

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

History

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

History Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)	1,020
Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)	893

General comments re entry numbers

Despite the fall in entry numbers, it is still disappointing to report that a large a proportion of candidates were not able to progress beyond the level of historical competence they had already achieved at Higher, and meet the demands of History at Advanced Higher Level. About a quarter of the candidates were in the 10% marks band below the pass level. Centres and candidates need to find a way of raising the maturity, depth and technique of answering of both dissertations and essays/source questions, so that borderline candidates can push themselves to provide those few marks extra that are needed to reward their year's effort with a pass rather than a near miss.

It has been observed before that there still too many candidates being presented who appear to be receiving no direct teaching of their chosen field. The Examining team have always held the view that Advanced Higher needs to be a taught course. This course is more demanding than Higher and requires more sophisticated techniques of answering both the essays and the source questions, and in the supervision of the dissertation.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

A	11.4%
B	23.5%
C	32.4%
D	15.1%
No award	17.6%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

The 'normal distribution' marks spread of candidates is remarkably similar to previous years. It is notable for having **a dip** at the mid-point [due to the large number who do not quite make it up to the pass level], and a fairly long 'tail'. This year there was a worrying 1.5% [ie 14] candidates getting less than 25% overall, who seemed to make little effort in the written paper.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	11.4	11.4	102	95
B	23.5	34.9	210	80
C	32.4	67.3	289	66
D	15.1	82.4	135	
No award	17.6	100	157	

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as syllabuses evolve and change

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The grade boundaries are based on the aggregate mark gained from both the dissertation and script.

With regard to the dissertation; it was hoped that the smaller entry this year would lead to a more 'selective' presentation who would be better equipped to provide good quality dissertations. In some fields examiners found this was the case, but overall the picture hardly improved from last year. The average dissertation mark is still a high middle C. Given the right guidance it is to be hoped the average mark could be pushed by the candidates into a solid B. This is an area which merits attention by centres in order to try and ensure their candidates do justice to themselves in their overall grade. At the moment, for many candidates, the dissertation is not boosting their award.

With regard to the scripts, it might have been inferred from the lack of adverse comments about the examination from teachers/area subject panels etc, that centres saw the 2004 examination as a fair and equivalent test to previous year's. In two or three key areas, however, especially in source questions in three particular fields, we must acknowledge that some questions were more opaque or abstract than in previous years, and this year's cohort had noticeably greater difficulty in offering convincing answers to earn decent marks. This was not true of all fields, but the deficit was of a sufficiently great magnitude in three large-presentation fields, to have distorted the overall picture if left unchanged. Therefore the pass mark was

lowered. Fundamentally, therefore, we felt that this year's cohort was operating at the same ability level as last year, yet they faced a recognisably more difficult task, and the grade boundaries were therefore adjusted.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

General Comments on Dissertations.

1. Points about titles

As always, it is very difficult to generalise on this. More of the titles this year were taken from the approved list, but this was not in itself necessarily a good thing since approved titles could still be done poorly. Once again, the ‘classics’ on slavery as a cause of the Civil War, Nazi propaganda and William Wallace were generally poorly done.

Some new titles were in evidence, but whilst some were an improvement on the existing list, others [which tried to conflate two titles, or invented titles with curious dates, or had an over-concentration on one person] were not helpful to the candidate. There was evidence in some schools of the candidates clearly being left alone to make up their own, often clumsily worded, titles.

For all titles, candidates must ask themselves, ‘What are the issues here?’ .. not ‘What story can I tell?’

2. Points about structure

Many markers observed that the more classic the shape of the dissertation, the more successfully candidates seemed to tackle it. If it had an introductory section, 2-3 middle chapters and a conclusion, the piece tended to have an integrity, a more distinct classification of the information/arguments it contained, and a more purposeful feel to the direction it was headed. There were still many dissertations with as many as 8-10 subheadings which did not lead to a focused debate over the issues raised. Whilst accepting that chapters are not mandatory, more than one marker wondered whether they should be, arguing that many candidates at this age simply haven’t progressed enough in the organisational skills of writing to be able to boldly and safely go for a 4000 word single flowing piece of work. Chapters provide a structure that many candidates need.

With regard to structure, markers spotted more than one centre where several candidates’ dissertations on the same topic, bore fairly deep structural resemblances, which seemed to suggest the school had provided almost a template to work from. If this is the case, we counsel against it, as it really is against the spirit of the whole exercise, which is letting a candidate select the area they want to research and deciding for themselves how they then wish to present their findings. Abler candidates seem to under-perform in such situations.

3. Word length

There are many aspects of the word length ruling that will have to be absolutely clarified for all candidates. Once again the number of candidates who either didn’t understand the word length ruling or chose to deliberately disobey it was concerning. To the Examining team it is a clear rule. If the 4000 word rule is infringed, even by a small amount, that is an automatic penalty of 5 marks that is very difficult to claw back in the examination paper. **There is no leeway on this.** It is not as if a candidate who signs for 4023 will somehow be ushered through with no penalty because they only broke the rule by a small amount.

There are three clarifications on the word length issue that are being put into this Report, and will be widely circulated to guide next session’s candidates.

[a] The 4000 word count is for **TEXT of the dissertation only**. This does **not** include the contents page, chapter headings, footnotes or bibliography or appendices.

[b] The rubric on the blue sheet the candidates sign will become even more clear; the candidates **MUST** sign to show they have **NOT** written more than 4000 words.

[3] The candidate should put a word count [either hand counted and hand written-in, or done automatically by the computer by highlighting that page then going to word-count, and writing/typing it in,] **at the bottom of every page of text in the dissertation.** This should be total net of headings, footnotes etc. Markers will count

a random number of pages to verify accuracy.

Candidates should not attempt to gain an unfair advantage by heavily loading the footnotes or providing lengthy appendices.

4. Points about footnotes and bibliographies

The real worries here were more to do with the quality of the reading and resources referred to, than any worries about direct ‘borrowing’ of what the authors said. In terms of footnotes, some markers were concerned to see the low level of reading material that some candidates seemed to unabashedly acknowledge as their chief sources. The ‘Modern Times’ series does not provide the level of intellectual debate that Advanced Higher candidates should be looking for. Equally, candidates should get beyond the one big classroom text book in especially the Germany and Russia fields. These books are valuable for study in the field, and for the written examination; but they cannot possibly provide the width of detailed reading that is required in a dissertation. Unfortunately for candidates, markers know the contents of Farmer, Corin and Fiehn etc only too well, and recognise instantly when a chapter is being basically rehearsed in a slightly re-written form. In some fields, markers regrettably noticed an over-reliance on the Support materials. That does seem to represent a very threadbare approach towards doing this subject properly. Just as this course has to be properly taught in timetabled time, so it must be properly resourced. The Support materials are the beginnings of the resources road, not the end.

However, whilst some markers, as above, reported on a ‘poverty of scholarship’ others noted with satisfaction the impressive understanding that some candidates had gained from a wide range of up-to-date books.

5. Points about plagiarism

This was not as great a problem as in previous years. There was greater internet research, but often there was some attempt to properly credit where the information was coming from. There was still inappropriate use of some sites, in the sense that the information/views taken from them were not really being ‘sifted’, and basically were too lightweight or nationalistic for the purpose the candidate intended.

There was recognisably a tendency for some candidates to be looking for ‘sound bites’ from the internet, to spice up a more mundane piece of work

6. Points about typography and proof reading.

Teachers require to be more pro-active in this area of their pupils’ work. Teachers may have been reluctant to interfere in the mechanics of presentation/written English/ spelling/ word length etc, on the grounds that they could be accused on writing the thing for the candidates. Many have therefore kept their intervention very much at an arms length from the piece of work itself. The net result is that many dissertations are very poorly proof-read, full of typos, with pages missing or out of order, and sentences that do not make sense.

Dissertations are written that just do not help the candidate do justice to themselves.

Many markers commented on the poor standard of written English. At this level, candidates should be moving towards a professional, semi-academic style of writing that is objective, de-personalised and concise. They see this in almost everything they read and should attempt to replicate it in how they write about their chosen issue.

It is within the purview of the presenting teacher to take some involvement in these ‘literacy’ aspects of their pupils’ work. Obviously some might be worried on the grounds of professionalism, but it is acceptable to:

[1] Point out if it was over 4000 words

[2] Insist in the class that candidates check each other’s work and use the red pen on mis-spellings and poor sentence structure or grammar.

[3] Ask if their parents had read it, to see if they thought it made sense; another pair of eyes can pick up errors.

[4] Plan and push the whole thing through just a little bit earlier, so that they did not come in at the last minute without having time to be properly checked. Centres could make 31st March the deadline rather than 28th April.

General Comments on examination scripts

1. Essays

One shortcoming that was reported by markers **across almost all fields** this year was the prepared answer. Again and again candidates were marked down for providing an essay answer to the title they wished it could have been rather than the one it actually was. This may have been due to what some markers saw as a greater attempt by candidates to 'question spot' and therefore save themselves the strenuous revision regime across the whole field, or whether it was more a function of weaker candidates who were simply unable to think on their feet in using the information they had got; or indeed, whether they simply didn't understand that the question was asking them to do a certain thing. It is true that a question in 2004 on Stalin's Purges or Hitler's rise to power, may be built substantially around some of the same information, ideas, schools of thought that were needed in a previous year's question on that topic, but the 2004 question would have had a different emphasis and required candidates to argue their cases in a particular way. Merely rehearsing their revised answer to a previous question is not sufficient at this level.

2. Getting the source questions right

There are several areas here which must be addressed:-

a) Too many candidates still spend far too much time discussing the provenance of their sources which can earn them few marks. In previous PA reports, and in the revised NABs, the bulk of marks for source questions come from applied historical recall and the offering of wider contextual views. Some candidates still spend a whole page giving comments on provenance instead of on areas where the candidate can offer real historical analysis.

Where in essence, the candidate writes about provenance in a formulaic way and interprets content in a perfunctory, uncritical manner, providing no recall relating to either the views in the source or wider recall placing those views in a context, such an answer will receive, at best, 5-6 out of 12. The best quality responses are where the candidate quickly sets the source in its context via provenance, before moving on to develop issues such as the nature, (and scholarship where appropriate), of the view in the source, and something of the wider historical perspectives, that are necessary to contextualise the view.

b) In the last two PA Reports there have been clear guidelines on the style that should be used to help answer all types of source question. The marks schemes are also laid out in a way that will encourage candidates to look for recognition/interpretation of key ideas of the source, followed by triggered recall that supports/criticises/develops the source's views, followed by wider contextual comment that places the source's views in perspective. It is pleasing to report that many, many candidates showed they have a clear idea of this coherent way of expressing their views about the value of a source in elucidating some issue. Candidates should be aware of the implications of the word 'perspectives.'

c) In last year's PA's report there was reference to a couple of fields where candidates were caught out. This point applies to **all** fields, and it is quite simply this: all the field must be taught. The source questions can come from ANY part of the field, even the very later sections. Candidates **MUST** go into the examination prepared to offer their recalled thoughts on all topics. Any topics listed under Course Arrangements can legitimately appear as an essay or source question.

3. Historiography

Markers generally noted an improvement in this area. There were a few exceptions, but most presenting centres clearly had properly prepared their candidates to include within their essay structure/approach, an ability to refer to the authorities from whom their ideas came. It is true that not all essays lend themselves to a keen historical debate with key schools of thought arguing the case, but all essay titles would have been open enough for the candidate to include some signs of their reading on that issue. For some candidates, it was often still little more than the very generalised 'Some historians have argued... ', for others it was just historical name dropping, but for many the essays had a clear sense of a review of key historians' views on an issue, and these read convincingly as pieces of Advanced Higher work. Some poorer candidates invented historians' names. This practice is entirely unacceptable. Candidates are reminded that their work will be read and marked by highly experienced, very well-read teachers.

In the case of the source questions, candidates who were able to see the historiographical element as a clearly crucial part of the wider contextualising and 'perspectives', were able to enhance their mark beyond that of the candidates who merely saw wider context in terms of more, but different, facts.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Comments on performance in the examination papers follow, under their particular fields. In forming comments in this area, grateful appreciation is acknowledged of the full and detailed reports that each marker and examiner submitted. Here and there the views of different markers have been quoted.

Field 1: North Britain

The first three essay questions were generally well done, with evidence of plenty of good reading around these issues, and *'some very pertinent texts referred to.'* With reference to the archaeological evidence in Essay question 1; there were a lot of candidates who clearly knew different sites and what their individual contribution to understanding was. This was a clear cut above previous years, where candidates much more generalised over the value of archaeological evidence.

There were some excellent stylists and *'no-one wrote really bad English, apart from some infelicitous spelling.'*

Field 2: Scottish Wars

Nearly all candidates were able to bring historians' views to bear on their essays. There were a lot of straightforward essays where candidates did try to answer the question. There were *'some excellent and articulate answers showing fine command of English.'*

The third source question was well done. Candidates seemed to show here that they knew how to follow the 'formula' for doing a source question.

Field 3: Renaissance

Most of the essay writing was of a high standard. Candidates *'generally addressed the focus of the question well.'* *'More able candidates used historiography as a discursive tool rather than merely as supporting evidence.'* This was a strong field this year. There was *'some excellent work on humanism.'*

Most candidates had a reasonable idea on how to tackle the source questions and this was a better performance this year than in previous years. *'Fewer candidates simply deconstructed the source, with minimum recall, although some failed to exploit the sources themselves properly, and jumped straight to wider recall.'*

Field 4: Louis XIV

There were 5 candidates this year. They all tackled essays 1-3, with varying success. There was *'one spectacular answer on cultural patronage'*, and all essays successfully brought in historiography.

Candidates seemed comfortable with bringing historians' views into their source questions as well as their essays, although *'there is still evidence of discomfort in source-handling technique.'*

Field 5: Jacobites

Historiography was present in the essays of almost all pupils, and there was a very satisfactory standard of written English.

Field 6: US Civil War

There were some very good essays with *'excellent essay style'*. Some candidates *'had obviously gone to great lengths to establish the different historians' views.'* Pleasingly for markers, the competence in answering, and the good technique in including historians' views, was matched in some with a writing style where candidates *'appeared genuinely interested in the titles they tackled.'* Essay 6 had some very promising answers. For this item, weaker candidates seemed able to use the Support materials as, at the very least, an effective crutch, while better candidates leapt on to higher reading.

Field 7: Japan

Unlike the case in all other fields, it often seemed that there was a higher standard of analysis and reasoning in the source answers than in the essays! For some candidates, *'pass essays were contrasted with full marks for their sources answers.'* In some centres there is clearly some very sound teaching on the approach and technique needed to do the source questions.

Field 8: Germany

In the essays, *'It is pleasing to report that only a handful of candidates failed to take account of different historical interpretations.'* Some markers reported on candidates having *'an impressive and detailed knowledge of the field.'* The 'Was Weimar a failure?' question was done very well by a few. Not many candidates did Q6 but it was well tackled by those who did.

The sources did not appear to present too many problems and most were able to use them as a launch pad for developing out into a worthwhile historical debate... *'standards were higher than last year.. candidates showed good - and in cases exceptional - contextual knowledge to provide genuine evaluation.'*

Field 9: South Africa

Historiography had definitely improved, with fewer references to 'historians' and more named historians and their views.

There was one very impressive analytical essay on the reasons for the NP victory in 1948.

Field 10: Soviet Russia

Essay questions 1 and 4 were generally done well and candidates included accurate historians' views. One marker commented that *'the vast majority of candidates I marked were very good and their English was first class.'*

Field 11 Spanish Civil War

There was some evidence of good source-handling skills but responses varied.

Field 12: Britain at War

There were some very good essays on Labour's management of the economy.. *'but these were the exception rather than the rule'*

The 16 mark two-source perspectives question was generally well done. The fact that it came from what seemed to be a popular part of the course helped many candidates come up with promising recall on all sorts of perspectives *'candidates were well clued up on the issues relating to the bombing campaign against Germany.'*

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Field 1: North Britain

Some schools still seemed to be keeping the focus of their teaching on the old CSYS studies in depth of the Roman and Native, and Pict and Viking, rather than taking an overview.

The two-source perspectives question was generally poorly done, with candidates bringing in very little wider recall to either explain the sources, or provide contextualisation. There were still too many candidates who *'just rehearsed the sources'*.

Field 2: Scottish Wars

There were too many examples of candidates wanting *'to turn their essay question into their preferred option rather than the one that was asked'*. Essays on Balliol wanted to discuss whether or not he was weak, not why he was deposed. The Wallace question still seems to attract candidates to give narrative answers.

Candidates found the two-source perspectives question difficult. They did not seem to appreciate that the two sources give different angles on a debate. Candidates should have been able to recognise the issue concerned, and bring to bear relevant recall to *'talk round'* that debate. Many candidates still tried to directly *'compare'* the sources.

Candidates seemed to have a fairly thin content knowledge of the Guardianship.

Field 3: Renaissance Italy

In some essays there was a tendency towards narrative, and *'some weaker candidates lapsed into very casual English.'*

More worrying was the appearance of *'bogus'* historiography. Candidates should avoid throwing in the names of historians in that field. Markers/examiners are well aware of which historians write about which aspects of the course.

In the source questions; numbers 2 and 3 were more poorly done, where candidates were not always sure what was being looked for, although their knowledge in the areas was quite good.

Field 4: Louis XIV

With few exceptions, essays tended to be superficial, unbalanced and unfocused. In the source questions, *'the bulk of the answers were inept paraphrasing of the sources'*, with not nearly enough discussion of the points that the sources gave rise to.

Field 5: Jacobites and Georgians

'There were a large number of candidates who did not answer the question set but the one they would have liked.' This fact alone disadvantaged the chances of many candidates. All fields of study at Advanced Higher must be taught through the topics and issues involved in the course, not just through potential essay titles that is hoped will come up.

There were still shortcomings in source handling skills, where too many candidates *'worked the source, added immediate recall and stopped.'* Much of the recall was often vague, and *'certainly not argument-clinching stuff.'*

Field 6: US Civil War

It is still a concern to find schools where the whole intake still includes no historiography in any essay.

The third source question was very poorly done; *'Many candidates had never heard of the Wade-Davis Bill,'* and *'candidates were badly damaged'* by their poor responses to this question.

In the source questions generally, some candidates *'struggled with the depth of answer required.'* and many markers were dismayed at the lack of competence generally; *'it appeared that many candidates had little training in how to answer source based questions... the Wade Davis Bill question compounded the problem but did not excuse the overall level of response.'*

Field 7: Japan

As in Field 6, it is still a concern to find schools where the whole intake still includes no historiography in any essay... *'there was a big disparity between centres who 'do' historiography and those that don't.'*

In Source question 3, some candidates had difficulty with *the nature* of Japan's military changes.

Field 8: Germany

In the essay on the political response to Versailles, candidates too often chose to interpret this as 'general/popular response, with no reference to any political parties/figures, or didn't see the word *maintained* as having a time aspect to it over the 1920s. The 'Was Weimar a failure?' question tended to see too many candidates provide unbalanced answers concentrating on the early years.

Field 9: South Africa

Several candidates were not able to manage two good essays. They generally did one good one from the early part of the field, and a weaker second one. *'There were no good essays on the Apartheid era!'*

Some responses to source questions were *'shockingly poor'*, with most candidates not knowing what to do with the sources and including little recall. *'Few candidates recognised the Treason Trial at all'* even though it is named in the syllabus.

Field 10: Soviet Russia

In Essay Q1 the question required an analysis of the roles of Trotsky and Lenin in bringing about the revolution. Many candidates wanted to give a chronological, biographical portrait of these two characters. Source question 3 was generally very poorly done; many candidates seemed unfamiliar with this part of the course. The area of foreign policy is well covered in the HSDU Support materials.

Field 11 Spanish Civil War

There must be account taken of different historical interpretations in ALL essay answers to get a pass. Markers must fail any essay which has no reference to this part of the criteria laid down in the Course Arrangements.

In the essays, there is still evidence of the candidate *'trying to bend the question to suit.'*

With both the sources in the two-source perspectives question referring to Italy, candidates tended to concentrate too much on Italy even though the question itself clearly wanted a wider picture. There still seems too much emphasis in the candidates' mind to directly compare the sentences in the two sources.

Field 12: Britain at War

There were some high quality essays, but several candidates exposed their weaknesses in trying to fit pre-prepared titles into the title that was asked.

Markers reported on a *'lack of attention to answering the question.'*

Source questions were *'done very badly'*. In general they were weak on providing both additional explanation of the views in the source, and also recalled wider contextualisation.

More worryingly however, there simply seemed to be a lack of vocabulary that prevented candidates appreciating what *emancipation* meant in Source Q2, or what *consensus* meant in Source Q3. Source Q3, was generally poorly done, perhaps as a result of its position in the course.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

1 Historiography must be included in all essays. Centres should ensure candidates include references to differing interpretations or views of historians in their essays.

2 Teach the entire course. Candidates will suffer if they tackle a question that comes from a part of the field that was not taught.

3 It is worth looking at the two previous PA reports for guidance on successfully tackling the source questions. Some centres do it very capably, others rather less so.

4 The two-source perspectives question is not merely a comparison of the 2 sources; after all, in many cases the 2 sources could be totally opposite in what they say. It is a **perspectives question** which needs the candidate to analyse the view, develop it with additional evidence as to the validity of the view, then place it in context by referring to other views. This technique needs to be taught. It is worth spending time with candidates going over the marks schemes of NABs (Post test) and past papers to demonstrate the range and depth of possible alternative recall/wider views that the markers would be prepared to reward in any particular area of the course. At the moment this is often lacking and markers are unable to give so few marks to candidates who do little other than rephrase the sources or state the obvious.

5 Success in the dissertation is central to attaining an A or B grade. More candidates must be able to go into the examination in the confident knowledge that they have done justice to themselves with an analytic, issue-driven, well-organised and structured, properly-typeset and proof-read piece of work of less than 4000 words. This is the spring board for a decent pass. At the moment, too many candidates are going in to the exam with a deficit to try and make up.

6 The word count for the dissertation is 4000. This does not include headings, footnotes or bibliography. In 2005 candidates will actively sign that they have given a true statement of the net length, and that they will be due a penalty of five marks if they infringe the limit. Candidates should also include a net word count for each page, as well as an overall total. Teachers/lecturers are advised to check the length of the dissertation. Candidates are highly unlikely to make up any penalty arising from infringement. To this end teachers/lecturers are urged to insist that dissertations are available to them in good time.