



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	History
Level	Advanced 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

The standard of work produced was very strong this year. The 2010 exam has seen confidence in writing grow. The team was impressed by the diversity of approach in the dissertations and the quality of some of the exam papers and the obvious dedication and commitment to the subject from teachers/lecturers and pupils/students alike. The majority of centres and candidates are now very much aware of the demands of this exam and are presenting some excellent work in all component parts. The pass rate reflects both that endeavour and an exam which has allowed candidates to write full, considered and academic work.

This report will highlight the dissertations in the first instance as this is where candidates have the time to hone their historical skills and really gain marks.

General comments on Dissertations

Titles

The majority of dissertation titles were selected from the approved list which covers the main topics and issues in each field. Dissertations that used titles that have been discontinued proved unsatisfactory in one or more respects.

Structure

Candidates on the whole had moved away from the narrative driven descriptive piece. With the use of chapter headings they found it easier to focus on the issues and to present their analysis of them. Where candidates used the essay/narrative style approach, they were more likely to lose track of their arguments.

Word length

Most candidates are now writing to the word limit and not beyond. Centres are advising candidates well. The dissertation has to be, in part, a test of the selection skills of the candidate and the word limit allows for that. The significant weakness which stood out once again in the Markers' reports was the major shortage in length rather than excess wordage. Candidates who wrote to a word count of 3,000 words were not able to present the substance required (producing in some instances more of a Higher response), and even at 3,600 words they have omitted ten percent of the possible content.

Footnotes and bibliography

There was good demonstration of the expected application of footnoting. Only a few did still not cite sources properly, and even fewer attempted to put text into the footnotes in order to remedy an excessive word count. Those really stood out as contravening the expected structure of the piece, and certainly did not enhance their work. Footnoting is only expected to reference sources, and (in the exceptional case) to define or explain an unusual term.

Plagiarism

It is worth repeating a point made year on year. Markers are quick to recognise derivative work (and not only if taken from standard texts) and where this was recognised the mark reflected this. Indeed, the thoroughness of the piece came into question and the research proved obviously limited.

Internet sources provided the most overt comments from Markers. Overuse of material from less than rigorous authorities in an unquestioning manner by the candidates will not gain them marks. Also, downloading material en masse will incur significant penalties and is considered malpractice; indeed one particularly blatant instance, which was referred to the Malpractice Panel, received no marks at all.

Typography and proof reading

Many Markers' reports referred to wordprocessed work that was extremely difficult to read. The majority of candidates did demonstrate professional standards and courtesy and used double-line spacing and a font size of 11 or 12 point. While other candidates put much time and effort into the dissertation, their first substantial piece of historical research, it was disappointing that their quality of presentation made life unduly hard for Markers.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Field of study 1: Northern Britain from the Romans to AD 1000

Dissertations

The majority of the titles were on Vikings and Celts this year. Markers considered the quality of argument generally improved, with good analysis which was more consistent across the centres and literacy uniformly better. For some there was still reluctance to go beyond the most obvious response.

Candidates did refer to the main authorities, the width of reading was most limited in those tackling research on the Romans — and it is suggested that candidates should become more familiar with the revised views of the Flavian period. However lesser known texts were employed to good effect especially in Viking dissertations.

As in many fields the word length was commented on 'too many happy to settle for 3,700, thereby missing 10%', but on the plus side 'over 90% within a whisker of 4,000 words' which pleased the team. The quality of written work was commended and there were outstanding pieces of research on Iron Age society and Celtic society which were a pleasure to read.

Scripts

There was a good standard in Part 1; indeed it was felt to be better than previous years. The essays on the whole were well done. It was refreshing to find that some took a totally different approach, engaging with the debate and achieving well. There were some excellent answers to essay question 2. Overall the standard of source work was improved this year. The expected technique was readily applied and certainly was a support for weaker candidates.

Field of Study 2: Scottish Independence (1286–1329)

Dissertations

Overall there was a narrower selection of titles this year, most coming from the central area of the Course. Popular topics were Edward I and the Great Cause, Wallace's role/importance and the military achievements of Bruce and Balliol. The quality of argument was variable, ranging from exceptionally sophisticated pieces of work to many with 'bolt on' analysis.

Scripts

The best candidates challenged the use of 'lenient' in Essay Question 4. In general, candidates answered the source questions effectively and these were better done than the essays.

Field of Study 3: The Renaissance in Italy in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries

No candidates.

Field of Study 4: Georgians and Jacobites: Scotland (1715–1800)

Dissertations

There was, in the main, a good standard of work here but a variety in presentation did impact on grades. Clear structure/format, chapter headings, double-spacing, accurate footnoting and bibliography benefited candidates immensely. These are indeed not high order tasks but clear instruction is likely to give all candidates the best possible chance to succeed. As was commented, 'be the Marker's friend'.

Scripts

The structure of essays was on the whole good and candidates were well prepared for the source questions.

Field of Study 5: 'The House Divided': USA (1850–1865)

Dissertations

The position and identity of Blacks was often done well, as were aspects of the war itself, with 'Some excellent work on the forging of the cultural identity by the Southern Slaves, and on the reasons for the casualty rates in the American Civil War'. In the best cases there was a heightened awareness of a variety of historians, though the worst did not name them at all. Having said that, the standard was recognised as better than last year with more candidates analysing rather than merely describing. Markers commented that there was 'generally a high degree of analysis ...impressive for 17/18 year olds'.

Most candidates were writing to the expected length but brevity did cause some concern. Candidates benefited themselves by proof reading their work closely, using chapters and really considering the introduction as a means of setting out the arguments and to avoid a formulaic approach.

Scripts

Essay structure was overall good and source questions gained the expected responses. Where there was an obvious attempt to engage with the essay questions, candidates achieved well. Many had adopted the required answering technique for sources to good effect.

Field of study 6: Japan: From Medieval to Modern State (1850s–1920)

Dissertations

There was a broad selection of titles which was most encouraging. Candidates employed a 'refreshingly wide range of sources' and in many cases there was a real engagement with research. In the best cases there was an authentic use of historiography. The quality of argument varied significantly but most avoided the trap of the narrative. The structure was good in most cases.

Most candidates attempted to use quotes well.

Scripts

Well prepared candidates performed well in both essays and sources using the expected approaches.

Field of study 7: Germany: Versailles to the Outbreak of the Second World War

Dissertations

Overall there was a good selection of titles which represented the range of issues in this field of study. Analysis of the effectiveness of propaganda in the Nazi state, an issue which has often produced turgid, narrative dissertations in past years, was much better done this year, and genuine attempts were made to assess effectiveness rather than simply catalogue a range of methodology. Similarly the work on the economic consequences of hyper-inflation was done well by able candidates.

This year the quality of argument was improved. There was a shift away from the narrative with a greater amount following the expected discussion points. Where some adopted the interesting approach of using historians' comments to direct the narrative there was the danger of losing sight of the candidates' views. Some candidates produced high order argument and debate which came from extensive reading and one Marker commented on a stunning piece of work on Weimar culture.

Legitimate quotes were frequently seen but in many cases served merely to illustrate rather than further the analysis.

Word length was not problematic although a few were under 3,500 words which prevented the depth and sustained analysis required. Markers did note that the presentation of work varied and candidates should be aware that SQA expects a word count, with a page total at the bottom of each page.

Overall, candidates who tackled the more complicated issues seemed to rise to the challenge. There was demonstration of mature thought and reflection, and some exhibited an excellent language and writing style.

Scripts

Essays ranged in quality but there were many excellent ones, and many of the best essays were outstanding. Most candidates understood the principal aims of the questions and attempted to answer using relevant knowledge in an appropriate structure. There were some excellent responses with impressive levels of knowledge and understanding, clearly based on substantial reading and candidates were confident enough to engage with all the implications of the question and the current historiography. The responses to source questions were good and often highly effective. Candidates followed the process well and most showed an understanding of the sources and their context. Many candidates displayed wide reading in their responses and relevant use of historians' views. Overall the standard was generally good, and many, many candidates produced excellent work.

Field of Study 8: South Africa (1910–1984)

Dissertations

Responses as a whole were of a better quality this year, because candidates were providing a more succinct context, using a wider range of historical sources and showing a greater willingness to engage with historical debate rather than merely using this as evidence. The result was, on the whole, work which was much more analytical and less dependent on narrative. It was good to see the breadth of topics tackled and in particular new titles — with a focus on Smuts and Mandela — done well. Markers did flag up those who were using old titles which had been deliberately revised.

Candidates wrote to the word limit, and most used the expected conventions in presentation. Some would benefit from better use of footnoting and bibliography, and (on a practical note) double-line spacing.

Nonetheless, centres were obviously responding positively to previous PA reports. 'There is encouraging evidence of good teaching and enthusiasm for the South Africa study'.

Scripts

Essay Question 2 was answered well and candidates succeeded in focusing on development in the 1940s rather than the years earlier. There were some outstanding answers on the role of organised black labour in the revival of African resistance in the 1970s reflecting a good knowledge of the later part of the Course. The technique on source answering was improved and candidates found the sources accessible.

Field of Study 9: Soviet Union (1917–53)

Dissertations

There was a wide variety of titles selected, the most popular being the Civil War, Stalin's rise to power and the Purges. Those questions which had key terms in the title — eg personality, rational — were well executed only where the candidate worked from a considered definition, which is crucial to good argument and analysis. Most Markers felt that

introductions and conclusions were much better written and focused on the question. There were more with unusual structures, taking fresh approaches to questions, and really engaging with the issues.

Many candidates had a clear structure which they followed throughout their dissertation, and the use of chapters certainly helped sustain focus. It is difficult to sustain an essay style at this level and Markers strongly recommend chapter headings. Very few candidates slipped into narrative, an improvement on last year, and thoroughness in selection of appropriate evidence was matched by developed analysis and synthesis. Historical sources, in the main, were used to develop argument rather than merely illustrate a point.

Selection of evidence in this field of study is vital. There is certainly an abundance of websites, but not all are robust. Candidates who wrote well had evaluated the merits of some of the more extreme views and glib commentaries which can appear. The internet can give a superficial awareness and understanding and careful guidance is required.

Scripts

The essays were well tackled in the main and the source work was particularly strong. The process is being well taught in source answers and commentary on provenance was better this year.

Field of Study 10: Spanish Civil War (1931–39)

Dissertations

There was a good selection of titles with a wider variety than last year and most dissertations drove the answer with argument and detailed analysis.

Scripts

Candidates produced good essays which addressed the questions and certainly had a sound understanding of the technique in answering source questions.

Field of Study 11: Britain at War and Peace (1939–51)

Dissertations

The titles were selected from the approved list and this year the most popular were those relating to Churchill and to the Bomber Offensive. The best work was on these subjects. The quality of argument was good with most candidates trying to adopt a conscientiously analytical approach although they do need to be aware that historical opinions should not be used for illustration alone. Evidence was carefully and successfully selected and the quality of detail did reflect wide reading.

The length of work was good with only one candidate writing over 4,000 words. As in all fields there was mention of the need for double-spacing and standard font size.

Scripts

There were some outstanding essays and in general the response of candidates to Part 1 was very good. Sources were tackled successfully in the main and the required technique was applied.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Field of Study 1: Northern Britain from the Romans to AD 1000

Dissertations

There was only one badly chosen title which led to a poor response. Three candidates choose from an outdated list of titles which handicapped their efforts.

Scripts

Candidates would benefit by taking a few minutes to plan essays in order to directly answer the question set, not the one they would have liked. It would help them focus on the question. The sources were approached well. In Question 2 on Agricola many candidates displayed little awareness of post-2000 publications. Provenance proved demanding and some candidates had an overwhelming amount of their own knowledge but did not tackle the sources well.

Field of Study 2: Scottish Independence (1286–1329)

Dissertations

The number of really poor pieces was significantly lower this year. Those who came unstuck did so by misunderstanding the title rather than being weak candidates. Not being able to identify what the issue was meant they had difficulty sustaining any really effective argument.

Markers noted that those choosing the military leadership of Bruce or Wallace struggled to present convincing analysis. Candidates should refer to the current list of approved titles. Again Markers noted that in some cases historians were used mainly to illustrate points whereas candidates should use them to show debate. Here as elsewhere some dubious websites were chosen. Many did not make use of the full word quota.

Scripts

Candidates found the essays more challenging this year. The wording of questions appears to have surprised many candidates, even though in some cases (eg Essay Question 1), the phrase was lifted directly from the expanded descriptor. It is also very surprising that so many struggled with the concept of 'social origin' in the question on Wallace, despite this being a central feature of the argument. Equally, most who wrote about Wallace wanted to concentrate on his success and significance, even though the question was clearly about his failure.

Where candidates tended to misinterpret and were taken out of their comfort zone the standard of response was disappointingly low. Candidates too often failed to show a grasp of

the historical knowledge required in order to make a sustained analysis in answer to questions at this level. They appear to have wanted to write prepared answers to a very limited range of questions on frequently examined topics. The absence of an essay on either the great cause or Balliol, and an unusual (though straightforward) question on Wallace stymied many.

The source questions were on the whole, better done, though again it appears that many candidates do not have a thorough knowledge of the Course across the whole time period. Many, though, followed correct process and were highly rewarded as a result. There is still a problem with candidates making only the vaguest statements about provenance, many of which would not earn credit at Standard Grade General level.

Field of Study 3: The Renaissance in Italy in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries

No candidates.

Field of Study 4: Georgians and Jacobites: Scotland (1715–1800)

Dissertations

A number were poorly presented, with single-line spacing that was difficult to read.

Scripts

Lack of historiography remains a problem in some essays. The source questions were challenging but were done well. The two-source question provoked thought but gave candidates ample opportunity to shine.

Field of Study 5: 'The House Divided': USA (1850–1865)

Dissertations

Some misinterpretation of titles was noted, particularly those on the reasons for the election of Lincoln, which were 'frequently treated wrongly as causes of war'. Weaker candidates produced nothing more than the most obvious points of debate and in the slavery topic there was an over-reliance on certain sources, eg Hugh Tulloch.

As in other fields, the Markers commented on the overdependence on websites which were not always robust, and that in many cases historiography was used for illustrative purposes rather than being employed to lend rigour to the debate. The weaker candidates did still expect the facts to speak for themselves and lapsed into narrative. Analysis was weaker than thoroughness and the candidates' voice could be lost, with the reader waiting until the conclusion to find out the view of the writer.

Scripts

Essay structure can prove difficult for some and there was a tendency to rely on a formulaic presentation and a typical response to the general topic area rather than the question set. Whilst there may seem to be similarities in topics the wording of the question should provoke an individual response. Many simply skipped the isolated factor in the question or found it difficult to write with a focus on it. Some therefore ended up with weak survey-like responses

with a limited attempt to show the relationship between factors. Source answers were on the whole well done but some still were merely repeating quotes, not interpreting them, giving mostly their own knowledge and all but ignoring the source, and treating the two-source question as the comparison question at Higher.

Field of Study 6: Japan: From Medieval to Modern State (1850s–1920s)

Dissertations

The key elements are analysis and thoroughness. Where the narrative dominated and there was bolt-on analysis in the final comment, the piece did not warrant ‘sustained’ analysis and therefore was limited to a C grade for that element.

The weak area for many was the introduction, and in isolated-factor dissertations (eg How far was military success the main reason for Japan’s desire to rid herself of the Unequal Treaties?), this was key in setting out issues and the direction of the piece. In some cases there were dropped-in quotes with no real linking to the work, and lengthy quotes which did no more than illustrate points and brought little to the analytical nature of the work.

Scripts

In the essay questions the challenge for some candidates was to produce the expected historiography in order to pass them. In most cases candidates did refer to historical interpretations. In source answers, marks were lost when candidates did not interpret the source at all.

Field of Study 7: Germany: Versailles to the Outbreak of the Second World War

Dissertations

A number of candidates came unstuck with some poorly chosen, imprecise titles (eg ‘Account for the significance of economic factors...’), and titles with stated time-spans not being covered.

For some there were problems in their assessment of the ‘effectiveness’ of a policy, highlighting the number impacted on by it rather than its aims or intentions. Where candidates limited their attainment, it was often because of their selection of evidence. This field of study is rich in writing and while some websites may be robust, many in this area are far from that. Selection is key and it was to their detriment where candidates cited ‘BrainyQuote’ as an authority. Omission of the expected bibliography coupled with minimal footnoting did not suggest depth of reading.

Scripts

Many candidates were still not clear that an essay is a disciplined piece of writing that is meant to be arguing a case based on evidence. Those who had ‘prepared’ answers struggled to match them to the questions. A few candidates were not able to tackle work at this level. Question 5 proved most challenging as many all but ignored the isolated factor. Some candidates seemed to be still unaware that historians’ views are vital to pass the essay. In source answers some simply stated what was in the source rather than interpreting it — which is not the intention — and a few tackled the two-source question as a comparison without bringing in any background knowledge to the answer.

Field of Study 8: South Africa (1910–1984)

Dissertations

In weaker pieces, candidates treated questions involving the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism as 'all I know about Afrikaner nationalism', ignoring the focus of the chosen question. Candidates were not always mindful of the time frame chosen. Dissertations about the role of Mandela in the ANC erroneously considered the years after 1984, which are outside the period defined in the Course descriptor.

Scripts

Essays were generally competent but relatively few were sufficiently thorough or analytical enough to merit the top marks. Introductions did set out a line of argument but conclusions were too often lengthy summaries, adding little to the debate. Some candidates failed to provide a clear answer to the set question and would answer the question that they wanted to appear. This was particularly the case in Question 1 where many wanted this to be why resistance failed. Candidates also did not realise that thoroughness and relevance require that they demonstrate detailed knowledge to substantiate arguments. While most candidates picked up marks in the sources section, some failed to pick up the interpretation marks and instead answers were overloaded with recalled knowledge. There is also no need to force historians into schools of historiography. Many used the terms 'revisionist' and 'post-revisionist' incorrectly, where it would have been better to identify Marxist historians and to mention the view given.

Field of Study 9 Soviet Union (1917–53)

Dissertations

A few dissertations contained little analysis and poor, if any, evaluation of historical interpretations. Weaker candidates presented what seemed like a well-rehearsed review of historians' arguments, let down by lack of synthesis and the candidates' own views at the end. A few candidates wrote functional introductions and conclusions which did not relate directly to the question asked. Some strayed from the wording on the approved list, which resulted in poorer answers.

Scripts

A few candidates struggled to adapt their knowledge and expectations to Essay Questions 1, 2 and 4. Some misinterpreted 'Allies' in Question 2 thinking that this meant the Whites. Question 1 was also challenging with the term 'proletarian' it seemingly throwing some candidates. This terminology appears in the core texts. Some candidates tackled the two-source question as if it were a Higher question and in a few cases the application of wider contextual development was weak.

Field of Study 10: The Spanish Civil War (1931–1939)

Dissertations

Some candidates did not cover the time frame set out in the broader questions. These who chose 'how significant' stems did not evaluate the relative merits of the key factors, and just described what happened. Weaker candidates tended to let facts speak for themselves.

Scripts

In the essay questions there was some sign of candidates trying to 'turn' questions towards the fall of monarchy or Azaña's reforms. On occasion, candidates also used information outwith the specified dates. In the source questions, candidates found difficulty gaining provenance points in the source evaluation item.

Field of Study 11: Britain at War and Peace (1939–1951)

Dissertations

The weakest dissertations were on the role of the British Army in the defeat of Germany and war as a locomotive for change. In work from weaker candidates there was a lack of direction and a straying from the time period of the topic. There were often large chunks of contextualisation and narrative and a corresponding lack of analysis.

Scripts

Candidates who were determined to write a prepared answer performed poorly in the essay questions. Some found the words 'consensus' and 'complacency' difficult. The sources work was again good but it was surprising that some candidates did not know who RA Butler was. As in other fields some mistakenly thought that the two-source question was a comparison question and brought minimal recalled knowledge to the answer. This meant that they denied themselves access to at least 8 marks which are available for wider contextual development.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

For those who are not getting the results they hoped for the following points may help clarify key issues and areas of preparation for this qualification:

Dissertations

- ◆ Grades can be improved by careful planning by candidates and monitoring of the process by staff. In the first instance choosing a title from the current approved list is strongly advised. This is updated on a regular basis and centres should review their selection of titles against the current list, as most seemed to be doing. If a candidate wants to deviate from this then submitting an alternative title to SQA will allow for advice to be given. Centres should take advantage of this service in order that candidates do not disadvantage themselves. The link is dissertations@sqa.org.uk; submissions should be made before 1 November.
- ◆ Teacher input should be as a guide and mentor, not as the editor. To this end the candidate will benefit from establishing a clear structure at the outset.
- ◆ The introduction has a function of setting out the key areas of debate, and should not be used to over-contextualise the work.

- ◆ Chapter headings do provide direction and the majority of candidates benefit from that. It is important to read the writer's views as the synthesis of all points of argument. These conclusions should be seen throughout the work and in the conclusion itself.
- ◆ Dissertations should be submitted in a standard font (Ariel or Times New Roman), in 12 point type and in one-and-a-half or double-spacing. They should have appropriate footnoting and bibliography.

Examination

- ◆ In a formal examination, the best essays are the ones which answer the question. A simple point to make but one many find difficult to execute. The expectation that a prepared essay will suffice for an answer at this level is naïve. The topics may appear but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate. The isolated factor means that significant attention should be given to it, not just 'a nod on the way through' as some Markers found. Balance in the discussion is also vital.
- ◆ To ensure the best answers to source questions, centres should prepare candidates by using the grids to mark class work. Interpretation is more than repetition of sources; candidates need to explain why their selected point is important to the issue being discussed. The two-source question is not the same as the comparison question at Higher. Here candidates are required to provide a substantial amount of wider contextual development; there is also no need to compare the sources point by point.
- ◆ In the examination there should be no overlapping of questions, ie no candidate should be unfairly advantaged by being able to use the same material to answer more than one question. Centres should prepare their candidates accordingly. Likewise, the prelim should mirror the exam exactly and the best way to ensure this is so is to check it against the extended descriptor for the chosen field of study.
- ◆ In marking essays (and the dissertation) refer to the landscape marking grid and consider the drivers to be thoroughness and analysis.
- ◆ Beware of the internet. It can provide an abundance of information but selection here is the key to success. Much of what is produced is not authentic and accurate and each internet source should be checked carefully.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	1016
Number of resulted entries in 2010	1193

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark — 140				
A	38.5%	38.5%	459	98
B	30.3%	68.7%	361	84
C	21.4%	90.1%	255	70
D	4.4%	94.5%	52	63
No award	5.5%	100.0%	66	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.