

Principal Assessor Report 2002

Assessment Panel:

History

Qualification area

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

History – Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2001	
Pre appeal	-
Post appeal	481

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	938
Post appeal	-

General comments re entry numbers

It was very pleasing to see such a large increase in numbers sitting the Advanced Higher History examination. A typical CSYS entry in years past was 600-620, so to see over 900 candidates sitting Advanced Higher was very encouraging. More pleasing still, however, was the satisfactory [or better] standard of performance from the majority of the candidates. There are clear signs that some of the key rulings/instructions in last year's Principal Assessor's Report have been acted upon. Candidates are showing that expected progression from Higher.

General comments

This second year of Advanced Higher History is the first year with all possible candidates from across the full range of ability. This stretched from the bright, literate and remarkably well prepared, to those who found the reading and study demands of Advanced Higher a 'step too far'. Advanced Higher History is a subject open to anyone who has a realistic chance of meeting the demanding standard, but clearly there was a small group of candidates, who in their own better interest, perhaps should have been dissuaded at an early stage from pursuing this course.

Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

	Mark	% mark	A priori (%)
A	97	69.2	70
B	84	60	60
C	70	50	50

General commentary on grade boundaries

Notional percentage cut-offs for each grade

Question papers and their associated marking schemes are designed to be of the required standard and to meet the assessment specification for the subject/level concerned.

For National courses the examination paper(s) are set in order that a score of approximately 50% of the total marks for all components merits a grade C (based on the grade descriptions for that grade), and similarly a score of 70 % for a grade A. The lowest mark for a grade B is set by the computer software as half way between the C and A grade boundaries.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

These grade boundaries were very close to the a priori scores, with a pass mark of 50% [70/140 marks] and a satisfactory pass rate at that level.

The grade boundary for A was set at 97/140, which is one mark out of 140 lower than an exact 70% pass mark. It was felt that the pupils on that score and above were all candidates who had satisfactorily met the A criteria.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Almost all markers noted that candidates seemed able to cope with the three hour examination. There were only a very few candidates [less than 10] who looked as though they had been forced to abbreviate their last answer into note form, or stop before they had written all they wanted to say.

In order to be more helpful as a direct comparison with points made last year, comments on the examination and dissertation will be in the same order as last year's.

General comments on Dissertations

1. Points about titles

Some candidates would still benefit from better advice about how to turn their chosen title into an issue. If the title does not provide the basis for debate, it is very likely that the candidate will deliver a narrative.

Markers can cope with the idea that a weak title could, nevertheless, yield a quality dissertation, but it will become quickly apparent from the introductory pages whether the candidate is likely to be turning an apparently bland and descriptive title into a stimulating intellectual debate.

Candidates should not submit dissertations with titles which are either all or mainly outside the course. For example, 'Artistic developments in Wilhelmine Germany' would **not** be approved either as a title in itself or as half of a planned comparison with Art in Weimar Germany.

This year the majority of the titles were taken from the approved list, and no new outstanding titles were recommended by markers.

2. Points about word length.

It remained the case that there were too many candidates who could not get their word lengths down to the prescribed amount. This varied across fields but may have been as high as 15% of the candidates.

The team were unhappy with candidates who signed up for c.4000 words. This evasiveness encouraged markers to count and if over, they were penalised. 99% of dissertations were word-processed and candidates should use the word count facility and honestly record that figure. Candidates did get the word count down to 3,990 and did this successfully. Those who do not deserve the penalty.

In a small number of centres the figure signed up for was well over 4,500; in one school all candidates signed for 5,000. This inevitably means a penalty of 5 marks before the marker even begins to read the dissertation.

3. Points about footnotes and bibliographies

A small number of centres seemed to take no account of last year's advice about footnotes. If footnotes start becoming explanatory and develop further ideas then this will be regarded as an unacceptable practice and will inevitably mean a marks deduction. Footnoting for dissertations should be referential only. Centres should not regard the specification that footnoting is not part of the word count as a carte blanche for massive inclusion of additional debate in an attempt to sway the marker to be more generous. It will have the opposite effect.

The team would hope that books quoted in bibliographies have actually been read. A large bibliography where none of it has shown up in the dissertation itself is likely to betray the inadequacies of that dissertation just as much as a short bibliography, where the couple of books listed have been copied out wholesale into the text.

4. Points about plagiarism

There were no outrageously long quotes this year, but all candidates should remember that, as a simple demonstration of courtesy to all authors where they have studied their writings and used parts of it in their own work to help explain or support points they want to make, then they should acknowledge where the quote came from. Quotes themselves should be kept shortish and certainly should not be seeing 100+ word lifts from even an acknowledged source.

It is necessary to give a stern warning against internet plagiarism. Where a marker suspects that a dissertation contains a level of phraseology that is out of keeping with that candidate's general level, it is a simple matter to call up an internet search engine such as Google and key in the suspect phrase. Candidates are very likely to be caught out and heavily penalised.

Candidates should be aware that in some fields their dissertations could be marked by the very person who wrote one of the standard texts that they have plagiarised.

5. Templates

While we encourage schools to come up with innovative ways of getting over the right techniques of study, and good presentation of their work, the team has reservations about such heavy 'coaching' that the school has prepared a dissertation template which all pupils follow (including suitable introductory quotes, section sub-headings, etc) and indeed, the whole candidate group then prepares the same dissertation title. Experience suggests this approach unduly restricts candidates, particularly those at the upper end.

6. Proof reading

Many markers remarked upon the poor standard of proof reading of many dissertations. Every candidate should be anxious to present their work in its best light. Candidates have a spell check on their computer and should use it. Too many dissertations were riddled with spelling and grammatical errors, and general signs of carelessness in presentation. The big issue here is how far the teacher can persuade the candidate to tackle spelling, grammar and expression errors, without the teacher feeling that they are encouraging the candidate to cheat by helping them to 're-write' it. This area is worthy of debate.

7. Typography

It is of great assistance to the markers if the dissertations are typed out in a simple straightforward font [not bold] and double-spaced. Where candidates use fancy fonts, all capitals, dense print and narrow line spacing, the marker's task becomes more difficult.

General Comments on Examination scripts

1. Getting the source questions right.

It remains the case that, across the fields, some centres have markedly greater success in showing their candidates the best way to answer the source questions in Part 2. There are obviously different styles/approaches, but some work far better than others in moving the candidate away from merely rehearsing the provenance or paraphrasing the source.

A recommended 'formula' is:-

Outline the view of the source [back this up with selected evidence from the source which shows this], discuss why, how justifiably and how widely this view is held by bringing in other evidence which helps support it or other historians who back it, then discuss the shortcomings of the source's view in terms of other views that could be held [and historians/evidence to back them up] and omissions from the source.

2. **Misuse of the sources**

A small but noticeable group of candidates tried to get extra credit by taking quotes from the source passages in Part 2, and transferring them into their essays (whether they were relevant or not!). This is fairly obvious and will gain no extra credit for the candidate.

3. **Historiography.**

It is still surprising that there are candidates who provide no sense of historical interpretation in their essays, although it is mandatory in the course. Essays without recognition of different historical interpretations must therefore fail. Centres should appreciate that the team operates a fairly open definition of 'historical interpretations', but expect at Advanced Higher some signs of the candidates' reading, and therefore some awareness that there are different views on an issue.

If a candidate were to introduce a new paragraph with a phrase such as 'Naturally, other historians have argued.....' or 'There is another school of thought on this matter.....' that will suffice for meeting the C standard. If they start [accurately] quoting historians by name or refer to particular schools of thought, or give quotes from historians and changing views over time, that clearly takes the essay into B and A territory **on this aspect of the marking.**

4. **The danger of prepared answers.**

There is no credit given for re-wording the question to suit the prepared answer with which the candidate went into the exam. This was fairly common on a couple of questions in particular, where the question asked did not quite fit the standard format of how the topic had been taught.

5. **Legibility**

It may seem curious and perhaps unfair to criticise a 17-18 year old for their writing ability, but it remains the case that several of the examination scripts were virtually unreadable. It is not unreasonable to expect presenting centres to have identified this problem in a candidate's work and have taken steps to address the difficulties created by illegibility.

Comments on the examination papers are specified on the pages following, under their particular fields. In forming comments in this area, grateful appreciation is acknowledged of the full and detailed reports that each marker submitted. So also are the always helpful round-table comments that the examination team offered during the standardisation process. Here and there the views of different markers have been quoted.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Field 1 Romans

The general sense was that the candidates had been well taught on the content/detail part of the course, although too many essays still had no references to the views of any historians. There were good sound answers on Question 4 and 5 where 'there were some excellent essays with clear flowing style and great clarity of expression.' There was sound knowledge on Roman attempts at conquest, Christianity and Kenneth mac Alpin.

In the sources questions there was a greater realisation in many candidates that they have to get beyond what is merely in the source, and provide the wider context.

Field 2 Scottish Wars

In general the essays were well informed and most addressed the issue. In some cases the amount some candidates manage to write in the time given is astonishing.

The Bruce candidature question was competently done, and Question 6 provided some very good answers with many candidates showing great skill in drawing in evidence from across the course to illustrate their answers.

Field 3 Renaissance

Some candidates were clearly making systematic use of historians' opinions in answering both Parts 1 and 2. In the source questions, many candidates are getting beyond the provenance, and are handling the idea of contextualising the question well.

As with last year, there were clear signs in the essay answers of many candidates, of just how much they had enjoyed studying this area. There was knowledge, recall and coverage, but also a sense of enthusiasm for explaining what they had found out.

Field 4 Louis XIV

Candidates seemed to have plenty of detailed content which they applied to their essays. They seemed to have the 'drill' in their essay structure that 'There are a range of factors that have importance here....' and also brought in historians' interpretations. The monarchy question 'showed some impressive answers.'

Field 5 Georgians and Jacobites

All candidates had good detailed knowledge and understanding of the essays. They knew they were supposed to bring in historical interpretations but not all were very good at it, and coped well with the sources questions, showing good signs that the whole course had been taught, and generally showing a fairly clear understanding that the real marks to be earned were for contextualisation.

Field 6 British economic and political development

Only one candidate sat this field this year, so it is difficult to generalise.

Field 7 US Civil War

Some centres had trained their candidates well in the integral use of historiography which just seeped through their answers in both Parts 1 and 2 of the paper. There was 'evidence of wide reading and thorough training.' Markers generally commented that the standard of English was appropriate at this level.

Source Question 3 was generally well done. It seemed to give the candidates scope to bring in plenty of wider relevant contextual thinking.

Field 8 Japan

It was good to see the interest and enthusiasm that 'shone through some candidate's work.' All essays were attempted, and signs of competence shown in all of them.

Field 9 Germany

Candidates generally seemed to be able to fit in two reasonable attempts at essays and the source questions in the time given. There are signs of better teaching of the skills of including historiography both in the essays and the source questions. Good candidates seemed to have a clear idea of what was needed in the sources questions. Essay Question 1 on Versailles was often well done.

Field 10 South Africa

Essay answers were quite sound; students wrote relevantly and sensibly. All the candidates seemed to have time enough to finish the paper. The topic seems to generate enthusiasm in its candidates.

Field 11 Soviet Russia

Essay Question 4 had some answers of outstanding merit. It is good to see that the majority were able to use historiography well in their essays. This makes those that do not do it properly even more conspicuous. All markers observed that most essays had a logical structure and gave a range of analytical points. There were few very poor candidates.

More are passing the sources questions, whereas in some fields it seems the weaker section.

Field 12 Spanish Civil War

Many candidates argued their points well in the essays. However, there were not the top quality answers that were noted last year.

Field 13 Britain at War and Peace

Essays were generally reasonably well done but too many candidates still 'had little inkling that historiography was required.'

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Field 1 Romans

The lack of willingness to include historical interpretations in the essays is a concern. The expectation is that after a year of studying this field, candidates would give some sign in their answers of what they have read, and that this reading had influenced their view on the matter.

In many cases candidates showed they did not know much about the Gask Frontier.

There are still worries about some candidates' literacy.

In the source questions there were still some candidates who could not get beyond a prepared approach of expecting all the marks for referring to little more than origin, purpose and content.

Field 2 Scottish Wars

Many candidates did poorly in the Wallace question because they did not appreciate that 'Account for...' meant explain, not describe, leading to many answers that were narrative.

There were examples of weak technique in the source questions, with too much reiteration of source content.

Field 3 Renaissance

It is noted with concern that in some candidates' essays, there was no sign of a single reference to the views of historians or historical interpretations. Centres should be aware that such essays cannot achieve a pass mark.

Some candidates still over-focus on the text of the sources rather than linking the view of the source to their recalled knowledge on the context of that view.

Field 4 Louis XIV

There was a noticeable tendency to rewrite the question in the image of the one they wanted to answer. The Colbert question often missed out references to mercantilism. In some cases, 'references to historian's views were rather creative.' Sometimes there was too much paraphrasing of the sources, and an inability to detect what was the context of the source question.

Field 5 Georgians and Jacobites

There were some signs of padding out essays with narrative.

Field 6 British economic and political development

Only one candidate sat this field this year.

Field 7 US Civil War

Some candidates tried to 're-interpret' essay questions to suit their own knowledge. Essay questions 1-3 were better done than questions 4-6. Conclusions were the weakest part of the essays. In some cases, candidates fell back on narrative, and it seems that there were centres which encouraged all their candidates to write in the first person. Few candidates produced two good essays.

Field 8 Japan

Although source handling was 'competently done', there were signs of major differences between centres. In the case of essays, some centres have more clearly instilled the need for pupils to make historiography integral to their work.

Field 9 Germany

The tendency towards using prepared but inappropriate essay responses was more marked here than in other fields.

Many potentially 'A' quality essays had suitable factual detail but lacked the corresponding historiographical dimension.

Many markers noted what they saw as a decided difference in performance level between candidates from those centres that had been taught and those with what appeared to be less direct contact time with teachers.

There was some unsophisticated writing on the secondary sources with too many formulaic comments such as 'employing the benefit of hindsight'. The candidates should use comments on provenance sparingly and concentrate on why the historian actually holds that view and how widely the view is shared. Similarly, the tendency merely to paraphrase the source is not productive.

Field 10 South Africa

The responses to the source questions were 'adequate' with too much merely quoting of the source. Some candidates made the source comparison question more difficult than it really was.

Field 11 Soviet Russia

There is a tendency in some candidates to bring in too much distant background to their essays. It is not particularly good practice to tack on a little section of historians' views at the end of the essay. This will help the candidate meet the criteria for a C or B pass on the historical interpretations aspect of the marking, but it makes it look a clumsy and unsophisticated piece of work.

The source comparison question was not done as well as last year. There was too much direct paraphrasing comparison of what the two sources said.

For source questions, some candidates are being [wrongly] taught to do a little mini essay on the background to what they think is the general topic of the source, then say what the source says, then compare the two. This is poor technique since it is such an indirect way of getting to an answer of what the question is asking.

Field 12 Spanish Civil War

There is evidence that some questions were misunderstood or manipulated into something the candidate thought they would prefer to answer. Some candidates still missed out historical interpretations and wrote very briefly.

In the source questions, weaker candidates spent a lot of time copying out the sources; little or no attention was paid to wider context with some candidates. Candidates were 'over-versed in provenance aspects of the sources.'

Field 13 Britain at War and Peace

Sources were 'generally still poorly done'. Only a few candidates got beyond the stage of simple source rehearsal. Candidates are still 'not doing the source questions properly.'

This criticism is more widespread than just Field 13. Last year's PA's report, the exemplar papers and now the annotated marked papers should all help teachers prepare their candidates in the appropriate way for this key aspect of the course and its assessment.

Areas of common misunderstanding

Again problems of technique are the main areas of common misunderstanding that let candidates down.

Dissertations

The best dissertations have an introduction, chapters, and a conclusion. It is possible to write a good one which is just 4000 straight words, but most candidates would benefit from being given the advice to break the thing down into manageable parts and link them together properly with sub-conclusions. However, a dissertation with four separate disconnected sub-headings is not the answer either.

Essay questions in Part 1

What are expected are length, depth and development. It is highly unlikely that three thin sides would pass at Higher, let alone at Advanced Higher. Sample marks schemes for 2001 have been published on the CD Rom: candidates should study these and see the depth of detail that is required to meet the pass standard. Too many weak candidates 'spot' the question area, then give all they know about that topic whether it helps answer the particular question that was set or not. These candidates are highly likely to fail.

Source questions in Part 2

The demands of Advanced Higher source questions are a clear extension from the demands of Higher source questions, ie the technique is to establish the view of the source and contextualise it in terms of the validity of that view and the alternative views that could be held.

Techniques appropriate at Standard Grade may be seen as stepping stones, but at this level a broader brush is required, with much less emphasis on aspects such as bias, exaggeration or hindsight or on a detailed breakdown of the content, and much more on the context and importance of the source. Demonstrating knowledge and understanding of events, movements and schools of thought are the key aspects of this course.

Recommendations

Summary of feedback to centres

Points about Dissertations

The simple presentation of the dissertations in just the cellophane packet, was appreciated by markers, who found them easier to handle.

With respect to the advance checking of the dissertation titles, centres are asked to be aware of the mechanism involved. This is a quite time consuming process since every one of these is checked by phoning up the appropriate setter and getting general advice, then noting that on the sheet. This year that was for 72 candidates. Centres should not submit titles that are on the list, those that are a close paraphrase of those on the list, or ones that are outside the chronological boundaries of the course descriptor.

One general recommendation is to steer the candidate away from titles that delve into the psychology of the historical personality concerned. There have been some truly dire attempts to explain Hitler's actions by his upbringing. Equally, Stalin's rise to power should largely be seen in terms of the 1920s; there is only so much mileage in his life in the seminary.

Pictures put in simply as illustrations have little value in earning marks at this level.

In the external examination, candidates do not need to spend time writing the essay title at the top of their page at the start of the essay; just writing the essay number will do.

Presentations across several fields of study.

There is still serious worry about centres with small entries presenting candidates across a variety of different fields. It may be that these are weaker candidates, who like the idea of picking whichever field they like, but it is felt the results of these centres could be improved by concentrating on the teaching and resourcing of one field for that particular year group.