Course report 2023

Advanced Higher History

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   1,472

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   1,408

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	425	Percentage	30.2	Cumulative percentage	30.2	Minimum mark required	96
B	Number of candidates	411	Percentage	29.2	Cumulative percentage	59.4	Minimum mark required	81
C	Number of candidates	320	Percentage	22.7	Cumulative percentage	82.1	Minimum mark required	66
D	Number of candidates	167	Percentage	11.9	Cumulative percentage	94	Minimum mark required	51
No award	Number of candidates	85	Percentage	6	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper has 10 sections recognising the 10 fields of study. Each section has five essay questions and three source questions. Modifications this session meant that the two sections that were not directly assessed in the question paper were communicated in advance so that candidates could focus on the eight sections that would be examined in detail in the paper.

The question paper produced a wide range of responses. Markers noted that a few candidates did not complete the paper, choosing to answer one essay and the source questions. A few also missed out a source answer.

Project–dissertation

Most candidates performed well, demonstrating a clear line of argument and relevant knowledge. However, areas for improvement include the depth of analysis and evaluation, synthesis of historical interpretations, and critical engagement with primary evidence. Markers noted technical issues and the need for better proofreading.

The maximum word count for the project–dissertation is 4,000 words. If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty is applied. There was a mixture of responses in terms of length. Markers noted that a few were under 3,000 words in length and read more like an essay.

Overall, this part of the assessment performed very much as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Part A: Historical issues — essays

Many candidates answered the questions set, led with the isolated factor and addressed all other factors, as expected. However, more than the usual number of candidates wrote about the topic and did not address the specifics of the question set. Stronger essays had substantial factual evidence, which candidates used to forward their argument. A few were prone to generalisations. At times, with little detail, candidates made assertions such as 'this clearly shows…' when it did not.

Part B: Historical sources — source-based questions

Source questions consider the causes of, impact of, or nature of an event, topic or issue. It is important to recognise that while candidates require the same skills in order to answer these questions, they need to use a different approach for each. Most candidates understood 'cause' and 'impact' but 'nature' caused difficulties. The 'nature' means the way in which an event unfolded or the way a topic or issue was considered at the time. Some candidates incorrectly answered these questions as a cause.

♦ Candidates answered the 'How fully….?' question well unless it was on the 'nature' of the event, topic or issue.

♦ The 'two-source' question requires candidates to assess the viewpoints from the academic works of two historians. In the main, candidates did this well.

♦ The 'Evaluate the usefulness….' question focuses totally on the value of the source regarding a particular topic or issue. That value is assessed by commenting on rubric provenance — author, purpose and time. Candidates rarely managed to access marks for this. Responses were quite generic and a few confused type with purpose. Content provenance was better, but some interpreted without making any comment on the value of the source.

♦ In all source answers there are many opportunities for candidates to add in recalled knowledge as wider contextual development (WCD). The candidate is relating that knowledge to the context of the source and the question. A few tended to 'list' facts without giving any further detail.

♦ Historians' views are allocated 2 marks in each question, but more can become WCD. Most candidates gave historians' views, but a few did not.

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034: essays

Structure

Most candidates provided context in the introduction. Most answers had a sound grasp of the essay structure.

A few candidates explicitly addressed the debate in the introduction. Some did not set out a clear line of argument. Some candidates provided different interpretations and approaches in response to question 20. Occasionally candidates attempted to twist the wording of the question or addressed the topic rather than the specific wording set.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Most candidates correctly identified the focus of the questions and adopted a sensible approach, for example thematic paragraphs. Overall, candidates were well informed and well prepared.

In question 4, some candidates wrote their response on Viking impact rather than resistance without using the evidence to answer the question. A few candidates gave a narrative overview or provided an explanation without any supporting evidence.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Although some candidates could improve by establishing a clear line of argument in the introduction, in most essays, the overall line of argument became apparent. Many essays contained good basic analysis, but only the best considered counterarguments and/or made concerted efforts to evaluate the relative importance of the factors. There were many good examples of clear, consistent lines of argument provided at the end of each paragraph. However, some candidates made efforts to use sub-conclusions, but this could be much more consistent. Occasionally there was a one-sided approach and lack of analysis and any sense of counterargument.

Historical sources and interpretations

Strong responses used historians' views effectively to advance the argument but this was not the norm.

However, there were few examples of historians' views flowing through an essay from the introduction to the conclusion. Few candidates referred to more than three historians, and it was often bolted on and/or inaccurate.

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Some candidates made insightful provenance comments. Also, there was good, relevant WCD in this answer. For Iron Age society, some interpretation was strong.

However, some candidates did not grasp the level of detail required for rubric provenance points. For some the provenance comments were vague and showed a general lack of insight about whether Roman sources are really reliable for evidence of Iron Age society. A few seemed unclear on the balance of marks allocated, attempting many extra WCD comments where 4 marks are allocated. Some candidates identified the appropriate quotations but still struggled to provide insightful interpretation.

How fully…?

On the whole this was probably the strongest source answer. There were examples of responses with very good WCD, which included both general and specific recall points.

However, candidates occasionally misunderstood the content of the source and a few candidates struggled to identify the correct points from the source.

Two-source historical interpretations

It was good to see the accurate assessment of the overall views in this question. Candidates were strong on technique. However, for many candidates this was the last question they attempted, and a few answers were incomplete.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: independence and kingship, 1249–1334: essays

Structure

Most candidates grasped and attempted to answer the question properly. Most essays were structured well and focused on the question.

However, candidates occasionally misinterpreted the question and isolated factors, for example in question 10, a few candidates misinterpreted this as a King John essay as he is mentioned in the isolated factor. A few candidates tried to provide an issue 2 response to this question when it was an issue 3 question.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Most candidates provided very good detail and knowledge in their responses.

Some candidates used time well to cover fewer issues but in greater depth.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

The quality of candidate responses was, at times, excellent and markers noted some insightful and reflective analysis and evaluation. Candidates included sub-conclusions in most essays. Candidates identified the line of argument early and focused on it throughout. However, there were some more formulaic responses.

Historical sources and interpretations

Markers noted an improvement from last session. Most candidates included relevant historians' views and some candidates demonstrated an excellent knowledge of the historians. However, a few responses focused on the phrase 'Some historians'.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: independence and kingship, 1249–1334: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Markers noted that candidates' provenance comments were better than in previous years, and there was a more specific understanding of the demands. However, for some the rubric provenance proved a challenge. Candidates misunderstood the purpose of the chronicle and the time.

How fully…?

Most candidates provided an excellent response. Many candidates demonstrated good, detailed recalled knowledge.

Two-source historical interpretations

Most candidates tackled source interpretations well and understood how to approach this question effectively. However, some struggled with interpretations and lifted irrelevant quotes from the source. Source A proved to be more challenging.

Field of study 3 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to Enlightenment, 1701–1815: essays

Structure

Nearly all candidate responses were well structured and had a clear line of argument and methodology. However, a small number of candidates appeared to attempt to use pre-prepared answers to fit the questions.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Detail varied, but in the best answers candidates sustained breadth and depth of detail across several factors.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

The best candidate responses were considered, constantly analytical and included counter-analysis throughout, which helped them in their evaluation. Some candidates provided answers that were sophisticated and presented arguments that went beyond the most obvious. However, some were basic in places but very few were largely narrative.

Historical sources and interpretations

Several candidates established the historical debate but did not always engage with it throughout.

Field of study 3 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to Enlightenment, 1701–1815: source-based questions

Candidates interpretated source content and historiography to a high standard.

Evaluate the usefulness

Some candidates excellently interpreted content provenance and there were excellent examples of relevant recalled knowledge. However, candidates found the rubric provenance challenging. Most offered generic responses to the rubric provenance. In interpretation, some candidates were unable to distinguish between the source's point of poor communication from the impact of no French support.

How fully…?

This question was answered to a high standard, but some responses were incomplete.

Two-source historical interpretations

Most candidates remained focused on schooling, providing specific detailed answers. Candidates gave the overall view of each source, which was pleasing to see. Generally, candidates did well in this question.

However, a few candidates were unable to identify the relevant points in the source. Some candidates did not complete or even begin to answer this question.

Field of study 4 — USA: 'a house divided', 1850–1865: essays

Structure

Overall, the structure of the responses was good, with well-structured introductions and conclusions. Many candidates followed a logical line of argument and engaged with the questions. The best demonstrated clear evaluations in their answers. However, some lacked historical interpretations in the introduction.

Some responses did not focus on the specific questions asked.

In question 25, some candidates focused on a wider issue on differences, rather than specifically on the economic gulf, which lead to much irrelevance. There were instances where answers evaded division opting for general discussion of impact of abolitionists (question 26). A few had a limited knowledge of Grant (question 29).

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Some candidates provided relevant and detailed knowledge, including some very good use of statistics. Markers noted comprehensive coverage in essays on Grant.

Several essays lacked breadth and depth and had many irrelevancies, particularly in questions 25 and 27. There were also some very brief answers.

Many candidates did not provide enough specific examples and some candidates demonstrated only a basic understanding of the issues.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates adopted an analytical approach and attempted evaluation. Many candidates followed a logical line of argument in terms of the boldness of voice and clearly tried to engage with the question by building their argument throughout the essay. Most candidates made real efforts to include clear evaluation.

Some candidates did not attempt evaluation. In a few responses, candidates did not decide on the line of argument, which weakened their answer. On a few occasions the line of argument did not match the knowledge and content provided.

Historical sources and interpretations

Most candidates included historians' views. Generally, all candidates engaged with this to some extent, but largely used it for illustrative purposes. Some tended to give four or more per essay, but they were used well.

At times, however, candidates wrongly attributed historians' views or gave an incorrect view. In the sectionalism essay candidates acknowledged the Mary Beard argument well, although lacked perspectives in discussing historiography. Sometimes the historiography was not

relevant to the question and occasionally very vague. Others relied too much on Alan Farmer.

Field of study 4 — USA: 'a house divided', 1850–1865: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Markers noted that more candidates accessed the rubric provenance and content provenance marks than previously.

However, for some candidates rubric provenance proved challenging. Many gave generic responses. A few candidates did not know Calhoun. Some candidates included provenance comments on type of source. At Advanced Higher level candidates are invited to comment on the author, timing and purpose of the source. Many candidates gave good responses on timing and on content provenance.

How fully…?

Responses were mixed in terms of knowledge but had good source points and analysis. Many candidates gave well-structured responses. However, a few struggled to interpret the source even if selecting the correct quote.

Two-source historical interpretations

Some candidates struggled to interpret the source even if choosing the right quote, but it was generally well done. However, a few responses compared the two sources. Overall, candidates were able to access the interpretation points and included historians' views.

Field of study 5 — Japan: the modernisation of a nation, 1840–1920: essays

Structure

Some candidate responses were excellent in structural approach with a careful balance of knowledge, analysis and interpretation, and historical perspectives strengthening the analytical debate.

Candidate responses to question 36 sometimes resulted in an answer that was more to do with causes than reasons for victory.

Candidates gave some very detailed answers to question 37.

Those candidates who had not prepared for set answers were more successful as it allowed their approach to be completely responsive to the question.

However, some candidates did not introduce their line of argument in the introduction. Some candidates did not understand what the question was asking. This was especially true in question 36 where many candidates approached the answer as a possession question, which is not what was being asked.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Many candidate responses were detailed and relevant. However, some candidates were very brief about the isolated factor, which limits more thoroughness and their analysis and evaluation of the response. In questions 30 and 34 a few candidates wrote responses on the topic rather than on the specific issue asked.

Markers noted that essays were shorter than usual and that some candidates chose to answer the source questions first.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

The candidates who were most successful clearly identified their line of argument before they started writing. This led to a real clarity of thought with evaluative statements providing that analytical structure throughout.

However, while most candidates kept referencing the question, at times this led to a rather stilted and generic approach.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates used some very good quotes to develop or exemplify the argument. Some candidates excellently integrated perspectives to support the developing line of arguments and to introduce counterbalance.

However, some candidates merely added quotes, which were not fully integrated with their writing.

Field of study 5 — Japan: the modernisation of a nation, 1840–1920: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Many candidates accessed marks for content provenance. However, rubric provenance proved challenging. Most responses still contained quite generic expressions such as 'a primary source from the time of the event', 'an eyewitness who was actually there'. Some candidates did not comment on the full point from the source.

How fully…?

Candidates produced some excellent responses.

Two-source historical interpretations

Candidate responses were very good. However, some candidates did not demonstrate recall, which limited the number of marks available.'

Field of study 6 — Germany: from democracy to dictatorship,1918–1939: essays

Structure

Most candidates understood the intention of the questions and had a good structure, with an introduction, main body and conclusions.

Questions 41 and 42 were popular. Candidates did very well in question 45. There was good work on opposition. Volkspartei (question 43) confused some candidates who answered it as if it was about the rise of the Nazis. Many avoided the full discussion of the idea of Volkspartei, struggled with the class aspect of it or considered it Volksgemeinschaft. Some candidates ignored the 'myth' aspect (in question 44) or dealt with it in a very general way. A few did not deal with the domestic policies and a couple focused on foreign policy.

However, some candidates did not complete all parts of the essay in the main body, and some did not complete a conclusion. This was evident in more of the second essays. Markers noted unfinished or barely-started second essays. A number of candidates struggled to prioritise arguments and, in the introduction, also struggled with setting context, which was often very brief. Some introductions were quite functional.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Most candidates showed sufficient knowledge of the issue, which was based on some awareness of the breadth and depth of knowledge required for the study.

Some responses seemed rehearsed, for example question 43, where a few candidates did not answer the question directly — very few looked at how different groups voted. A few essays used examples outwith the time period, for example White Rose in question 45.

Some candidates showed a lack of knowledge about 'internal stability' for question 42. Some candidates appeared to use a pre-prepared answered about Stresemann and his legacy. Some candidates focused on Stresemann and his foreign policy too much in the 'golden years' question. A number of candidates had a very narrative approach or demonstrated only basic knowledge.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Some candidates demonstrated analysis throughout the essay and some candidates attempted evaluation at the end of paragraphs. Many used sub-conclusions throughout. While there were some good examples of essays, many candidates provided a fairly basic, well-rehearsed approach.

Although many conclusions helped display at least a basic analytical style, the majority were not deep or sustained. Some candidates struggled to analyse the 'Hitler myth' and provided only vague statements as arguments, which lacked depth and evaluation. Some candidates struggled to fully evaluate and many conclusions were confined to analysis.

Historical sources and interpretations

Most candidates included more than one named historian. A few candidates had really strong historiography. Many included relevant quotes. In the best responses the views were embedded in the discussion. Most candidates included historiography but few engaged with the historians.

Many historians' views were illustrative. Some candidates bolted on historians to paragraphs in neither useful nor meaningful ways. A small number of candidates did not show any historical interpretations or general knowledge of their texts. Occasionally historiography was used, but not always linked to the issue.

Field of study 6 — Germany: from democracy to dictatorship,1918–1939: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Many candidates did not access the full range of marks for rubric provenance although comments on author and purpose were stronger this year. Timing remained an issue. Some candidates wrote about the type of source, which is not what is wanted. Candidates interpreted points well and, in some cases, demonstrated excellent recalled knowledge.

How fully…?

Most candidates did this question well, showing some excellent knowledge. For many candidates this was the best question for receiving interpretation points. Most managed to identify the source points. However, a few candidates tackled it as a maintenance of power question rather than a consolidation of power question. Some candidates gave recalled knowledge about general Nazi society, rather than consolidation. Some limited themselves with no historians' views.

Two-source historical interpretations

Generally, candidates did very well, paraphrasing sources, interpreting them well, and the sources were accessible to most candidates. Most understood the conventions of this question.

However, a few candidates still approached it as a comparison question. Some candidates identified source points but did not then explain them. When interpreting the first source point, a few candidates said many young people joined Hitler Youth rather than explaining why. Markers noted that some candidates failed to complete this question, since it was the last question.

Field of study 7 — South Africa: race and power, 1902–1984: essays

Structure

On the whole, candidates answered questions well, with the strongest candidates outlining their line of argument. Some candidates struggled with questions based on key issues relating to earlier parts of the course.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Candidates showed very little evidence of irrelevant knowledge and some excellent instances of research and evidence.

However, some candidates went outside the parameters of the question, which had an impact on the thoroughness and relevance.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates attempted analysis — a number had embedded analysis and evaluation and made good use of sub-conclusions. Some candidates had an excellent command of arguments going beyond the most obvious ones. Most candidates demonstrated a clear line of argument in their introductions.

A few introductions did not set out a line of argument and some candidates answered the question area they wanted to, rather than the question that was asked.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates engaged excellently with historical interpretations. However, some merely added historical interpretations. Candidates made increased use of primary sources, compared to previous years. In weaker responses candidates used historians as illustrative rather than engaging with them.

Field of study 7 — South Africa: race and power, 1902–1984: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Many candidates answered this question well. However, there were generic responses to the rubric provenance. Some stated that Malan was 'a prominent figure' but more detail is expected. A few struggled with the purpose of the source.

How fully…?

Most candidates answered this question well, had a good understanding of technique, and brought relevant specific recalled knowledge to the response. However, some did not have the knowledge required and a few misinterpreted the source.

Two-source historical interpretations

Candidates answered this question well. Markers commented favourably on the identification of 'viewpoints'.

Field of study 8 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–1945: essays

Structure

The most popular questions were the downfall of the Tsar (question 57), the Civil War (question 59) and the Great Patriotic War (question 61). Candidates addressed the isolated factor well, and most understood the aims of the question. The overall structure was positive, although it would be stylistically better if candidates addressed the isolated factor first. Most candidates included historiography in their introductions. The best responses prioritised interpretations.

Some candidates appeared to use pre-prepared essays and attempted to twist their answers to fit the questions.

Some candidates misunderstood question 57 and read it as the causes of the February Revolution when it was on the reasons for the collapse of Tsarism up to January 1917, before the February Revolution. Others misunderstood question 62 and saw it as a 'causes' of the February Revolution when it was about the 'nature' of the revolution — the way in which it unfolded — the debate being about the level of spontaneity or organisation. A few did not discuss the multiple 'opponents' in question 59 and considered only Trotsky.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Overall, the breadth and depth of detail was good and the majority of candidates selected relevant evidence. Candidates were well prepared for the civil war essay (question 58). Others did not discuss allied aid in much detail in question 61. There was a tendency for some candidates to produce a lot of pre-determined factors, not really responding to the actual question, rather producing a rehearsed response.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates gave clear lines of argument in the introduction and were analytical. They attempted evaluation and the best responses consistently built a line of argument. Sub-conclusions and final conclusions were also very good.

However, timing had an impact on the second essay, notably in question 61. Some candidates lacked the sub-conclusions to build the line of argument. Many candidates dismissed the isolated factor in favour of, it seemed, what they wished the question had been. At times candidates bolted on evaluation and line of argument at the end of the paragraph and provided limited counterarguments. In a very few responses, candidates did not reference a line of argument.

Historical sources and interpretations

Almost all candidates included multiple quotes from historians, mostly illustrative. Candidates relied less on Corin and Fiehn than in previous years, and more candidates used primary views to enhance their responses.

However, few candidates showed an appreciation of the context of the historians themselves. A few candidates used bolt-on historians' views. A number used the historians' names with little conviction and randomly applied quotes.

Field of study 8 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–1945: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the reasons for the Purges and used historians' views to contextualise their arguments. Candidates solidly interpreted the 'Kulak saboteurs', recognising the tone of the source and its manipulation of evidence.

However, rubric provenance was a challenge, particularly the author and purpose of the source. Candidates gave mixed content provenance interpretations, and a few did not interpret the information accurately or did not interpret it at all. Some candidates focused solely on the reasons for the Purges, neglecting the evaluation aspect.

How fully…?

The best candidate responses engaged with the 'spontaneous, not so spontaneous' debate and selected quotes that showed how the events unfolded. Overall, candidates performed well.

However, some saw this as a 'cause' and not the 'nature' of the February Revolution. Others used knowledge from the downfall of the Tsar. Some gave reasons and causes not linking to the popular anger in the evolution of the revolution, as expected.

Two-source historical interpretations

Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of the overall view in the two-source question. They selected accurate points of interpretation and complemented this with appropriate recalled knowledge.

However, there were instances where candidates provided short answers, possibly due to time constraints. A minority treated the question as a source comparison with no interpretation. Although most candidates were able to discern the meaning of both sources and their importance to the historical debate, a few did not link them to the popular or coup d'etat debate in the October Revolution.

Field of study 9 — the Spanish Civil War: causes, conflict and consequences, 1923–1945: essays

Structure

A few candidates had a functional approach to an essay but there were other examples of clear structure.

The popular topics, Franco (question 67) and internal divisions (question 69), were accessible for candidates. In question 65 some candidate responses did not include Primo and military dictatorship.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Almost all candidates linked knowledge to the question effectively. However, a few did not include robust evidence on every factor.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Many candidate responses sustained analysis with some exceptionally nuanced arguments that were developed throughout. Some candidates provided excellent examples of evaluation and sustained lines of argument.

However, several candidates did not venture beyond analysis of points — some were very simple in their arguments and analysis.

Historical sources and interpretations

The majority of candidates showed considerable awareness of the historical debate. Some candidates looked at two historians and cross-referenced them on the same point. However, a significant minority made no reference to historians.

Field of study 9 — the Spanish Civil War: causes, conflict and consequences, 1923–1945: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Some candidates gave good examples of rubric provenance. Most candidates were confident on content provenance interpretation.

However, some discussed the type of source while others gave very brief, vague responses on provenance and recall on the motives of the International Brigades rather than their contribution. Many found wider knowledge a challenge. Some misunderstood the quote and therefore interpreted incorrectly, and others did not take care when selecting evidence from the sources.

How fully…?

Candidates answered this question well, accessing interpretation and adding recall. However, some candidates did not include as much recall as required.

Two-source historical interpretations

Candidates showed examples of good interpretation and most identified the source points. However, some candidates misunderstood the question and revolution. A few candidates regularly misinterpreted the source points. Some struggled to extract the appropriate quotes. Some therefore used irrelevant recall.

Field of study 10 — Britain; at war and peace, 1938–1951: essays

Structure

Most candidates understood how to structure paragraphs and include ideas to allow sophisticated analysis.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Candidates showed a hugely impressive amount of knowledge, with many candidates showing clear engagement with the topics.

However, a significant number of candidates demonstrated only a basic understanding and there were issues of extreme brevity.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates who brought together key themes and ideas were very successful and created sophisticated lines of arguments. Many identified a line of argument and followed it through.

However, occasionally candidates included analysis that was thin and lacked substance. Some candidates were limited because they addressed the topic, but not the question.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates engaged with wider reading on the issues, while a few candidates had limited reading and responses reflected this.

Field of study 10 — Britain; at war and peace, 1938–1951: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Some candidates' interpretation was consistently good. Many candidates were able to make sophisticated judgements and coped well with the content provenance interpretation. However, a few candidates struggled with the time and the purpose in rubric provenance.

How fully…?

Candidates did very well in this question. Candidates included significant amounts of insightful recalled knowledge. However, a few candidates struggled to select and interpret the correct points as source interpretations. A few did not take advantage of the chance to demonstrate their knowledge, but most found this very accessible.

Two-source historical interpretations

A few candidates treated this as a comparison question, but most interpreted very well and brought in recall, which was appropriate.

Project–dissertation

Candidates addressed the abstract introduction better this year, although some still wrote introductions. Candidates are asked to explain the rationale for their choice of issue, the research methods undertaken, the historians consulted and their viewpoints, and the use of primary evidence. Doing this gave candidates greater focus and allowed for a better structure in their response.

Primary evidence, now included on the marking grid, was apparent in most responses although in most it was used as evidence at face value. Comment is expected on the value of this evidence. Most candidates opted for three chapters and in each came to conclusions and evaluated by linking to their overall question.

Breadth and depth of knowledge varied. Candidates produced some excellent responses, which considered a wealth of evidence and had excellent analysis and evaluation.

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034

Titles and structure

Titles covered the full range of course content. Most had the relevant structure.

Abstract introduction

Most candidates set out factors clearly, main interpretations, and the debate. Candidates discussed the methodology in terms of sources used, research and rationale. However, in some cases candidates wrote separate abstracts and introductions, which were at times long and repetitive. Others did not set a clear line of argument.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Most candidates demonstrated clear evidence of wider reading, whether books or online resources. They included a range of appropriate evidence, for example literary sources, archaeology, place names and statistics. However, some included irrelevant information, for example discussion of Anglo-Saxon England. This was self-penalising.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates who set out a clear line of argument and pursued this by analysing evidence were very successful. Many candidates made effective use of sub-conclusions to build their argument. Some candidates produced effective final conclusions. However, some conclusions were overly brief and imbalanced by an overlong introduction. Some candidates focused on the narrative or description at the expense of analysis. Not all used sub-conclusions and, at times, the evaluation was very traditional and/or simplistic, for example Vikings equals bad, Rome's impact equals negative.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates made good, critical comments on literary sources, for example Bede, Orkneyinga Saga, Tacitus and Dio. However, often candidates used historiography to illustrate knowledge rather than opinion or historical debate. Primary sources were used in an uncritical way, for example took Tacitus at face value and retold the story.

Referencing and bibliography

Markers noted excellent examples of moving beyond the traditional texts and using more recent works. Most responses had sound referencing. However, in some instances, candidates did not construct proper footnotes and bibliographies. Only a minority provided annotated bibliographies.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: independence and kingship, 1249–1334

Titles and structure

Candidates' dissertations had a good range of titles, displaying a variety of topics and demonstrating a broad understanding of the subject matter. Changes to the list of titles made last year resulted in a significant difference this year, offering a diverse range of options for candidates.

However, some titles focused heavily on Balliol, with fewer titles related to the Comyns or issues beyond the eighth area. A few candidates chose titles that were not well suited to their research, potentially having an impact on the quality of their arguments.

Abstract introduction

Most candidates tackled the abstract well, providing concise overviews of research methods, parameters, and historiography. Candidates generally adhered to the recommended length for the abstract and highlighted key areas of their research.

However, a number were excessively lengthy, blurring the line between an abstract and an introduction. A few omitted research methods and the specific parameters of their work, potentially lacking clarity in their approach.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Many candidates demonstrated excellent and thorough research, incorporating a wide range of sources and displaying a high level of detail. Candidates showed strong engagement and real depth of understanding within their chosen areas of study. Some candidates went beyond the expected texts, conducting extensive reading and incorporating a wide range of sources.

However, while most candidates showed awareness of the importance of wider reading, a few were superficial in their research, relying on limited sources. In some cases, candidates used secondary sources purely to reinforce existing knowledge, lacking critical engagement.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

In general candidates returned regularly to the question and built analysis and arguments effectively. Most had a balanced approach, presenting a well-rounded assessment of the topic. Candidates largely adhered to the line of argument throughout the work. The best responses presented articulate arguments, which demonstrated a deep understanding of the topic.

However, some candidates struggled with analysis and evaluation due to a lack of in-depth knowledge, resulting in implicit or weak analysis. They did not provide a comprehensive assessment of the issue. In others there was evidence of 'bolt-on' analysis, for example comments at the end of paragraphs and sections.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates showed a clear engagement with historians' arguments and views, incorporating them effectively into their work. All engaged with primary evidence to some extent. Some demonstrated excellent engagement and analysis of these sources and used them to advance their argument. However, some historians' views were illustrative, and a number of candidates used primary evidence in a similar way and struggled to engage with it effectively.

Referencing and bibliography

In the main candidates' referencing was good. The annotated bibliography provided reflection on the resources used.

Field of study 3 — Scotland: from Union to Enlightenment, 1701–1815

Titles and structure

The titles candidates selected worked well. Many chose Charles Edward Stuart and 1745 circumstances in Europe. Virtually all dissertations in this field were very well-structured arguments, backed up by excellent use of evidence. However, in some cases, candidates implied the line of argument rather than specifically stating it.

Abstract introduction

Overall, the abstract introduction worked well.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

A few candidates produced excellent examples of thorough and well-directed work. However, some tackling an assessment of Charles Edward's leadership approached it in terms of four factors and treated them unequally. In these cases the extent of foreign and domestic support both received lighter analysis.

The supporting evidence was very impressive. Markers noted the prominent use of journals and current historiography.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

For most candidates, the level of analysis was substantial and sustained. Line of argument was almost universally clear and well-directed. Candidates ended most chapters with mini-conclusions, which enhanced evaluative commentary. The best responses developed a line of argument over the course of the dissertation. However, a minority allowed the narrative to dominate almost entirely.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates used a good core range of sources, which included prevailing and current views. Candidates increasingly used primary evidence as a point of critical analysis rather than illustrative. However, some interpretations were misinterpreted by candidates attempting to comment on 'the debate' and they struggled to use primary evidence critically.

Referencing and bibliography

Candidates' showed examples of excellent referencing and very sound use of footnoting. Annotated bibliographies reflected the value of the resources accessed.

Field of study 4 — USA: 'a house divided', 1850–1865

Titles and structure

Candidates provided a good range of titles, most from the approved list. Occasional adaptations to existing titles appeared on the topics of the Civil War and also women. Fogel and Engelmann are still popular choices.

Abstract introduction

Candidates showed that they understand this well and included research methods and rationale alongside the introduction. There were some individualised approaches. In the best examples candidates did two things well: prioritised their factors and arguments and showed specific awareness of historical ideas and debate.

However, some candidates used a formulaic approach, or used a prescribed template. Others did not address the research methods, listed the sub-issues rather than prioritising them, had irrelevant context, and did not give a line of argument. Furthermore, markers noted a lack of rationale for the topic studied.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Candidates demonstrated a wide range of reading, including new sources, statistics and articles. Some candidates considered unique angles and attempted to go beyond standard texts. Dissertations contained good, relevant historical knowledge. Candidates provided clear examples to support arguments.

Candidates increasingly used websites and traditional sources, and some candidates focused on excellent sources from USA university websites. However, in other cases there was an over-reliance on a small number of core texts and sources. Evidence was limited, with few facts to support the argument, which resulted in superficial answers with overly descriptive sections, for example on the contribution of women.

Some candidates showed a lack of research and attempted to hide it through excessive analytical and evaluative explanations.

Websites are useful but only if the candidate is aware of their sources of information. Some were taken at face value and lacked any critical evaluation of online information.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Some candidates displayed a high quality of argument and consistent directed analysis. Candidates showed the ability to take on the counterargument. Candidates demonstrated a good grasp of the arguments and aims of the question. Markers noted impressive and sophisticated evaluation in responses.

However, some candidates made bold assertions based on limited evidence, and some responses focused on explaining rather than analysing or evaluating. Some really struggled to build and sustain a line of argument. A few changed their line of argument throughout the dissertation without altering their initial stance. A few candidates adopted a point, counterpoint approach, which did not align with the theme of the chapter.

Historical sources and interpretations

Markers noted, in general, good use of historical interpretations and primary evidence. The best answers noted the contrasting views of the historians and discussed their differences.

Some candidates used historians as mere illustrations of evidence or views rather than using them to engage with the debate. Some lacked a critical review of primary sources and only mentioned them without deeper analysis.

Referencing and bibliography

Candidates' use of referencing was varied. Some seemed unfamiliar with the methods that should be used. Annotated bibliographies were helpful in showing the focus and development of chapters. Occasionally there was a lack of reflection of the bibliography in the dissertation text.

Field of study 5 — Japan: the modernisation of a nation, 1840–1920

Titles and structure

Candidates provided a relatively broad range of titles this year, with fewer candidates attempting a downfall type question, and, although fairly varied, there was some understandable similarity within centres.

Abstract introduction

For some candidates, this was the best part of the dissertation. Generally, candidates wrote an appropriate and helpful abstract giving an overview of perspectives and a reason for research methods. However, sometimes the line of argument was implicitly referred to and being explicit about the parameters of the dissertation, defining terms, and what would be covered, would be very helpful when appropriate. Some abstracts would benefit from addressing or indicating a clear line of argument early on.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Some candidates had clearly read up on their topic and produced outstanding dissertations that displayed breadth and depth, highlighting independent research. They supported their research with a wide range of resources — particularly electronic. Candidates carefully selected and applied research to make evidence relevant and resonant with the significance of their line of argument.

However, unfortunately a few candidates included excessive, irrelevant information in lengthy narratives, which hindered the clarity of their arguments. Others attempted to include all the obscure evidence found during their research, unintentionally distracting from their main argument and creating confusion. Markers noted less well-researched dissertations compared to previous years, evidenced by the lower number of footnotes under 20, not all of which added value. Some relied heavily on standard texts and guides in their research, indicating a lack of original thought and exploration.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

The most successful candidates were really confident about their line of argument and had clearly spent time thinking about the nuances of this and selected evidence to support it throughout. Markers noted some highly successful, sustained synthesised lines of argument, which shaped the flow and structure of the work.

Markers highlighted the importance of having an explicit line of argument, which would help those candidates who deviate or tend to fall into a narrative style. It was rare to read sustained or consistent quality throughout. Some candidates merely acknowledged their line of argument occasionally, rather than using it to provide the focus for analysis and evaluation. A few candidates obscured their own argument by attempting to be overly intellectual.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates were really successful in applying historical sources and (historical) interpretations and almost all dissertations acknowledged differing perspectives on a given issue. Most successful candidates were able to argue which viewpoint was most convincing

and based this on their use of primary evidence. Candidates engaged impressively with primary sources, especially in dissertations about the status of women and those on the Meiji reforms.

However, historiography for some was largely illustrative and was frequently followed by an unnecessary explanation, rather than being integrated into the analysis.

Referencing and bibliography

Referencing was appropriate and the annotated bibliography provided a reflection on the resources used.

Field of study 6 — Germany: from democracy to dictatorship,1918–1939

Titles and structure

Markers noted the focus of many dissertations centred on issues relating to Nazi propaganda, Hitler's leadership, and the effectiveness of Nazi policies. However, there were a few dissertations that explored different angles, sometimes deviating from the well-known titles. Most candidates produced dissertations around 4,400 words, with a few falling below 3,000 words. However, the quality of arguments varied, with some demonstrating insightful comments and clarity, while others lacked fluency and cohesion.

Abstract introduction

Most candidates tackled this quite well. They included research methods alongside a rationale for the study. However, in some there was a lack of clarity and content. Some candidates were unclear about what should be included in the abstract and sometimes produced both an abstract and an introduction. Some candidates did not prioritise interpretations and included general background information instead. When this was the case the lack of organisation at the outset continued throughout the dissertation.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Most candidates provided relevant content that demonstrated an impressive breadth of knowledge. Candidates used academic sources effectively. However, there were disparities among candidates in terms of engaging with reading materials. There was evidence that some candidates relied heavily on non-academic websites and online articles such as essay websites. Some candidates included information tenuously linked to the question or approached the dissertation as a long essay.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

The quality was variable. Some candidates produced excellent examples of sustained analysis and evaluation that built their case and linked to the topic or issue. These candidates developed and sustained a clear line of argument throughout their work.

However, in some cases even though candidates presented relevant knowledge related to the question, the depth of analysis and evaluation was sometimes lacking. Some struggled to sustain their argument throughout the dissertation. In a few cases certain sections deviated from the chosen line of argument, resulting in a loss of coherence. There were

many examples of candidates adding analysis by the statement 'this shows that…' with a comment that did not always reflect the previous information.

Historical sources and interpretations

Many candidates used a wide range of historians and demonstrated an awareness of historical interpretations. Candidates also showed improvement in using primary sources. However, the use of historians' interpretations often remained superficial, with candidates illustrating points rather than advancing arguments or addressing contradictions. Also, in some responses, critical engagement with primary evidence was lacking, with some sources appearing disconnected from the overall argument.

Referencing and bibliography

Markers noted that there were some good, annotated bibliographies where candidates reflected on the value of the resources used. However, markers observed technical issues such as lack of double line spacing, inconsistent referencing, and proofreading errors. Some dissertations lacked page numbers and annotated bibliographies, which affected the overall presentation.

Field of study 7 — South Africa: race and power,1902–1984

Titles and structure

Markers noted candidates did not always answer the question they had chosen.

Abstract introduction

Candidates demonstrated an improved understanding of what an abstract introduction should include. Most mentioned rationale, methodology, chapters and line of argument. However, some lacked relevant context that addressed the issue, weakening effectiveness. Other did not include research methods or prioritise debates. A few candidates wrote introductions without abstracts, indicating a misunderstanding of the required format.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Candidates showed a good breadth of contextual understanding and thoughtfulness. There were excellent instances of evidence and research, demonstrating a high standard. Markers noted the increased use of online sources, used both appropriately and effectively. However, some candidates lacked focus on their chosen title, resulting in insufficient detail and evidence. A few took a general approach without delving into necessary details. Others viewed the question as having an isolated factor when a broader perspective was necessary. There were a few where adherence to the specified dates of the question was not consistently maintained.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates who had a clear line of argument backed by thorough research, demonstrated assured and consistent control of their work. Some consistently related evidence to the issue to advance their line of argument, and candidates showed a commitment to and good use of sub-conclusions. However, some struggled to grasp the question's requirements, hindering

their ability to present a coherent line of argument. Those who did not commit to an argument and remained indecisive were less effective.

In topics related to resistance, some candidates lacked sufficient balance in their arguments. Instances of limited arguments were often due to a lack of evidence or a limited command of the issue. Candidates who attained a C grade did not push their arguments further, indicating a need for more depth and development.

Historical sources and interpretations

Most candidates demonstrated an improved understanding of historical debates. Some showed excellent engagement and prioritisation of relevant aspects. A few candidates critiqued primary evidence in terms of the topic or issue.

However, a few merely interpreted historians' works without analysis or critique and were therefore only illustrative. Although all candidates included at least one primary source, critical engagement with primary evidence was rare. Candidates often used primary sources as add-ons without meaningful integration or analysis.

Referencing and bibliography

Markers noted some excellent research shown in thorough annotated bibliographies, which included comment on the use of primary sources. Some lacked consistent referencing via footnotes and had very brief bibliographies.

Field of study 8 — Russia from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–1945

Titles and structure

An increased number of candidates produced titles on the Great Patriotic War and several focused on Stalingrad as the key issue. Others included Purges, Trotsky v Stalin, and Red victory in Civil War. Fewer dissertations focused on key issues relating to earlier parts of the course.

A few exceptional pieces of work included identity and culture in Stalinist Russia, and the changing role of women in Stalinist Russia. However, some candidates chose titles that were not suitable or overly broad in scope. This was self-penalising as for some this had an impact on the depth of their research.

There were a few examples of dissertations that did not address the isolated factor chosen, for example foreign intervention in the Civil War, where candidates gave little attention to it. In certain cases, candidates did not answer their question, for example 'Was February a Spontaneous Revolution?' as a proxy for 'Why was there a February Revolution?'. Failure to identify the key terms in the question was self-penalising.

Abstract introduction

Most candidates understood how to structure an abstract and embedded it in their dissertation introduction. On the whole, candidates provided good context outlines with historical interpretations and a clear line of argument, and generally good use of historical debate.

A few were written as a standard introduction, omitting rationale for the study, research methods, sources and overall findings. Some candidates only dealt with schools of thought, not naming any of the historians. A few candidates treated it as a mini essay, used the traditional introduction format, and wrote in the first person.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Some responses were very thorough and provided accurate, relevant information. Markers noted that candidates consistently showed admirable breadth and depth in their answers. Almost all dissertations were thorough and had a good grasp of the question.

Candidates increasingly used digital sources. Some were very well considered. However, in some cases candidates prioritised breadth over depth. They gave evidence of events but did not pursue the depth to show the impact of the event, which led to either the dominance of narrative or superficial analysis. There were certain cases where candidates selected irrelevant evidence. The use of web pages can be problematic if generic sites are in constant use.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates focused on the question and the aims in their analysis, evaluation, and line of argument. Most candidates attempted to evaluate the sources and avoided narrative accounts. Almost all maintained a consistent line of argument. Candidates used schools of thought to present argument and counterargument. However, in some dissertations, candidates did not develop analysis and evaluation. Others chose lines of argument that went against the key issue in the question and dismissed the issue too quickly. In a few there was the sense of three distinct chapters that did not tie to the main question.

Historical sources and interpretations

Many candidates used historians effectively to build analysis and engaged with the historical debate. There were some examples of context and the timing of historians' views in relationship to the question. Primary evidence in a couple of cases dominated the work and there was excellent evaluation and analysis to match the original piece of research. However, markers noted that there was less full engagement with recent academic history and historiography. In some there was an over-reliance on the core textbook.

Referencing and bibliography

Not all submissions had annotated bibliographies. A few candidates showed evidence of poor proofreading and scant footnoting. Chapter headings are helpful and expected, as are page numbers, and a significant minority had neither. There were some inconsistencies in referencing.

Field of study 9 — The Spanish Civil War: causes, conflict and consequences, 1923–1945

Titles and structure

Candidates chose a range of titles, demonstrating a variety of research topics. The selection of titles was strong, and some candidates amended them to suit their response.

Abstract introduction

Overall, the abstracts were strong, displaying candidates' understanding of the requirements, historical context, debate, and research methodology. However, sometimes candidates set parameters that limited the scope of the dissertation. In such cases the dissertation resembled a 'to what extent' essay rather than a comprehensive exploration. Some candidates did not prioritise historical interpretations, missing opportunities for in-depth analysis.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Some candidates demonstrated extensive reading and a strong ability to incorporate supporting evidence. They used a good range of sources, reflecting a thorough approach — books, journals, websites, documentaries. However, some candidates included information that, while related to the subject, did not directly address the question. In a few cases candidates missed areas that were clearly referenced in the question, indicating a lack of attention to detail. For example, in a question about the leadership of Franco causing a failed coup but turning into a successful war, few candidates adequately discussed the failed coup.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Many candidates presented strong arguments, regularly relating evidence back to the question and making judgements to support their arguments. These candidates demonstrated comprehensive analysis and evaluation.

However, some arguments were poor in quality, lacking coherence and depth. Not all candidates maintained a consistent line of argument throughout their dissertation, resulting in a weaker overall analysis. Furthermore, some candidates failed to fully address all aspects of their self-set questions, indicating a lack of thoroughness.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates were able to explore variations or connections between historians' interpretations, displaying insightful analysis. The use of primary evidence was mostly strong and interesting, with no candidates failing to include it. Almost all candidates effectively used primary evidence to illustrate lines of interpretation. However, one or two had very limited primary evidence.

Referencing and bibliography

Most candidates used an appropriate referencing system.

Field of study 10 — Britain: at war and peace, 1938–1951

Titles and structure

Most titles came from the approved list, demonstrating adherence to the guidelines. Some candidates chose new, innovative titles that emerged from new questions, displaying a broader selection of topics. However, a significant proportion of candidates deviated from the approved list, choosing titles that were not suitable or overly broad in scope. This was self-penalising as for some this had an impact on the depth of their research.

Abstract introduction

Candidates showed improvement from last year, setting out their research methods in the abstract introduction. The outline of chapter areas and thematic layout were generally well done, providing a clear line of argument. Many also explained the debates effectively.

However, overall, markers considered the abstract introduction an area in need of improvement. Some candidates did not set out a clear context or outline of the parameters of the question, which diminished the overall quality of the abstract introduction.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Most candidates demonstrated thorough research and relevance in their chosen topics. Many accessed the full word count and extended their research to multiple authors, displaying clear ideas and consistency in writing. Candidates showed a good range of textual reading, and an increasing number had online research, but in a very considered way.

However, some struggled to provide meaningful examples and relied on generalisations, limiting the depth of their knowledge. There were instances of candidates relying heavily on websites of dubious academic quality. Candidates with limited research compromised the scope of their argument.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Some candidates provided sophisticated arguments based on a wide range of reading. They highlighted clear ideas, insightful commentary, and a consistent line of argument throughout the dissertation. Some candidates demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how evidence leads to interpretation and engaged thoroughly with all points of the debate.

However, a few did not address the question directly, leading to a lack of consistency in their line of argument. Some candidates produced anecdotal narrative writing, limiting the strength of the analysis and evaluation.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates demonstrated superb engagement with a wide range of reading, further shown by a sophisticated understanding of historiography. Many candidates used primary evidence effectively to support their arguments and engaged with historical interpretations. Candidates actively analysed and interpreted the primary evidence.

However, there was significant variation in using historians' views: some were illustrative and did not link to the argument while some did not critique primary evidence and used it for illustrative purposes without an explanation or examination of the source.

Referencing and bibliography

Most candidates used an appropriate referencing system.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Part A: Historical issues — essays

Candidates should be reminded of the following:

♦ Read the question very carefully. One word can change the response expectation. The topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate.

♦ The isolated factor means that significant attention should be given to it, not just a cursory comment.

♦ It is important to refer back to the question and line of argument in discussion of subsequent factors. Use sub-conclusions to build argument as the essay progresses.

♦ Historians' views are vital to attain more than 9 out of 25 marks. Try to provide names and views, not generalisations. Generalised references might attain up to 12 out of 25 marks.

♦ Try to include views to back up arguments, not as factual illustration and try to cross-reference views.

♦ 'Balance' in the discussion is vital. This means considering more than one view. It does not mean equity. Use historians to highlight the range, or not, of arguments — not as 'history' but as evidence of the arguments. Views can be challenged as long as they can be justified.

♦ Make sure the reader reads the writer's view, not a synopsis of the viewpoints currently held. Candidates' own conclusions are vital.

Candidates should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the marking instructions.

Part B: Historical sources — source-based questions

To ensure the best answers to source questions, prepare by using the guidance in the course specification. Candidates should be reminded of the following:

♦ Interpretation is more than repetition of sources — there needs to be an explanation about why the selected point is important to the issue being discussed. It does not mean selecting the correct quote and leaving it at that.

♦ Adding further recall will gain more marks.

The 'Evaluate the usefulness…' question is about its provenance. It is a primary source of evidence. It contains:

♦ rubric provenance — 1 mark each for the author, timing and purpose of the source

♦ content provenance — three points, which should be contextualised in terms of their value as evidence, and in this way commenting on the provenance of the source text

Candidates should note the following for the two-source question:

♦ This question has the viewpoints of two historians in an academic work that they have written.

♦ The sources are not set out to contrast with one another. Candidates should look for nuances rather than distinctly opposed views.

♦ The two-source question is not a comparison question.

♦ Candidates could use comments such as 'This view given by the historian is' rather than state it as if it is a matter of factual accuracy.

♦ This question requires a substantial amount of wider contextual development. Candidates should note the mark allocation for interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views.

Candidates should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the marking instructions.

Project–dissertation

The dissertation requires the same skills as the question paper. Essays provide structure and approach; the 'evaluate' source question allows the candidate to demonstrate awareness of provenance in primary evidence; the 'how fully …?' has a focus on the factual detail; and the 'two-source' has a focus on the differing interpretations of historians.

In terms of research, quality is as important as quantity and a very high standard can be reached form the detailed reading of one good book, or a few good books.

Titles

Centres are encouraged to read the 'Approved list of dissertations', which is updated annually. If the title diverges in a significant way, centres are encouraged to seek approval of the title from SQA.

Some titles do not give candidates enough scope to write 4,000 words or do not easily suit well-directed responses. It is important to keep in mind that the title should allow for the depth and breadth required.

Abstract introduction

This should be concise. The Understanding Standards webinar on the project–dissertation and the associated exemplars give guidance on what is expected, including abstract requirements.

Presentation and referencing

Candidates should be encouraged to follow these guidelines in terms of the presentation of work:

♦ proofread their final piece
♦ double line space their work

- ♦ reference quotes, statistics and arguments, in some cases, by using footnotes — this gives the work validity
- ♦ include a contents page that includes chapter titles
- ♦ use numbers on pages
- ♦ include a bibliography
- ♦ include an annotated bibliography, which reinforces research undertaken
- ♦ use font size 11 or 12
- ♦ include a word count on each page
- ♦ do not staple
- ♦ print single-sided

In terms of referencing, candidates should use footnotes rather than embedding references in the body of the dissertation. Historical opinions or debates should be embedded throughout the dissertation. Quoting historians without footnoting or including their work in the bibliography and/or having an uncritical over-reliance on internet sites can hinder attainment.

Candidates and centres should refer to the detailed marking instructions in the coursework assessment task to help understand the progression in this assessment.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)

♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.

♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.