

Principal Assessor Report 2002

Assessment Panel:

History

Qualification area

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

History – Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2001	
Pre appeal	-
Post appeal	7800

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	7901
Post appeal	-

General comments re entry numbers

A pleasing increase in entries is noted

General comments

Awards rose marginally, mainly a result of better performance in Paper 1

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

	Mark	% Mark	a priori %
A	73	66	70
B	63	57	60
C	53	48	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

Only changes from 2001 are that boundaries for B and C rose by one mark each. Grade boundaries at this level have traditionally been low, to achieve awards that are comparable to related subjects. Work is ongoing in an effort to raise grade boundaries to the a priori figures

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The overall standard of performance was slightly better than in 2001, as reflected in an overall rise in the mean score from 60/110 to 61/110. What was especially encouraging was the increase of 0.7 of a mark in the mean for Paper 1. While this may not appear to be great rise, it equates to 1.4% in the mean score for the part of the examination that has traditionally been the one in which candidates score least impressively.

Significant numbers of markers reported that their allocations contained better responses than in previous years and also that the number of very weak scripts continued to decline, perhaps reflecting a greater confidence among teachers in selecting appropriate levels at which to present their candidates as the Intermediate 2 option settles in.

Patterns of presentation followed the familiar pattern, with a large proportion of candidates attempting Later Modern History. Within Option C, the popularity of the Large Scale State: the USA appears to be growing, as also seems to be the case in the numbers presented for Special Topic 8: The Cold War in Paper 2.

Relative performance between the various elements followed familiar patterns. The vast majority of candidates achieved at least half marks in the Extended Essay, with the largest cluster of marks being in the range from 16/30 to 20/30. In Paper 1 the range of marks awarded again tended to be compressed towards the middle, but the rise in the mean score indicates a slight upward shift in the graph. In Paper 2, markers reported a broad range of responses from outstanding to a (relatively small) number of very weak scripts. It remains easier for the more able candidates to achieve very high marks in this paper than in Paper 1, with a number of candidates this year achieving full marks in Paper 2 (including a script used as an exemplar at the Markers' Meeting).

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

As usual, it may be helpful to reflect separately on the three elements of the examination:

Extended Essay

As has become the norm, markers reported that the vast majority of candidates displayed at least competence in this element, a few markers also noting a greater number of very good essays than previously (though this was not a unanimous view, with other markers noting a proliferation of work at pass or slightly better level with relatively few high quality scripts). Most markers reported an almost complete absence of very weak scripts.

There was, as in recent years, much evidence of hard work and careful preparation. Markers highlighted the following as areas in which further progress was apparent:

- More confidence among candidates structuring essays appropriately, with better scripts having introductions and conclusions that were focused and purposeful.
- Impressive awareness of historiography and historical debate on the part of many candidates, though there were also examples of candidates using trivial “quotes” to create a bogus impression of such learning (see below).
- Good knowledge and understanding of the historical content of the areas studied, reflecting hard work in research.
- Some interesting developments in the planning process, with some candidates using mind mapping techniques and colour to enhance the organisation of the plan. There were, as in recent years, almost no plans that transgressed the word limits.

Among the best essays, there were examples of a refreshingly personal approach displaying independence of thought. A few candidates even noted the need to avoid judging the past from a 21st Century viewpoint. There were clear signs that the best essays result from the choice of titles that address issues of historical debate. With regard to context areas, markers reported good work in Medieval History, notably on essays on David I of Scotland and on the Crusades, and in Later Modern History there were examples of excellent work dealing with the growth of democracy in Britain, Bismarck and German nationalism and appeasement (though also see remarks below).

Paper 1

The overall standard of performance in Paper 1 was better than in previous years, with fewer very weak performances and some evidence of more scripts scoring very high marks.

These improvements may in part be a consequence of an examination paper that, but for one or two specific areas, has been welcomed as direct and uncomplicated. Certainly, there were fewer examples of candidates misinterpreting questions than in previous years.

As in the Extended Essay, there were pleasing signs of better awareness of essay structures, with several markers noting better use of introductions and conclusions. There were also signs of transfer from Extended Essay practice of awareness of historical debate. There was again evidence of good knowledge and understanding and of meticulous preparation.

Markers reported good standards of performance generally in centres presenting for Early Modern History. In Later Modern History, the questions drawing the best responses were 1, 2, 4, 6a, 8a and 11. However, it should be observed that in question 1, while relatively few weak answers were noted, many candidates were content to say that Britain was democratic (or more democratic than formerly) by 1911 because various Acts had been passed, and then simply to describe these Acts.

Paper 2

The mean score in paper 2 was the same as in 2001, but markers' reports were generally positive. The main strengths were in better structuring of answers and in the knowledge and understanding of the topics studied that candidates brought to the examination, reflecting careful preparation and hard work.

Most candidates attempted Special Topic 7: Appeasement and the Road to War, to 1939, but markers reported good work in scripts relating to Special Topics 2 (the Crusades) and 8 (The Cold War). In Special Topic 7, responses to question 3 showed better understanding of the Spanish Civil War than has often been the case. Answers to question 4 showed that the use of a photograph (Source D) instead of a cartoon posed no special problems for the candidates, this question producing many excellent answers, though some candidates identified the subject of the photograph variously as Churchill, Eden or even Hitler. There were also more examples of comprehensive answers to question 5 than in the past, with more than usual justifying the award of full marks (though see also remarks below). There were also reports of high quality answers to the equivalent question in Special Topic 8.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In the following observations, there are several references to difficulties affecting “some centres”. Frequently, the patterns of performance or behaviour in one paper affect candidates from the same centres as those in another. Centres whose results are well below expectations might benefit from reflecting on whether they follow the practices referred to below, and whether these might actually disadvantage their own candidates.

Extended Essay

Once again, the main concern of examiners is the carelessness sometimes shown in the selection of titles. While well-chosen issues often produce fine work, many candidates start the exercise by disadvantaging themselves with poor selections of title; some markers express astonishment that some titles escape teacher scrutiny (though accepting that some candidates may refuse to accept guidance). These fall into several types, none of which assist the candidates to plan and write their essays effectively. The following examples were all seen in the 2002 diet:

- Double issues – what problems faced the National Government in 1931 and how successful was it in dealing with them?
- Over-complex or demanding issues – how Marxist was Lenin?
- Questions that were phrased in ways that made their meanings unclear or that lacked analytical focus – From Russia, back to the Reich. Did the Tsar run out of luck? To what extent did foreign policy play a part in the Spanish Civil War? To what extent was Henry and Becket’s argument personal or was Henry trying to look after his Empire? Did the knight in the middle ages live a privileged or dangerous lifestyle?
- Issues not phrased as questions – Joseph [sic] Goebbels and Nazi propaganda up until 1933. Charles II as “Merry Monarch”. General Franco and the Spanish Civil War.
- Titles that encouraged narrative or descriptive writing – Did events in World War I give women the vote? What factors led to the downfall of the Tsarist Regime in 1917? What was the role of President Johnson in Vietnam? Why did democracy grow?

Some markers were sufficiently concerned to suggest that the SQA might consider publishing a list of sample phrasings for questions, especially on topics covered in paper 2, where potential phrasings are not available through the paper itself.

Other issues raised in markers’ reports were the obverse of the favourable comments cited above. Some were concerned that, apart from the best essays, introductions and conclusions were not used to their best effect. Some introductions failed to set the issue in context or to clarify the issue itself, while many conclusions amounted to little more than repetition of the main points in the essay, or were simplistic statements about the issue unconnected with points made earlier in the essay. Frequently, such essays were essentially narratives rather than evaluations of evidence leading to a genuine conclusion on an issue.

Despite the generally favourable reception to increased evidence of student awareness of historical debate and historiography, some candidates appeared to be using trivial quotations to make their essays appear more erudite than they really were. For example, one candidate wrote, “World War broke out in 1914 (A.J.P.Taylor)”. Such references are used for show rather than being integrated into the presentation, which is the case when historiographical material is used effectively.

Finally, several markers again expressed concern over what they saw as an increasing practice of class preparation of a single essay title and over the level of teacher input, which was felt in some cases to be excessive. Several examples were reported of whole packets of scripts with the same, or very similar, titles, where the presentation of the essays suggested drilling of candidates. While appreciating that teachers wish to prepare their candidates as effectively as possible, such practices are against the spirit of the Extended Essay, which is intended to permit candidates to study in more depth an issue of personal interest. This approach may assist less capable candidates in achieving a basic level of performance, but can be seriously inhibiting to more able candidates.

Paper 1

The following remarks should be read in the context of the evidence of higher standards over previous years, and are intended as a contribution to improving an already encouraging performance still further.

The main concern among markers was increasing evidence of candidates preparing stock answers on particular topics, which were then produced with minimal adjustment to address the terms of the question. As one marker wrote, candidates in “Several centres had clearly received ‘model’ answers and even good candidates regurgitated these (with varying degrees of accuracy) rather than think for themselves.”

Historians often argue, rightly, that one of the subject’s major contributions to personal development is its emphasis on evaluation of evidence to support independent thought. This is reflected in our marking instructions, which emphasise quality of thought as the key discriminator. This makes the above observations the more regrettable.

As in previous years, the other – and connected - main issue was that of candidates being satisfied to communicate factual knowledge in narrative or descriptive form instead of addressing the issue raised in the question. For instance, in Later Modern History, some answers to question 2 focused on describing the Liberal Reforms without addressing the issue of motivation for passing the reforms, many answers to question 3 amounted to accounts of the suffrage campaigns and some responses to question 6(a) addressed only the story of the Wars of Unification.

Paper 2

Again, the following remarks should be read against the above generally positive report on standards, and are intended to indicate areas in which further improvement could be made.

The examiners continue to be concerned that, in some centres, candidates appear to be trained in a formulaic approach to answering every question, regardless of whether it asks for source evaluation, source comparison, contextualisation or judgement on an issue. It is not uncommon in scripts from these centres for candidates to spend half a page (or even more) in every question repeating the same formula: source identification (sometimes by merely copying the rubric), comment on authorship, date of origin (accurately or inaccurately stating the primary or secondary nature of the source) and comment (often trivial) about the alleged purpose of the source. This is followed by a paraphrase of the source content, or sometimes quotations from it, followed by some recall and a final sentence which, at last, refers to the question. As with formulaic approaches to other elements in the examination, this approach can provide an illusion of structure, and is perhaps helpful to less able candidates, but it is positively stultifying to candidates of higher potential. What is worse, where it is necessary to refer to the same source in two, or perhaps even three, questions, the process is repeated on each occasion. While credit may be given once for this “information”, it certainly cannot be credited more than once, so the candidate who repeats the process is wasting time that could be spent more profitably answering the question. This will be addressed to an extent by the inclusion of prompts in both external and internal assessments in 2003.

Despite the improving quality of many answers in terms of integrating recalled knowledge with views extracted from the sources, there are still substantial numbers of cases where, as in the description above, candidates make no effort to use recall to comment on the source content, nor indeed to use the source evidence to reflect on issues from recall. This continues to be most evident in the 8 mark questions, where weaker answers typically follow one of two patterns, as revealed in responses to Option 7 question 5, which asked candidates how fully the named sources explained the British policy of appeasement:

- Answers repeating earlier paraphrases of the sources, but with no (or minimal) recall, on the apparent assumption that the sources did contain all of the relevant factors; or
- Answers incorporating a list of recalled factors but with no reference to the sources at all.

Some markers also expressed concern at answers, in several Special Topics, to the question requiring a direct comparison between two sources. Too many answers contain summaries of each source, quite separately, and a single sentence saying “therefore they agree (or disagree)”. Such answers do not indicate an understanding of the points of view in the sources and make no genuinely valid comparison. By contrast, the best answers this year to question 2 in Special Topic7 identified areas of both agreement and disagreement between the sources.

Areas of common misunderstanding

Paper 1

Though there were fewer such areas than in previous years, most attempts to answer Option C: Later Modern History question 7 dealt with periods other than that specified in the question, and answers to question 14 frequently ignored the dates in the question.

Paper 2

The only source that appears to have misled some candidates was Source A in Special Topic 7, taken from the autobiography of Duff Cooper. In the source, Cooper criticises the appeasement point of view, though stating his own position clearly. However, some candidates did not make this distinction, especially in answering question 2, resulting in weak comparisons between this source and Source B.

Recommendations

Summary of feedback to centres

Recommendations to centres are implicit in the remarks above about candidate performances, strengths and areas of difficulty. The key points are:

- In the Extended Essay, it is vital that candidates' choices of title are monitored carefully to ensure that they select an issue appropriate to their age and ability and that the question is phrased in a way that will guide research and encourage the writing of a discursive rather than a descriptive essay.
- In Paper 1, there has been pleasing progress in developing essay skills and understanding of essay structure. Continued work on these aspects will help to improve standards further.
- In Paper 2, students should be encouraged to use the source and recalled evidence to focus on what the question asks them to *do*. They should be discouraged from repetitious formulae about source provenance, which distort answers and prevent candidates from answering the question asked.
- In source comparison questions, specific comparisons or contrasts between points made in each source and on the overall views of the authors are required, not summaries or paraphrases of sources followed by a statement alleging agreement or disagreement.