



Course report 2024

National 5 Modern Studies

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. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 13,747

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 12,962

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	5,102	Percentage	39.4	Cumulative percentage	39.4	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	2,395	Percentage	18.5	Cumulative percentage	57.8	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	2,168	Percentage	16.7	Cumulative percentage	74.6	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	1,673	Percentage	12.9	Cumulative percentage	87.5	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	1,624	Percentage	12.5	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper was accessible for the majority of candidates, however a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

As in previous years, 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.

While overall the question paper performed as expected, 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, rather focusing on the source evaluation questions. These candidates may have been struggling with the full demand of National 5 as they were able to attempt the more straightforward 4- and 6-mark 'describe' questions but did not go on to attempt the more demanding 6- or 8-mark 'explain' questions.

The 8-mark 'knowledge' questions are the clear discriminatory questions in the paper and performance in them was mixed. Most candidates chose to answer on the trade unions and pressure groups questions.

Overall, most candidates performed well in the source evaluation questions. However, a few candidates struggled with certain elements of these questions.

Assignment

The assignment was accessible for the majority of candidates, with candidate performance overall being very good. However, a few candidates may have been presented at the wrong level.

Most candidates selected topics or issues appropriate for Modern Studies however a few did not fall within the parameters of the subject and therefore placed these candidates at a disadvantage given they could not access all marks available.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Areas that candidates performed well in and areas that candidates found demanding

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

Questions 1 and 4

These questions proved to be very accessible for candidates with most being able to access the 4 marks available. Candidates were able to describe political rights such as voting, protesting and joining a political party as well as giving accurate exemplification to support their answer.

Questions 2 and 5

These were straightforward 'describe' questions covering a core part of the course however a few candidates gave poor-quality answers and appeared to have limited understanding of the question. Many candidates did not give a description of the devolved and reserved matters that the Scottish Parliament and UK Parliament retain.

Questions 3a and 6a

Some candidates were unable to explain why trade unions or pressure groups are influential in a democracy and simply gave a description of the methods used by trade unions and pressure groups to try and gain influence. This was in contrast to excellent responses in relation to the role of committees or the House of Lords.

Questions 3b and 6b

Some candidates gave excellent answers to these questions and were able to explain why committees and the House of Lords are an important part of the Scottish and UK Parliaments respectively. However, other candidates simply described what committees and the House of Lords do.

Question 7

Many candidates were able to access a high number of marks in this question. Candidates were able to provide evidence that both supported and opposed the given viewpoint and structured their answer appropriately, making it clear where they were supporting or opposing the viewpoint. Candidates accessing high numbers of marks referred to all three sources in their answer as well as making links within and between the sources.

However, 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.

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

Question 8

Many candidates were unable to access the full range of marks because they described the consequences of social and economic inequality on individuals or families rather than on communities.

Question 10

Candidates often found it difficult to explain why unemployment can cause social and economic inequality in society and simply described other factors that could lead to inequality such as poor housing, poor health and poor educational attainment. These responses were often confused and lacked clarity in relation to the impact of unemployment.

Question 11

Many candidates gave very detailed descriptions of the consequences of crime on communities, referring to examples such as reputation, lack of amenities, closure of businesses and falling house prices. However, a few candidates were often unable to access the full range of marks as their answer was more tailored to the consequences of crime on victims and individuals.

Question 13

Many candidates were able to give full explanations in relation to why economic factors can cause crime, suitably supported with relevant, real-life exemplification. Candidates who did not perform well often related their answer to social factors that cause crime or gave generic, hypothetical exemplification.

Question 14

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

However, some candidates found this question challenging in relation to interpreting certain parts of the source evidence that could have been used to reject the other option. This was evident when considering the information in source 3 where Zainab Ahmed says 'I have had discussions with GP colleagues and almost all would support a full ban on e-cigarettes', which is rebutted by the GP survey in source 2. The pie chart highlights that 54% of GPs think e-cigarettes should be banned, which is not almost all and therefore should have been used as a rejection of option 1.

Similarly, often candidates did not take account of conflicting evidence between the viewpoint in source 3 and source 1 whereby Lukas O'Donnell in source 3 says that 'there have been no reports at all of e-cigarettes being linked to suspicious deaths', which is countered by source 1, which states that 'e-cigarettes have been linked to over 70 deaths worldwide with numbers increasing yearly'. This point should have been used as a rejection of option 2.

Section 3: Parts E and F — International Issues

Question 15

Some candidates were unable to describe two features of the political system they had studied and either did not attempt the question or gave an unrelated generic description of something relating to the world power they had studied.

Question 17

Some candidates were unable to explain why governments are effective in tackling social and economic issues and either did not attempt the question or gave a generic description of measures taken by the governments to tackle social and economic issues. Candidates who

performed well in this question were able to explain the effectiveness of the measures in terms of reducing poverty, providing support for families in need and improving educational outcomes.

Question 18

A few candidates did not identify that they were required to describe the consequences of the international conflict or issue on 'other countries and their governments' and instead they simply described the consequences within the country where the issue or conflict arose.

Question 19

Some candidates were able to give excellent answers in relation to the political causes of the conflict or issue they had studied, providing clear exemplification to support this. Candidates who answered on terrorism or underdevelopment in Africa were able to give some very insightful explanations for this question.

Question 21

Candidates who performed well in this question were able to make insightful conclusions based on the bullet point prompts. These answers were well structured with candidates making a clear conclusion, giving two pieces of evidence to support their conclusion with evaluative terminology in their answer. Successful candidates were able to make comparisons between the UAE and other countries and were able to evaluate these comparisons in relation to obesity rate, poverty rates and the crime index rate.

However, some candidates misinterpreted the data in relation to bullet point 4 — the gender equality gap. Source A highlighted that a score of 0 equals complete gender inequality, while a score of 1 indicates complete gender equality, therefore highlighting that the closer the figure to 0, the bigger the gender equality gap is. Some candidates confused the score of the UAE with greater equality, which prevented them from accessing the full range of marks available.

Assignment

Areas that candidates performed well in

Section A

Although no marks are awarded in this section, most candidates used it appropriately to identify their chosen topic or issue and set out their intentions for their research. There are no specific criteria for this section, however the majority of 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 so were clearly able to identify and discuss the two relevant methods of research that they had used to undertake their assignment, with these two methods being evident on their research sheet. These candidates were able to outline 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 or issue of research, as well as surveys they had created as part of the research process. It was also evident that 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 within their assignment, with most being able to link these findings back to their original research. This allowed candidates to access the full range of marks available.

Candidates who performed well also ensured they made clear reference to their research sheet and the methods of research that they used to gather these findings.

Section D

Many candidates were able to use data and statistics from their findings to give clear, insightful conclusions, accessing the full range of marks available. Most candidates who had completed a survey were able to support these conclusions with data that they had gathered during the research process.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Section A

A few candidates chose topics or issues that did not necessarily align with Modern Studies, which prevented them accessing the full range of marks available.

Section B

A few candidates did not include a research sheet, which prevented them accessing the marks available for this section. The research sheet is required in order to access the full range of marks in both sections B and C. The research sheet also allows the marker to gain a full understanding of the types of research that the candidate has undertaken.

A few candidates found the research methods section the most challenging and they simply gave generic descriptions of two methods of research rather than discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the two methods that they used. This was more evident from those candidates who discussed 'the internet' or had used class textbooks. Furthermore, a few candidates discussed different methods of research to those on their research sheet, preventing 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 their research sheet or failing to refer to the methods of research used when undertaking the assignment.

Section D

Many candidates did not perform well in this section due to failing to make any specific conclusions or simply repeating information from their findings sections. Some candidates found accessing the full range of marks in the conclusion section difficult. A few candidates did not attempt this section.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should ensure that they are familiar with the National 5 course specification, which is available on SQA's website. This details the mandatory content of the course, which forms the basis of what is assessed in the question paper. Centres should also aim to ensure that candidates are presented at the correct level.

Centres should re-emphasise the importance of expanding knowledge answers using specific 'real world' current examples. In relation to this, centres should consider the conflict or issue they teach in the world issue section, ensuring candidates are making reference to relevant and up-to-date exemplification. For example, some candidates are still making reference to Hiroshima in terms of the nuclear threat when there is clearly more up-to-date exemplification available.

In the international issues section, it is imperative that candidates state clearly the world power or international conflict or issue they have studied.

Candidates should be reminded 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to compare statistics, show changes over time, show differences between ethnic groups, genders, countries, and to make evaluative comments such as 'significant increase or decrease' and 'showing similarities or differences' when analysing information in source evaluation questions. This will also 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 explicitly 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 will support the candidate in terms of giving a more structured response allowing marks to be allocated accordingly.

Centres should also ensure that candidates understand the requirements of the 'options' question in relation to part (iii) — 'Explain why you did not choose the other option'. This can often confuse candidates and they consequently give incorrect or irrelevant evidence. The requirements for this question have not changed in recent years and candidates should be encouraged to look within and between sources for conflicting evidence to support their rejection of the other option.

Further information to support centres can be found in the Understanding Standards section of SQA's website, where exemplar materials and audio presentations are available.

Assignment

Centres should ensure that candidates are prepared appropriately for the assignment, with relevant time given to both the research and production of evidence stages.

Centres should give reasonable assistance on the types of topic or issue that would be suitable and guide candidates on the availability and accessibility of potential methods of research. It is imperative that centres ensure that candidates understand that some topics such as the death penalty, euthanasia and the legalisation of cannabis can often result in candidates failing to access the full range of marks available. This occurs when candidates find themselves approaching it from a moral and/or philosophical perspective that is more suited to RMPS. The same applies to themes such as climate change or GM crops or foods as this can often lead to a more geographical or biological assignment. Similarly, candidates should be discouraged from researching topics or issues that could be considered historical.

Candidates should be encouraged to consider their own research when producing their evidence and refer to this throughout their assignment. Candidates who perform well are able to evaluate the effectiveness of their chosen methods, commenting on their specific strengths and weaknesses. Candidates should also refer to their own research when presenting their findings in order to access the full range of marks available. In terms of conclusions, candidates should be encouraged to use evaluative terminology to reach a well-supported conclusion, rather than simply repeating a finding.

Centres should ensure that candidates include their research sheet with their assignment so that they can access the full range of marks. Centres should also remind candidates that the research sheet should be a maximum of two sides of A4. However, it is worth noting that candidates who include a wide range of evidence on their research sheet are more inclined to copy this into their assignment, which will prevent them from accessing the full range of marks available.

Further information to support centres can be found in the Understanding Standards section of SQA's website, where exemplar materials and audio presentations are available. Additional candidate exemplars and commentaries from 2024 will be made available during this session.

Appendix: 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.

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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).