



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	History
Level(s)	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

There was a small improvement in overall performance from candidates compared to last year. A minority of candidates continue to be presented at this level who are not able to access the complexities of the Higher History course.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Paper 1

There was a small, but significant, improvement in performance in the essay-based Paper 1. Many markers commented on improvements in the application of relevant argument and evaluation.

The vast majority of candidates are well-taught and have widespread relevant knowledge of the course content. The majority of candidates continue to tackle the questions on Britain 1851–1951, and Germany 1815–1939, though there is greater centre subject selection in the European and World topic, with significant numbers of candidates attempting answers on the America, Russia and Cold War Topics.

The following questions were particularly well done:

- ◆ Question 10 generated very competent, workmanlike essays from the majority of candidates who chose it.
- ◆ Question 11 was well answered by the majority of candidates who chose it. Frequently there was a very encouraging level of historiography.
- ◆ Questions 16 and 17 generated excellent responses from the small number of candidates who completed them.
- ◆ Question 27 was well answered by the majority of candidates. Very good candidates introduced a strong amount of debate and historiography in their responses.
- ◆ In Question 38, many candidates developed focused and appropriate argument.
- ◆ Question 40 generated some excellent responses from candidates.

Paper 2

Most candidates answered the Scottish Wars, Migration and Great War topics. Feedback from markers and centres suggests that this was a very fair paper that allowed the vast majority of candidates to show their knowledge with appropriate comment.

The vast majority of questions allowed candidates to show their knowledge of the issues and sub-issues which the questions explored. Most candidates had good knowledge of the issues and were able to tailor this to the question posed.

The comparison question (Question 3 in all options) was answered very well with good technique evident from the vast majority of candidates.

The contextualise questions (Questions 1 and 2 in all options) also generated good answers in the vast majority of questions asked. Frequently the candidates did a lot more than simply list information, which was encouraging. There was a lot of good comment, which tied the information to the question.

Extended Essay

As expected, this continued to be the best-completed element of the qualification. Candidates are well versed in the standard required and show excellent knowledge of their selected options. Many candidates show sophisticated argument and debate of the issues generated by their selected questions.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper 1

The wording of some questions caused some candidates problems. There also continued to be problems in candidates' ability to adapt argument to the specifics of the essay-based questions.

In Question 12, a minority of candidates only looked at the effectiveness element of the question and did not tie it, specifically, to the problem of poverty.

In Question 25, a small minority of candidates confused issue 1 and issue 2 questions on the German nationalism topic. The knowledge gains marks, but argument marks can be affected by this misinterpretation.

In Question 37, a small minority of candidates did not broaden the content/argument to the non-violent Fascist methods. The question also expects reference to more than one Fascist country, though this did not have an effect on marks.

Paper 2

The evaluation question (Question 4) continued to cause problems, with many candidates continuing to describe the source rather than evaluate it/give reasons for the judgments that they should be making.

Special Topic 5, Question 3 caused problems for some candidates who did not read the question carefully and selected inappropriate content not relevant to the question of why so many left Scotland after 1918.

Extended Essay

There was very little inappropriate issue selection, but the wording of some questions continued to be a problem. Over-complex issue selection only favours a minority of very able candidates.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

2015 was the final examination of this course.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	10881
Number of resulted entries in 2015	3906

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	36.0%	36.0%	1406	72
B	30.8%	66.8%	1204	63
C	21.5%	88.3%	839	54
D	4.7%	93.0%	185	49
No award	7.0%	-	272	-

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.