



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	History
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The quality of work reflected, in general, a commitment to study and an ability to research History in a variety of areas. There were some outstanding pieces of work, particularly in dissertations. There is on the whole a positive impact from Higher now, but the move to Advanced Higher requires candidates to genuinely engage with a study at a deeper level, to analyse and evaluate both primary and secondary evidence and draw their own conclusions.

This is the last year of presentation of this exam in its present form, though the principles established here will continue. This report will therefore bear direct relevance for the 2016 diet. It is the intention to give key points of advice in preparation for next year by using examples of good work and highlighting the possible pitfalls.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Dissertations

The performance here was certainly as good as previous years, and in many cases better. Most candidates produced well-considered work, based on wide research with analysis and evaluation embedded throughout the writing. It was obvious that the grid was being used and this will continue to be a significant guide next year.

Titles

The majority came from the approved list and this will continue to appear on the SQA website in the autumn of each presenting year. Where an alternative is proposed it is expected that the centre will submit the suggestion for approval by the SQA. The examining team can then give advice to help ensure that candidates can produce thorough, analytical and evaluative work. Titles should be issue driven in order to allow for this. Should centres choose not to seek advice for alternative titles there is a danger that the candidates may be disadvantaged.

Structure

It is rare to see a wholly narrative-driven descriptive piece, but some are presented. The best work included chapter headings. For most candidates this is a way of maintaining focus in the work. The headings can give an idea of the direction of the key areas of argument and therefore inform the selection of evidence. Chapter headings should also indicate the individual nature of the research and should not be seen as a template. Mini conclusions at the end of each chapter, or even topic within the chapter, are expected.

Once again more candidates were using resources to inform discussion and argument in a balanced fashion rather than simply to inform a single line of argument. The bibliographies were impressive. It is important that these are used and referenced in the work by using the expected footnoting.

Word Count

The vast majority of candidates are now writing to the word count. Centres are obviously advising candidates well and should continue with this message. The dissertation is, in part, to test the selection skills of the candidate and their ability to prioritise what is important to their argument. The weaknesses this year came when there was a significant shortfall in length. Candidates who write under 3,000 words are not able to present the substance required. At 3,600 words the candidate has still omitted ten percent of the possible content.

Footnotes and bibliography

Footnoting is, in the main, being applied well, but some 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 will be particularly relevant from 2016 as it will 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 because of the use of detailed, academic works. Quantity is to be applauded but only if matched by the quality of its use.

Plagiarism

It is worth repeating this point made year on year. Markers are quick to recognise derivative work (and not only if taken from standard texts) and when this is done candidates are self-penalising. The thoroughness of the work is brought into question. It is recognised that our candidates have a wealth of resources from the internet, and that in itself is part of the task. More and more the skill of selecting now applies to online materials. In the end we want to read the candidates evaluation of the issue under discussion.

Typography and proof reading

The majority of candidates demonstrated professional standards and courtesy, but it is worth restating the expectations here. Good practice is to have double line spacing and to use 11 or 12 sized font. We appreciate the time and effort many candidates put into this, their first substantial piece of historical research, and it would be a pity if their presentation limited the flow of their writing.

Field of Study 1: Northern Britain from the Romans to AD 1000

Dissertations

This year the popular topics were on Romans and the impact of the Vikings. The quality of argument in most work was good. The best argued their case, rather than merely stating it. The internet continued to be employed well, allowing for the use of journals which are now online.

Most titles were chosen from the approved list. Chapters focused candidates, and the marker, on the line of argument. There was plenty of breadth and depth of knowledge on show.

Scripts

Some excellent work here. Essays had the expected structure. Outstanding analysis and evaluation combined with the detail expected meant some achieved full marks. Candidates coped well with the sources and technique was generally good.

The overall impression was positive. Markers had the view that the candidates were well-drilled and hard-working who were not caught out by any of the questions set.

Field of Study 2: Scottish Independence (1286–1329)

Dissertations

There was a broad range of titles here and in many there was evidence of thorough research and balanced argument. The analysis was served best by use of chapter headings. The arguments were coherent and the best built on points chapter by chapter.

Use of newer historians continues and this is commended. Again there was improvement in thoroughness when up-to-date reading lists and broader materials were used, with more access now to primary sources online, eg a few now using POMS website via Glasgow University.

Carefully constructed chapter headings made the candidate focus on the argument. The best of these married up with sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter to make for some excellent pieces of work.

Scripts

When candidates engaged well with the premise of the questions their discussion was much more argument-driven and meant that many essays accessed the top range of marks. Where candidates addressed the specific nature of the source question there was success.

Many understood the differences here. As last year the markers praised the scholarship and the real sense of engagement with the topic.

Field of Study 3: The Renaissance in Italy in the Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries

Dissertations

A range of titles was seen here, with the status of the artist becoming more popular. The contribution of the courts to Renaissance culture attracted good quality responses.

Candidates made very good use of the texts available and the best work showed that quality of reading can be better than quantity of reading.

Scripts

In Part 1 the range of essays was covered. In the best discussions 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 certainly were aware that interpretation means more than just lifting from the source.

Field of Study 4: Georgians and Jacobites: Scotland (1715–1800)

Dissertations

Again an encouraging range of titles were presented and all from the approved list. The quality of argument was sustained throughout in many works. The analysis and evaluation was particularly strong in Jacobite dissertations.

Markers commented on the clarity of English in the best works, which helped drive the argument forward. In most there was a clear structure/format, with chapter headings, double-spacing, accurate footnoting and bibliography, which benefitted the candidate immensely.

Scripts

In Part 1 candidates wrote well. Markers noted that there were excellent responses here that showed real involvement and understanding and commitment to the study. In Part 2 the responses again were good and well-trained candidates scored well.

Field of Study 5: ‘The House Divided’: The USA (1850–1920)

Dissertations

Again this field had a wide selection of titles. 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. This year also saw some good work evaluating the role of women.

The better dissertations made better use of conclusions — these gave focus to the writing and helped build the argument. Good expression, clear direct and decisive, enhanced arguments. The research undertaken in the best work proved to be detailed and well considered.

Scripts

Candidates tackled the full range of questions. Candidates in general answered well when the appropriate structure was employed. Some good use of historians' views where they were used to advance the argument. Source questions were very well done.

Most candidates are aware of the methodology here, however provenance still seems to be a challenge. 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. Markers noted that overall knowledge was very good in source answers. Yet again the overall feeling was of a paper well done.

Field of Study 6: Japan: From Medieval to Modern State (1850s–1920)

Dissertations

There was a broad range of titles in this Field of Study, and some reflected impressive individual research. Candidates introduced a line of argument in the introduction and, when followed through, this can give good direction to the work. In the best work, candidates successfully challenged established historiography either by name or by contrasting schools of thought.

Structure was readily apparent in the best dissertations. 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.

Scripts

Candidates tackled the essays well. Some very thorough and analytical work was presented. The best drove forward answers with the argument. Good habits from Higher History help this.

Well-drilled source answers are the key to success in Part 2. Markers noted that there was evidence of good learning and teaching here.

Field of Study 7: Germany: Versailles to the Outbreak of the Second World War

Dissertations

Most candidates had engaged widely with the relevant sources, and the more successful had researched more deeply. Dissertations on the 1928–33 period were very successful. Some outstanding pieces of work were presented on a range of topics including anti-Semitic policies, propaganda, and Hitler's rise to power.

The best work had excellent structure with mini conclusions throughout and chapter headings which allowed the argument to build. Some had excellent use of historians' views, where they were compared and evaluated.

Yet again it was noted that 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.

Scripts

Candidates tackled the full range of questions. The wording of the questions and the focus on the italicised areas was considered, by the marking team, to be straightforward. Candidates chose key words/issues and put their interpretation into their response.

Some candidates made very effective use of historians' views to develop arguments 'beyond the most obvious'. Where source technique had been established, candidates attained well when they had been made aware of the expected technique in the three different source questions. The grid for essays and the template for the sources were successfully employed.

Field of Study 8: South Africa (1910–1984)

Dissertations

A wide range of titles was presented, which reflected the individual nature of the research. There was less 'fence-sitting' in terms of evaluation of evidence and this helped drive forward the argument. Candidates had consulted recent works (eg Dubow, Koontz) which are more accessible.

Alongside a commitment to their argument, candidates had a professional approach to their presentation. The use of chapters, working to the word limit and proof reading was excellent in the best work.

Scripts

Markers commented on the fact that the range of essays was tackled. The breadth of knowledge, length of response and understanding of issues were all good. Candidates were engaged and had access to very robust resources.

The structure and emphasis on developed conclusions was noted. The strongest candidates sustained a sophisticated line of argument much more readily. The source technique was very good overall. The best work saw evaluation and linking to the question constantly.

Field of Study 9: Soviet Russia (1917–1953)

Dissertations

Some excellent dissertations on the role of women, on the purges, and the church in Soviet Russia. Homo Sovieticus, Socialist Realism and the Great Patriotic War also proved rich areas to investigate. The best work sustained the debate on a line of argument throughout.

The use of historians' views to further the argument was done well. Integration here, rather than a bolt on approach, made all the difference. There was good evidence of wider reading. Markers were impressed by the efforts of some candidates, and noted that they had read impressive work.

Scripts

Markers noted the full range of essay questions were attempted and there were some outstanding responses. Candidates who really attained engaged with the isolated factor or issue in the essay questions. The best work used the introduction to define their intentions and understanding of the issue and set it in its wider context. In this case this meant when the words 'manipulation' and 'propaganda' were discussed throughout the essay.

In the best work historians' views became embedded in answers and informed the line of argument taken. The sources were also answered very well by many candidates. The appropriate technique was used and markers were impressed by the selection of specific recall pertinent to the questions.

Field of Study 10: The Spanish Civil War (1931–1939)

Dissertations

A very wide selection of dissertations were presented which allowed for the individual nature of the research to come to the fore. The quality of argument was good. There was, in some cases, evidence of the candidate using the detailed research to advance their own thesis. There continues to be a consistent improvement in approach and structure here and the markers are aware that candidates are certainly paying attention to the grid.

Scripts

In Part 1 there was generally evidence of good essay skills and knowledge of key issues and some very good use of historians' viewpoints. All essay questions were attempted in this cohort which was particularly pleasing. Part 2 was well answered with an obvious skill base in the differing source questions. Markers noted that there was generally a high standard this year.

Field of Study 11: Britain at War and Peace (1939–1951)

Dissertations

There were some outstanding dissertations here and a range of titles presented. Some had a very good structural and thematic breakdown of the issue studied. In one case the discussion of the British Army in the Second World War was particularly impressive in what could have drifted into narrative. Instead the detail and historians were used to drive the argumentation and the evaluation of the subject.

Scripts

There were well-prepared candidates who really engaged with the questions set and used their knowledge to drive forward their argument. Markers noted that the question on the 1945 Election was tackled effectively.

The best source answers had interpreted the evidence and used wider contextual development which linked to the question set. Again best work used historians' views to drive forward the argument.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Field of Study 1: Northern Britain from the Romans to AD 1000

Dissertations

A small but significant number were adaptations from the approved list, and for some this did not work well. The quality of argument varied.

Some candidates presumed that looking beyond the isolated factor inherently meant that they were analysing and evaluating. There was little or no analysis within a factor.

Research was varied — uncritical use of the web can be problematic.

Some candidates used language that they did not understand. As mentioned last year, over-employment of the marking instructions as a guide could produce a workmanlike response, but limited the candidate.

Scripts

Some candidates misunderstood question 3, and Britons became Britain which changed the response completely. This is something to watch for, particularly given the revised descriptors from next year.

Again some candidates strayed into the Bronze Age and were discussing evidence which was 500 years too early.

At times the use of historians was contrived and not done to exemplify or add weight to an argument. In the main summary conclusions dominated and there is a need to reinforce the point that qualitative judgements are necessary.

The sources do need to be interpreted which means more than merely quoting or paraphrasing. A link to the question is expected.

Similarly, provenance should link by showing its relevance to the question asked. For some the approach to answering the question let them down.

Field of Study 2: Scottish Independence (1286–1329)

Dissertations

The presentation of this research piece is important. This does not mean rarefied academic language, but the basic structure and look of it. Some candidates did not use headings or

page numbers, did not have a word count, and did not double line space the piece. While this is a holistic task, it does help both writer and reader to use chapters to help the analysis.

In selecting questions, candidates should be very careful in the consideration of the stem of the question. Some struggled to tackle the issue of 'How effectively...?' as opposed to 'How successfully...?'

Most analysed well, but there was a lack of synthesis in many conclusions. In weaker responses candidates tended to employ bolt-on analysis and evaluation. Again some candidates were stuck in the narrative or, equally, argumentation was stronger but quality and quantity of supporting evidence was less impressive.

Scripts

Some candidates found it difficult to engage with the isolated factor in the essays. In those cases they presented a generic response on the topic, or decided to immediately dismiss 'luck', for example, and move on to their own premise. Many tried to fit in the standard 'Toom Tabard' response to the King John question.

In the question on Wallace, weaker responses tended to be narrative-driven and concentrate on military contribution, with little on diplomatic or the contribution of others. Historians' views in weaker answers were added with little or no evaluation or explanation.

In source answers, linking to the question is vital. Where provenance or evidence in the source is not interpreted, that is linked to the question a poorer response is the result. The two-source question is not a comparison question, as in Higher; it is on the interpretations of a topic.

Field of Study 3: The Renaissance in Italy in the Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries

Dissertations

Dissertations in this Field of Study were on the whole done well. Some candidates struggled to find different interpretations or to suggest alternative explanations. Some were using books which take a purely narrative approach.

Works with brief introductions or ones where contextual background dominates do not help the reader. It is good to refer to the differing interpretations in the introduction and to put forward a line of argument.

Although there were examples of excellent work without chapter headings, in the main these help writer and reader alike. They help the candidate focus back on the question and lead to analysis and evaluation throughout the work.

Conclusions at times were presented as a lengthy summation, with little synthesis or judgement.

Scripts

Although some essays were strong enough on knowledge the analysis and the evaluation was often cursory. Some candidates wandered off-topic, for example in question two on artistic innovation when analysing the role of the guilds. Some found difficulty selecting the interpretation points in the sources, deciding on what were the most significant.

Field of Study 4: Georgians and Jacobites: Scotland (1715–1800)

Dissertations

Candidates must be aware that choosing a title which has a complex concept, such as democracy, achievements, or successful foreign policy, can disadvantage you — especially if you do not work with a clear meaning in mind. A common fault was also to write with descriptive interest about the subject but not to focus on the question.

Conclusions should bring together and make a judgement on the issue, and at times they did not, or worse, included new ideas not considered throughout the piece.

Scripts

In Part 1, candidates were differentiated by their response to the actual question set. Some candidates did not link historians' views.

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

Field of Study 5: 'The House Divided': The USA (1850–1920)

Dissertations

Selection of the title is key. Those on slavery could result in a poorer piece of work if the narrative dominates too much and the debate is lost. It is best to try to avoid a chronological narrative. This can also be a problem when discussing the Generals. Some struggled to have a full discussion and evaluation of the economic effects of the war on the Antebellum South.

Some did not use the referencing and footnoting expected.

It is important to pay attention to the introduction and the conclusion. They should not conflict with each other. If a bold assertion is made in both, it is important to make sure that the evidence in the middle chapters supports the argument.

The presentation of work is important. Again there were instances of poor proof-reading, and again a suggestion of rushing to meet deadlines. Yet again as in previous years, this was a challenge for some (no matter the ability of the candidate), as was the inability to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font).

Scripts

Essay Question 1 proved a challenge for some. Candidates found it difficult to interpret 'industrial' and 'agricultural'. In some cases candidates threw everything at the answer whether relevant or not.

The specific wording of Question 3 was ignored by some who chose to present an answer based on the wider causes and less on the specific events of 1860–61. Weaker answers read as a broad description. Brevity was an issue for others. And for some the issue was historiography. It is expected to use the ideas and views of historians to advance the argument.

In source answers, weaker work had poor provenance and lacked any robust historical viewpoints. A few tackled the two-source question as if it was the comparison question at Higher while others quoted large chunks of the source and did not select well. Markers again highlighted the poor technique of listing recalled knowledge with no explanation.

Field of Study 6: Japan: From Medieval to Modern State (1850s–1920)

Dissertations

For some the mechanism of the line of argument in the introduction was present, but they did not refer back to it in the conclusion. There was a tendency to the narrative which dominated some work and this meant that the argument was lost.

It was obvious when there was real independent research rather than relying on course notes and published Marking Instructions. Many are still not engaging with the perspectives of historians enough, and there is still a lot of illustrative historiography. Some dissertations needed further proof reading.

Scripts

In Part 1, Question 1 was interpreted as an isolated factor question, which was not the intention. When there were isolated factor questions some candidates did not give that area due attention.

In Part 2 it is important to select the relevant point/quote from the source. It is better to integrate the evidence and wider contextual knowledge. Some candidates presented almost lists of recall with no link to the question asked. This limited attainment.

Field of Study 7: Germany: Versailles to the Outbreak of the Second World War

Dissertations

Weaker work tended to present a better argument than the supporting evidence would suggest. Some ignored the question they set and would give a potted history of Weimar or the rise of the Nazi Party. A narrative survey with little analysis or evaluation will limit attainment.

Some candidates selected an isolated factor question but then chose to give it minimal attention. There were also instances where the isolated factor did get due attention but then all other factors were assessed with no sense of any linking evaluative comments. It bears mentioning, as last year's comment stated, these dissertations became 'a mile wide and an inch deep'.

While Hite and Hinton is an asset for all in this Field of Study, it is expected that research should go further and should necessitate the reading of the historians, not just the extracts which appear in other works.

Shortcomings in presentation also impacted on achievement. In terms of the presentation of work, it will benefit the candidate to proofread their final piece, to double line space their work, to footnote, to have a contents page and indeed to number pages.

Scripts

Weaker responses in essays turned the question to fit the candidate's knowledge. Work tended to be narrative and descriptive, rather than analytical and evaluative.

For some there was a failure to understand the question, or they spent too much time on one essay to their detriment. For others lack of understanding meant that they put anything and everything in to the work. One example was Question 3, where some candidates did not discuss the nature of Nazi dictatorship but instead discussed the Nazi consolidation of power and aspects of the Volksgemeinschaft.

In Question 1 some candidates failed to see 'political and economic' and wrote generally about 1924–29. Some candidates went beyond 1939 in source Question 3. Some candidates seemed to be unaware of the need for historians' views. This is one of the main differences at AH level and will continue to be.

No referencing in essays will result in poor attainment. In sources it could result in dropping one grade. Some candidates are still approaching the two-source question as a comparison. It is an examination of the differing interpretations on a topic /issue rather than a comparison.

Candidates still have difficulty with provenance and tend to provide a rehearsed response. It is important to relate everything to the issue in the question set. Provenance, interpretation, wider contextual development and historians' views all have to be explained and justified in relation to the question.

Field of Study 8: South Africa (1910–1984)

Dissertation

Some candidates struggled to go beyond commenting or stating and then explaining the point. There were many who wrote summarised conclusions and did not provide qualitative judgements supported by evidence.

It is also important to advance the overall line of argument across the chapters rather than dealing with each aspect in isolation. Presentation is important and some still did not use the expected conventions.

Scripts

Some candidates did not stick to the limits of the question, regarding the time frame suggested. Others found it problematic to consider 'labour unrest' in Question 1.

The provenance of the source is often misjudged. It is vital to link this to the question itself, rather than making a general comment about the author. Some candidates did not have any sense of evaluation in source answers which is vital to the answers here.

Field of Study 9: Soviet Russia (1917–1953)

Dissertations

Some dissertations chose to ignore the narrative completely when evaluating the causes of an event. This was particularly true for the February Revolution and the October Revolution. Some dissertation titles were misinterpreted and candidates covered Lenin and Stalin's Russia, when one or other was expected.

While websites can be useful, it is important to be quite careful in the selection here. Not all are authoritative sources. The lack of chapter headings makes it harder to sustain coherent and consistent argument. Some dissertations that had a focus on ideology forgot to write the history and tended to become more about political philosophy.

Presentation is important and the usual conventions should apply. Yet again, for some the challenge seems to be proofreading (no matter the ability of the candidate) as well as an inability to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font).

Scripts

It was surprising that more candidates did not really integrate historians' views in their work. Some tried to write the prepared essay on the topic in order to make it fit and hence all but ignored the word 'manipulation' in Question 3. The same was true of 'propaganda' in Question 5. Weaker answers had limited engagement with the debate in the question and that engagement is vital to score well.

The lack of historians' views will severely limit attainment in the essay but, equally, it can have significant impact on source answers. While the skills obtained at National 5 and Higher certainly link and help here, there is no need to evaluate the usefulness of the source at the end of every sentence. Similarly it is expected that provenance will link to the question, rather than become a formulaic response.

In the two-source question, some candidates simply listed information and did not relate it to either source. Once again there were a few who tried to make the two-source a comparison question. The two-source is about the differing interpretations of an issue. It is important that

the interpretation of a source is more than just lifting a quote, but rather it should then link to the question being asked.

Field of Study 10: The Spanish Civil War (1931–1939)

Dissertation

There were the usual generic issues here. As in other Fields of Study, for some the challenge was in proofreading and the ability to adhere to formatting guidelines (ie double spacing and 11 or 12 point font). It was also noted that some candidates had strayed from their question or had misinterpreted the question they set themselves.

Scripts

In Part 1 most of the essay questions were tackled and well. In Part 2 the sources were mostly well done, but some answers were poorly structured.

It is important to interpret the source rather than simply lift a quote. Linking everything back to the question is vital. The same is true in provenance points. They are only credit worthy if they relate to the question.

Field of Study 11: Britain at War and Peace (1939–1951)

Dissertations

At times the focus of the dissertation was ignored or neglected, eg the British Army's contribution to the defeat of Germany. Also candidates found the Churchill dissertation quite challenging. It is expected that you would evaluate his actions and errors, but you would not simply look at the errors and then claim he was a great success.

Where candidates did not sub-divide their work they lost focus and limited their conclusions. Not using chapters is almost universally self-penalising. As last year, many primarily had website referencing — not a fault in itself, but some were less than academic and the concern here was that they were not a starting point for more detailed work, but rather the final destination in terms of research.

Scripts

Essay Question 1 was misinterpreted by some candidates. Some candidates were determined to write a pre-prepared answer on Churchill's leadership, rather than tackle the question set. To attain the best marks it is vital that candidates engage with the debate in the question set.

In source answers there was a variation in approach. Some candidates still tackled the two-source as if it was a comparison question. It is a question on differing interpretations of a topic or issue. Some candidates did not link their evidence from the source, by way of an explanation, to the question.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

For those who are not getting the results they hoped for the following points may help clarify key issues and areas of preparation for this examination. Much of this is the same as usual, but there are areas where attention to the demands of each distinct task is advised. This is particularly true as we move to the new CfE exam in 2016.

Dissertations

- ◆ 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. Key here is the function of the introduction. It 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. Where candidates do not set out an analysis of the title in the introduction they do limit their achievement. Missed opportunities like this mean that they do not demonstrate an understanding of the question which they could have by giving a focus to the evidence areas and the arguments. Furthermore candidates should be careful when setting out a line of argument which might be effective on their terms but is not historically accurate or valid.
- ◆ Chapter headings provide direction, and the majority of candidates need that. 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 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. This has been included over the years, but from 2016 there is an overt statement that this is expected as part of the intention of the task.
- ◆ Historical opinions or debates should be embedded throughout the work. There have been instances where this was set aside in a chapter. In all the best dissertations, candidates direct the reader in the introduction, highlighting the key argument(s) and citing the debate(s). The best have an excellent awareness of the need for analysis, and sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter, which is managed effectively. Furthermore there should be real engagement with historians' interpretations.

Examination

- ◆ In a formal exam paper the best essays are the ones that answer the question — a simple point to make but something many find difficult to do. Expecting a prepared essay

to a 'banker' question at this level is wrong. The expected topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate. Make sure that the question is read carefully. One word will change the expectation of response. 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. Evaluation in the discussion is also vital. Use historians to highlight the range, or not, of arguments — not as 'history' but as evidence of the arguments, and do feel that you can challenge views as long as you can justify this. In the end make sure the reader reads the writer's view, not a synopsis of the viewpoints currently held. Candidates own conclusions are vital.

- ◆ To ensure the best answers to source questions, prepare by using the marking 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. The 'scaffolding' of English is necessary, and the addition of further recall will gain more marks. By looking at the specimen and exemplar papers the process should become more obvious. 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 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. Here you are required to provide a substantial amount of wider contextual development. Look at the mark allocation for interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1356
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	1515
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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 - 140				
A	32.4%	32.4%	491	98
B	28.4%	60.8%	430	84
C	25.5%	86.3%	387	70
D	6.9%	93.3%	105	63
No award	6.7%	-	102	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.