Course Report 2016

Subject	History
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the Course assessment

Although this technically was the first presentation, both the course assessment and the exam were actually very much in keeping with previous exams in style and content. As a result, performance in the course assessment was also similar to previous years.

This report focuses on overall performance and generic guidance as later this year, through Understanding Standards, we will be providing exemplar materials across a range of Fields of Study, and will be including material that demonstrates the differing skills required in different parts of the assessment.

Component 1: Question paper

The exam paper performed well in all Fields of Study. Candidates accessed all questions.

Component 2: Project – dissertation

There were some outstanding pieces of work produced (in all Fields of Study) which reflected a real commitment to the study of History.

While there is an obvious positive impact from Higher, it bears repetition to note that at Advanced Higher, candidates are expected to engage with a study at a deeper level and to analyse and evaluate both primary and secondary evidence and to draw their own conclusions.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Essays

When candidates engaged well with the premise of the questions, their discussion was much more argument-driven, which meant that many essays accessed the top range of marks.

It is expected that candidates should use the introduction to present the main arguments and the factors, and to direct the reader as to how it may be answered. The line of argument established here should continue throughout the essay.

Candidates displayed thoroughness in their knowledge which is only valid if it links to the argument and analysis. This can only happen if there is evidence to back it up. Also, evaluation of each factor should link back to the line of argument. All of this has been established at Higher level, but in Advanced Higher the depth of knowledge and argumentation is increased. Also, there must be recognition of historians' viewpoints. In the best work these should be embedded throughout the essay.

The conclusions drawn were best when they were referenced throughout the work and brought together in the concluding paragraph.

As last year, the markers praised the scholarship and the real sense of engagement with the topic. Examples of excellent work were seen across the paper.

Sources

Source questions were, on the whole, very well done. Most candidates were aware of the methodology here.

Provenance seems to be a challenge still. Nonetheless, candidates clearly understood the different approaches required for the three different types of question. Some very good additional contextual knowledge was used to enhance answers. Overall, knowledge was very good in source answers and there was evidence of good selection of specific recall pertinent and overtly linked to questions.

Component 2: Project – dissertation

The performance this year was good and, indeed, some outstanding work was presented. It must be transparent throughout that the piece is the candidates' work, with *their* findings, *their* selection of evidence, *their* analysis and *their* evaluation.

While no marks are given specifically for the look of the dissertation, it is expected that academic conventions should be followed. The best work followed such conventions, and analysis and evaluation were embedded in their work.

Titles

The majority of questions this year came from the approved list, and it is the intention for this to appear on the SQA website in the September of each presenting year.

At the heart of a good dissertation is the question or hypothesis that is being tested. If that is flawed, and mostly this was the case when there was no real issue to be evaluated, the task cannot be completed. Using a title from the approved list does not limit personalisation and choice, but rather serves to offer guidance. Should a candidate wish to propose an alternative title that is significantly different from the approved list, it is expected that the centre will submit the suggestion for feedback from SQA. This means the examination team can advise to ensure that candidates can produce analytical and evaluative work.

It is vital that titles be issue-driven in order to allow for this. Should centres choose not to seek advice there is a danger that candidates may be disadvantaged

Structure

The best dissertations tended to use chapter headings because, at this level of writing, chapter headings give the piece of work a greater opportunity to focus the reader and to direct the argument. Headings give the marker an idea of the direction of the key areas of argument and of what evidence was selected. As there is a 4,000 word limit for the piece, part of the task itself is to select the most appropriate evidence.

Candidates in the main used their introduction to the dissertation well; this should serve to lay out the main areas within the piece of research and the arguments that are about to be tested. Conclusions should be seen throughout the piece of work, and certainly conclusions at the end of each chapter and most probably conclusions within the chapter as well.

Although it is possible to write a dissertation which completely denies the validity of the issue being discussed, it would seem a very odd stance to take. Candidates performed better when they selected the main cause effect or nature in the topic they discussed.

Footnotes and bibliography

Footnoting is being applied well, in the main. It is true that some candidates are not citing sources properly. Footnoting is expected only to reference sources, and (in the exceptional case) to define or explain an unusual term. This is particularly relevant to further substantiate the use of primary evidence. Some of the bibliographies were impressive, not necessarily because of the number of books, sources etc. consulted but rather because of the use of detailed, academic works. Quantity is to be applauded but only if matched by the quality of its use.

The better dissertations included a range of historiographical interpretations and primary sources, which were evaluated. A good dissertation should also have the appropriate footnoting and referencing which should be used to highlight the origin of specific viewpoints, specific factual information or specific events. This should not be used to explain points in the main body of the work.

The majority of candidates produced well-presented bibliographies. The bibliography should contain websites and date of access, primary sources, secondary texts and also an annotated bibliography where candidates assess the value of the sources relative to their dissertation.

Word count

Most candidates completed the task as expected with very few cases incurring a penalty for exceeding the word limit.

Typography and proof reading

The majority of candidates demonstrated good practice (ie double line spacing and font in size 11 or 12).

It is obvious that many candidates put in a lot of time and effort to produce their best work where a substantial piece of historical research has been undertaken, but as much as the content may be excellent, the presentation of it has to match up to that in its precision and delivery of content.

Overall the performance overall this year was good. Most candidates produced well considered work, based on wide research with analysis and evaluation embedded throughout the writing.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Essays

Some essays were compromised by giving a rehearsed response with very little sense that the question was being addressed. Also, in some cases, there was no sense of prioritising factors, and/or a limited sense of building a line of argument. In some there was a considerable amount of analysis without sufficient time being given to the narrative, while in others, the narrative was given with little or no interpretation. Some tried to turn all questions into isolated factor questions.

The use of historians' viewpoints was varied. The bolt-on approach was not the best and was contrived and not effectively used to exemplify or add weight to an argument.

Some candidates failed to complete two essays, and time management seemed to be an issue for some, where one essay was given more attention than the other.

Sources

Some candidates attempted the two-source question as though it was a Higher comparison question — candidates should discuss the interpretations of the topic as represented in the two sources.

In source answers some work had poor provenance which was a rehearsed response.

Some quoted large chunks of the source, did not select well, and did not link it back to the question. In some cases, candidates listed recalled knowledge/produced random facts about the area of study in general with no explanation. It is vital to link it back to the question.

Component 2: Project – dissertation

A small but significant number of candidates chose titles which were adaptations from the approved list or simply a new title, and for some this did not work well. Selection of the title is key. If candidates choose a complex concept they need to be sure to define their terms in the introduction and make sure that it is issue-driven.

Some candidates seemed to ignore the question they set and gave a narrative about the topic rather than address the issues involved. This narrative approach, with little analysis or evaluation, did limit the marks candidates could attain. Also, some candidates selected an isolated factor question but then chose to give it minimal attention.

Research was varied. Uncritical use of the internet can be problematic. Some candidates appeared to use language that they did not understand.

Some candidates wrote with descriptive interest about the subject but did not focus on the question. The quality of argument varied; some had little or no analysis within a factor. In some cases, historians' views were added with little or no evaluation or explanation.

Conclusions should bring together and make a judgement on the issue. At times this was not done, and in some cases the conclusions included new ideas not considered elsewhere in

the piece. The introduction and conclusion should also match, rather than conflict with each other.

In some cases, formatting preference (ie double line spacing and font in size 11 or 12) had not been adhered to.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Centres are encouraged to consult the exemplar and specimen papers and accompanying marking instructions.

The marking grid approach will continue to be used to inform an overall holistic approach. The mandatory content for each Field of Study is given in the Course Assessment Specification document (CAS). The source questions will come from the italicised areas highlighted in the CAS.

There has been some alteration to all Fields from the previous Advanced Higher, and it is important to check which areas are italicised now. Essays could come from any part of the mandatory content.

Component 1: Question paper

For essays, candidates should be reminded to read the questions carefully and answer the questions that are set rather than answering questions they were expecting. The expected topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate.

Candidates should be reminded that not all questions are isolated factor questions. If it is an isolated factor, this means that significant attention should be given to it, not just a cursory comment. Candidates should refer back to it in discussion of subsequent factors. Evaluation in the discussion is also vital and historians' views must be included.

Candidates must use historians' views to highlight the range (or not) of arguments, and should be encouraged to challenge views if this can be justified.

Conclusions are vital. The best essays build on a line of argument throughout the work.

Candidates should be reminded that interpretation is about more than repetition of sources. Candidates need to explain why their selected point is important to the issue being discussed.

In the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question, provenance is still required and should link to the question.

The two-source question is not the same as the comparison question at Higher. Differing viewpoints (or interpretations) may be read here, but these sources are not set out to contrast one another. This question is to focus on differing interpretations of events. Candidates are required to provide a substantial amount of wider contextual development.

In each of the three types of question, candidates should look at the mark allocation for provenance, interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views.

Centres are encouraged to attend Understanding Standards events, where exemplars of good practice will be provided. Materials issued at the event will also be available online following the events.

Component 2: Project – dissertation

Dissertation grades can be improved by careful planning and monitoring of the process. In the first instance, choosing a title from the current approved list is still advised. If a candidate wants to deviate from this, submitting the proposed title to the SQA will allow advice to be given. The title is the key to success. It should be issue-driven and allow for analysis and evaluation, rather than merely description.

The candidate will benefit from establishing a clear structure at the outset. The key here is the function of the introduction. It should certainly contextualise, but it should also focus the reader on the key areas of debate and present the writer's hypothesis. In this way, the reader is prepared for a line of argument to be proved in the following chapters. Candidates who do not set out an analysis of the title in the introduction can limit their achievement. Furthermore, candidates should be careful when setting out a line of argument that might be effective on their terms but is not historically accurate or valid.

Candidates should be encouraged to use chapter headings.

It is important to read the writer's views as the synthesis of all points of argument in each chapter. These conclusions should be seen throughout the work/chapters and in the conclusion itself. Candidates should also be aware that not all factors are equal in importance, and qualitative judgements are expected.

The dissertation must include the use and examination of primary evidence as part of the research. This may be documents from the time or artefacts.

Historical opinions or debates must be included, and should ideally be embedded throughout the work. Candidates should be encouraged to direct the reader in the introduction, highlighting the key argument(s) and citing the debate(s). Most of the strongest pieces have an excellent awareness of the need for analysis, and sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter. Furthermore, there should be real engagement with historians' interpretations.

Candidates should be reminded that the word limit for the project – dissertation is 4000 words. A penalty will be applied if candidates exceed this limit by 10% or more.

Markers quickly recognise 'lifted' work, and when this is done the candidate will be penalised for the thoroughness of the research (which is then brought into question). It is recognised that candidates have a wealth of resources from the internet, and that in itself is part of the task. More and more, this skill of selecting applies to materials which are so readily available online. The dissertation should show the candidate's evaluation of the issues selected. The advice is simple: always reference other works or significant ideas.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	0

Number of resulted entries in 2016	1578

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	30.2%	30.2%	476	98
B	29.7%	59.9%	469	84
C	26.7%	86.6%	421	70
D	6.0%	92.6%	95	63
No award	7.4%	-	117	0

General commentary on grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

- Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). 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 management team at SQA.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

- 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, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this 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.

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