



Course report 2022

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	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	9770
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	41.1	Cumulative percentage	41.1	Number of candidates	4015	Minimum mark required	51
B	Percentage	20.8	Cumulative percentage	61.9	Number of candidates	2035	Minimum mark required	42
C	Percentage	17.5	Cumulative percentage	79.4	Number of candidates	1710	Minimum mark required	33
D	Percentage	11.3	Cumulative percentage	90.7	Number of candidates	1100	Minimum mark required	24
No award	Percentage	9.3	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	910	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 1

Overall, question paper 1 was more challenging than intended.

The most popular questions in each section were as follows:

- ◆ Section 1, democracy in Scotland: questions 1(b) and 1(c)
- ◆ Section 2A, social inequality: question 2(a)
- ◆ Section 2B, crime and the law: question 2(e)
- ◆ Section 3C, world powers, question 3(a)
- ◆ Section 3D, world issues, question 3(d)

Questions 1(a), 1(c), 2(b), 2(d) and 2(f) were more demanding than intended, while 1(d) and 2(e) proved less demanding than intended. Section 1 did not perform as intended, with question 1(c) proving particularly challenging.

Although some questions were deliberately broad, some were narrower in their focus. There was evidence that some candidates may have provided pre-prepared answers, which did not always fit the specific question asked.

Question paper 2

Questions 1 and 2 performed as intended and performance was in line with the last SQA exam diet in 2019. Question 3, however, was more demanding than intended with few candidates gaining high or full marks. Candidate performance in question 3 was below the standard of 2019, and below that shown in questions 1 and 2. Many candidates provided generic, undeveloped answers, which did not demonstrate the required justifications or understanding of the sources.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2021–22.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1

Question 1(b)

Many candidates managed to provide accurate discussion of one electoral system (mostly first past the post) in their response. Some successfully introduced a second or third system as part of their analysis of the first past the post. These candidates gained higher marks than those who simply provided arguments around two or three systems in isolated paragraphs or sections. Most examples were up-to-date, many providing accurate information from the most recent UK and Scottish elections.

Question 1(d)

Many candidates successfully made the distinction between different categories of pressure group, for example insider or outsider groups. Their evaluation then centred around the abilities of each category and the techniques and campaign methods that brought success or failure. Exemplification in this area was more up-to-date than in previous years although a few candidates still used out-of-date examples.

Question 2(a)

This was the most popular option in the paper and many candidates were able to provide the wide discussion around health inequality that was expected. Factors such as class, poverty, housing, race and lifestyle were all widely covered. Some specifically Scottish exemplification was old and some of this was inaccurate. Many candidates were well prepared for this question and many concentrated on the central argument between poverty and lifestyle as the main cause of health inequality. Candidates who focused on the relationship between social conditions and personal lifestyle choices achieved higher marks than those who focused on the impact of illness on individuals or communities.

Question 2(c)

This question was completed by only a few candidates but overall, they did well. Many who did complete it discussed the opposing ideological views on various social issues such as education, health and welfare benefits. The nature of the question made historical references more likely but most still managed to comment on the current welfare debate in the UK and Scotland. Candidates who performed well in this question tended to gain high analysis and evaluation marks, rather than straightforward knowledge marks.

Question 2(e)

This was the most popular choice among the crime and the law options, and many candidates performed well. A variety of potential causes of crime were discussed, including genetic issues and the impact of society and economy. Theorists such as Merton, Durkheim and Marx were often cited.

Question 3(a)

Many candidates in this question had good, up-to-date knowledge of the ability of US citizens to influence decision-making. Many managed to discuss the reasons why distinct types of activity have greater impact at different times and in different circumstances. Some candidates also managed to focus on the ability of different socio-economic groups to influence government. Most exemplification was up-to-date, giving details of recent events such as the 2020 US election and the Capitol demonstrations in January 2021.

Most candidates who answered on China provided detailed discussion of the ineffectiveness of political participation in that country.

This question was the most popular of the world powers options. The US remains the most popular choice in the world powers section, followed by China. Few candidates answered on South Africa while there was no feedback to suggest any other world power was chosen.

Question 3(c)

Candidates completing this option tended to spend a lot of time discussing the nature of their world power's influence (for example, political, economic, military). This prevented some candidates from accessing the full marks available but many managed to focus on the specific demands of the question to gain high marks.

There was evidence that candidates may have used pre-prepared or memorised answers in question 3(c). The specific nature of the question — asking about the motives for exerting international influence — was tackled by some candidates but some were unable to expand beyond what appeared to be rehearsed answers.

Question 3(d)

The most successful candidates managed to discuss all the causes of their world issue in a comprehensive manner, showing the links between social, economic, political and military causal factors, and to draw valid conclusions around their relative importance. Some however, appeared to provide a memorised essay covering social, economic and political causes in separate and isolated sections or paragraphs.

This question was the most popular of the world issues options. Underdevelopment in Africa remains by far the most popular choice in the world issues section. A few candidates answered on international terrorism, the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and LGBTQ issues. The Syrian crisis appears to have dropped in popularity.

Question 3(e)

Most candidates who scored highly in this question tackled it from the view of an 'outside' country such as the UK and its attempts to tackle an issue such as underdevelopment in Africa. Few scored very low marks, and a few answered as a series of individual countries tackling their own domestic issue (as had been the case in 2019). Most candidates who completed this option answered either on underdevelopment in Africa or on international terrorism.

Question 3(f)

Although this question was completed by few candidates, they provided up-to-date knowledge, analysis and evaluation around the success of various international organisations. Those answering on African development scored highest in this question. United Nation agencies and their specific aid programmes were cited to good effect.

Question paper 2

Question 1—Source conclusions

Most candidates gave clear conclusions on the impact of HIV/AIDS on various aspects of African society.

Conclusion 1 — impact on education: most said that HIV/AIDS had a serious, significant or negative impact. This was successfully supported by evidence from all three sources and most candidates scored highly for the first conclusion.

Conclusion 2 — the economic impact: like conclusion 1, most candidates concluded that HIV/AIDS had a significant or serious negative impact. Evidence was provided concerning Gross Domestic Product, public spending and unemployment. Most candidates scored highly for the second conclusion.

Conclusion 3 — success in tackling HIV/AIDS: most candidates concluded that Africa had succeeded to some extent in tackling HIV/AIDS. Source B was used effectively in this conclusion as was the opening paragraph of Source A.

Overall conclusion — most candidates identified either Eswatini or Lesotho as the worst affected African country. Source B was cited very effectively. Some candidates attempted to use Source B to argue that, as Eswatini had the highest figure for Antiretroviral Therapy treatments, this showed it had been the worst affected by HIV/AIDS. This did not gain marks.

Overall, most candidates were well prepared for this type of question. They structured their answers well, interpreting and combining the source materials effectively.

Question 2 — Source objectivity

Most candidates provided appropriate evidence from within and between the sources to both support and oppose the view. Most candidates made it clear which way they were arguing and successfully linked evidence, displaying effective synthesis. Many candidates scored highly from the 8 marks available for this.

A few candidates managed to successfully provide an overall conclusion on the 'extent' to which Portugal's policy could be seen as the most effective, using phrases like 'to a large extent'.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

Many candidates answered this question by giving straightforward arguments for and against independence. Although this represented a valid response, some candidates failed to consider other possible reforms such as a move to a more federal system or in fact the scrapping of devolution altogether. This was the least commonly chosen option in section 1.

Question 1(c)

Most candidates who answered this question spent little of their answer specifically on social class. Instead, they covered three or four influential factors such as age, gender and media in isolated sections or paragraphs that did not address the central focus of the question. Some candidates tried to answer the question without any reference to social class at all. When candidates tackled social class, the knowledge and analysis provided were often extremely basic, dated or wrong.

In this instance, pre-prepared answers with separate, un-linked paragraphs on each of the main factors that influence voting behaviour, did not 'fit' the question, disadvantaging some candidates.

Question 2(b)

The wording of this question was intended to allow a very wide-ranging variety of response. Any type of impact on any group or groups in society was acceptable. Many candidates who chose this option tried to turn the question into one concerning government policies to tackle inequality, which seems to suggest that many candidates may have prepared an essay on this topic hoping for it to be included.

Question 2(d)

This was the first time a question on this piece of content had been included in the question paper and it was completed by few candidates. Many who completed it did so poorly with little knowledge of the UK rights framework. Evidence would suggest that most candidates attempting this question were not sufficiently prepared to provide a satisfactory answer.

Question 2(f)

Many candidates answering this question tried to 'flip' the question into one about the impact of crime on individuals and families. There was strong evidence that candidates may have memorised an essay in the hope of its inclusion in the paper. This disadvantaged most candidates.

Question 3(b)

Although this type of question has appeared in previous question papers, some candidates seemed less well prepared than in the past and answers tended not to contain the standard of knowledge or analysis required at Higher level. A few tried to discuss more than one group, but this was less of an issue than in previous years. Exemplification was often vague

and answers generic, repeating stereotypes without specific, accurate or up-to-date knowledge.

Question paper 2

Question 1 — Source conclusions

Conclusion 2 — the economic impact: some candidates tried to use evidence specifically relating to unemployment in an Asian country, which did not gain marks.

Conclusion 3 — success in tackling HIV/AIDS: many candidates tried to justify their conclusion by using the 33% statistic from Source C, but this referred to a global trend so no marks could be awarded.

Question 2 — Source objectivity

Some candidates did not gain marks because they misinterpreted certain parts of the source evidence. In Source B, a few candidates confused the ‘deaths per million citizens’ statistics in the graph and used them as total deaths, for example, stating that the UK had over 70 million drug deaths in 2020.

Some candidates did not interpret the pie charts in Source C correctly and in doing so failed to make an accurate numerical comparison between Singapore, Portugal and the UK.

Many candidates did not gain the 2 marks available for their overall judgement on the extent of the statement’s accuracy. Many argued that the statement was completely accurate and did not include any quantitative judgement. Such ‘absolute’ answers are not awarded marks.

Question 3 — Source reliability

Overall, many answers to this question were overly generic. Many did not provide the level of explanation required at this level.

Source A: many candidates copied the source of the information from the bottom of the page, ‘Cresh.org.uk — a research centre for scientists from the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow’. A few candidates added insightful comments about the peer review of academic work adding to reliability or about the highly-respected status of the two Scottish Universities. Most did not expand their explanation beyond the claim that ‘universities can be trusted’. Few candidates successfully made the point that as no date was included, the source was unreliable.

Source B: although some candidates correctly stated that the large sample size was a strength of the source, some also argued that this was in fact a weakness and that the sample was too small to be reliable. A few candidates correctly stated that although the source was from 2019, it was from the time of the last general election and so gave a trustworthy snapshot of that election. Some argued successfully that it was not an accurate reflection of current political views and so was out-of-date.

Some argued wrongly that YouGov is a government agency, but some successfully stated that it is a well-known and highly-respected polling organisation with a reputation and business to protect.

Source C: although some candidates correctly pointed to 2017 as being out-of-date, many did not mention this. Few candidates managed to answer regarding the fact that the source had been adapted and that this made it very unreliable.

The overall judgement as to which source was most reliable proved challenging for most candidates. Many tried to argue for one of the sources using the same points they had used earlier to criticise it as completely unreliable. Many simply re-stated the strengths of one of the sources from earlier in their response without any form of active comparison with the other two sources.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1

Centres should continue to provide candidates with up-to-date examples with which to illustrate their points. This aspect of candidate responses was improved in 2022.

Centres should try to discourage candidates from an over reliance on pre-learned, memorised, model answer type learning. This can prove successful for some candidates when the exam questions fit closely to the essays they have memorised. However, for many candidates this approach can be a disadvantage as they are unable to adapt their response to fit the specific focus of the question and are therefore unable to access the higher range of marks available. Candidates should be encouraged to learn the topic and not just a series of essays.

Candidates should be encouraged to avoid 'silo' or unconnected responses. It is perfectly valid to introduce other factors into an answer, but they must in some way relate to, and contribute to, the analyses of the question's primary focus.

Question paper 2

Centres should continue to encourage their candidates in their use of the sources in question paper 2. Responses were well structured, and candidates were able to demonstrate their skills. Questions 1 and 2 in question paper 2 were completed competently by most candidates. This is an obvious strength.

Candidates should be reminded that their overall judgement in the 'objectivity' question should contain a quantitative statement to show the 'extent' of the statement's accuracy. Vague phrases such as 'partly' or 'to an extent' will only be awarded partial marks. Absolute statements such as 'Portugal definitely is the most effective' will not be awarded marks.

Centres should encourage their candidates to expand their points and explanations in the 'reliability' question. Candidates should provide an explanation of why an aspect of a source deems it to be reliable or unreliable. Simply copying from the sources without development should also be discouraged.

Centres should remind candidates that their responses in the 'reliability' question should be specific to the three sources in the paper but that background knowledge about the source can also be awarded marks. For example, knowing that the Office for National Statistics is a state funded but independent agency is a valid point.

It should be stressed to candidates that the overall conclusion on the most reliable source of information should contain points of comparison between all three sources. A simple statement on the strength of the chosen source will receive only partial marks.

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](#).