



Course report 2024

Advanced Higher 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: 1,109

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,116

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	373	Percentage	33.4	Cumulative percentage	33.4	Minimum mark required	97
B	Number of candidates	276	Percentage	24.7	Cumulative percentage	58.2	Minimum mark required	83
C	Number of candidates	203	Percentage	18.2	Cumulative percentage	76.3	Minimum mark required	69
D	Number of candidates	140	Percentage	12.5	Cumulative percentage	88.9	Minimum mark required	55
No award	Number of candidates	124	Percentage	11.1	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 performed broadly in line with expectations with feedback suggesting it was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand. Most candidates completed the two required parts of the question paper in the allocated time. However, some extended-response questions in part A were perceived to be more demanding for a few candidates.

Section 1: Political issues and research methods was the second most popular area of study with a few candidates attempting questions from this section. In this section, topic A: power and influence (question 1) and topic B: political ideology (question 2) were the most popular questions.

Section 2: Law and order and research methods remains the most popular area of study with most candidates attempting questions from this section. In this section, topic B: understanding criminal behaviour (question 7) and topic C: responses by society to crime (question 8) were the most popular questions.

Section 3: Social inequality and research methods remains the least popular area of study. A very small number of candidates attempted questions from this section.

Extended-responses (questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

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 in the questions, while also attempting to integrate international comparisons. Direction in questions to include ‘reference to the UK/Scotland and any other country/countries you have studied’ supported candidates in adopting a comparative approach. The quality of the comparative analysis and evaluation acted to differentiate candidates.

Research methods (questions 4, 9 and 14)

The research methods question across the three sections referred to the same research methods — a longitudinal study and interviews. Candidates appeared familiar with the research methods and most engaged well with the question. The extent of engagement with the scenario in each question and the subsequent quality of analysis, evaluation, reference to social science research, and quality of overall conclusion acted to differentiate candidates.

Source evaluation questions (questions 5, 10 and 15)

Source questions across the three sections included sources that used the research method of participant observation. 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.

Overall, candidate performance in the question paper this year was lower than the previous year.

Project–dissertation

The project–dissertation performed as expected. As in previous years, most candidates performed better in the project–dissertation than the question paper.

Most candidates selected titles from the ‘Advanced Higher Modern Studies Approved List of Dissertations’ document. However, candidates who developed their own dissertation titles often produced insightful dissertations on contemporary issues, which should be encouraged.

Most candidates were familiar with the project–dissertation’s assessment criteria and developed an approach and structure to fit 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 showing evidence of primary research and/or statistical information
- ◆ a bibliography

Overall, candidate performance in the project–dissertation this year was higher than the previous year.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Many candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding of the political and social issues raised in the extended-response questions.

Extended-responses (questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

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

Analysis: candidates identified and analysed key factors, which they developed and related to the question throughout the main body of the response. They presented contemporary supporting evidence to support their analysis and evaluation and attributed the source or origin. In their analysis of key issues, candidates 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: candidates compared the UK/Scotland with a relevant comparator country or countries throughout the essay. In their evaluative and overall conclusions, candidates commented on the extent of difference or similarity between the UK/Scotland and the comparator country or countries cited.

Evaluation: candidates provided implicit as well as explicit conclusions and considered and evaluated alternative views or theories in relation to the question. Candidates made overall conclusions, which they justified and then included a reason for rejecting or accepting alternative arguments.

Synthesising information to structure and sustain lines of argument: candidates had a clear line of argument that flowed from an organised and logical sequence of ideas. They offered a developed conclusion, rather than a summary, which directly addressed the question and offered a judgement based on the evidence presented.

Research methods (questions 4, 9 and 14)

Most candidates correctly interpreted that the question required a comparison between the two given research methods. High-quality responses contained features of the following:

Analysis: candidates produced quality analysis that linked developed points to the scenario stated in the question. Additionally, quality responses showed knowledge of the benefits and limitations of using both a longitudinal study and interviews for research. High-quality analysis included supporting evidence from candidates' own knowledge, research experience or use of the method(s) in question in academic or contemporary research.

Evaluation: candidates produced quality responses that 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.

Candidates commented on common ethical issues such as informed consent, harm, confidentiality and anonymity.

Conclusion: candidates produced quality conclusions that offered a clear judgement outlining their preferred method in relation to the issue. Candidates clearly stated their justification for preferring one method and reasons for rejecting the other method(s).

Source evaluation questions (questions 5, 10 and 15)

Most 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: candidates were able to show 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: candidates used supporting evidence drawn from the source and their own knowledge of social science research. They made reference to alternative approaches that would increase the trustworthiness of the source.

Conclusion: candidates wrote 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: candidates included 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. Candidates included justification of the aims and an outline of the line of argument and coverage to come.
- ◆ Evaluating research methodology: candidates offered a balanced evaluation of the two to three methods they used. They offered analysis and evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the methods, discussion of ethical issues, and considerations of ways in which the use of one of the methods could be improved upon.
- ◆ Using a wide range of sources of information: in high-quality dissertations, candidates used a wide and varied range of both primary and secondary sources of information. They accurately referenced primary sources of information by detailing the provenance of the approach used.
- ◆ Analysing the issue: candidates analysed key issues leading to evaluative comments, which they supported with contemporary evidence, case studies, statistics, theories or examples. High-quality dissertations acknowledged and evaluated alternative views, perspectives and/or theories.
- ◆ Evaluating arguments and evidence: in quality dissertations, candidates included implicit and explicit evaluations and conclusions. They presented arguments that supported the stated hypothesis, as well as alternative views, 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: in quality dissertations, candidates made evaluations or conclusions consistently in and at the end of each chapter as well as in the overall conclusion. Points raised in aims and/or chapters built towards and linked to the overall conclusion.
- ◆ Organising, presenting and referencing findings using appropriate conventions: most candidates who achieved high or full marks in this element produced 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

Part A — Extended-responses (questions 1–3, 6–8 and 11–13)

Some candidates did not refer to an international comparator(s) or made only cursory reference to another country other than Scotland or the UK. In weaker responses, candidates described rather than analysed the issue, lacked supporting evidence and presented one-sided responses. In weaker responses, candidates also attempted to turn questions to fit pre-prepared answers rather than answering the question set.

A few candidates found the following extended-response questions demanding:

- ◆ Question 2 — Political ideology: ‘Approaches to contemporary political issues are no longer bound by ideology.’ Discuss...
Some candidate responses adopted a descriptive, rather than critically balanced, approach to issues and contained little or no international evidence. Weaker responses also cited historic evidence and examples.
- ◆ Question 7 — Understanding criminal behaviour: ‘The cost of crime cannot be underestimated.’ Discuss...
Some candidate responses showed appropriate detail and knowledge of the topic but did not directly engage with the question set. This led to responses that provided a one-sided response, singularly accepting that ‘crime cannot be underestimated’ without considering counter-points, views or perspectives.
- ◆ Question 8 — Responses by society to crime: ‘Custodial responses to crime are increasingly successful.’ Discuss...
Some candidate responses provided a one-sided response that argued simplistically that prisons in the UK are ‘bad’, Scandinavian prisons are ‘good’, and provided little or no recognition of the positive, purposeful activity happening in penal settings in the UK. Weaker responses also tended to ignore custodial responses and focused solely on non-custodial, therefore not engaging with the question.

Part B — Research methods (questions 4, 9 and 14)

Some candidate responses did not relate the methods stated to the scenario in question. Some candidates also lacked an understanding of longitudinal studies and their strengths or

their limitations. In these cases, analysis was superficial or inaccurate and did not fully engage with the question.

Project-dissertation

A few candidates found the following areas in the project-dissertation demanding:

- ◆ 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 continue to be based on research gathered from a limited number of websites.
- ◆ Analysing the issue: some candidates adopted a weak, one-sided approach to their hypothesis, rather than objectively assessing evidence and arguments in a balanced manner. Such an approach, which fails to consider alternative viewpoints, perspectives or theories, reduces the scope for gaining marks and should be discouraged.
- ◆ Evaluating arguments and evidence: a few candidates did not provide evaluative comments or conclusions at the end of each aim and/or chapter.
- ◆ Synthesising information to develop a sustained and coherent line of argument, leading to a conclusion, supported by evidence: some candidates provided very brief overall conclusions that summarised points and did not make any substantive judgements or engage with their original hypothesis.

Other issues

A few candidates did not word aims as questions, leading to descriptive responses.

A few candidates did not make full use of the word count available and self-penalised as a result. Conversely, a few candidates exceeded the maximum word count by more than 10% and therefore incurred a penalty.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres should ensure all candidates are fully familiar with all relevant supporting documentation for Advanced Higher Modern Studies. Centres should also ensure candidates are familiar with the Advanced Higher Modern Studies assessable criteria used 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. Centres should continue to direct candidates to focus on answering the questions set in the question paper and avoid attempting to turn the questions or provide pre-prepared responses.

Research methods questions

Centres should aim to prepare candidates adequately by ensuring that all key research methods are covered. Centres should ensure candidates are aware of the terms validity and reliability in relation to research and ensure they apply these terms accurately when referring to them in their responses. Analysis of issues and evaluative comments should be related to the research scenario stipulated in the question to maximise marks.

Source-based questions

Centres should encourage candidates to critically analyse and evaluate sources. Candidates should be discouraged from simply describing source content or research methodology and should critically evaluate the source in relation to factors including currency, authority, accuracy, relevance and purpose, as well as any methodological approaches used or referred to in the source.

Project–dissertation

Centres can assist candidates in the planning stage of the project–dissertation by ensuring they adopt appropriate hypothesis and aims. To support this process, centres may wish to 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. Where centres are unsure about hypothesis, title or aims candidates develop themselves, they may wish to 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 ...’, and ‘To examine the extent to which ...’ when formulating their aims and chapter titles. A two- or three-chapter approach is advised.

Candidates should be directed to provide an evaluation of two to three research methods used in the production of their project–dissertation. Analysis and evaluation 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. Where appropriate candidates should be encouraged to carry out primary research.

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. Details on the provenance of appendix evidence should be included.

Centres should ensure candidates’ dissertations are within the maximum word count.

Centres should support candidates by proofreading project–dissertations 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-sided printing
- ◆ a word count per chapter included
- ◆ an overall word count included

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](#).