rights of asylum seekers.

Civil rights organisations remain the only credible opposition to the government's infraction on individual's rights.

Criminal justice issues

Extending the powers of the security services is necessary to safeguard national security.

Reducing the pre-charge detention period for terror suspects in the UK to 14 days threatens the UK's national security.

Only those who attempt to disrupt the state should fear the use of new technology by the police and other government agencies.

Biometric ID cards should be compulsory for all UK citizens.

The 'not proven' verdict has no place in a modern Scottish criminal justice system.

The Scottish criminal justice system discriminates against young males.

The special needs of women are being recognised and met within the Scottish criminal justice system.

Ethnic minorities in the USA fail to receive equality before the law.

The criminal justice system is inherently racist.

Technology has been the key factor in recent reductions in crime levels across the UK.

Responses to cybercrime are 'too little, too late'.

Cybercrime poses the biggest criminal threat to society.

Arming the police in the UK would undermine the principle of policing by consent.

Topic B: understanding criminal behaviour

Definitions, measurements and perceptions of crime

All crime is deviant.

Police crime statistics cannot be trusted.

Self-reporting crime statistics are the only believable crime statistics.

Statistics on reported crimes are inherently untrustworthy.

Hate crime is increasing.

Perceptions of crime are universal.

An irrational fear of crime is fed by the media.

The media has altered our perceptions of crime.

Public perceptions of crime are distorted.

Fear of crime is irrational and misplaced.

Contemporary relevance of theories of criminal behaviour including physiological, psychological and sociological theories

Criminals are born that way.

Society creates criminals.

Social deprivation and crime are inextricably linked.

Violent crime is in the genes.

Sexual violence against women is a consequence of misogynistic attitudes within society.

Testosterone is the driver of violent crime.

Poor parenting is the cause of youth criminality.

Adverse childhood experiences and crime are inextricably linked.

Poor educational attainment is a driver of crime.

Neuroscience now provides the strongest indication of criminality.

Social and economic impact of criminal behaviour on victims, perpetrators, families and wider society

Crime affects the elderly more than any other group.

The real cost of crime is paid by young men.

Crime is concentrated in the most economically deprived areas.

White-collar crime is most damaging to society.

The middle classes are insulated from the worst aspects of crime.

Female criminality is more damaging to families than male criminality.

Racism is surviving and thriving in today's society.

Topic C: responses by society to crime

Contemporary relevance of theories of punishment, including deterrence, rehabilitation, incapacitation, retributivism and denunciation

Prison systems are too focused on punishment to succeed.

Protecting the public should be the first and only priority of any penal system.

Crime prevention is more effective than punishment.

Capital punishment is a legitimate response to crime.

Rehabilitation is revolutionising criminal justice.

Zero tolerance does not deter crime.

The best response to crime is a tough one.

Incapacitation should remain at the forefront of punishment.

Preventative responses to crime, including policing strategies, multi-agency approaches and early interventions

Mass policing is the way to combat crime.

Police relations with minority communities are broken.

Scotland has led the way in tackling knife crime.

Stop and search powers are abused by the police and require reform.

Racial profiling is controversial but necessary.

Multi-agency approaches to drug-related crime are ineffective.

Drug crime should be treated as a medical rather than a criminal issue.

Technology is the key to preventing crime.

The case for gun control in the USA is irrefutable.

Early intervention is vital in preventing crime.

Criminal justice responses to crime, including custodial and non-custodial sentences

Prison works.

Prison is a costly waste of time.

Prisons are universities of crime.

Short-term prison sentences are counter-productive in reducing crime.

Prisons in Scotland get an unfair press.

Radicalisation is increasing in UK prisons.

Restorative justice fails to tackle crime.

Rehabilitation is the way to lower recidivism rates.

Purposeful activity in prison does not go far enough.

Only serious crime warrants a prison sentence.

Alternatives to prison jeopardise public safety.

Criminalising drug-related offences is ineffective.

Women should not be sent to prison.

Gender should not be a factor when it comes to crime and punishment.

Only men should go to prison.

Scotland must rethink its approach to tackling youth crime.

The human rights of prisoners are not being met.

The Scottish prison system lets down its most vulnerable inmates.

Criminal justice is inherently biased against minorities.

Locking up young people does more harm than good.

Young people should be diverted from prosecution.

Scottish approaches to crime lag behind global comparators.

The ageing prison population is the biggest challenge facing the prison system.

Area of study 3: Social inequality

Topic A: understanding social inequality

Definitions, measurements and perceptions of inequality

Social inequality cannot be measured by income alone.

Child poverty in the UK is exaggerated.

Eradicating child poverty is an unachievable goal.

All poverty is relative.

Social mobility is a thing of the past.

All inequality is structural in nature.

Inequality is beneficial and necessary.

Social stratification

Social divisions are no longer solely economic.

The individual has no power to change their standing in society.

Meritocracy is a myth.

Social divisions allow society to function properly.

Ethnicity is the most important dimension of inequality in society.

Contemporary relevance of theories of inequality, including individualism, functionalism, structuralism and conflict theory

Poverty is a consequence of individual choice.

Attitudes of the poor trap them in poverty.

Wage differences between the highest and lowest earners cannot be justified.

Hierarchical societies are more prosperous.

The UK class system reinforces socio-economic inequality.

Globalisation has reduced inequality.

Trade liberalisation reinforces economic inequality.

Scarcity of resources is the cause of global inequalities.

Private education perpetuates inequality.

Marx's critique of capitalism is more relevant in the 21st century than ever.

Society cannot function without inequality.

Topic B: the impact of social inequality

Impact of inequality at an individual level, including education, employment, mental health and lifestyle

Private schools entrench inequality.

Health and inequality are inextricably linked.

Poverty pushes the poor into making bad lifestyle choices.

The gig economy increases poverty and inequality.

Zero-hour contracts bring no benefits to employees.

The housing market is the key driver of social division within society.

Impact of inequality at a local level, including social cohesion, reputation, services and businesses

Unequal societies have the greatest social problems.

Inequality fuels racial and social division.

Managing decline is the only solution for some regions.

The poorest regions have the worst services.

Inequality damages business and employment opportunities.

Topic C: responses to social inequality

Theories of responses to inequality, including individualism and collectivism

The social democratic model is the most effective approach to tackling poverty and inequality.

‘Trickle-down’ economics increase inequality.

Free markets are the most effective way to lift people out of poverty.

Equality of opportunity rather than equality is more effective in reducing inequality.

Liberal welfare systems are unsustainable.

Government responses to inequality

The state cannot solve poverty and inequality.

Universal benefits create a more equal society.

Reform is needed to tackle welfare dependency.

The NHS has failed to tackle health inequalities.

Privatised healthcare increases poverty and inequality.

Non-profit healthcare systems are best at tackling health inequalities.

Comprehensive education has failed.

Free/private schools promote social mobility.

Housing policies widen the inequality gap.

Privately run workfare programmes have been a success.

Austerity extends poverty and inequality.

Privatisation of public services reinforces inequality.

Redistributive taxation is the only way to address inequality.

Non-governmental organisation (NGO) responses to inequality

The third sector has a key role to play in tackling inequality.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities cannot replace the role of the state in tackling inequality.

NGOs have effectively tackled global poverty.

Administrative information

Published: July 2025 (version 1.3)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
1.3	<p>Changes made to the format and layout of the document to improve accessibility.</p> <p>Some titles have been amended for session 2025–26 onwards.</p> <p>What you need to do differently</p> <p>You should update your teaching notes and ensure candidates are provided with this updated list of approved dissertation titles.</p>	July 2025