



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	History
Level	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 2010 Higher History Paper was, in general, well-received by centres, with a widespread acceptance that it was a fair paper, which provided a good sampling of the syllabus. Candidates, for the most part, found the paper accessible, enabling them to demonstrate both their knowledge, and their grasp of the central skills of analysis and evaluation.

There was no change in the most popular options chosen by centres, with most choosing Later Modern History, and, within that, the continuing strong preference for the Growth of Nationalism in the European and World section of Paper I, and for Appeasement and the Road to War in Paper II.

The revised Marking Instructions for Paper I introduced in 2009 continue to be well-received by Markers who, in general, feel that it makes more clear why specific marks have been awarded, and that it makes it easier for them to award a greater range of marks.

Markers reported good quality responses by candidates to all three components of the examination, showing clear evidence of diligent and thorough work by candidates, and high standards of teaching and preparation. This was particularly apparent in the Extended Essay where Markers commented favourably on the high quality of many pieces of work. In Paper I, candidates continue to be well-prepared for the skills of essay-writing with many successful answers being written. However, in Paper I, Markers were also highly concerned at the numbers of candidates who seriously misinterpreted specific questions and thereby lost marks. This remains an area of serious concern. In Paper II, Markers continued to note the good quality work being produced by many candidates, who demonstrated their ability to interpret sources, and supported this by making use of appropriate recall.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The Extended Essay

Overall, Markers commented favourably on the quality of this year's Extended Essays, with a strong endorsement of the view that the Extended Essay is a highly effective vehicle for enabling candidates to produce their best quality work. There were many Extended Essays of good quality, showing clear evidence of diligent and effective research by candidates. Many Markers acknowledged the effectiveness and quality of the teaching which had enabled candidates to achieve this quality of work, and it is indeed heartening and encouraging to be able to recognise this.

Many Extended Essays were substantial pieces of work, showing both clear understanding and awareness of the historical issues being tackled, and also demonstrating good levels of analysis and interpretation. Markers, in their reports, frequently used words such as 'substantial' and 'impressive'. A number of Markers commented favourably on the effective structure and organisation of the Extended Essay, with more candidates writing a clear and definitive Introduction, followed by an extensive Development section, and finishing with an

effective Conclusion. Again, this can only be the result of dedicated and effective teaching and preparation by centres, and has therefore to be commended.

Good quality Extended Essays were written on issues from all sections of the syllabus. For example, in Medieval History, effective Extended Essays were produced on topics such as the Reign of David I, and Wallace and Bruce. In Early Modern History, topics such as the Treaty of Union, and the French Revolution were also done well. Finally, in Later Modern History, candidates produced good quality work on a wide range of topics — the Liberal Reforms, the Labour Government, German Unification, Bismarck, the Rise of Hitler, Civil Rights in the USA, and Tsarist Russia.

There was only one report by a Marker of ‘class’ or ‘group’ essays. The huge majority of centres gave candidates the opportunity to pursue individual pieces of research.

Paper I

Many candidates produced essays in Paper I, which were, in general, well-structured and organised, and Markers recognised and commended the effectiveness of the teaching which enabled candidates to achieve this quality of work. Most candidates had clearly been well-prepared for the examination, and understood that they are required to produce clearly structured essays, with recognisable Introductions, Development sections, and Conclusions.

In Medieval History, candidates appeared, in general, to cope well with the paper. For example, Question 4, on David I of Scotland, led to a number of highly effective answers, as did Question 6, on King John. In Early Modern History, candidates produced effective answers to Question 7, on the causes of the Civil War, and to Question 11, on Louis XIV.

In Later Modern History, questions on British History were, on the whole, done well with many successful answers to Question 1, on democracy, and to Question 2, on the Liberal Reforms. Likewise, there were a number of successful answers to the questions on the Large-Scale State, on both America and Russia.

Paper II

Markers continue to recognise, and to commend, the quality of the work of many candidates in analysing and evaluating sources, and in supporting this with effective and accurate recalled knowledge. This year, Markers noted with approval the success of candidates in tackling the source comparison questions, and their readiness to make point-by-point comparisons, and, in many cases, effective overall comparisons. In addition, Markers commented favourably on the success of candidates with the 3-source, 8 mark question, with greater numbers of candidates realising the necessity for accurate recalled knowledge to support points taken from the sources.

In Special Topic 7, Appeasement and the Road to War, there were many successful answers to Question 4, the source comparison, and to Question 5, on British foreign policy in the later 1930s. There were also effective responses in Special Topic 2, the Crusades, Special Topic 6, Patterns of Migration, and Special Topic 8, the Cold War.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The Extended Essay

The general quality of this year's Extended Essays was good, with many Markers complimenting candidates on the quality of their work. However, there are two areas of concern which require to be addressed.

Markers reported an apparent increase in the numbers of Extended Essays where the issue being considered was a direct question, such as 'Why did the Liberal Government 1906–1914 introduce social reforms?' or 'Why did Hitler succeed in gaining power in Germany in 1933?' This usually resulted in essays which were very much lists of evidence or factors, which made it difficult for candidates to demonstrate their skills of analysis and evaluation, and thereby to access marks at the upper levels of the Analysis/Evaluation scale.

While there is also still a minor, residual concern on the issue of 'class' or 'group' essays, centres are commended on taking on board the advice and guidance on this matter from SQA.

Paper I

The main area of concern here was in Later Modern History, on German nationalism where candidates' responses to two questions raised significant concerns among Markers.

Question 6

Candidates were asked to consider the significance of religious divisions in Germany as an obstacle to the growth of nationalism. Candidates were expected to address the issue of factors inhibiting unification (and the development of nationalism), with religious divisions as the isolated factor. However, Markers reported that many candidates simply wrote about reasons for the growth of nationalism in Germany, and largely disregarded the question.

Question 9

This question asked candidates to consider the significance of propaganda as opposed to solid achievement in the maintenance of Nazi authority 1933–1939. The question was very clearly about the period of Nazi rule in Germany during these years.

However, Markers noted with concern that numbers of candidates wrote very little or nothing at all on the issue of 'solid achievement', simply producing a general survey of Nazi Germany. A further concern was that other candidates answered in terms of the significance of propaganda in the rise of the Nazis to power in the years up to 1933.

Clearly, responses of this nature to these two questions had a significant effect on the marks awarded.

It is apparent from this that numbers of candidates are going into the examination having prepared and memorised a number of highly specific approaches to specific issues and themes. However, when faced with a question which requires a different approach, the prepared/memorised answer is still written down, even though it may not be appropriate to the question.

Clearly, the fact that candidates work hard and attempt to memorise factual content and analytical approaches is commendable, and to be encouraged. However, it has to be emphasised, yet again, that candidates must read questions carefully before they begin to write, and understand clearly what they are being asked to do. It is a matter of serious concern that too many candidates failed to do this in Questions 6 and 9.

Some Markers also raised concerns about responses to Question 7 where numbers of candidates either failed to address at all, or did so in the slightest of terms, the issue of 'mistakes by others' in Bismarck's success in achieving unification.

Paper II

Markers noted a number of individual questions which some candidates found demanding.

For example, in Special Topic 8, Cold War, a number of candidates had difficulties with Question 5, which asked them to consider the significance of ideology as a factor in causing tension. In Special Topic 7, Appeasement and the Road to War, in Question 2, many candidates answered in terms of British policy towards the Spanish Civil War, rather than on the reasons why some British people chose to become involved. In the same Special Topic, in Question 3, some candidates answered in terms of why there was support for the Munich Agreement, rather than how much support, as required by the question. In Special Topic 2, the Crusades, some candidates had difficulty with Question 4, which asked them to evaluate a visual source.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The Higher History examination for 2010 demonstrates, yet again, the continuing success of History in Scottish schools. There is substantial evidence of dedicated and continuing hard work by departments and individual teachers, encouraging and supporting candidates to produce work of good quality. The overall quality of pupil work, has manifested in the examination, continues to impress.

Centres should take note of the following points which come from the reports made by Markers.

In Paper I, it must be repeatedly stressed to candidates that it is important that they read and understand questions correctly, before beginning to write their answers. They must establish clearly what the question is asking them to do.

In the Extended Essay, where candidates tackle the same issue, they should use different titles as far as possible, and vary the use of facts, evidence, sequence, paragraph structure, quotes and phrasing. Evaluative type essays are readily varied by the use of different isolated factors. Centres are reminded of the importance of referring to notes and guidance provided by the SQA, in their support for candidates. It is good practice for these to be shared with candidates.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	8596
Number of resulted entries in 2010	9189

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	22.2%	22.2%	2038	67
B	31.0%	53.2%	2851	58
C	26.4%	79.6%	2424	50
D	7.2%	86.8%	665	46
No award	13.2%	100.0%	1211	—

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.