



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	History
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 was very good again this year. The team was impressed by some innovative dissertation topics which resulted in outstanding pieces of historical research. The commitment of teachers and candidates was obvious. Centres are now, in the main, very much aware of the demands of this exam and its component parts.

We see the best of practice at Higher translated effectively into Advanced Higher writing. In some cases however we still notice the more mechanistic response. The question asked should be addressed specifically, a generic response is not expected. The best responses were indeed a response to the specific question set. Many candidates were writing full, thorough, analytical and evaluative answers. It may be useful to ask for them to complete their work in two 20-page booklets, rather than having, in some cases, up to 15 extra supplementary sheets added.

This report will give a general overview of Dissertation performance and a brief summary of the exam performance before considering each Field of Study in more detail.

General comments on dissertation titles

The majority of dissertation titles were selected from the approved list. This is updated regularly, and centres should review their selection of titles against the current list. Where an alternative title is selected it is expected that the centre will submit that suggestion to SQA for approval. Centres should do this because the Examining Team can advise on the issue/topic to help candidates produce a thorough and essentially analytical piece. Should centres not choose to do so, there is a danger that the candidates may be disadvantaged. This was more obvious this year and was seen across all Fields of Study. Some did not move very far from the narrative, and while the detail is very important (indicated by thoroughness in the marking grid) it really only holds relevance when examined. Hence the analysis and evaluation of the evidence is vital.

Structure

Year on year we see that candidates are much more aware of the significant role that structure plays in setting out the dissertation. Those candidates who lost track of their arguments did so most frequently in the essay-style approach. Chapter headings help give an idea of the direction of key areas of argument and to inform candidates' selection of appropriate material.

Chapter headings should also highlight the individual nature of the research and should not be seen as a template for an answer applied to all work on a given topic. While marking instructions for essays which appear in the exam might give some guidance, they should not be seen as a template for a dissertation. Mini-conclusions made throughout the dissertation were much more common this year, and on the whole were used effectively to draw the attention back to the issue underpinning the dissertation.

Word count

It is now the exception where candidates are writing beyond the word limit. 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.

Again this year there were instances of abbreviations that are not common practice being used. This should be avoided and should not be employed as a tool to limit word count.

The significant weakness which stood out once again in the markers' reports was the major shortfall in length, rather than excess wordage. Candidates who write to a word count of 3,000 words are 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

Year on year this continues to improve. We see more of the expected application of footnoting. Only a few are still not citing sources properly, and even fewer are attempting to put text into the footnotes to remedy an excessive word count. These footnotes really stand out as contravening the expected structure of the piece, and certainly will not enhance their work.

It is important to remember that footnoting is expected only to reference sources, and (in the exceptional case) to define or explain an unusual term.

The absence of footnoting is also a concern. Markers need to see the recognition of sources researched as part of the dissertation, and this can help avoid consideration of plagiarism. Similarly, bibliographies should be included, and some markers noted that the annotated bibliography (vital for the Research NAB) was very helpful to them.

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 when this is recognised there is not much of a temptation to award high marks. Indeed, the thoroughness of the piece is in question, and the research is obviously limited. Internet sources provided the most overt comments from markers. Overuse of material from less than rigorous authorities in an unquestioning manner will not gain candidates marks. There is, however, a recognition that online resources can be used well.

Typography and proof reading

The majority of candidates demonstrated professional standards and courtesy, and only a minority did not present work in a format that was easy to read. Good practice here is double spacing and 11 or 12 point font. The time and effort many candidates put into this, their first substantial piece of historical research, is appreciated and it would be a pity if their presentation limited the flow of their writing. Markers did note this year that closer proof reading would benefit candidates.

General comments on exam performance

The paper was very well received and the candidate responses were certainly more than competent in the main. An exceptional standard of response was notable over all fields from a significant proportion of the candidates. The weakest presented a generic essay response to the question. It is vital to take a moment to read and analyse the question, plan your answer, and write to the question. Some outstanding work had historians' views embedded and used to drive forward

the argument. Very few essays were unworthy of a minimal pass, and those that were assigned a D grade or below were almost universally due to poor time management.

The source technique is understood by most, and where that was the case the results were commendable; where it was not the case candidates really suffered. It is a key point here that the techniques are vital to gain marks. The marking template on the SQA website gives a guide to the marks awarded. Careful scrutiny of this and the detailed Marking Instructions for the Field of Study will benefit candidates.

Yet again, the provenance points proved difficult for some to access. Some candidates applied the Higher technique as a comparison in the two-source question. This caused candidates to miss valuable marks for wider contextualisation.

Markers in all fields felt that the paper was fair and gave candidates the opportunity to highlight the knowledge and skills they had developed in this course of study.

Areas in which candidates performed well

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

Dissertations

Many positive comments were made about the good quality of argument, with more candidates actually arguing their case rather than merely stating one. Wide-ranging and quality research was visible including up-to-date areas of debate, particularly relating to brochs and works on the Roman occupation of North Britain.

The internet was employed well, allowing for the use of journals which are now online.

Even more than last year, the structure candidates employed was readily apparent and enhanced their work. Most titles were chosen from the approved list. Chapters did focus candidates, and the marker, on the line of argument.

There was some very impressive use of historical interpretations to really develop arguments, and not just for the sake of it. There was plenty of breadth and depth of knowledge on show. This year the popular topics were what shaped Iron Age society and the impact of the Vikings.

Scripts

The majority of essays were solid, capable pieces with a breadth of knowledge. There were outstanding responses, particularly to the Viking question, and the attention to the isolated factor in those essays was very good as was, in the main, the use of historians' opinions. The source answers were certainly competent in their overall approach, but could have had more of a focus on the specific aspect of the topic asked. The overall impression was positive. Markers had the view that the candidates were well-drilled and hard-working and were not caught out by any of the questions.

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

Dissertations

This field reported a good spread of titles including Balliol, Bruce, the Church and Wallace. There were some excellent pieces of work, most notably on the role of the Scottish Church during the

Wars of Independence. It was good to see newer historians' viewpoints embedded in work, eg Michael Brown, alongside the traditional references, eg Barrow.

There was a real improvement in thoroughness with up-to-date reading lists and broader materials, with more access now to primary sources online, eg a few now using POMS website via Glasgow University.

Chapter headings were carefully constructed, which made the candidate focus on the argument. This along with sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter made for some excellent pieces of work where candidates addressed the issue consistently.

Scripts

Markers commented on some excellent essays, particularly on the first two questions. They praised good structure and sound employment of historians' views. They noted that the most effective introductions used these opinions to state their case and show the issues involved in the essay.

The markers highlighted the improved quality of response overall here, both in essays and in source answers. In the latter area they were very pleased to see a distinct improvement in source answering technique. A positive improvement in response was noted here.

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

Dissertations

Yet again the dissertations which were most popular were those on the Medici in Florence. The standard was very good here and some works were a pleasure to read. Those on the differences between Florence and Venice, and the way in which these affected cultural developments in the respective cities were highlighted.

Scripts

In Part 1 all essays were tackled, with Question 2 on the Medici proving to be the most popular. The analysis was good and drove forward arguments. The knowledge and evaluation of the success of the aims of Charles VIII in the invasion of Italy was impressive. Also, candidates showed their understanding of the complexities of the Florentine constitution and the ways in which Cosimo and Lorenzo manipulated existing and newly created institutions to suit their own ends.

In Part 2 source answers also had high-quality knowledge of the topics covered, and these were often further substantiated by historians. The best candidates wrote fluently and certainly were aware that interpretation means more than just lifting from the source.

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

Dissertations

This field presented a wide range of appropriate titles which allowed candidates to perform to their ability. Excellent work was seen where candidates really grasped the issue and engaged in the debate. The ability to see what constitutes evidence as proof, as opposed to description and assertion, is a high-level skill and was commended in some dissertations.

Markers highlighted one very good piece on painting and national identity in the eighteenth century. This is a rare topic, easy to do badly, but in this case the result was impressive.

In most there was a clear structure/format, with chapter headings, double-spacing, accurate footnoting and bibliography, which benefited the candidate immensely. These are not high-order tasks but clear instruction is likely to give all candidates the best possible chance to succeed.

Scripts

In Part 1 candidates wrote well. Markers noted that there were excellent responses here that showed real involvement and understanding and commitment to the study. In Part 2 the responses again were good, and well-trained candidates scored well.

Field of Study 5: 'The House Divided': The USA (1850–1920)

Dissertations

Again this field had a wide selection of titles. Questions on the origins of the war tended to be done well, as were those on the leadership of either Lee or Grant and also those which tackled the Fogel and Engerman debate.

The best work contained a clear awareness and control of the argument. They presented and sustained the argument by bringing in short conclusions at the end of each chapter. In doing this they built on the argument right up to the final conclusion. The width and depth of evidence was referenced by strong bibliographies.

The top-end work produced more polished selected work. The signs of candidates' wide reading allowed for more confident engagement with the debates/arguments surrounding the issue. There was especially strong evidence presented on the nature of slavery and the causes of war. The commitment of candidates to produce their best work here was noted.

Scripts

A wide range of essays was tackled with a variety of approaches in Part 1. Candidates here were comfortable with including historians' views. Some included primary sources in their answers, which lifted the quality of interpretation and added an impressive flair to their work. Many included sub-conclusions in their work, which was very helpful. Equally, most produced analytical work with evaluative comments and very few were wholly descriptive and limited to the narrative.

In Part 2 there were some excellent responses where candidates clearly understood the different approaches required for the three different types of question. Some very good additional contextual knowledge was used to enhance answers. Markers noted that overall knowledge seemed better this year. Candidates clearly enjoyed this Field of Study, as the level of detail shown indicated a thirst and enthusiasm for this study. Yet again the overall feeling was of a paper well done.

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

Dissertations

Yet again there was a broad range of titles, many on the Meiji Reforms. Particularly popular this year was foreign influence in the downfall of the Tokugawa. There were some excellent examples where candidates challenged established historiography. Others weighed up the contrasting schools of thought rather than individual historians. In the best work the structure was readily apparent. Chapters were successfully employed to build the case towards the conclusion. Sub-

conclusions throughout were really effective with some candidates really developing arguments across and between factors.

Scripts

Markers felt the full range of essay questions were tackled. The appropriate structure, tone and history were delivered. Candidates were also well-prepared for the source questions. The topics allowed for a wealth of recalled knowledge.

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

Dissertations

Yet again a range of titles was presented from across the period. Markers highlighted this year some outstanding work on the Treaty of Versailles and a particularly interesting one on the nature of the Nazi Party — middle class or *Volkspartei*. One marker commented on a piece on the political intrigue leading to January 1933, noting the eloquence in the presentation of well-researched findings which highlighted the expertise of the candidate.

The more successful candidates employed very high-order skills demonstrated both in thought/argument and the ability to express ideas using scholarly terms. The use of research and supporting evidence to introduce historical debate and advance arguments was stronger this year. In some cases candidates challenged the views of some historians and advanced the debates even further.

Yet again more candidates were using resources to inform discussion and argument in a balanced fashion rather than simply to inform a single line of argument. The bibliographies were impressive. More websites were being used, and well, with markers noting the effective use of web articles. The use of evidence to advance the argument resulted in more mature work which received credit accordingly.

Scripts

Candidates on the whole were very well prepared for essays, with good structures and subject knowledge. Some candidates were well prepared in the use of historians' views, and in many essays this seemed more purposeful than previously. Yet again a wide range of factual detail was brought to answers.

The essay answers were well worded, so that the unique interpretations seemed to derive from the candidates' ways of thinking. Markers commented that the use of language and expression remained admirable given the intense nature of the exam situation.

In Part 2 sources were answered well and it was obvious that candidates had been made aware of the expected technique in the three different source questions. The grid for essays and the template for the sources have been successfully employed. One marker commented that the responses he read indicated that this was a fair paper which gave candidates the opportunity to shine.

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

Dissertations

This year the titles covered a broad range of topics, and it was pleasing to see more concentrating in the post-1960 period. The stronger work came from the more controversial topics, such as the

origins of segregation. The best responses came from those with a clearly defined argument from the outset. The evidence used reflected that the teachers are certainly up to date with new writing. One excellent piece on the influence of the Cold War on Western powers was noted for its outstanding research, analysis and evaluation.

Scripts

Markers commented on the full range of essay questions being attempted, and that the work was very good overall. The good practice employed in Higher had obviously helped the weaker candidates set out their structure in a clear fashion. There were outstanding answers which had analysis and evaluation embedded in the structure which often took a thematic approach. There was a great breadth of historians' views, which reflected a genuine understanding of the range of interpretations in each essay.

In the main, in Part 2, candidates applied the expected source technique. Candidates also showed detailed recall of the whole course.

Field of Study 9: Soviet Russia (1917–1953)

Dissertations

Yet again there was a range of titles and this year some impressive work on the Civil War, Socialist Realism, Stalin as heir of Lenin, and the Great Patriotic War. Most candidates sustained argumentation throughout the work. The evidence presented was certainly current and provoked thought. The most recent research had been accessed by many and markers noted the enthusiasm of some writers. The consideration of Stalin as a blue elephant as an explanation for his actions was a case in point.

In all the best dissertations, candidates directed the reader in the introduction, highlighting the key argument(s) and citing the debate(s). There was an excellent awareness of the need for analysis, and sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter were very effective. Furthermore, there was real engagement with historians' interpretations. Annotated bibliographies, although not a requirement here, were considered very helpful. Generally there was a very professional look to the dissertations with candidates being able to write in a professional academic manner.

Scripts

There was a high and consistent standard throughout the paper. Markers noted the full range of essay questions were attempted and there were some outstanding responses. This was the case when the question was directly tackled. In this case this meant when the phrases 'truly popular' and 'profoundly democratic' were discussed throughout the essay. Historians were employed well and became embedded in answers and informed the line of argument taken. The sources were also answered very well by many candidates. The appropriate technique was used and markers were impressed by the selection of specific recall pertinent to the questions.

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

Dissertations

This was again a year with a good selection of titles, and most dissertations drove the answer with argument and detailed analysis. Arguments were sustained, and the structure of work was generally very good. There has been a consistent improvement over the last few years and the markers are aware that candidates are certainly paying attention to the grid here.

Scripts

In Part 1 there was generally evidence of good essay skills and knowledge of key issues and some very good use of historians' viewpoints. Part 2 was well answered with an obvious skill base in the differing source questions.

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

Dissertations

Popular titles this year were on the war years, preparedness for war, civil defence, and the bomber offensive. Work was clear in presentation, using chapters and carefully argued, which indicated thorough research. There were impressive arguments with real attention given to sub-conclusions throughout the work. A number of dissertations engaged with a wide range of historical interpretations.

Scripts

Markers commented on evidence of well-prepared candidates who had a real commitment to their studies. A range of essays was tackled. High quality pieces were mentioned which impressed both in terms of width and depth of knowledge as well as analysis and evaluation. Source answers were also clear in addressing the topics and gave clear indication of further recalled knowledge. The evaluation in some cases was excellent, with historians' views embedded in the answer.

Areas which candidates found demanding

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

Dissertations

Several candidates were disadvantaged by an ill-considered overall structure which constrained analysis. An example would be chapter titles such as 'Were Viking raids destructive?' or 'Was Viking conquest destructive?' These chapters are flawed in their premises and there is a sense of truism here which allowed less scope to showcase their depth of understanding.

Again this year some candidates produced work that was dominated by the narrative, where the structure was based on chronology rather than themes and the analysis was diminished because of this. A few candidates used language that they did not understand, which was particularly obvious in Viking pieces. Over-employment of the marking instructions as a guide could produce a workmanlike response, but limited the candidate. One candidate had only used two sources of information, which proved limiting and self-penalising,

Scripts

In Part 1 again there was evidence of the generic response. Candidates lost focus on the question they were actually answering and some omitted the isolated factor or historians' opinions. For some, a weak structure with little attention to the introduction and direction of the development of the essay obscured the line of argument and clarity of thought. The result was work that was heavy in narrative with little evaluation.

In Part 2 provenance was not strong. Candidates found it difficult to address the specific focus of the question, eg Flavian Aims not Rome's Aims. It is expected that there should be more detail on the specific area of the topic, rather than adding everything remotely connected with the same time period or topic.

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

Dissertations

In weaker responses candidates tended to employ bolt-on analysis and evaluation. Some candidates were stuck in the narrative, for others argumentation was stronger but quality and quantity of supporting evidence was less impressive. Markers commented that there were some who failed to define the elements of the question, eg What is understood by *effective* military leader, with the result that there were few references to the question throughout and all too often analysis and evaluation remained inferred.

There were also careless errors that could have been resolved by proof-reading. In one case an entirely duplicated chapter was presented.

Also it is ill-advised for candidates to choose narrow topics where the title is not on the approved list.

Scripts

In Part 1 some candidates were quick to condemn the Guardians and ignore the very difficult position in which they found themselves. In Question 4 it might help if the period 1298–1305 could be approached by looking at various factors, ie Divisions within the political community; abandonment of the Scottish cause by France and the Papacy; Edward's campaign of 1303–04; defection of key Scots. In poorer responses to Question 5, some sadly ignored the parameters set by the dates.

In Part 2, Source B Question 1 proved challenging for a few candidates. Some candidates are still not aware of source handling techniques here. In this Field of Study some did not complete the paper and markers commented on the issue of timing.

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

Dissertations

Dissertations here were on the whole done well. Some candidates struggled to find different interpretations or to suggest alternative explanations. Some were using books which take a purely narrative approach. Works with brief introductions or where contextual background dominates do not help the reader. Candidates are encouraged to use the introduction to refer to context, debate, issues and the line of argument to be taken.

Scripts

Some candidates need to be careful to answer the question as set, rather than attempt to twist it to suit their own knowledge. In a question about the achievements of the Medici, they should be prepared to consider more than one area of achievement, ie writing exclusively on the political achievements of Cosimo and Lorenzo. Answers on Venice often failed to make the link between geographical (and other) factors and cultural and artistic achievement, resulting in largely descriptive essays.

The sources were generally well done, although some candidates missed opportunities to include sufficient wider contextual recall. Some candidates were too eager to show the process of analysis, argument and structure through elaborate and repeated phrases. As a result they did not manage to finish the paper, and the marker felt valuable time had been wasted.

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

Dissertations

The thorough effort was obvious here, but at times even with a solid structure some candidates struggled to develop analysis and evaluation. This was because they relied too heavily on marking schemes which, although thorough in their own right, would be meant as a starting point for this study. If work follows in a workmanlike fashion faithful to the marking instructions candidates are limiting their attainment. In one case there was no introduction at all, which significantly impacted on the potential award.

Scripts

In Part 1 candidates wrote well but one flaw was highlighted where the response did not reflect the precise wording of the question. This year some candidates were not using historians' views in their essays. This is vital in this part of the course. In Part 2 some candidates attempted the two-source question as though it was a Higher comparison question.

Field of Study 5: 'The House Divided': The USA (1850–1920)

Dissertations

Candidates who did not set out an analysis of the title in the introduction limited their achievement. Missed opportunities like this meant that they had not demonstrated an understanding of the question, which they could have done by giving a focus to the evidence areas and the arguments. Furthermore, some would give a line of argument which might be effective on their terms but was not historically accurate or valid.

Candidates should also be aware that not all factors are equal in importance. For example, in some work Lincoln's election as a cause was not given due weight and tended to get 'lost' in a general list of causes. Some work tended to concentrate on the narrative, and others relied too much on traditional texts such as Alan Farmer. If only two or three sources of information are used, the grade gained for thoroughness will be limited. When quoting historians some candidates did so as if this was mere information and did not engage with the debate.

Some dissertations were short, barely over 3,000 words, meaning that depth and detail would be difficult to achieve. Again there were instances of poor proof-reading, and again a suggestion of rushing to meet deadlines. For some this was a challenge (no matter the ability of the candidate), as was the inability to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font).

Scripts

In essays there were examples of weaker introductions where there was a failure to establish the factors involved or set out a broad line of argument. The result tended to be an overlong narrative, and markers struggled to find evaluation.

It was remarked that the quality of analysis and evaluation were sacrificed for detailed knowledge. In specific questions there was either misinterpretation or a more generic response given. In Question 2 some tackled this as the longer-term causes of war when the focus of the question was the short term. Equally when looking at the quote 'Lincoln misread the South in 1860–61' there was a tendency to concentrate on others factors and not give due attention to Lincoln. Some essays fell foul of bolt-on historians' views at the expense of their own evaluation.

In Part 2 provenance comments were sparse, and some were very much like an old Standard Grade response. Some interpretation points were only quotes and the two-source question was answered as the comparison question in Higher. Markers also highlighted the poor technique of listing recalled knowledge with no explanation.

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

Dissertations

Some candidates altered the titles on the approved list to questions that did not allow a great deal of analysis and debate. Others did not use the introduction to focus on a line of argument, or did not refer to the isolated factor outside the section on it. They presented it (and the other factors) in a stand-alone fashion rather than have the question permeate the work.

Some work ended up being an overview of the topic, eg Reasons for the downfall of the Tokugawa. Some work had multiple headings, which had a detrimental impact on the development of a line of argument as well as hindering the depth of analysis. Indeed some headings were only loosely relevant to the central issue. Some dissertations needed further proofreading.

Scripts

In Part 1, although essay Question 2 was a relatively familiar topic, most candidates did not really explore the impact of foreign powers between 1862 and 1868 in any great depth. Most preferred to elaborate on internal pressures 1800–53. Some are still not aware of the essential inclusion of historians' views in essays. In Part 2 the sources were tackled well overall.

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

Dissertations

Yet again some candidates ignored titles. In this Field of Study it applied particularly to dissertations on the Impact of Versailles up to 1923 but some developed it to 1929. Some used the marking instructions for similar essays but had not developed their findings much further from them. These are a very good starting point but should not be seen as the template for dissertation work.

Some presented narrative-dominated work and did not leave themselves enough words to fully assess the exact issue in question. There were instances where the isolated factor was dealt with in one or two pages and then all other factors were assessed but with no sense of any linking evaluative comments. These dissertations became, as a marker commented, 'a mile wide and an inch deep'. While Hite and Hinton is an asset for all in this Field of Study, it is expected that research should go further and should necessitate the reading of the historians, not just the extracts that appear in other works.

Shortcomings in presentation also impacted on achievement. It will benefit the candidate to proofread the final piece, to double line space their work, to footnote, to have a contents page, and to number pages. Some work had bibliographies which flattered to deceive, or had no footnotes or endnotes, or were very short at under 3,500 words. All of this would limit achievement.

Quoting historians without footnoting or including their work in the bibliography, and having an uncritical over-reliance on internet sites also hindered attainment. The historical opinions or debates should be embedded throughout the work. There were instances where this was set aside in a chapter. Some were unable to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font), to have page numbers and a word count on each page. This does not help the marker.

Scripts

In some essays the question was not tackled, rather a generic viewpoint was given.

- ◆ In Question 1 often too much background was given and there were many unbalanced answers with no real understanding of the range of detail and debate about the left threats or right threats.
- ◆ Again in Question 2 many struggled with the phrase 'republic without republicans' and gave an overview of the Golden Age.
- ◆ In Question 3 some were thrown by the propaganda issue between 1928 and 1932, opting either to say that it was exaggerated and then present all the other information, or to focus on the consolidation of power post-1933.
- ◆ In Question 5 most candidates wrote about all aspects of *Volksgemeinschaft* without doing much more than paying lip service to the 'racial state' issue. This question was not on its success but on the Nazi success in imposing its racial element.

The message here is clear — candidates should answer the question set rather than see the topic and give a prepared response. A significant minority of candidates had essays with absolutely no historians' views included and therefore did not pass the essay.

In sources it was surprising how many candidates missed the obvious opportunity for provenance marks, given that it is useful because it is an actual extract from the Weimar Constitution. There is still a tendency to provide rehearsed statements such as 'it is a primary source from the time of the event' and not to develop the answer to meet the requirements of this level. Some still answered the two-source question in the style of the Higher comparison question. Some struggled with wider contextual knowledge.

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

Dissertations

Candidates still struggled with some of the concepts in the titles. They found it difficult to pin down the meanings of 'catalyst', 'turning point' and 'fundamental change'. The concept-driven work was testing for some. They also struggled to differentiate between the apartheid state and apartheid policies.

Story-telling could dominate, and meant the analysis and evaluation was not strong. In many cases the use of chapters would help focus on the arguments. Historians were often being used as evidence rather than opinion, which means candidates are not engaging with the debate but taking it as read. Poor proofreading was evident when Daniel Malan became Daniel Martin.

Scripts

Some candidates found it difficult to tackle the specific question. This was true in essay Question 3 where 'white supremacy' was certainly addressed but not always 'political'. In source answers some candidates were writing unnecessarily lengthy introductions and conclusions.

Field of Study 9: Soviet Russia (1917–1953)

Dissertations

It is always better to have alternative titles approved. Some candidates misinterpreted questions eg 'Did Stalin's rule rely on fear?' was changed in the response to 'Why did the Purges occur?' Some who chose to study February looked in detail at the long-term causes. This topic is not a survey of

all the causes of conflict since the abolition of serfdom, rather it is a discussion of why the revolution happened in February. Weaker evidence came from an over-reliance on questionable websites. Also, while Corin and Fiehn is an excellent resource for this field, candidates should read more widely than this. Some candidates produced work that was too short (2,500–3,000 words). And yet again for some the challenge seems to be proofreading (no matter the ability of the candidate), as well as an inability to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font).

Scripts

In the essay paper some candidates did not tackle the question. In Question 1 some found it difficult to define social unrest, thinking this meant World War One. Others failed to link the events of the days of February to the idea of social unrest. In Question 2 candidates did tackle the idea of a 'truly popular' revolution, but some did not clearly answer 'profoundly democratic'. Some candidates misinterpreted Question 3 and wrote on NEP. Although the sources were well answered on the whole, some found the topic area in Question 3 challenging and decided to write on the purges. Others did answer the two-source question as if it invited a comparison like Higher.

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

Dissertation

There were the generic issues here. As for other Fields of Study, for some the challenge was in proofreading and the ability to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font). It was also noted that some candidates had strayed from their question or had not set the appropriate dates for their work.

Scripts

In Part 1 most of the essay questions were tackled and well. In Part 2 the sources were mostly well done but some answers were poorly structured.

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

Dissertations

This year a significant minority altered the titles from the approved list but did not seem to take account of this in their answers. Others had distinctly different titles. Centres should seek advice through the SQA on the viability of the proposal and the direction to go in regarding research.

Where candidates did not sub-divide their work they lost focus and limited their conclusions. Not using chapters is almost universally self-penalising. Some work contained an excessive use of quotes, which impacted on the flow of writing and clarity of the argument. Some were still trapped in narrative. As was the case last year, many primarily had website referencing, not a fault in itself, but some were less than academic and the concern here was that they were not a starting point for more detailed work, but rather the final destination in terms of research.

The technical points hold good again here. Proofreading is vital and double line spacing is the convention expected.

Scripts

In Part 1 some candidates did not give adequate attention to the quote or isolated factor. There was still the tendency to produce a prepared response to the topic, almost totally ignoring the angle of the question. Some answers only paid lip-service to the introduction and the conclusion.

In source answers there were missed opportunities when candidates did lift points from the source but failed to comment on them and link them to the question.

In Question 1 some veered off into a narrative on the Blitz despite the focus of the question being on the impact of evacuation.

In the two-source question some did not add enough wider context and recall, but treated this like the Higher comparison question. Some had time management issues.

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 examination.

Dissertations

- ◆ Dissertation grades can be improved by careful planning and monitoring of the process. In the first instance, choosing a title from the current approved list is advised. If a candidate wants to deviate from this, submitting the proposed title to the SQA will allow advice to be given.
- ◆ The candidate will benefit from establishing a clear structure at the outset. Key here is the function of the introduction. It should certainly contextualise, but it should also focus the reader on the key areas of debate and present the writer's hypothesis. In this way the reader is prepared for a line of argument to be proved in the following chapters.
- ◆ Chapter headings do provide direction, and the majority of candidates need that. It is important to read the writer's views as the synthesis of all points of argument in each chapter. These conclusions should be seen throughout the work and in the conclusion itself.
- ◆ On a practical and professional note, candidates should take account of presentation conventions. Dissertations should be submitted in a standard font (Arial or Times New Roman), in 11 or 12 point type and in one-and-a-half or double-spacing. The latter point on spacing is one which all markers highlight in reports. The dissertation should have appropriate footnoting and bibliography.

Examination

- ◆ Each year this point is made and it remains true. In a formal exam paper the best essays are the ones that answer the question — it is a simple point to make but something many find difficult to do. Expecting a prepared essay to be a 'banker' question at this level is wrong. The expected topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate. Make sure that the question is read carefully. One word will change the expectation of response. The isolated factor means that significant attention should be given to it, not just a cursory comment. Candidates may refer back to it in discussion of subsequent factors. Balance in the discussion is also vital. Use historians to highlight the range, or not, of arguments — not as 'history' but as evidence of the arguments, and do feel that you can challenge views as long as you can justify this. In the end make sure the reader reads the writer's view, not a synopsis of the viewpoints currently held. Your own conclusions are vital.
- ◆ To ensure the best answers to source questions, prepare 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 'scaffolding' of English is necessary, and the addition of further recall will gain more marks. The two-source question is not the same as the comparison question at Higher. Differing viewpoints may be read here, but these sources are not set out to contrast one another. Here you are required to provide a substantial amount of wider contextual development. Look at the mark allocation for interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views.

- ◆ The prelim should mirror the exam exactly. This means that there should be no overlapping of questions, and the best way to ensure this is to check it against the extended descriptor for your chosen Field of Study.
- ◆ In marking both the dissertation and essays, refer to the landscape grid and consider the drivers to be thoroughness and analysis. Note the minor alteration in phrasing to clarify expectations in progression for all factors, particularly for introductions and conclusions.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	1208
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	1356
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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 140				
A	31.1%	31.1%	422	98
B	30.1%	61.2%	408	84
C	26.5%	87.8%	360	70
D	5.5%	93.2%	74	63
No award	6.8%	-	92	-

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.