

Review of Higher History 2007

Preamble to Questionnaire

Introduction

SQA has received representations from a number of stakeholders on various issues related to Higher History, including a request from the Scottish Association of Teachers of History (SATH) in 2006 for a review of Higher History. In response SQA has undertaken a thorough investigation of issues facing Higher History in the short and medium term. These are:

- 1 The position of Scottish History in the Course.
- 2 The place of the history of non-Western societies, studied for their own sake.
- 3 The content of the Course.
- 4 The structure of the Course assessment.
- 5 The distribution of marks and pattern of awards.

In the short term, issues relating to the distribution of marks are being addressed with the introduction of marking grid for the Extended Essay in 2007 and the reduction in the number of marks per essay in Paper I to 20 in 2008, with further measures under active consideration.

To address the issues facing Higher History in the medium term, a Development Officer was appointed in December 2006. During the spring term he consulted a representative selection of stakeholders, including members of the History Assessment Panel, the Principal Assessor and other members of the Higher History examining team, members of other examining teams and the verification team, members of the committee of SATH, and other stakeholders from all over Scotland. The main finding was the overwhelming demand for making some element of Scottish History compulsory.

A progress report drafted by the Development Officer was discussed by the SQA Assessment Panel for History. They in turn devised the options put in March 2007 to a subject conference comprising a representative group of stakeholders. The model for Scottish History was endorsed by 90% of participants. On other issues there was less agreement and these are part of this consultation too.

The consultation process suggests that there is a great deal of support among stakeholders for significant change in the Higher History qualification, both to take account of the introduction of a compulsory Scottish History element, and to revise, update and trim existing syllabus content.

It is envisaged that contexts will be offered for each of the existing periods (Medieval, Early Modern and Later Modern), to enable the teaching of a particular period in depth. There would be, however, no restrictions on choice of period, so that centres may choose, for example to study a chosen theme, such as revolution, across time periods.

The three unit structure of the Course will remain, though the titles of the units may change as necessary. The overall time for the Course assessment will remain at three hours, although time may be redistributed between the two question papers.

The timescale for development and implementation depends to an extent on the results of this consultation. At the very earliest, the new Course could be introduced in 2009 for first certification in 2010. Contact will be made with the appropriate bodies to negotiate the provision of support materials.

Although not a part of the development of ACfE, this revision will be sympathetic to its aims.

The Proposals

Scottish History

Throughout the preliminary consultation process there has been very strong support for a compulsory element of Scottish History in the Higher syllabus. The current climate in Scotland and Britain has played a part in fostering interest in the teaching of Scottish History, but it is clear that issues regarding the teaching of local and national history are being discussed in the rest of the United Kingdom, across Europe, and beyond. Scotland, as a small nation that has been united with its more populous neighbour for 300 years, is asking questions about the place of its own history within British, European and World contexts. Indeed, the self-knowledge that a study of some Scottish history will bring may enhance the self-confidence of learners.

The recommendation is that Scottish History should become a compulsory Unit of the course and be assessed in a manner similar to that in the existing Paper 2, ie questions would be source-based. There would be a range of contexts, from which centres/candidates select one. There would be a free choice with no period restrictions. The paper would be out of 30 marks.

Questions 1–4 address the implications of the recommendation in terms of the possible content of Scottish history in the Course.

Points to consider:

Questions 1 and 2

- ◆ The study of Scottish History would be compulsory and worth a minimum of 30% of course (and a maximum of 60% where candidates select a Scottish topic for their Extended Essay).
- ◆ Scottish History topics would be taught in depth and examined using a range of source material.
- ◆ Centres would have opportunities for field work and other teaching methodologies based on resources close at hand.
- ◆ Existing Special Topics based on Scottish History can be retained and amended as necessary.
- ◆ There is an opportunity to introduce new Scottish Special Topics. There has been considerable debate engendered by recent publications on Scottish history.
- ◆ A Course where Scottish history is compulsory in all centres will encourage publishers, broadcasters, Learning and Teaching Scotland and other resource providers to produce new materials for Scottish history.
- ◆ Other Special Topics can be moved to other parts of Course. This may lead to some change in teaching methodology for former Special Topics such as ‘Appeasement’ or the Cold War, but the resources in use will still be relevant.

Questions 3 and 4

- ◆ Existing Scottish History content could be incorporated into new Special Topics eg Scotland in the Age of the Reformation.
- ◆ Scottish Special Topics could look at key aspects of the nation’s history in new and intriguing ways.
- ◆ Scottish History in the Higher History syllabus could be extended to include a study of post–1945 Scotland in the light of social, economic and political developments.
- ◆ The suggested topics articulate to a large degree with existing provision at Intermediate and/or Standard Grade.

The content of the Syllabus: Paper 1

Questions 5–8 address the implications of the recommendations in terms of possible revisions to course content and other issues relating to Course content.

Points to consider

Question 5

- ◆ The change to assessment of these topics by extended writing rather than source-based items may mean a change in assessment rather than teaching methodology.
- ◆ The topics have a good uptake at Intermediate.
- ◆ There is criticism that the ‘Appeasement and the Road to War’ topic is too difficult for candidates at this level and should move to Advanced Higher.

Question 6

- ◆ There has been comment that centres find it difficult to cover all of some topics and that some content of some topics could be pruned.
- ◆ Some topics have a very low uptake at Higher: the Crisis of Authority; the Age of Revolutions; Royal Authority in C17 and C18 Europe; and the French Revolution. Where they exist, the Intermediate equivalents also have a very low uptake.

Question 7

- ◆ SQA is open to criticism that the Higher Course does not have any examples of non-Western societies or states studied for their own worth, rather than from the point of view of contact with the West.
- ◆ Such non-western studies have had a low uptake in the past.

Question 8

- ◆ It is difficult to define ‘British’ History pre–1707. This should be taken to mean the history of the ‘British’ Isles and the peoples who live there.
- ◆ If the topics mentioned in question 8 are not included in this Unit, choice would be restricted to versions, amended as necessary, of:

Medieval Society/Nation and King
The Century of Revolutions in Scotland and England
Britain 1850–1979

- ◆ Similarly, if more topics do not move to British history, the European and World section would have a very large number of options.

The structure of assessment

Questions 9–12 address other matters relating to the assessment of the Course.

Points to consider

Question 9

- ◆ Shorter 10 mark essays can act as a bridge to the 20 mark discursive essay.
- ◆ 10 mark essays could be tied to 20 hour themes eg in European and World History, the existing German and Italian topics could be split into two themes (1815–71 and 1919–39). This would provide centres with greater flexibility when planning courses. On the other hand, other topics may not split so conveniently.
- ◆ Discursive essay writing is a key skill taught by History departments recognised and valued by Further and Higher Education colleagues.
- ◆ Two 10 mark essays and a discursive essay would require Higher History candidates to write three responses in Paper 1 as against two 20 mark essay responses at present.
- ◆ The introduction of two 10 mark essays would require Higher History candidates to be taught the different skills of writing 10, 20 and 30 mark answers for Paper 1 and the Extended Essay.

Question 10

- ◆ The structure of the present Paper 2 does not articulate fully with Advanced Higher at one end or Intermediate and Standard Grade at the other.
- ◆ The 8 mark item has no articulation with items at any other level.
- ◆ The 8 mark item does allow an overview to be taken of the Special Topic.
- ◆ There may be a case for fewer items, still worth 30 marks in total.

Question 11

The overall time of the two question papers can not be extended, but time may be given from one paper to the other.

Question 12

- ◆ The Extended Essay allows candidates to produce their best work.
- ◆ The Extended Essay fits well with the aims of A Curriculum for Excellence in terms of candidate choice, individual responsibility for learning and candidate-centred learning.
- ◆ Centres and candidates have supported the retention of the Extended Essay in the past.
- ◆ The Extended Essay articulates well with the Extended Response at Intermediate and the Advanced Higher Dissertation.
- ◆ The Extended Essay is an extra burden on candidates and centres, particularly when compared with other subjects.
- ◆ The Extended Essay is open to abuse and can also advantage some candidates unfairly.
- ◆ The Extended Essay diverts teaching time from the other parts of the Course.