Course report 2022

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Advanced Higher

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. 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 appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	1175

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	31.1	Cumulative percentage	31.1	Number of candidates	365	Minimum mark required	96
B	Percentage	26.3	Cumulative percentage	57.4	Number of candidates	310	Minimum mark required	82
C	Percentage	20.3	Cumulative percentage	77.7	Number of candidates	240	Minimum mark required	68
D	Percentage	11.9	Cumulative percentage	89.6	Number of candidates	140	Minimum mark required	54
No award	Percentage	10.4	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	120	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

In this report:

- ‘most’ means greater than 70%
- ‘many’ means 50% to 69%
- ‘some’ means 25% to 49%
- ‘a few’ means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics page of SQA’s website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected and was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand.

Section 1: Political issues and research methods was the second most popular area of study. In this section, topic A: power and influence (questions 1 and 2) and topic B: political ideology (questions 3 and 4) were the most commonly-attempted questions.

Section 2: Law and order and research methods was the most popular area of study. In this section, topic B: understanding criminal behaviour (questions 11 and 12) and topic C: responses by society to crime (questions 13 and 14) were the most commonly-attempted questions.

Section 3: Social inequality and research methods was attempted by a very small number of candidates. In this section, topic A: understanding social inequality (questions 17 and 18) and topic C: responses to social inequality (question 21) were the most commonly-attempted questions.

Extended-responses (questions 1–6, 9–14 and 17–22)

Similar structure and framing of the extended-response questions allowed candidates to access the questions and apply their knowledge to analyse, synthesise and evaluate the statements within the questions, while also attempting to make international comparisons. Direction within questions to include 'reference to the UK/Scotland and any other country or countries' supported candidates in adopting a comparative approach. The quality of the comparative analysis and evaluation acted to differentiate candidates.

Research methods (questions 7, 15 and 23)

Questions 7, 15 and 23 across sections 1–3 referred to the same research methods — online surveys and focus groups. The two research methods were provided in advance as part of the revision support. Candidates were clearly familiar with the stated methods in question and were able to analyse and evaluate both methods. The extent of engagement with the scenario in each question and the subsequent quality of analysis, evaluation, reference to social science research, and overall conclusion acted to differentiate candidates.

Source evaluation questions (questions 8, 16 and 24)

Source questions across sections 1–3, although from different organisations, contained evidence of online blogs and were of a similar, challenging but accessible level of difficulty. This ensured equity for candidates irrespective of their area of study. Source content allowed candidates to analyse, evaluate and comment on key aspects relating to validity, reliability and overall trustworthiness. The quality of analysis, evaluation, knowledge of social science research, and overall conclusion acted to differentiate candidates.

Project–dissertation

Candidates performed, on average, better in the project–dissertation than the question paper, which is in line with previous assessment diets.

The majority of candidates selected titles from the 'Advanced Higher Modern Studies Approved List of Dissertations' document. Candidates who developed their own dissertation titles often produced insightful dissertations on contemporary issues.

Most candidates were familiar with the project–dissertation's assessment criteria and developed an approach and structure that fitted this. The most common approach included:

- an introduction justifying the political or social issue for research
- a discrete chapter evaluating research methodologies
- two or three chapters that draw on a wide and varied range of sources of information to analyse and evaluate the issue, arguments and evidence
- an overall conclusion
- an appendix or appendices evidencing primary research and/or statistical information
- a bibliography

Overall, candidate performance in the dissertation component represented a slight deterioration from the last SQA exam diet in 2019.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

The majority of candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding of the political and social issues raised in the extended-response questions. However, a minority of candidates were clearly unprepared for some of the questions sampled in this year's question paper.

Extended-responses (questions 1–6, 9–14 and 17–22)

Across the assessable criteria for the 30-mark extended-response, strong candidates produced high-quality answers containing the following features:

- Analysis: responses identified and analysed key factors, which were developed and related to the question throughout the main body of the response. Contemporary supporting evidence was presented in support of analysis and evaluation with the source or origin attributed. Analysis of key issues integrated evidence from an international comparator to compare, contrast, analyse and evaluate the issue in relation to the UK/Scotland and other countries. High-quality responses also contained reference to ideas and/or theories or the academic arguments of others.
- Comparison: responses compared the UK/Scotland with a relevant comparator country or countries throughout the essay. Evaluative and overall conclusions commented on the extent of difference or similarity between the UK/Scotland and the comparator country or countries cited.
- Evaluation: responses provided implicit as well as explicit conclusions and considered and evaluated alternative views or theories in relation to the question. Overall conclusions were justified and included a reason for rejecting or accepting alternative arguments.
- Synthesising information to structure and sustain lines of argument: answers had a clear line of argument that flowed from an organised and logical sequence of ideas. A developed conclusion, rather than a summary, was offered, which directly addressed the question and offered a judgement based on the evidence presented.

Research methods (questions 7, 15 and 23)

Candidate performance in these questions represented an improvement from the last SQA exam diet in 2019. Most candidates correctly interpreted that the question required comparison between online surveys and focus groups. Responses that compared both methods rather than discussed the benefits and limitations of each tended to do better. A few candidates also analysed a further third, alternative method to those stated in the question. High-quality answers also contained features of the following:

- Analysis: quality analysis linked developed points to the scenario stated in the question. Additionally, quality responses showed knowledge of the benefits and limitations of using both online surveys and focus groups for research. High-quality analysis included supporting evidence from the candidates' own knowledge, research experience or use of the method(s) in question in academic research.
- Evaluation: quality responses evaluated the effectiveness of both stated research methods in relation to the scenario outlined in the question. High-quality responses also commented on ethical issues related to at least one research method. Common ethical issues commented on included confidentiality and anonymity.
- Conclusion: quality conclusions offered a clear judgement outlining the candidates' preferred method in relation to the issue. Justification for preferring one method and reasons for rejecting the other method(s) were clearly stated.

Source stimulus questions (questions 8, 16 and 24)

Candidate performance in these questions was broadly in line with the last SQA exam diet in 2019. A majority of candidates analysed and evaluated aspects of the source that enhanced as well as diminished its validity, reliability and trustworthiness. High-quality answers also contained features of the following:

- Analysis of a source: detailed knowledge of aspects of the source that affected its trustworthiness including provenance, source evidence, methodology, recording approach or date of publication.
- Evaluation of trustworthiness: use of supporting evidence drawn from the source and candidates' own knowledge of social science research. Reference to alternative approaches that would increase the trustworthiness of the source.
- Conclusion: a clear conclusion quantifying and justifying the extent to which the source was trustworthy.

Project–dissertation

In the project–dissertation, high-quality responses contained the following features:

- Justifying an appropriate, complex, contemporary political or social issue for research: titles, hypotheses and aims that were logical, linked and supported analysis and evaluation of a contemporary modern studies issue. An introduction that explained the contemporary political or social relevance of the issue and its local, national and/or global significance with reference to up-to-date issues or events related to the issue. A justification of the aims and outline of the line of argument and coverage to come.
- Evaluating research methodology: quality responses offered a balanced evaluation of a select range of methods used by candidates. High-quality analysis and evaluation commented on the strengths and weaknesses of the methods, commented on ethical issues and considerations surrounding the selected methodologies and also commented on specific, detailed ways in which the use of one of their methods could be improved on.
- Using a wide range of sources of information: high-quality dissertations used a wide and varied range of primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources of

information were accurately referenced, academically evidenced in the appendices and integrated into the main body of the dissertation.

- Analysing the issue: analysis of key issues leads to evaluative comments, which were supported by contemporary evidence, case studies, statistics, theories or examples.
- Evaluating arguments and evidence: quality dissertations included implicit and explicit evaluations and conclusions. arguments that supported the stated hypothesis as well as alternative views were presented and evaluated, with it being clear which arguments were accepted and which were discounted.
- Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence: candidates who produced high-quality dissertations made evaluations or conclusions consistently within chapters, at the end of each chapter and in their overall conclusion. Points raised within aims and chapters built towards and linked to the overall conclusion.
- Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions: candidates who achieved high or full marks in this element presented a well-organised bibliography, which presented source types in a clear and logical manner. References were consistent and in line with an acceptable academic form. Appendices included detail on the origin and provenance of the primary or secondary information. Evidence from appendices was integrated and referenced in the main body of the dissertation.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Extended-responses (questions 1–6, 9–14 and 17–22)

A minority of candidates did not refer to an international comparator(s) or made only cursory reference to another country. Poor responses described rather than analysed the issue, tended to lack supporting evidence and presented one-sided responses to the issue. Poor responses also tried to turn questions to fit pre-prepared answers rather than answering the questions set.

Common weaknesses shown by candidates in relation to specific extended-response questions were as follows:

- Question 2 — Power and influence: 'Political parties are reasserting their relevance within political systems.' Discuss…
  Candidates who found this question challenging often attempted to turn the question and apply knowledge of issues such as voting systems and voting behaviour that were irrelevant. Clearly a few candidates were unprepared for a question on this issue. Issues relevant to the question that could have been analysed by candidates included the function and relevance of political parties, for example to inform, educate, formulate policy; internal democracy and policymaking; political party membership and activism; the influence of smaller parties, for example UKIP, Green Party, Podemos, Front-National; 2-party and multi-party political systems.
- Question 5 — Political structures: 'Political developments often have constitutional consequences.' Discuss…
  Candidates who found this question challenging tended to adopt an approach that

compared constitutional approaches of the UK and US rather than engage with the substance of the question, which was to evaluate the extent to which political developments can or cannot have implications for the constitution of a country. Issues relevant to the question that could have been analysed by candidates included Brexit, immigration issues, Scottish independence, women's issues and abortion.

- Question 10 — Understanding the criminal justice system: 'Human rights and civil liberties are adequately protected by the law.' Discuss…
  Candidates who found this question challenging tended to adopt an approach that focused only on human rights and failed to analyse the legislation that protects these rights or the extent to which these legal protections may or may not be 'adequate'. Issues relevant to the question that could have been analysed by candidates included Universal Declaration of Human Rights, European Convention on Human Rights. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Data Protection Regulation, Brexit, terrorism, women's rights and abortion, and LGBTQ issues.

Project–dissertation

Areas of difficulty or poor candidate performance across the dissertation included aspects of the following assessable criteria:

- Using a wide range of sources of information: most candidates consulted an adequate number of sources and used a range and variety of appropriate methods of gathering information. However, weaker dissertations continued to be based on research gathered solely from a limited number of websites. Thought should also be given to the weight given to the results of surveys which draw from small, unrepresentative samples. In many cases they may be useful for evaluating research methods but may be questionable in supporting analysis and evaluation of issues.
- Analysing the issue: a minority of candidates continue to adopt a weak, one-sided approach to their hypothesis, rather than dispassionately assessing evidence and arguments in a balanced manner. Such an approach, which fails to acknowledge or analyse alternative viewpoints or theories, severely reduces the scope for gaining marks and should be discouraged.
- Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions: a minority of candidates did not use consistent academic referencing conventions. Bibliographies that simply list website URLs were also common in weaker dissertations and do not gain any marks.
- Exceeding the maximum word count (5000 words with 10% toleration): a very small number of candidates received a penalty for violation of the maximum word count.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres should ensure all candidates have access to, and are familiar with, the relevant supporting documentation for Advanced Higher Modern Studies. Centres should also ensure that all candidates are fully informed and familiar with the assessable criteria used for the range of question types across the question paper and the project–dissertation.

Question paper

Extended-responses

Centres should ensure that course coverage complies with the course specification to adequately support candidates. In session 2022–23 course modifications introduced in 2021–22 will be retained. In Part A of each section, each topic area will contain a choice of two 30-mark extended-response questions. Candidates will still be required to answer two questions from separate topics. This modification remains to help ease pressures on learning and teaching by providing the option to teach a narrower range of topics while still enabling candidates to be sufficiently prepared for the question paper. Centres should continue to direct candidates to focus on answering the questions set in the question paper and avoid attempting to turn the questions.

Research methods questions

Centres should aim to prepare candidates adequately by ensuring that the key research methods outlined in the course specification are covered in their courses. Candidates should be familiar with the assessment criteria outlined in the general marking principles and criterion marking grids for this question type.

Source-based questions

Centres can support candidates by ensuring they are familiar with the assessable criteria for the source stimulus questions and that they have many opportunities to practise these types of questions. Centres should discourage candidates from simply describing the source content or research methodology. Candidates should be directed to make an overall conclusion in their responses.

Project–dissertation

Centres can assist candidates in the planning stage by ensuring they adopt an appropriate hypothesis and aims. To support this process, many centres make use of the 'Advanced Higher Modern Studies Approved List of Dissertations' document available on the Advanced Higher Modern Studies subject page on SQA's website. However, it is acceptable for candidates to adapt or modify these. Candidates should also be supported in selecting their own dissertation titles if they wish to do so. Where centres are unsure about the hypothesis, title or aims candidates developed themselves, they can submit a 'Project–dissertation title feedback form', also available on the Advanced Higher Modern Studies subject page.

Centres should direct candidates to use stems such as 'To what extent …?', 'To analyse ...', 'To examine ...', 'To examine the extent to which ...' when formulating their aims and chapter titles.

Candidates should be directed to provide an evaluation of a selected range of methods they used. Analysis should comment on benefits and limitations of selected methods, ethical issues related to at least one method, and ways in which the use of at least one method could have been improved on.

Candidates should aim to use a wide and varied range of sources of information. Secondary resources can involve a wide range of sources and may include academic texts, journals, newspapers, websites, documentaries and other audio or visual sources. Primary research is not mandatory for the project–dissertation, but often enhances research and offers further insight or perspectives on issues.

Candidates should be strongly encouraged to discuss and critically evaluate alternative views and theories as part of their dissertation.

Candidates should avoid summary conclusions and instead offer a conclusion to their dissertation that makes and supports a balanced and considered judgement of the issue.

Centres should adopt a consistent, academic style of referencing and ensure candidates follow this.

Appendices are crucial evidence of the candidate's research process and should include interview transcripts, letters or emails sent and received, survey results and other resources. Candidates who only conduct secondary research should also include appendices, for example, statistical or graphical information that they analyse, evaluate and integrate into the main body of their dissertation.

Centres should ensure candidates' dissertations are within the maximum word count and proofread before final submission.

Centres should encourage candidates to ensure final dissertations are produced using the following conventions:

- size 12 font
- 1.5 line spacing
- one-side printing
- a word count per chapter included
- an overall word count included

Appendix 1: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, SQA aims 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, SQA holds 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 SQA's 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. SQA 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.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report.