Course report 2023

National 5 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:   15,709

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   16,264

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	6,856	Percentage	42.2	Cumulative percentage	42.2	Minimum mark required	56
B	Number of candidates	3,671	Percentage	22.6	Cumulative percentage	64.7	Minimum mark required	45
C	Number of candidates	2,616	Percentage	16.1	Cumulative percentage	80.8	Minimum mark required	34
D	Number of candidates	1,803	Percentage	11.1	Cumulative percentage	91.9	Minimum mark required	23
No award	Number of candidates	1,318	Percentage	8.1	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

Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicated that the question paper was seen as fair and accessible to candidates, with a positive response to session 2022–23 modifications.

Overall, the question paper worked as intended in terms of demand on candidates. There was appropriate differentiation within and between questions, proportionate to the skill being assessed. Many candidates performed strongly with a few achieving full marks. A few candidates found it challenging to demonstrate the required range of knowledge and skills within the time available.

Overall, popular options such as Section 1: Scottish contexts, Part E — The Era of the Great War, 1900–1928 performed well compared to other Scottish contexts. In Section 2: British contexts, popular options such as Part C — The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770–1807 performed well compared to other British contexts. In Section 3: European and world contexts, popular options such as Part D — Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939 and Part E — Red Flag: Lenin and the Russian Revolution, 1894–1921 performed well compared to other European and world contexts.

Across all British sections, there were a few candidates who did not attempt the optional question assessing the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022–23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Most candidates completed all questions.

A few candidates demonstrated exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding in their responses.

Overall, most candidates coped well with the 9-mark essay questions in the Scottish and European and world sections. They demonstrated secure understanding of skills and knowledge, writing well-structured responses.

Many candidates performed well in the 'Explain' questions, finding greater variation in demonstrating appropriate explanation of relevant reasons without repeating generic phrases.

Many candidates expanded their repertoire of appropriate evaluative comments for provenance marks in the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

A few candidates found it challenging to complete the 9-mark essay:

♦ question 7, Part B — Mary Queen of Scots, and the Reformation, 1542–1587
♦ question 12, Part C — The Treaty of Union, 1689–1715
♦ question 62, Part C — USA, 1850–1880
♦ question 66, Part D — Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939
♦ question 70, Part E — Red Flag: Lenin and the Russian Revolution, 1894–1921
♦ question 78, Part G — Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA,1918–1968
♦ question 90, Part J — The Cold War, 1945–1989

Some candidates found question 16 (Scottish contexts: Part D — Migration and Empire, 1830–1939) challenging because they misinterpreted the focus of the question, writing about living conditions rather than where, and for what purpose, immigrant groups settled in Scotland.

Some candidates found question 38 (British contexts: Part C — The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770–1807) challenging because they misinterpreted the focus of the question, providing historical knowledge relevant to the impact of the slave trade on Africa, or gave information on modern-day ethical and moral issues resulting from the slave trade, neglecting the specific historical impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade within the timeframe of the topic.

A few candidates misinterpreted question 61 (European and world contexts: Part C — USA, 1850–1880) about the reasons for negative reactions to 'reconstruction', referring to knowledge on pre-civil war issues, outwith the scope of the question.

A few candidates found it challenging to demonstrate the skill of interpreting source points in the 'How fully' question. This was because they did not supply an explanation of the specific source point, but provided a generic link to the question or copied the source point word for word.

A few candidates interpreted source points in the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question rather than supplying evaluative comments that explained their significance.

A few candidates did not consider the possible bias of source points in question 60 (European and world contexts: Part C — USA, 1850–1880) and question 64 (European and world contexts: Part D — Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939), and supplied generic evaluative comments attesting to their accuracy and usefulness without accompanying explanation that demonstrated understanding of the specific source point.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should advise candidates to use the question numbering given in the question paper when providing their answers.

Candidates and centres are encouraged to review the key issues and description of content, which determines the topics on which questions could be asked.

Centres should ensure that they prepare candidates with specific historical knowledge (as detailed in the course specification). This advice is important for centres teaching Scottish contexts: Part D — Migration and Empire, 1830–1939, where some candidates were not familiar with patterns of settlement in Scotland. This was also the case for British contexts: Part C —The Atlantic Slave Trade, 1770–1807, where some candidates were not familiar with the historical impact of the slave trade on the Caribbean, focusing instead on modern-day moral and ethical issues.

Question types and skills

For the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question teachers and lecturers should note the advice on the Understanding Standards website (National 5 History page) on the variety of ways in which candidates can make evaluative comments on source content and provenance points. Further exemplification is given in the 2023 detailed marking instructions.

For the 'How fully' question teachers and lecturers should note the advice on the Understanding Standards website (National 5 History page) on how to make appropriate source interpretation comments and relevant recall points. Further exemplification is given in the 2023 detailed marking instructions.

For the 'Explain' question teachers and lecturers should note the advice on the Understanding Standards website (National 5 History page) on how candidates can ensure that they provide valid explained reasons. Further exemplification is given in the 2023 detailed marking instructions.

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.