

## Principal Assessor Report 2004

**Assessment Panel:**

**History**

**Qualification area**

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

**Higher History**

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2003 (Post-appeal)</b>	8,084
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2004 (Pre-appeal)</b>	7,885
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### General comments re entry numbers

Though slightly below the exceptionally high level of 2003, total entries are being sustained well at a level significantly higher than even three or four years ago. This is pleasing, as in that period Intermediate 2 has become available for candidates who previously would have had no option but Higher.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards

A	15.5%
B	32.6%
C	29.0%
D	8.5%
No award	14.4%

### Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

There was a small increase in the number of upper A and lower A awards, and a larger increase in the numbers attaining band B, with the result that the total percentage of A and B passes increased from 44.3% to 48.1%. There were, however, 3% fewer awards at band C.

These changes reflect markers' reports of evidence of more candidates achieving beyond basic pass standard, but also that there were more very weak scripts than in 2003.

## Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards (Marks out of 110)	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	15.5	15.5	1,220	72
B	32.6	48.1	2,575	61
C	29.0	77.1	2,285	51
D	8.5	85.6	672	
No award	14.4	100	1,133	

### 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

Unfortunately, it was necessary to lower the grade boundaries this year owing to a combination of factors:

In Paper 1, in the Later Modern Period three questions (9 – relating to Germany, 10 and 12) were reported by some markers to have presented some difficulties in interpretation for candidates, and this may have disadvantaged some candidates.

In Paper 2 Special Topic 7, Source B proved less accessible than had been hoped to candidates around and slightly above the borderline. As this source was used in two questions it had an adverse impact on performance. A few markers also reported some concern over the accessibility of Special Topic 8, question 5, though this was more a teaching than an examination issue.

As the above issues affected higher performing candidates less than those nearer to the borderline, it was agreed to adjust the grade boundaries by 2 marks at the C boundary but only by 1 at the A boundary.

The correction notice had no discernable effect, but all scripts potentially at risk were scrutinised.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

The overall performance of candidates was slightly weaker than in 2003, though the general standard was still satisfactory. There were, however, rather more examples of outstandingly good work than last year, with the best scripts scoring very high marks. At pass mark stage, the overall pass rate fell by 0.6% to 77.8%, but the A pass rate increased from 14.2% to 14.8%, reversing last year's trend. It is concerning that some markers reported an increase in very weak scripts, suggesting that some candidates were entered for Higher when they might more appropriately have been presented for Intermediate 2. One Paper 1 marker in particular queried why candidates with no chance of passing (scoring less than 10/50 for that paper) were being presented at Higher, and wondered whether they had passed the unit assessments, the latter point being endorsed by another marker. A third commented on "a number of efforts clearly not acceptable at this level". All of these responses suggest that centres might consider more carefully whether some candidates would benefit more by being presented at Intermediate 2 in S5, perhaps with the opportunity of progressing to Higher in S6.

Especially in Paper 1, some markers noted that patterns of performance or approach tended to be common across all the scripts they marked from particular centres, reflecting the preparation by the centre. This can disadvantage candidates in some instances.

Though the mean score in Paper 2 was marginally lower than last year, this was not reflected in markers' reports, many of which expressed satisfaction at the general standard of performance. As in previous years, it was noticeable that more able candidates were able to score very high marks in this paper, with several markers reporting increasing numbers of candidates scoring 24/30 or more, though some also reported an increase in the number of scripts scoring very low marks. Regrettably, there was a Correction Notice in this Paper relating to Special Topic 7, and there were reports that some invigilators read the notice out late or did not do so at all. Scripts for such centres were reviewed at finalisation, and there was no evidence that candidates had been disadvantaged. The marks for only two candidates were adjusted, and neither was attributable to the effects of the Correction Notice.

There were no obvious changes to the selection of syllabus areas by centres, with no evidence that any centre had taken the opportunity to select a Special Topic from a different area of the syllabus to that selected for study in Paper 1.

Relative performance in the three elements of the examination were similar to those in past years, though the differential between Paper 1 and the other two elements was greater than in any of the three preceding years. In all three elements the mean score was lower than in 2003, though in the Extended Essay and Paper 2 the margins were small. However, the perennial problem of candidates failing to transfer their essay skills to the unseen conditions of Paper 1 was even greater than in recent years, the mean score falling to 25.4, a full mark lower than 2003 and 1.8 below 2002. Clearly, for results to improve further, this is the area in which concentration is required.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

### Paper 1

Despite the fall in the mean score, there was some evidence of very high quality work from some candidates who took care to read the question carefully and respond appropriately to the question asked.

The main positive feature of responses to this paper was that most candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of historical content. In some cases there was also evidence of awareness of historical debate, especially among more able candidates.

Some individual questions drew generally good responses. These included questions 13 and 14 in Option B: Early Modern History, while in Option C: Later Modern History the best responses came in questions 4 on the post-war Labour Government reforms, question 6 on the growth of German nationalism and more generally in answers to questions on the Large-Scale State (Russia).

### Paper 2

Across all Special Topics the level of recalled knowledge displayed by candidates was good, though it could often have been used more constructively to illustrate specific points of evaluation. In most Special Topics source evaluation questions were also answered well, with candidates able to identify the views of the authors, comment sensibly on their provenance and provide an evaluation supported by recall.

The improvement noted in 2003 in answers to the three-source questions has continued, with a much improved balance between evidence from the sources and from recall. The best responses in this style of question continue to resemble mini-essays in format, complete with short introductions showing an understanding of the issue and a brief conclusion focussed on the terms of the question.

In respect of specific options, there were some very good scripts in Special Topics 2 and 3, with good work also being reported in Special Topic 8 (though see below for one area of difficulty here). In the most popular option, Special Topic 7, markers reported good responses to questions 1 and 5, with there being a mixed report on question 4. In this question, based on a visual, many candidates were able to interpret the source in great detail: for example, some noted that the cartoonist depicted Chamberlain with his sleeves rolled up, indicating how hard he was working for peace; others referred to the globe being as yet some distance from the safety of the cliff marked “peace”, showing that his policy was still at risk. Some were, however, less successful in using recall to explain how the evidence from the source related to Chamberlain’s foreign policy during the Czech crisis, with recalled evidence being limited to the story of his flights to meet Hitler during September 1938.

### Extended Essay

The Extended Essay continues to offer candidates an excellent opportunity to display their best work. This was the one element of the examination in which there were reports of a reduction in the number of very weak scripts, perhaps indicating that the process of preparing for this exercise is now so well established that even relatively weak candidates are able to cope successfully with the task. There were fewer reports of inappropriate titles.

Markers praised the preparation and research for the essay, reflected both in the knowledge and understanding displayed and in the sound essay structures adopted by the vast majority of candidates, most of whom now make positive use of introductions and conclusions. Many markers also commented favourably on the increased use of historiography and awareness of historical debate.

Areas of the syllabus in which particularly good work was seen included Appeasement (though there were also some cases here where candidates disadvantaged themselves by selecting cumbersome essay titles that made it difficult to structure their responses), women’s suffrage (where submissions tended to be either outstanding or very ordinary), German and Italian unification.

One unusual feature to report is that candidates from a few centres were reported to be breaking the spirit, and in some cases the letter, of the rules for the plan, by using pictograms instead of words. Apart from making it difficult for markers to judge accurately whether the 200-word rule had been contravened, it also made it difficult for them to gauge whether the plan was actually that of the essay that had been written. Yet one of the main reasons for having the plan is to provide evidence that the candidate produced the essay in accordance with the regulations. SQA will clarify the position to centres that such hieroglyphs are not acceptable in future.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

### Paper 1

As reported in 2003, the biggest issue here remains that of candidates addressing the terms of the question. Marker after marker reported concerns over the apparent determination of candidates to use “prepared” answers without reference to the terms of the question. One remarked that there was “a high percentage of prepared essays that ill-fitted the questions in the paper, as candidates obviously hoped for different questions and failed to adapt”. Sometimes it appeared that whole classes had been prepared to answer a specific question rather than learning a historical theme with a view to responding to the terms of whatever question might be asked on it. As another marker said, there were “too many ‘standard’ answers in which the influence of practice essays was evident ... a large number of essays lacked focus and wandered into irrelevant areas (a consequence of practice essays?)” Candidates who score highly in this paper do so because they *read* the question, as opposed to noticing what the topic is, and then *answer the question asked*, not the one they practised weeks or months before.

This feature was compounded by an additional issue: it appeared that some centres were preparing candidates on a very restricted syllabus in respect of the Later Modern History Historical Study: Scottish and British. The absence of questions on the extension of democracy and on the Liberal Reforms 1906-1914 appeared to cause candidates from a few centres serious problems, despite the presence of other major themes such as women’s suffrage and the Labour Government 1945-1951, leading examiners to suspect that in these centres teaching in this study has been limited to a very narrow area of the syllabus. To a lesser extent this was also noticed in Historical Study: European and World with respect to nationalism in Germany, where the absence of a question on the rise of the Nazis to power seemed to inconvenience some candidates unreasonably, given the presence of direct questions on the growth of nationalism to 1850 and Bismarck and German unification.

Centres are reminded that the whole course is assessable, and that examiners must sample it both within individual papers and across a number of papers. There are risks attached to “cherry-picking” the syllabus, and centres should ensure that candidates do not depend too heavily on a limited range of topics.

The combined effect of these two issues was summarised by one marker, who observed that “too many candidates still come in with a rehearsed, pre-prepared answer and write it despite the topic not being in the paper i.e. Liberal Reforms”.

Issues of understanding arose in relation to two questions:

- some candidates had difficulty with the concept of “a total dictatorship”, in Later Modern History question 9 (Germany); and
- Later Modern History question 12 produced a number of answers which were more about the causes of the Depression in the USA than about the impact of the Wall Street Crash itself.

### Paper 2

In the option of highest uptake, Special Topic 7, there were several reports of candidates whose performance was near or a little above the pass borderline finding difficulty in understanding Source B. Because the source commented on the role of the International Brigade, some candidates read this source as an expression of *support* for intervention, though more able candidates found no problem in understanding that the author was

an opponent of the International Brigade and of intervention, actually being sympathetic to Franco. As the source was used in both questions 2 and 3, this misunderstanding had an adverse impact on the scores of the candidates who were affected. As a corollary, it also resulted in an overall weaker performance in the source comparison question (question 3) than in previous years.

Weaknesses reported in other Special Topics were:

Special Topic 2: In some centres, candidates found it difficult to interpret the map to support their answers to question 3, though candidates in some other centres were able to use the source much more effectively.

Special Topic 6: Some markers reported that the quality of recalled evidence was weaker in this Special Topics than in others, especially with reference to questions 1 and 4.

Special Topic 8: A minority of candidates had difficulty with question 5, on the importance of ideology in the development of tension during the Cold War. Though they understood the concept of “ideology” well enough, they found it hard to relate the concept to the wider context of the question.

### **Extended Essay**

Given the overall high quality of the submissions in this element of the examination, it is not surprising that the main issue to raise – yet again - is that a minority of candidates disadvantage themselves by selecting inappropriate titles for their study. As in previous years there were some titles that were invitations to narrative, others that were over-complex for this level of study or were simply pretentious, and others that were simply names of topics. There is some evidence that the last of these was particularly prevalent among candidates from further education colleges.

Many examples have been given in the past of inappropriate titles, but further illustrations may help teachers in advising candidates who are reluctant to amend their drafts. Examples this year included:

- Bismarck and the Unification of Germany
- How far had the Labour Government grew [sic] and developed by 1922 and did it help Britain become more democratic?
- How far were the Weimar government’s failures responsible for their reputation with the German public?  
and, memorably,
- Was Lenin the cork bobbing on the tide of revolution or was he the driving force behind the wave?

Markers also raised more prominently than in previous years their concern that some centres appear to be adopting a “group” approach to the Extended Essay, with a whole class being “taught” a particular essay title – or even plan. One marker reported that “this tactic produces batches of similar, bland essays, removing the individual’s strength while trying to ensure a collective pass”. That marker identified some specific centres where this appeared to have been done. The effects were as follows:

*Centre A:* All nine candidates wrote on the rise of the Nazis to power, with five answering exactly the same question.

*Centre B:* Eight out of nine essays were on Bismarck, with all of them having similar introductions and order of content.

*Centre C:* All ten scripts were on appeasement, all having similar titles, the same style of plan, similar contents and order of presentation.

Another marker criticised this approach as a formula provided by the teachers and followed rigidly by the candidates. A third noted that answers prepared in this way result in “very similar essays, based on the same notes and repeating the same quotes, making it difficult to distinguish individual thought”. While understanding that such patterns can result from students choosing a title that has been the subject of a class lesson on planning an essay, and also that this approach can assist borderline candidates by offering them a sound structure for their work, there is a real concern that it is the antithesis of a major purpose of the Extended Essay – to offer candidates the chance to follow a topic of individual interest. Candidates and teachers should be aware that, even if an approach of this kind assists candidates whose realistic

aspiration is a C pass, it can be seriously damaging to candidates who have the potential to attain higher levels of award.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

The main issues that centres should consider, arising from this year's examination, are:

- As in past years, but even more noticeably this year, candidates who demonstrate competence or ability beyond competence in the Extended Essay are still not transferring their skills successfully to the more demanding conditions of the unseen and shorter essay required in Paper 1.
- The single most important piece of advice to any candidate is “read the question: what does it ask you to do?” If candidates made certain that their answers addressed the terms of the questions, this would of itself raise the standard of performance substantially.
- Centres should ensure that in Paper 1 candidates are prepared across a sufficiently wide area of the syllabus that they will not be disadvantaged if particular favourite themes are not present in the examination. This is especially true in Later Modern History – Historical Study: Scottish and British, though it was also observed in the Nationalism section with respect to Germany.
- Centres are again encouraged to persuade candidates to select Extended Essay titles that reflect real interest and provide opportunities for them to express their individual qualities.
- Centres should remind candidates of the 200 word limit for the Extended Essay. Pictograms, maps, codes and text language will be penalised, but mind maps are permissible. This will be kept under review.