



## External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	History
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

### Extended Essay

Many markers commented that the general standard of Extended Essays had improved compared to previous years. A large number of markers felt that the essays were excellent, with candidates clearly understanding the criteria and requirements of the Extended Essay.

### Paper 1

General comments indicated that the overall performance of candidates was good, with much evidence of hard work and effort from students, as well as good preparation from centres. Some markers commented on the fact that they had very few poor essays, with a significant minority saying that there was real excellence evident. At the other end of the spectrum, there was comment that a reasonable number of candidates were being entered at the wrong level and were unable to deal with the demands of the Higher Course.

### Paper 2

Markers were just about uniform in commenting that candidate performance was much improved this year in terms of the skills that are being assessed. This higher standard was complemented by nice local touches from some centres. For example, the local experience of recruitment to Scottish units or of clearances is clearly being taught in many centres.

The rubric of Source D in the Wars of Independence topic contained an incorrect date. Appropriate action was undertaken to ensure that no candidate was disadvantaged by this error.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Extended essay

Nearly all candidates showed excellent knowledge of the topic they were researching. Many candidates were writing analytical essays that showed qualitative aspects such as counter-argument and excellent use of historians' views. Many markers commented that more time was taken over the introductions and conclusions of the essays. There was plenty of evidence of good planning, with the vast majority of candidates choosing appropriate issues and utilising the 200-word count effectively.

Some topics came up for particular comment in terms of the quality of responses. Essays on the Liberal Reforms, Suffragettes, Causes of Appeasement, 1930s America, Russia and the Cold War came in for particular praise from individual markers.

### Paper 1

Many markers commented favourably on the levels of knowledge demonstrated. A significant number of markers felt that structure was significantly improved this year. There

were far better introductions and conclusions to the essays. Essays that come in for particular comment as having seen excellent performances from many candidates included:

- ◆ Question 7: How important was the slave trade in the development of the British economy in the eighteenth century?
- ◆ Question 11: To what extent did the Liberal Government of 1906–14 introduce social reform due to the social surveys of Booth and Rowntree?
- ◆ Question 12: ‘The social reforms of the Labour Government of 1945–51 failed to deal effectively with the needs of the people.’ How valid is this view?
- ◆ Question 26: How important was the attitude of foreign states in the achievement of German unification by 1871?
- ◆ Question 27: ‘Propaganda was crucial to the maintenance of power by the Nazis.’ How accurate is this view?
- ◆ Question 37: To what extent did Fascist governments use military threat and force in pursuing their foreign policies from 1933?

## **Paper 2**

In general, candidates were well prepared and were supporting their information selection with clear judgement in terms of the question asked. This was a big improvement on the previous two years presentations.

- ◆ Question 1: ‘How fully...’ This was generally well completed, with good interpretation of source content and appropriate and relevant recall applied to the answer.
- ◆ Question 2: Comparison. Individual points of comparison were well made. Candidates clearly identified areas of similarity/difference and supported this with appropriate information selection.
- ◆ Question 3: ‘How useful...’ Some good use of the source content and appropriate recall applied.
- ◆ Question 4: ‘How far...’ With the exception of the Great War topic, this was well completed.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Extended Essay**

Some candidates are neglecting to put context in their introductions and are dropping easy marks as a result.

There continues to be a minority of candidates who choose inappropriate issues that lead to poor marks. Two distinct trends can be identified here. There are candidates who chose weak titles such as, ‘Why did women gain the vote in 1918?’ or ‘Why did the Nazis come to power in 1933?’ These, along with stems like ‘Analyse’ or ‘Discuss’, generally lead to weak responses that can be credited for appropriate knowledge, but for which argument marks are difficult to give. This is because the titles tend to imply a descriptive response rather than a response that invites debate, discussion and analysis. The other trend is over-complex issues that the candidate cannot complete effectively.

The other issue that was commented on extensively by markers was the problem of analysis. There is a tendency among many candidates to apportion equal weighting to

factors leading to an event/development, rather than discriminating between factors in a hierarchy of importance.

## Paper 1

There were considerable problems with a minority of candidates who were misreading questions and confusing issues. There is also the continued problem of pupils answering questions with set responses, and poor analysis of the issues that are identified in the posed questions. Many candidates were not dealing with the isolated factor in posed questions effectively. A minority of candidates had problems dealing with two essays in the time allocation: writing one good essay and a second, much briefer, essay.

Particular problems were caused by:

- ◆ Question 11: To what extent did the Liberal Government of 1906–14 introduce social reform due to the social surveys of Booth and Rowntree? A small number of candidates misinterpreted the essay as an ‘How effective’ question.
- ◆ Question 25: ‘By 1850 political nationalism had made little progress in Germany.’ How valid is this view? A number of candidates had problems interpreting this question.
- ◆ Question 27: ‘Propaganda was crucial to the maintenance of power by the Nazis.’ How accurate is this view? A small number of candidates misinterpreted this essay as a rise to power essay.
- ◆ Questions 34 and 36 in the USA topic: some candidates mixed up the issues.
- ◆ Question 38: ‘British foreign policy was a complete failure in containing the spread of Fascist aggression up to March 1938.’ How valid is this view? A number of candidates misinterpreted this question as a ‘Causes of Appeasement’ question.

## Paper 2

Question 4 on The Great War topic caused problems for many candidates. Unionism was interpreted as Trade Unionism, despite the source being clearly about the Scottish Unionist [Conservative] Party.

The discriminating ‘How far...’ question caused problems for a minority of candidates in all five of the study themes.

A number of markers commented on the lack of overall comparisons in the comparison question.

# Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

## Extended Essay

Centres should supervise the Extended Essay in an appropriate fashion. This will ensure that the following problems do not arise.

- ◆ **Inappropriate issues.** Issues should come from the Course content studied. There continue to be a few centres letting topics such as the National Government through.

These are no longer part of the course content and are, therefore, invalid issues for which no marks can be awarded.

- ◆ **Going over the word limit.** If the candidate goes over 200 words for their plan, a penalty of up to ten marks will be deducted. Great care should be taken by candidates to only use standard acronyms such as WSPU, NUWSS or KKK. Made-up acronyms will see each letter counted as a word. This inevitably leads to candidates breaching the word limit and having a penalty applied. Two recent examples will illustrate the problem. 'COTR' is not a standard acronym — 'community of the realm' should be written out in full. Also, 'ToV' may mean Treaty of Versailles to the candidate, but it is NOT an acronym in common use and will be counted as three words.
- ◆ Ensure the word count is used. Short plans tend to give poor essays. A number of markers commented on this.

It is very useful to get the candidates to number the pages of their essay. This ensures that markers are not struggling to see the flow of the essay should pages become muddled up.

## **Paper 1**

Clear teaching of the course through the six issues is vital to ensure that the candidates are not confused on the day of the exam. Also, centres are to be commended for clearly focusing on what was a neglected part of the essay: structure. Easy marks can be gained with a clear introduction and focused conclusion. It is clear that many candidates gained marks in this area this year. It would be good to see this progress continue next year.

Progress was made in terms of the argument aspect of the posed essays. However, there continue to be considerable problems with many candidates answering with pre-prepared essays rather than the essay in front of them. Adaptability with the information is very important if candidates are to succeed. It is good practice to develop this specific skill throughout the year.

## **Paper 2**

The examination team for Higher History uses the Arrangements Document as a guide to content for setting the examination. Paper 2 is further defined through the issues and sub-issues that are clearly set out in the Specimen Question Paper. The entire course must be taught if candidates are to have the chance to complete their best work in the final examination. It is up to centres to do this.

Some candidates persist in writing provenance comments in all four of the questions. This will only be given credit in the 'How useful...' response. Candidates are wasting precious time with such action. There were also a number of comments relating to candidates clearly hurrying their reading and not thinking about the question in front of them. The dates given in some questions are often ignored, with candidates going past the date and using irrelevant material in their response. There are also some candidates muddling up the issues when answering questions.

In terms of answering the question, care should be taken to ensure that judgements on the evidence are made. It is not enough to simply describe information. It needs to be validated with appropriate comment. This is how marks are gained. Last year's External Assessment Report went in to considerable detail in how to do this. However, centres are to be

commended for the way in which candidates are now approaching Paper 2. It is very much a case of more of the same please.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	9831
Number of resulted entries in 2013	10337

## 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	32.1%	32.1%	3320	72
B	29.9%	62.0%	3089	63
C	22.8%	84.8%	2361	54
D	6.9%	91.7%	714	49
No award	8.3%	100.0%	853	-

## 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.