



External Assessment Report 2014

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| Subject(s) | History |
| Level(s) | 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

In general candidates showed good knowledge of the areas of the course content that they had been taught. This was particularly true of Paper 2 and the Extended Essay. Both of these papers showed that candidates had been well prepared and had decent examination technique.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

There was evidence of good knowledge across the course content. This was particularly true of the essay topic on Votes for Women, which most candidates attempted in the British section of the examination paper. There was also evidence of considerable good practice from centres which had prepared candidates for the German, Italian, Russian and Cold War topics.

Paper 2

Most candidates knew how to deal with the demands of Paper 2. There was widespread evidence of good examination technique in terms of interpretation of the source content as well as the application of recalled information. The Comparison question was particularly well completed, and centres clearly have their candidates well drilled for this part of the examination.

Extended Essay

As expected, this was frequently the candidates' best piece of work. Candidates showed good knowledge and decent technique when it came to answering the questions that they posed.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

There were numerous concerns expressed by markers regarding the quality of argument in Paper 1. All too often candidates wrote pre-prepared essays rather than essays that were tailored to the demands of the question. This particularly the case for the essay on votes for women. This showed a lack of adaptability from many candidates as well as a worrying propensity not to read the question that had been posed by the Examiners.

A minority of candidates confused issues in Paper 1. This was true of both the Democracy and Liberal reforms essay, where candidates confused issues 1 and 4 with issues 2 and 5.

A small minority of candidates were poorly prepared in terms of issue coverage in the European and World section of Paper 1 by their centres.

Paper 2

The 'How useful...' question in Paper 2 continues to be poorly completed by most candidates. There was widespread comment from markers regarding the inability of many candidates to analyse the source and its provenance. All too often candidates were simply describing the features of the source rather than giving reasons for its usefulness.

Extended Essay

There was an increase in the number of invalid issues that candidates attempted to answer their extended essay on. There was also a worrying tendency for candidates to exceed the specified word limit for the plan. In a number of cases, candidates signed for a word limit that exceeded the specified threshold of 200 words.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Paper 1

Centres must ensure that their candidates have covered sufficient course content to allow them to answer the questions that are posed. Advice given in this examination report over recent years has frequently specified that at least four of the six issues must be covered if centres are to ensure that candidates can answer at least one of the essays in the examination paper. Covering the full six issues will ensure that candidates will have a choice of three questions in the examination paper.

Candidates need to be far better trained in terms of analysis of the issues posed in the examination paper. All too frequently comment made was relevant to the topic of the question rather than the specifics of the issue posed. This was particularly true of the essay question on votes for women, where candidates clearly answered questions that had been successfully completed in their centres rather than answering the issue posed in the examination.

Paper 2

Candidates need to be much better prepared in terms of analysing the sources that are posed in the examination paper. With regards to the 'How useful...' question, in terms of the contextualised items posed, all too often candidates were simply describing the sources rather than analysing the provenance and content. There is absolutely nothing wrong with describing these, but this must be followed with relevant comment that answers the question. A simple technique that would ensure that candidates do not do this would be to describe the source and then add a sentence that says something like, 'this shows that Source X illustrates the problems of eg the Catholic Church in Scotland, as it describes the problems of poverty for many priests.'

Some sort of evidence that the candidate has interpreted the evidence using their own words, where possible, is a way to ensure that marks are not lost. The same is true for candidates who are seeking to analyse the provenance of sources. For example, it is simply not enough to say that a source is useful as it was written by John Knox. The point needs to be extended with some reason as to why this fact makes the source useful. So some comment on Knox as a leading Protestant reformer in Scotland needs to be made.

Centres also need to ensure that candidates are clear in the content needed for the four issue areas that the courses are structured around. There was some evidence of confusion in a minority of centres, which could have been avoided if clear guidance had been given regarding how the examination is structured around relevant content areas.

Extended Essay

Centres are reminded of the perils of candidates attempting to answer issues that are either too simple or too complex. Simple issues, such as 'Describe why Mary lost her throne', or 'Why did Scottish politics become divided post war?' lead to essays that are descriptions of historical events rather than answers to a historical issue. Similarly, complex or poorly worded issues such as, 'Was the greatest change in Scottish society and culture caused by the changes in Scottish politics during the war?', or 'To what extent was the spirit of the Liberal Party the reason for the strong support and positive public opinion on Unionists in the 1920s?' generally confuse candidates, and occasionally markers.

Centres are reminded that past papers show good practice in how questions are structured. It is perfectly acceptable to use past paper questions, though changing an isolated factor can be an effective way for candidates to generate their own question.

Candidates who sign for more than 200 words will be penalised by up to a 10 mark reduction in their mark. Centres are also reminded that acronyms that are not standard will have every letter counted as a word. Acceptable acronyms that are counted as one word include KKK, WSPU, NSDAP. In other words, they are used in textbooks and have meaning to markers. As soon as letters are being used by candidates in a way that is not clear to a marker they will be penalised. This is a shame as the extended essay is frequently a candidates' best piece of work.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2013 | 10337 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2014 | 10881 |
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of Course awards | % | Cum. % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|----------------------|-------------|
| Maximum Mark 100 | | | | |
| A | 33.5% | 33.5% | 3650 | 72 |
| B | 30.0% | 63.5% | 3262 | 63 |
| C | 22.0% | 85.6% | 2397 | 54 |
| D | 5.7% | 91.3% | 621 | 49 |
| No award | 8.7% | - | 951 | - |

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.