



Course Report 2017

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

Centres are now, in the main, very much aware of the demands of this course and its component parts.

Component 1: Question paper

The question paper was very well received and there was evidence of good teaching demonstrated through the high quality of candidates' responses. Markers in all fields of study felt that the paper was fair and gave candidates the opportunity to highlight the knowledge and skills they had developed.

Component 2: Project-dissertation

There was some exceptional work, particularly in the dissertations presented. The time candidates had taken to research and to find pertinent primary source material was evident.

Writing beyond the word limit rarely occurred. With a 10% leeway, candidates managed their work well. The dissertation has to be, in part, a test of the selection skills of the candidate, and the word limit allows for that.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Many candidates were writing full, thorough, analytical and evaluative answers. Source answers, in the main, recognised the distinct expectations of each of the three questions. It is expected that differing interpretations of the aspect of the topic are considered.

Section 1 – Northern Britain from the Iron Age to 1034

The majority of essays were solid, capable pieces with a breadth of knowledge. There were good responses, particularly to the Picts and Scots questions. The source answers were competent in their overall approach. Candidates analysed as expected and brought relevant knowledge to their answers.

Section 2 – Scotland: Independence and Kingship, 1249–1334

Markers commented that there were some excellent essays, and praised good structure and sound deployment of historians' views. The most effective introductions used these opinions to state their case and show the issues involved in the essay.

In the best source answers, technique was readily applied to all three questions.

Markers noted that there were more interesting interpretations of the Wallace questions than in previous years. The Alexander III question was also tackled well, where candidates all benefited from the clear time period of the majority. Markers also noted an improvement, from last year, in the engagement with more recent historiography.

Section 3 – Italy: The Renaissance in the 15th and early 16th centuries

In Part 1, all essays were tackled. In the best work, the analysis was good and drove forward arguments.

In Part 2, source answers also had high-quality knowledge of the topics covered, and these were often further substantiated by historians. The best candidates wrote fluently and interpreted the source rather than merely 'lifting' from the source.

Section 4 – Scotland: From the Treaty of Union to the Enlightenment, 1707–1815

In Part 1, candidates presented well-written, detailed essays with carefully worded and apposite analysis and evaluation. Markers noted that there were excellent responses that showed real involvement and understanding and commitment to the study.

In Part 2, the responses again were good.

Section 5 – USA: 'A House Divided', 1850–65

A broad range of essays was tackled with a variety of approaches in Part 1. Candidates were comfortable with including historians' views. Some included primary sources in their answers, which lifted the quality of interpretation and added an impressive flair to their work. Many included sub-conclusions in their work, which was very helpful. Equally, most produced analytical work with evaluative comments, and very few were wholly descriptive and limited to the narrative.

In Part 2, there were some excellent responses where candidates clearly understood the different approaches required for the three different types of question. There was also some very good additional contextual knowledge.

Section 6 – Japan: the Modernisation of Nation, 1840-1920

The topics allowed for a wealth of recalled knowledge.

Markers felt the full range of essay questions were tackled. The appropriate structure, tone and history were delivered.

Candidates were also well-prepared for the source questions.

Section 7 – Germany: from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918–39

On the whole, candidates were very well prepared for essays, with good structures and subject knowledge. Some candidates were well-prepared in the use of historians' views, and in many essays this seemed more purposeful than previously. A wide range of factual detail was brought to answers. There was some excellent discussion on the rise of Hitler's Chancellorship.

In Part 2, sources were answered well and it was obvious that candidates had been made aware of the expected technique in the three different source questions.

The grid for essays and the template for the sources on the whole have been successfully employed.

Section 8 – South Africa: Race and Power, 1902–84

Markers commented on the full range of essay questions being attempted, and that the work was very good overall, particularly essays on the growth of Afrikaner nationalism and Malan's victory. There were some outstanding answers that had analysis and evaluation embedded in the structure which often took a thematic approach. There was a great breadth of historians' views which reflected a genuine understanding of the range of interpretations in each essay.

In the main, in Part 2, candidates applied the expected source technique. Candidates also showed detailed recall of the whole course.

Section 9 – Russia: From Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–45

There was a high and consistent standard throughout. Markers noted the full range of essay questions were attempted and there were some outstanding responses. This was the case when the question was directly tackled and phrases were defined in the introduction. Many of the essays were perceptive and persuasively argued. The best work saw historians' views embedded in answers and informed the line of argument taken.

With regard to the source questions, while provenance was not best tackled, source analysis was very good with evidence of detailed knowledge and reading. The appropriate technique was used and markers were impressed by the selection of specific recall pertinent to the questions.

Section 10 – Spain: the Civil War – Causes, Conflict and Consequences, 1923–45

In Part 1, there was a good range of responses showing a level of confidence across all areas in this field of study. There was evidence of good essay skills and knowledge of key issues and some very good use of historians' viewpoints.

Part 2 was well answered with an obvious skill base in the differing source questions.

Section 11 – Britain: at War and Peace, 1938–51

A range of essays were tackled and there was evidence that candidates were well-prepared and had a real commitment to their studies. Some high quality pieces impressed both in terms of width and depth of knowledge, as well as analysis and evaluation.

Source answers were also clear in addressing the topics and gave clear indication of further recalled knowledge. The evaluation in some cases was excellent, with historians' views embedded in the answer.

Component 2: Project-dissertation

Section 1 –Northern Britain from the Iron Age to 1034

Many positive comments were made about the good quality of argument within dissertations, with more candidates actually arguing their case rather than merely stating one.

In the best work, wide ranging and quality research was visible. The internet was employed well, allowing for the use of online journals.

Chapters did focus candidates, and the marker, on the line of argument. There was some very impressive use of historical interpretations to really develop arguments, and not just for the sake of it. There was plenty of breadth and depth of knowledge on show and good use of primary works.

Most titles were chosen from the approved list.

Section 2 –Scotland: Independence and Kingship, 1249–1334

This field of study reported a wider spread of titles with less of a focus on Wallace and Balliol, and indeed many chose to look at Edward. More candidates tackled questions which are not the mainstream, and there were many of a very high standard.

There was a real improvement in thoroughness, with up-to-date reading lists and broader materials, with more access now to primary sources online, eg POMS website via Glasgow University.

Chapter headings were carefully constructed, which made the candidate focus on the argument. This, along with sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter, made for some excellent pieces of work where candidates addressed the issue consistently.

Section 3 – Italy: The Renaissance in the 15th and early 16th centuries

Dissertations covered a good range of possible topics. The standard was very good, and some works were a pleasure to read. Those which related to a discussion of 'was there a Renaissance for women' were highlighted as highly successful.

Section 4 – Scotland: From the Treaty of Union to the Enlightenment, 1707–1815

This field of study presented a wide range of appropriate titles which allowed candidates to perform to their ability. Excellent work was seen where candidates really grasped the issue and engaged in the debate. The ability to see what constitutes evidence as proof, as opposed to description and assertion, is a high-level skill and was commended in some dissertations.

Section 5 – USA: 'A House Divided', 1850–65

Questions on the origins of the war tended to be done well, as were those on the leadership of either Lee or Grant, and also those which tackled the Fogel and Engerman debate.

The best work showed a clear control of the line of argument throughout the work. This was sustained by bringing in short conclusions at the end of each chapter. In doing this, candidates were able to build on the argument right up to the final conclusion.

The width and depth of evidence was referenced by strong bibliographies. It was noted that quality of use was better than quantity presented. The signs that a candidate had engaged in wider reading came in the more confident engagement with the debates/arguments surrounding the issue.

Section 6 – Japan: the Modernisation of Nation, 1840–1920

There was a broad range of titles, many on the foreign pressures on the Bakufu.

There were some excellent examples where candidates challenged established historiography. Others weighed up the contrasting schools of thought rather than individual historians.

In the best work the structure was readily apparent. Chapters were successfully employed to build the case towards the conclusion. Sub-conclusions throughout were really effective, with some candidates really developing arguments across and between factors.

Section 7 – Germany: from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918–39

A huge range of titles was presented from across the period, and some outstanding work. The more successful candidates employed very high-order skills demonstrated both in thought/argument and the ability to express ideas using scholarly terms.

The use of research and supporting primary evidence to introduce historical debate and advance arguments was more evident this year. In some cases, candidates challenged the views of some historians and advanced the debates even further. More candidates were using resources to inform discussion and argument in a balanced fashion rather than simply to inform a single line of argument.

Some bibliographies were impressive. More websites were being used, and well, with markers noting the effective use of web articles. The use of evidence to advance the argument resulted in more mature work which received credit accordingly.

Section 8 – South Africa: Race and Power, 1902–84

This year the titles covered a broad range of topics with more concentrating in the pre-1948 period. The stronger work came from the more controversial topics such as the origins of segregation. There was some excellent work on the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the relative importance of the Broederbond or Malan in promoting the growth of Afrikaner nationalism.

The best responses came from those with a clearly defined argument from the outset. The evidence used reflected an up-to-date knowledge of new writing.

Section 9 – Russia: From Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–45

There was a spread of titles and this year some impressive work on the Civil War, Socialist Realism and the Great Patriotic War.

Most candidates sustained argumentation throughout the work. The evidence presented was current and provoked thought. The most recent research had been accessed by many and markers noted the enthusiasm of some writers.

In the best dissertations, candidates directed the reader in the introduction, highlighting the key arguments and citing the debates. There was an excellent awareness of the need for analysis, and sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter were very effective. Detail was robust, and evidence — both primary and secondary — was well-selected to advance the argument. Furthermore, there was real engagement with historians' interpretations.

Section 10 – Spain: the Civil War – Causes, Conflict and Consequences, 1923–45

Markers commented that there was a good selection of titles and even some of the more obscure titles resulted in some excellent pieces of analysis and evaluation.

Many candidates embraced the dissertation technique where arguments were backed up in the majority of cases with relevant evidence. Evidence of wide reading was seen in most cases and there was good use of primary sources. The best works were effective in their ability to use different sources to build and enhance the different perspectives.

Section 11 – Britain: at War and Peace, 1938–51

There was a greater variation in titles this year. Fewer opted for Churchill and more opted for the 1945 and 1951 general elections. Markers commented that many dissertations were a pleasure to read.

There was considerable evidence of high quality research and writing. Primary sources were integrated into the dissertation to enhance and forward the argument.

Work was clear in presentation, using chapters, and carefully argued which indicated thorough research. There were impressive arguments with real attention given to sub-conclusions throughout the work. A number of dissertations engaged with a wide range of historical interpretations.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

The weakest responses presented generic essay responses to the question. In these situations, candidates had failed to read and analyse the question properly, or plan their response and write to the question that was set.

Where the source technique was not understood by candidates, marks suffered. It is a key point here that the techniques are vital to gain marks. The marking template in the general marking instructions published on the Advanced Higher History subject pages on SQA's website gives a guide to the marks awarded. Careful scrutiny of this and the detailed marking Instructions for the field of study will benefit candidates.

Yet again the provenance points proved difficult for some to access. Some candidates applied the Higher technique as a comparison in the two-source question. This meant candidates were unable to access the full range of marks available for wider contextualisation.

Section 1 – Northern Britain from the Iron Age to 1034

In Part 1, there was evidence of the generic response. Some candidates did not focus on the question they were actually answering, and some omitted the isolated factor or historians' opinions. For some, a weak structure, with little attention to the introduction and direction of the development of the essay, obscured the line of argument and clarity of thought. The result was work which was heavy in narrative with little evaluation.

The Iron Age and Flavian questions were found to be the most testing. In Part 2, provenance was not strong.

Section 2 – Scotland: Independence and Kingship, 1249–1334

Some candidates did not pay due attention to the wording of the question, eg dates which are set to limit the parameters of recall or direct instructions to only cover certain elements, eg minority or majority.

Some candidates approached the two-source question as a higher-style comparison question. This meant no wider contextual development was even attempted. Some merely paraphrased the source and therefore did not illustrate that they had interpreted the material. Others simply copied source material. Provenance continued to be a challenge for some.

Section 3 – Italy: The Renaissance in the 15th and Early 16th Centuries

Some candidates need to be careful to answer the question as set, rather than attempt to make it suit their own knowledge. The most common limitation was the lack of balance in analysis in some answers.

The sources were generally well done, although some candidates missed opportunities to include sufficient wider contextual recall. Some candidates were too eager to show the process of analysis, argument and structure through elaborate and repeated phrases.

Section 4 – Scotland: From the Treaty of Union to the Enlightenment, 1707–1815

In Part 1, candidates wrote well. However, some candidates did not use historians' views in their essays. This is vital in this part of the course.

In Part 2, some candidates attempted the two-source question as though it was a Higher comparison question.

Section 5 – USA: 'A House Divided', 1850–65

Some essays were poor in their handling of the isolated factor, particularly with regard to the breakdown of the two-party system. This is a fairly significant factor but candidates struggled to get to grips with it.

Weaker work was light in substance. While it is not expected that candidates should present the detail seen in the dissertation, it is expected that they will present more than a broad descriptive answer.

Some candidates continue to have a 'bolt-on' approach to historians' views. Some need to focus on the conclusion of the essay, which seemed rushed in some cases. A few candidates only completed one essay.

Although source technique was well employed on the most part, some responses were disappointingly vague in their presentation of recall. Also for some candidates, provenance was challenging or they had not read the question carefully enough.

Process words and phrases were used as an end in themselves, eg to state a source is 'useful and accurate' rather than explain why.

Section 6 – Japan: the Modernisation of Nation, 1840–1920

In Part 1, in essay question 42, some candidates overlooked the 'internal' focus of the question and the fact that the context was only up to 1850. Quite a few candidates focused on the impact of US incursion instead of acknowledging the dates in the question.

Some work lacked synthesis between the factors, and candidates often did not draw important links between the causation factors.

In Part 2, the sources were tackled well overall, although some candidates struggled to adhere to the question, eg in question 46 many candidates discussed the long-term effects of Meiji policy in reaction to the treaties rather than the nature of the treaties themselves.

Section 7 – Germany: from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918–39

This year some markers felt that the essays were better tackled than the sources. The questions proved to be a fair challenge to those candidates who did not read the wording correctly. For example, in question 51, many candidates missed the word 'world' in front of economic crisis, and therefore included much irrelevant information.

Some candidates seemed to struggle with timing and missed out a whole essay.

It is expected that candidates will be aware of the views of specific historians. In the essay, failure to acknowledge this severely limits attainment. The use of phrases such as 'some historians' is a weak assertion, but a significant minority of candidates had essays with absolutely no historians' views included and, therefore, did not pass the essay.

In source answers, many candidates missed the opportunity for provenance marks. There was a tendency to provide rehearsed statements, eg 'it is a primary source from the time of the event' and not to develop the answer to meet the requirements of this level.

Some candidates still answered the two-source question in the style of the Higher comparison question. Some also struggled with wider contextual knowledge and tended to list points without linking them to the question.

Section 8 – South Africa: Race and Power, 1902–84

Some candidates found it difficult to tackle the specific question. A number neglected the isolated factors in questions and did not give the 'Great Depression' (question 57) due consideration.

Dates are included to guide candidates. Several referred to the Union of South Africa even though the question specified before 1910. Resistance in the 1950s should not include armed resistance of the 1960s. At times there was an over-reliance on the evaluative props learned at Higher, such as 'this shows that'. While worthy, these can hamper the flow of argument when over-used.

On the whole, sources were tackled well, but some found the interpretation points problematic. This was true in essay question 3 where 'white supremacy' was certainly addressed but not always 'political'. However, many accessed all 3 provenance marks.

In the source answers, some candidates were writing unnecessarily lengthy introductions and conclusions.

Section 9 – Russia: From Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–45

In some of the essays there was a tendency to the formulaic. An element of generic response and a sense of rote learning limited attainment. In some cases, there was very little engagement with the debate set up in the question. In some cases there was also a lack of judgement between the factors.

Some found the phrasing challenging and struggled with ‘all power to the soviets’, failing to see this as an alternative programme of government. Equally, the phrase ‘Great Retreat’ proved problematic for some. Some completely misinterpreted the question. In some responses, conclusions tended to be merely summaries.

In source answers it was challenging for some to integrate the recall with the interpretation of the source. Some are still seeing the two-source question as a comparison.

Time seemed to be an issue for quite a few and there were occasions where candidates either missed out questions or failed to complete their responses.

Section 10 – Spain: the Civil War – Causes, Conflict and Consequences, 1923–45

In Part 1, most of the essay questions were tackled and well.

In Part 2, the sources were mostly well done but some appeared to struggle with the two-source question and misunderstood the question intention.

Section 11 – Britain: at War and Peace, 1938–51

In Part 1, some candidates did not give adequate attention to the quote or isolated factor. There was still a tendency to produce a prepared response to the topic, almost totally ignoring the angle of the question. This happened particularly in question 81 on preparation for war.

Some answers provided little in terms of an introduction and conclusion. In source answers, there were missed opportunities where, although candidates did lift points from the source, they failed to comment on them and link them to the question. Some seemed to misunderstand the question and the points within the source.

In the two-source question some tended to assume that they would have opposite viewpoints, which is not the case; they display a range of views. Some did not add enough wider context and recall, but treated this like the Higher comparison question.

Time seemed to be an issue for quite a few and there were occasions where candidates either missed out questions or failed to complete their responses.

Component 2: Project-dissertation

Again this year there were instances of abbreviations being used which are not commonly recognised. This should be avoided and should not be employed as a tool to limit word count.

Generally a significant issue was the major shortfall in length, rather than excess wordage within the dissertations. Candidates who write to a word count of 3,000 words are not able to present the substance required (producing in some instances more of a Higher response), and even at 3,600 words, they have omitted over ten percent of the possible content.

Section 1 – Northern Britain from the Iron Age to 1034

Some candidates produced work that was dominated by the narrative, where the structure was based on chronology rather than themes, and the analysis was diminished because of this. Some candidates' work demonstrated a lack of exemplification, and others were very repetitive and did not really advance their argument.

Section 2 –Scotland: Independence and Kingship, 1249–1334

Many candidates did not engage with the question consistently in each part of the dissertation. Some candidates' responses focused on a chronological narrative. Other responses demonstrated strong argumentation, but quality and quantity of supporting evidence was less impressive.

Markers commented that there were some who did not define the parameters of the question and the key points. The result was inferred analysis and evaluation.

Candidates should be discouraged from choosing narrow topics where the title is not on the approved list.

Section 3 – Italy: The Renaissance in the 15th and early 16th centuries

On the whole, dissertations were done well. Some candidates struggled to find different interpretations or to suggest alternative explanations. Some work was very good in breadth of coverage, but did not have the depth of detail to substantiate arguments.

Works with brief introductions, or where contextual background dominated, did not help the reader. Candidates are encouraged to use the introduction to refer to context, debate, issues and the line of argument to be taken.

Section 4 – Scotland: From the Treaty of Union to the Enlightenment, 1707–1815

The thorough effort was apparent, but at times, even with a solid structure, some candidates struggled to develop analysis and evaluation. This was because some relied too heavily on marking schemes which, although thorough in their own right, are meant as a starting point for this study.

Section 5 – USA: 'A House Divided', 1850–65

The use of the introduction is key. Where candidates did not set out an analysis of the title, they did limit their achievement. This resulted in not being able to demonstrate an understanding of the question which could have been addressed, had candidates focused on the evidence areas and the arguments. There seemed to be a pattern emerging of isolated analysis within a factor, or indeed unsubstantiated assertions, eg 'X had good relations with his superiors' without going on to analyse and eventually evaluate what that might mean. Supporting evidence was varied.

Thoroughness in detail means more in the dissertation; this is where depth of knowledge can be displayed. Long bibliographies are fine, if this is demonstrated in the body of the

dissertation. There needs to be a careful reading of the texts so that the real meaning is understood. Furthermore, although it is good to have the historical arguments and their counter points, these should advance the line of argument.

Section 6 – Japan: the Modernisation of Nation, 1840–1920

Some candidates altered the titles on the approved list to questions that did not allow a great deal of analysis and debate.

Some introductions were not helpful; many candidates did not use the opportunity to introduce the historical discourse and debate surrounding the issue. A definitive line or hypothesis is possible, but it should still leave room for nuanced debate.

Some candidates gave quite lengthy abstracts at the beginning of each chapter that merely ate into word count and prompted repetition. Many tended to quote historians to reinforce rather than enhance the narrative and failed to include references to primary sources.

Section 7 – Germany: from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918–39

Many candidates had adapted or amended titles, often to the detriment of the issue/line of argument. Lack of a line of argument led to weak evaluation and weak interpretation, and often the narrative dominated.

Where the date range is changed by candidates, it is important to ensure that this does not have a negative impact, eg significance of political intrigue in the collapse of Weimar was changed from 1929–33 to 1928–32.

In some cases candidates ignored titles. In this field of study it applied particularly to dissertations on the Impact of Versailles up to 1923, but some developed it to 1929.

Some had used the marking instructions for similar essays but had not developed their findings much further from them. The marking instructions are a very good starting point but should not be seen as the template for dissertation work.

Some presented narrative-dominated work and did not leave themselves enough words to fully assess the exact issue in question. Others did not give due attention to the isolated factor they suggested in the title. It is expected that research should necessitate the reading of the historians, not just the extracts which appear in other works.

Section 8 – South Africa: Race and Power, 1902–84

Work on the consequences of Sharpeville tended to result in superficial and narrative answers, as did work looking at the consequences of Soweto for apartheid policy. Some candidates also struggled to differentiate between the apartheid state and apartheid policies. In some dissertations, story-telling dominated, which meant the analysis and evaluation was not strong.

Some candidates were hampered by poor selection of chapter headings, or when assessing Smuts or Hertzog applied the style of 'on the one hand he was great /on the other he wasn't'.

Historians were often used as evidence rather than opinion, which meant candidates were not engaging with the debate but taking it as read.

Section 9 – Russian: From Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–45

It is important that, in dissertations where the focus is on Stalin's paranoia, as an isolated factor in a consideration of the reasons for the Purges in the 1930s, there has to be a study of the intentions behind the Purges. Candidates should be cautious of deviating into areas such as mental illness and psychosis. This can easily lead to a speculative dissertation on the mind of Stalin, rather than the intentions of the regime.

Weaker evidence came from an over-reliance on questionable websites. Also, it is expected that research should necessitate the reading of the historians, not just the extracts which appear in other works.

Section 10 – Spain: the Civil War – Causes, Conflict and Consequences, 1923–45

Some candidates strayed from their question or had not set the appropriate dates for their work. Arguments were sustained but the presentation was at times lacking subtlety, eg use of 'The most important factor ...'.

Section 11 – Britain: at War and Peace, 1938–51

Many candidates used the internet instead of academic books with regard to accessing relevant information. This was met with varying degrees of success in the quality of information gathered.

Attempts to provide argument and counter-argument led to contradiction for some candidates. Some tended to employ a very narrative approach, discussing events without analysing their impact.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

While we continue to see best practice at Higher translated effectively into Advanced Higher writing, there are still some examples that demonstrate the more mechanistic response.

Candidates should be reminded to read the questions carefully; the best essays are the ones that answer the question. Using a prepared essay for an expected topic is unlikely to gain the best possible marks. The expected topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate. One word will change the expectation of the response. Essay questions are not just topic-driven, but focus on an aspect, issue or effect which should be addressed specifically; a generic response is not appropriate.

The isolated factor means that significant attention should be given to it, not just a cursory comment. Candidates may refer back to it in discussion of subsequent factors.

Balance in the discussion is also vital. Candidates should use historians to highlight the range, or not, of arguments — not as 'history', but as evidence of the arguments. Candidates should also be reminded that they can challenge views as long as they can justify this. The

responses should be the writer's view, not a synopsis of the viewpoints currently held. The candidate's own conclusions are vital.

To ensure the best answers to source questions, centres are encouraged to prepare candidates by using the grids to mark class work. Interpretation is more than repetition of sources — candidates need to explain why their selected point is important to the issue being discussed, and the addition of further recall will gain more marks.

Candidates should be reminded that the two-source question is not the same as the comparison question at Higher. Differing viewpoints may be read here but these sources are not set out to contrast one another. Candidates are required to provide a substantial amount of wider contextual development. Centres are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the mark allocations for interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views'.

In marking essays, centres are encouraged to refer to the marking instructions grid and consider the drivers to be thoroughness and analysis. Note the minor alteration in phrasing to clarify expectations in progression for all factors, particularly for introductions and conclusions.

Component 2: Project-dissertation

This year, the majority of dissertation titles were selected from the approved list which is updated regularly and is on the Advanced Higher History subject webpages. It is highly recommended that where an alternative title is selected, this is sent to SQA for approval. Centres are encouraged to do this so that SQA can advise on the issue/topic, thereby ensuring that the issue/topic does not prevent candidates from producing a thorough and essentially analytical piece.

This year, there were some titles for dissertations that had not been sent for approval to SQA and these did not allow the candidates to move very far from the narrative. While the detail is very important (indicated by thoroughness in the marking grid), it really only holds relevance when examined. The analysis and evaluation of the evidence is vital. The depth of research is demonstrated by the selection of fine detail, which then links to the chapter argument and to the line of argument as a whole. The task is to present carefully chosen apposite evidence. This refinement of the narrative should take much of the time in this task.

Materials from the Understanding Standards events are also useful, as are marking templates and instructions. Detailed marking instructions should be seen as a suggestion about what may be included, rather than a 'must include' list. That being said, they are a very useful guide in terms of the detail, argumentation and historians' viewpoints.

Structure

Year-on-year we see that candidates are much more aware of the significant role that structure plays in setting out the dissertation at the outset. Those candidates who lost track of their arguments did so most frequently in the essay-style approach.

- ◆ Introduction: The introduction should certainly contextualise, but it should 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.

- ◆ Chapter headings: These give an idea of the direction of key areas of argument and to inform candidates' selection of appropriate material. Chapter headings should also highlight the individual nature of the research and should not be seen as a template for an answer applied to all work on a given topic. While headings within marking instructions for essays that appear in the question paper might give some guidance, they should not be seen as a template for a dissertation.
- ◆ Mini-conclusions: Mini-conclusions made throughout the dissertation effectively draw the attention back to the issue and thesis underpinning the dissertation.

Bibliographies

Bibliographies help the marker to understand what the candidate has read, and annotated bibliographies are appreciated by markers. Bibliographies should include only what has been read. It is better to have consulted fewer sources but used them very well, rather than provide an extensive list which on closer examination could not have been consulted.

Footnotes

It is important that sources are cited sources properly, and there should be no text inserted into the footnotes in an attempt to remedy an excessive word count. These footnotes really stand out as contravening the expected structure of the piece. It is important, therefore, to remember that footnoting is expected only to reference sources, and (in the exceptional case) to define or explain an unusual term. The absence of footnoting is also a concern. Markers need to see the recognition of sources researched as part of the dissertation and this can help avoid consideration of plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Markers are quick to recognise derivative work (and not only if taken from standard texts), which results in the thoroughness of the piece being in question, and the research is obviously limited. Internet sources provided the most overt comments from markers. Overuse of material from less than rigorous authorities in an unquestioning manner will not gain candidates marks. There is, however, a recognition that online resources can be used well.

Typography and proofreading

The majority of candidates demonstrated professional standards. Only a minority did not present work in a format that was easy to read. The time and effort many candidates put into this, their first substantial piece of historical research, is appreciated and presentation should aid, not limit, the flow of their writing.

It is good practice for dissertations to be submitted:

- ◆ in a standard font (Arial or Times New Roman)
- ◆ in 11 or 12 point type
- ◆ in one-and-a-half or double-line spacing
- ◆ with a contents page
- ◆ with footnotes and bibliography (preferably annotated)
- ◆ with numbered pages
- ◆ with a word count on each page
- ◆ not stapled

- ◆ printed single sided

Overall, in terms of the presentation of work, it would benefit candidates to ensure that they give themselves enough time to properly proofread their dissertation.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	1578
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	1543
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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	29.2%	29.2%	450	98
B	29.4%	58.5%	453	84
C	25.2%	83.7%	389	70
D	7.1%	90.9%	110	63
No award	9.1%	-	141	-

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.