



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	History
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Paper 1

In general, markers felt that the standard was fair to good across the essays marked. There was evidence of excellence from a larger number of candidates, but also an increased number of candidates failing. The vast majority of candidates managed to answer two questions in the time allocation. The level of knowledge was generally very good and many more candidates had been effectively trained to gain structure marks. Argument marks continue to be the area where clear differentiation between candidates can be made.

The trend to greater diversification of topics taught continued with more centres answering questions on the Atlantic Slave Trade and The Crusades, to name but two. Markers felt that the wording of the questions was clear and unambiguous. A number of markers commented on candidates who were presented at Higher, but did not have the language skills to effectively deal with the demands of essay writing.

Paper 2

In general, markers felt that the examination paper was fair, although there were a number of comments about the difficulty of question three across the five contexts. Many markers felt that candidates performed better than last year, with far fewer basic answers.

There was evidence of excellence from a large number of centres. The importance of effective preparation of candidates was commented on by a number of markers this year. Where candidates had not been prepared, for example to complete an overall comparison, marks were lost.

There were some comments regarding the lack of recalled knowledge in the ten mark questions. The evidence continues to suggest that the majority of candidates attempt The Scottish Wars of Independence, Migration and Empire and The Impact of the Great War topics.

Fewer candidates attempt The Age of Reformation and The Treaty of Union topics, though numbers here are still healthy. As for Paper 1, there were a number of comments about presenting candidates at the wrong level in Paper 2.

Extended Essay

The overall quality of candidate responses was judged fair to very good by the vast majority of markers this year. Candidates chose relevant and appropriate essay titles, showed good knowledge, and commented effectively on the information given.

Analysis of the issues chosen was of a high quality in a significant number of essays. The vast majority of essays were of a good length, and there was significant evidence of

excellent preparation by the vast majority of centres presenting candidates. There was a very good spread of topics attempted this year, ranging from the Medieval Church to the end of the Cold War. There seemed to be a move away from the Nazi topic in extended essays

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

Many markers commented on overall improvement in structure marks. Introductions, in particular, were improved with candidates showing clear context, line of argument and factors for discussion. Markers also commented that candidates had a clear idea on how to structure a discursive essay with clear introduction, development and conclusion.

Although it is not mandatory for success, a number of markers commented favourably on candidates who were able to incorporate historiography into the fabric of their essays. This tended to enhance the argument mark. Where candidates performed well, it was due to good preparation from centres — candidates clearly understood the techniques of essay writing.

- ◆ Q10: many candidates showed good definition of terms as well as good knowledge of the relevant Acts of Parliament and developments extending democracy in Britain.
- ◆ Q11: many candidates showed good knowledge and focused directly on how the Liberal Reforms improved the lives of the British people.
- ◆ Q12: many candidates showed excellent knowledge and tailored it effectively to answer the posed question on Labour Reforms 1945–51.
- ◆ Q23: few candidates chose the French Revolution, but those who did produced very effective responses to this question on the end of the Directory in 1799.
- ◆ Q26: many candidates produced good responses to the question on the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic and their role in the rise of the Nazi Party.
- ◆ Q27: many candidates answered this question, on the Nazi maintenance of power, 'particularly well'.
- ◆ Qs 31–22 (Russia 1881-1921): some candidates produced excellent responses to these essay questions.
- ◆ Q34: many candidates produced 'excellent responses' on the KKK and obstacles to Civil Rights in America before 1941.
- ◆ Qs 40–42 (The Cold War 1945-1989): some candidates produced excellent responses to these essay questions.

Paper 2

There were a lot of positive comments about centres that had clearly prepared candidates well in terms of knowledge and skills. Some markers also commented favourably that topics like Migration and Empire allowed local examples to be given as recall.

Many markers commented that the 'Comparison' questions were well completed, with good teasing-out of the individual points of similarity/difference between the sources.

There were also many comments about the 'How useful...' questions, with good interpretation of content and application of relevant recall in terms of the posed question. The overall feeling was that this year there was a big improvement in performance with this type of question.

The 'How far ...' and 'How fully ...' questions saw many candidates writing much more than last year. There was far greater detail and relevance in many of the responses. There was also encouraging evidence of centres getting candidates to comment on the factual information in terms of the question asked.

Extended essay

Many markers commented favourably on the quality of argument and evaluation in many essays this year. Some topics that produced high quality work this year include the post-war Labour reforms, Women and the Vote, the reasons for calling the Crusade, and obstacles to German nationalism.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

Some markers continued to comment on the inability of some candidates to get to grips with the question asked. Some candidates wanted to answer a question that they clearly remembered from their coursework, rather than the question in front of them. This led to generalised comment or analysis that was not relevant to the question that was posed. Given the large number of marks (10) allocated to argument, such essays received poor overall marks.

- ◆ Question 10: Democracy: some candidates muddled up issues 1 and 2. Also, many candidates wasted time in looking at the 1832 Reform Act when the topic dates from 1851.
- ◆ Qs 11 and 12: Liberal Reforms and Labour Reforms: A small number of candidates confused events between 1906-14 and 1945-1951.
- ◆ Q25: some candidates answered this question as an issue 1 question. Other candidates produced a narrative rather than providing a judgement as to the extent of German nationalism by 1850.

- ◆ Q26: some candidates answered as if the question was just about the failure of the Weimar Republic, rather than relating this to the reasons for the rise of the Nazis.
- ◆ Q31: some candidates did not differentiate between the working-class and peasants in looking at the causes of the 1905 Revolution. Other candidates decided to write about the 1917 Revolution, rather than the Revolution in the title of the essay.
- ◆ Q35: some candidates did not mention effective Black Leaders and produced generalised answers.
- ◆ Q36: some candidates gave a narrative on the campaigns of Civil Rights organisations rather than focusing on the improvements these campaigns made to the lives of black Americans.
- ◆ Q37: some candidates just focused on Hitler rather than fascist leaders (including Mussolini) as identified in the question. Some candidates also failed to understand the word 'diplomacy' in the question.
- ◆ Q39: some candidates interpreted the question as what led up to war rather than events subsequent to the occupation of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia and the outbreak of war in 1939.
- ◆ Q40: some candidates described the ways in which the Soviet Union controlled Eastern Europe rather than assessing its effectiveness.
- ◆ Q41: some candidates described the Superpowers' attempts to manage the Cold War, rather than evaluating them.

Paper 2

Some candidates struggled to evaluate the Origin and Purpose of the sources in the 'How useful ...' question.

Many candidates are missing out the overall comparison, which can be awarded up to two marks, in the 'Comparison' question.

The 'How far ...' question was problematic for many candidates this year. This was commented on as being an issue by many markers across all five of the contexts in the examination paper, although there were more comments that focused on the demands of The Wars of Independence and The Impact of the Great War contexts.

In particular there were concerns at the vagueness of recall and irrelevance of recall that was applied to all of these questions. In the case of The Wars of Independence and The Impact of the Great Wars contexts, candidates were frequently choosing recalled information that was outwith the timeframes indicated by the questions. In the case of the Migration and Empire question, candidates frequently ignored the word 'economic' and gave very broad answers.

A smaller number of markers identified the 'How fully ...' question as also being problematic for some candidates this year. Some candidates did not appear to have the wide knowledge required at this level. Some candidates had difficulty with the terms, such as politics in The Impact of Great War topic, of the question.

In both the 'How far ...' and 'How fully ...' questions a minority of candidates persist in commenting on the provenance of the sources. This is a waste of time and gains no marks in the contextualise questions.

Time management was an issue for a small number of candidates who failed to complete the examination paper.

Extended Essay

The selection of inappropriate essay titles continues to be a problem for a small number of candidates. Descriptive and overly complex issues lead to descriptive and confused essays that are not credited highly in the argument mark in particular.

Some candidates did not produce quality introductions or conclusions. These areas count for up to six marks in the criterion-referenced mark scheme and are neglected at the candidate's peril. A number of markers commented on the lack of a line of argument in a number of essays.

The failure to include comment in terms of the question and lack of argument in the main body of the essay was a concern in a number of essays. Such essays tended to give a narrative of the historical development/issue they were tackling, and scored poorly in the argument mark as a result.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Paper 1

Centres are reminded that in any one year, three of the six essay issues identified in each context are sampled. Centres need to cover at least four of the six issues to ensure that candidates can do at least one essay from the sample. Centres are advised that more than four issues should be studied to ensure that candidates have a choice in the examination.

Support for candidates in structuring their essays is time well spent. A clear introduction that provides context of the issue, a clear line of argument that addresses the posed question, and factors that the candidate will develop in the answer, provides the marker with a clear signpost of the candidate's intentions. It also helps the candidate keep the posed question in mind. This can help when developing the comment/argument in terms of the question given, rather than the question that is hoped for. Similarly, a clear conclusion that sums up the arguments developed in the essay, and then provides an overall judgement in terms of the question posed, is good practice and should be encouraged.

Developing argument continues to challenge some candidates. Techniques to ensure focus on the posed question, through signposting paragraphs and/or encouraging candidates to comment/debate after they have described events is to be encouraged. Adding value by leading with the argument and using the knowledge to provide evidence in support of the argument is a high-order skill, and is also encouraged. Above all, working on the skills of flexibility in how candidates answer different questions brings benefits. There is a huge amount of evidence of existing good practice across centres already, but many candidates continue to struggle with these skills.

Paper 2

Centres are reminded that the 'How fully ...' and 'How far ...' questions are derived from the issues and sub-issues identified in the Specimen Question Paper that is to be found on the Higher History page of the SQA website.

The 'How fully ...' question stem assesses one quarter of the course content, therefore allowing a wide range of differing recall to be applied.

The 'How far ...' question stem assesses one twelfth of the course content, providing a differentiating question that assesses a more specific range of knowledge.

The sub-issues identified in the Specimen Question Paper are also used to derive the 'How useful ...' questions. It is hoped that this will make the paper more accessible, as the sub-issues are in the public domain. The Comparison question will continue to relate to the course content in the Arrangements document.

Comparison question

Candidates would benefit from training in the overall comparison. This is more than a simple 'Sources A and B agree about the Scots' attempts to protect their independence after the death of Alexander III.' Some basic identification of the areas of difference and similarity needs to be built into the overall comparison. So, for example, 'Sources A and B largely agree as they both talk about the Treaty of Birgham and the attempts of the Guardians to maintain independence through articles that recognised Scotland and England as separate kingdoms', would be considered a decent overall comparison and worthy of credit. This could then be built upon as individual points of similarity are built upon.

How useful question

Candidates would benefit from more training in using Origin and Purpose of the source. Candidates should move away from Standard Grade notation where possible and try to comment in terms of the contemporary nature of the sources and whether this makes the source more or less useful as a source of evidence (in terms of the question posed). Obviously this may vary depending on the source and period tackled by the individual candidates.

The Purpose of the source again varies depending on what is in front of the candidate, but some adaptability in thinking about what the source is there for — is it a personal record,

diary, piece of propaganda with an agenda? — and how this makes the source useful (in terms of the question posed) should be considered.

‘How far ...’ and ‘How fully ...’ questions

The general issue with both questions is the tendency of candidates to simply extract evidence and then do nothing with it. This applies to both source information and recalled information. If the information is simply sitting there and is doing nothing to help answer the question, it is difficult to give credit other than as listing. With the ten-mark questions this can have very large impact on the overall mark achieved.

Using Source E from The Impact of the Great War topic

If a candidate simply quoted that, ‘the Independent Labour Party emerged as the natural successor to Liberalism’, this is doing very little to answer the question, although the information extracted is perfectly correct. This may get a cumulative mark for listing information if there are other points simply described in the response.

Simply noting that, ‘the war had a big impact on politics in Scotland as the source explains, as the Independent Labour Party emerged as a political force and replaced the Liberal Party in Scotland’, is immediately tying the information to the question. This was credited.

The use of recall to explain the source is also a good way of explaining and developing the source point, as well as giving the opportunity of gaining two marks. So, ‘the war had a big impact on politics in Scotland as the source explains, as the Independent Labour party emerged as a political force and replaced the Liberal Party in Scotland. This is understandable as, in places like Glasgow, the ILP had supported working class demands for higher wages and even conscientious objection, while the Liberals were increasingly associated with the employers.’ The recall builds on the source, explains it, and gets further credit.

Extended Essay

Issue selection is crucial in the successful completion of the Extended Essay. A number of candidates continue to select issues that lead to descriptive answers. Examples from this year include: ‘Describe why America became involved in the Vietnam war and describe the consequences of their involvement’, ‘Why did James VII and II have a desire to secure and why was this difficult for him when he came to the throne?’ and ‘Why did the Liberals Reform?’

Other issues can be far more complex and confusing to candidates, such as: ‘To what extent did the impact of the activities of Scottish emigrants on native societies affect the impact of Scots on the Empire as a whole?’ Support by lecturers/teachers helping candidates to select appropriate issues is time well spent, as a good question leads to assessment and evaluation of historical issues. The exam paper is a good starting point to see appropriate questions that are accessible to candidates.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	9379
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	9831
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	29.0%	29.0%	2855	67
B	28.2%	57.3%	2776	58
C	21.9%	79.2%	2154	50
D	6.6%	85.8%	646	46
No award	14.2%	100.0%	1400	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.