Course report 2023

Higher History

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   9,864

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   10,116

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	3,668	Percentage	36.3	Cumulative percentage	36.3	Minimum mark required	56
B	Number of candidates	2,598	Percentage	25.7	Cumulative percentage	61.9	Minimum mark required	47
C	Number of candidates	1,700	Percentage	16.8	Cumulative percentage	78.7	Minimum mark required	38
D	Number of candidates	1,034	Percentage	10.2	Cumulative percentage	89	Minimum mark required	29
No award	Number of candidates	1,116	Percentage	11	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

Candidates were given a choice of four questions from the six key issues, in both the British and European and world sections.

In Section 1 — British: Part D — Britain, 1851–1951, most candidates answered question 14 (issue 3), and some answered questions 15 (issue 5) and 16 (issue 6). An increasing number of centres are teaching Part E — Britain and Ireland, 1900–1985.

In Section 2 — European and world, many candidates answered questions in Part D — Germany, 1815–1939, questions 35 (issue 5) and 36 (issue 6) and Part G — USA, 1918–1968, questions 45 (issue 2) and 47 (issue 5).

A few candidates found difficulty with question 42 (issue 3) in Part F — Russia, 1881–1921.

Evidence suggests that overall candidates performed well in this question paper, showing improvement on the previous year.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

All four issues were assessed. The issues and question stems were the same for each of the five parts (A–E) in 2023:

♦ 'How much …'
♦ 'Explain …'
♦ 'How fully …'
♦ 'Evaluate …'

Many candidates completed Part D — Migration and empire, 1830–1939. The other two popular topics remain Part A — The Wars of Independence, 1249–1328, and Part E — The impact of the Great War, 1914–1928.

Some candidates found difficulty with the 'How much' question in Parts A, C, D and E. The 'Evaluation' question in all topics proved challenging for most candidates.

Evidence suggests that candidates performed well, with overall marks showing an improvement on the previous year.

Assignment

The assignment was removed for session 2022–23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

Most candidates completed two essays, reflecting a very consistent standard.

Candidates were confident in changing the argument in the 'Evaluation' style questions. In the introduction, the isolated factor in the question paper should be addressed, although candidates can then refer to the isolated factor they wish to argue as the most important. An increasing number of candidates made isolated evaluation points, and a few candidates used evaluation to develop a line of argument in their essay. Markers noted more 2- or 3-mark conclusions where candidates made a relative overall judgement between the factors. Conclusions should answer the question, not just simply summarise or rank the factors.

In Section 1 — British, many candidates provided good essays for question 14 (issue 3) in Part D — Britain, 1851–1951. In Section 2 — European and world, candidates produced good essays in the following topics: Part D — Germany, 1815–1939, question 36 (issue 6); Part F — Russia, 1881–1921, question 41 (issue 2) and question 44 (issue 6); and Part I — The Cold War, 1945–1989, question 53 (issue 2).

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

Many candidates performed well in the 'How much …' and 'Explain …' questions this year, compared to last year.

Candidates used good historical knowledge to exemplify Scottish history. This was evident across all topics.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

In the British, European and world history sections many candidates were unable to access the full range of marks.

In the introduction candidates should have a clear line of argument, a list of factors, and two points of historical background. An increasing number of candidates are completing three paragraph essays. Therefore, candidates should use a minimum of two developed knowledge points in each paragraph.

For some candidates, use of analysis within essays was very brief. Developed comments are encouraged to access the full range of analysis marks. Most candidates did not access the evaluation marks.

In the conclusion, many candidates completed a summary list of the factors or ranked the factors in order of importance. This will only gain a maximum of 1 mark and is not considered good practice.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

Most candidates found the 'Evaluate the usefulness …' question challenging. Candidates should read the question carefully and respond using the relevant Scottish history. For origin and possible purpose (author, type of source, purpose and timing) generic comments do not gain marks.

A few candidates used partial quotes or ellipsis. This is not good practice. Candidates are expected to use the full quote from the source with an explanation to support their understanding or interpretation of the source point. Using a full quote from the source without an explanation will not gain any marks.

The 'How much …' question requires interpretation. It is important that candidates do not apply the comparison skill used at National 5.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

For session 2023–24, Higher History will return to full assessment requirements. Please refer to the course specification.

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

Candidates should read the essay question to avoid answering the wrong question or issue. They must answer the question as it appears in the question paper and not give a pre-prepared answer. Those who exemplify best practice focus on the issue in the question, not the topic.

In an introduction, candidates should clearly set out their line of argument.

In an evaluation question, it is important that candidates address the isolated factor in the introduction and throughout the essay, including in the conclusion.

In an assessment question, candidates should clearly state if their line of argument is effective, or not effective, or partially effective in answering the question. Successful candidates use developed analysis in support of the factor, for example a counter argument, limitation or comparing factors. Evaluation, when used correctly, offers candidates the opportunity to make isolated evaluative comments on an individual factor, or evaluative comments that build a line of argument. To access up to 3 marks in a conclusion, candidates should look to make a relative judgement in their line of argument against each of the factors.

Candidates should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the marking instructions.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

Centres should ensure that they prepare candidates with Scottish historical knowledge. Some centres are now using specific school, community, local or national examples that are clearly linked to the Scottish context. This is considered good practice.

'How fully' question

Candidates should fully quote source points, supported by detailed explanations clearly linked to the question, to access up to 4 source marks. Paraphrasing is accepted but the source point should not lose its meaning in the explanation. Candidates should use relevant developed knowledge to access up to 7 marks. The question allows candidates to access all the description of content points as the question addresses the key issue.

'Explain' question

Candidates are required to 'explain the reasons' in answering the key issue. Candidates need to identify a key point from the historical issue and provide a relevant explanation linked to the question. Each point is worth 1 mark, up to 8 marks. There is no additional mark awarded for a developed point.

'Evaluate' question

Candidates perform well using both the source points and relevant developed knowledge in answering this question, which always comes from the description of content. However, there is the additional skill of using origin and possible purpose. The four aspects of the source candidates should comment on are author, type of source, purpose and timing. The comments require candidates to think about each aspect of the origin and purpose, and why they are useful in answering the issue from the description of content. Focus should be on the specific area of Scottish history studied. Generic statements provide weak answers and rarely gain marks. Up to 4 marks are available for origin and purpose, up to 2 marks for source points, and 3 marks for developed knowledge points.

'How much' two-source question

Candidates are required to interpret the viewpoints from the sources, up to two points from each source. Candidates can gain a maximum of 4 marks for the interpretation of the views from the two sources. A further 2 marks are available for the overall viewpoint in each source, 1 mark for each overall interpretation. Each source point identified should correctly interpret the view and be linked to answering the question. Candidates should also include relevant developed knowledge, to access up to 6 marks.

Assignment

Candidates should choose a question that will allow them to access the full range of marks. The most effective candidate responses use an assessment or evaluation type question, for example 'How successful' or 'How important' or 'To what extent'. Changing an isolated factor allows candidates from the same centre to answer a different question on the same issue. It is not considered good practice to have candidates from a centre use the same question, factors, recall and references.

Candidates tend to produce their best work in the assignment write-up. This reflects good support from teachers and lecturers. However, the resource sheet has been an issue in the past, particularly the use of references. Best practice was reflected in candidates who use the resource sheet as an essay plan, for example providing a summary of the factors or issues, key knowledge points, and detailed referencing such as author, textbook (website) and full quote.

Candidates should note the following requirements when referencing sources:

♦ secondary sources — provide author, book title and quote
♦ primary sources — provide author, date and quote
♦ websites — provide quote, author or text (note: the full website address counts as one word)

References used to support the analysis and/or evaluation exemplified best practice.

The resource sheet should have no more than 250 words, and it can only be one side of A4.

Centres should ensure that, along with the assignment, all relevant supporting documentation is submitted for candidates. This includes checking the following:

♦ candidate's name and the full question being answered should be noted on both the flyleaf and the first page of the assignment
♦ each page, typed or handwritten, should be numbered
♦ the flyleaf should be signed, with the marking sheet overleaf
♦ the completed resource sheet should be included

Centres must ensure that resource sheets are submitted for each candidate for the 2023–24 session. These sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA along with the candidate's assignment. A penalty of 20% of the candidate's overall mark for the assignment component will be applied in the case of non-submission. Further information can be found in the Coursework for External Assessment document and the course assessment task on the History subject page of SQA's website.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).