Course report 2025

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   10,263

Number of resulted entries in 2025:   9,869

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	3,658	37.1	37.1	77
B	2,582	26.2	63.2	66
C	1,683	17.1	80.3	55
D	1,010	10.2	90.5	44
No award	936	9.5	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

In this report:

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

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

The question paper performed as expected and the overall level of demand was equal to previous years.

Candidates had a choice of three questions from the six key issues in both the British and European and world sections.

In Section 1 — British: Part D — Britain, 1851–1951, most candidates answered question 11 (issue 4) and question 12 (issue 5). An increasing number of centres are teaching Part E — Britain and Ireland, 1900–1985.

In Section 2 — European and world, many candidates answered questions in Part D — Germany, 1815–1939, question 27 (issue 5), Part F — Russia, 1881–1921, question 31 (issue 1), and Part G — USA, 1918–1968, questions 34 (issue 1) and 36 (issue 5).

Most candidates completed a variety of topics and demonstrated the required skills.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

The question paper was accessible and in line with previous years, with candidates performing equally across all sections.

Most candidates completed Part D — Migration and empire, 1830–1939. As in previous years, the other two popular topics were Part A — The Wars of Independence, 1249–1328, and Part E — The impact of the Great War, 1914–1928.

Assignment

This was the second year that the assignment was part of the course assessment after we reintroduced it in 2024. The assignment performed well, allowing candidates

to select an appropriate issue and write an extended response under controlled conditions in 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

Many candidates presented well-structured responses. Many candidates used relevant knowledge to support the factors and demonstrated good use of analysis, which addressed the issues. Markers commented that a greater number of candidates completed two essays this year, which allowed them to access a wider range of marks.

Most candidates provided strong introductions, detailed knowledge, analysis and conclusions.

Some candidates demonstrated evaluation well.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

Many candidates successfully demonstrated the required skills and structures. Markers noted good practice in the 'Explain' question where candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of Scottish history to answer the question. Markers commented on good source interpretation in the 'How fully' question and well-explained recall that answered the question.

Markers commented that candidates were much stronger in demonstrating the skill of source interpretation, with most candidates showing understanding of the information selected from the sources.

Assignment

Many candidates produced assignments of a high standard.

Most candidates selected an appropriate question relevant to their area of study. The most effective candidate responses used an assessment-type or evaluation-type question, for example 'How successful', 'How important' or 'To what extent'. Many candidates used the resource sheet as required. The most successful candidates used the resource sheet as an essay plan, for example, providing a summary of key knowledge points and references (clearly noting the author, book title and full quote on the resource sheet).

Many candidates used references well, however, some candidates need to ensure they use references to support their analysis, rather than just mentioning them in the assignment.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

Many candidates were unable to access the full range of marks.

In the introduction, candidates should have two points of relevant background, factors and a clear line of argument. For some candidates, the use of analysis in essays was very brief and insufficient for Higher level. Candidates need to provide developed comments to access the full range of analysis marks. Some candidates did not access the evaluation marks. Markers commented that a few candidates did not provide enough recall to access all 6 marks for the use of knowledge. A few candidates did not complete two essays. A few candidates provided responses on issue 3 and issue 6 for Part D — Britain, 1851–1951.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

Some candidates had difficulty answering the 'two-source' and 'evaluate the usefulness' questions in parts A, B, C, D and E. Both questions are based on areas

from the description of content. Most candidates found it challenging to access the full range of marks for the 'evaluate the usefulness' questions.

Markers observed that some candidates selected the correct content from the sources. However, for the two-source question, some candidates did not gain marks as they did not give the correct interpretations. The explanations given did not relate to the question asked.

For the 'evaluate the usefulness' questions some candidates did not provide evaluative comments relating to the content of the source.

For some candidates, recall was often unrelated to the question asked, with some candidates providing recall relating to the full key issue, rather than the more specific area from the description of content.

Some candidates gave very vague and generic points, not the required 'detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of complex historical issues in Scottish contexts' as stated in the course specification for Higher History.

The 'evaluate the usefulness' question

Many candidates gave generic responses to the author, type, purpose and timing of the source, rather than making evaluative comments on the usefulness of these aspects of the source in relation to the specific question and Scottish issue.

Each 'evaluate the usefulness' source has three potential source points, with a maximum of 2 marks available for evaluative comments relating to the content of the source. Candidates can gain 3 marks for relevant recall. Some candidates gave recall related to the full key issue rather than the more specific area from the description of content.

Question 4: Evaluate the usefulness of Source D as evidence of Bruce's conflict with his Scottish opponents

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave recall related to other areas from the description of content such as the Battle of Bannockburn, meaning

that they could not access the full range of marks as the question asked about Bruce's conflict with his Scottish opponents.

Question 12: Evaluate the usefulness of Source D as evidence of the political effects of the Union, up to 1740

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of economic effects of the Union, meaning that they could not access the full range of marks as the question asked about the political effects of the Union, up to 1740.

Question 16: Evaluate the usefulness of Source D as evidence of the impact of the empire on Scotland, to 1939

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of the effects of migration on Scotland, meaning that they could not access the full range of marks as the question asked about the impact of the empire on Scotland, to 1939.

Question 20: Evaluate the usefulness of Source D as evidence of events on Red Clydeside

Some candidates gave the wrong recall. Some candidates gave examples of the overall political impact of the war on Scotland, meaning that they could not access the full range of marks as the question asked about the specific events of Red Clydeside.

The 'two-source' question

Question 3: How much do Sources B and C reveal about differing interpretations of the roles of William Wallace and Andrew Murray?

Many candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoint of Source B that Andrew Murray's leadership of the Scottish resistance derived from his status as a leading noble.

Some candidates struggled to recognise the overall viewpoint of Source C that Wallace was not a traditional leader yet played an important role in Scottish resistance.

Question 15: How much do Sources B and C reveal about differing interpretations of the impact of Scots emigrants on Canada?

Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoints of Sources B and C. However, many candidates did not gain marks as their comments were too brief. For example, it is not enough to say, 'Source B's overall viewpoint shows that the Scots had a positive impact on Canada'. Candidates need to extend their answer to access the mark for the overall viewpoint. For example, 'Source B's viewpoint is that Scots had a positive impact on Indigenous Peoples as they protected their rights and introduced vaccinations'.

Some candidates said that 'Source C shows the Scots had a negative impact on Canada'. Candidates need to extend their answer further to access the mark for the overall viewpoint. For example, 'Source C's viewpoint is that Scots had a negative impact on Indigenous Peoples as they encouraged Indigenous Peoples to disregard their culture and move from their homes'.

Most candidates selected the correct point from the source, however, their understanding and/or interpretation of Source B was weak, as many candidates misunderstood that the reforms Macdonald passed were to benefit Natives (Indigenous Peoples), not all Canadian settlers.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of the impact of Scots on Australia, New Zealand and India, and therefore could not access the full range of marks.

Question 19: How much do Sources B and C reveal about differing interpretations of the impact of the Great War on Scottish industry?

Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoints of Sources B and C. However, many candidates did not gain marks as their comments were too brief. For example, it is not enough to say, 'Source B shows that the Scottish economy was badly impacted by the war'. Candidates needed to extend their answer to access the mark for the overall viewpoint by recognising what caused the decline, for example loss of overseas markets and poor-quality products.

Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoint of Source C that the war helped to expand Scottish shipbuilding.

Some candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of the impact of war on fishing and agriculture and therefore could not access the full range of marks.

Assignment

Some candidates did not perform as well because they either did not select an issue that was appropriate, or the question stem did not provide a basis for analysis and evaluation.

Some candidates had difficulty using the resource sheet correctly. A few candidates copied whole paragraphs directly from the resource sheet to the assignment. Text copied word for word from the resource sheet does not gain marks.

As in previous years, the main problem was referencing. Many candidates had not provided either the author, book title or website, or quote on the resource sheet. It is important that candidates provide this information in full. References that provide facts cannot gain marks.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

In Section 1 — British and Section 2 — European and world, any three from six issues are assessed. These are the same across sections 1 and 2. It is essential that candidates are prepared for a minimum of four issues in both the British and European and world sections studied.

You should encourage all candidates to carefully read the essay questions to avoid answering the wrong question or issue. Candidates must answer the question as it appears in the question paper and not give a prepared answer. Candidates who exemplified best practice focused on the issue in the question, not the topic.

In an introduction, two points of relevant historical background are required, as well as factors or issues to be discussed, and a line of argument in response to the issue. If a candidate chooses to answer an evaluation-type question by selecting another factor, they must still address the question.

In an assessment-type question, candidates should address the issue, for example, if it was effective or not effective, or effective to an extent, in the line of argument. They should not select an isolated factor.

In the body of the essay, candidates should focus on demonstrating the skills of knowledge, analysis and evaluation.

Candidates should be prepared to write a reasoned conclusion that is linked to the line of argument. It is essential that candidates make a relative judgement between the different factors in relation to the issue to access the full range of marks in a conclusion.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

The 'evaluate the usefulness' question (8 marks)

Candidates should comment on the different aspects of the source. For example, candidates can make evaluative comments relating to the author, type of source, purpose and timing, evaluate the usefulness of the source points, then provide developed knowledge as significant omission.

It is good practice for candidates to quote from the source. Although candidates can paraphrase a source point, they must be careful not to change its meaning.

Candidates should support their selected source point with an evaluative comment linked to the question.

Candidates should provide developed knowledge as significant omission. Recalled knowledge should link to the question, be at Higher level, and be sufficiently developed.

Candidates should not give generic responses for the origin and purpose of the source. The focus should be on explaining the source in relation to the specific question and Scottish issue. Candidates should link the author, type of source, purpose, and timing to the question, with reference to the particular Scottish issue, and their answers need to be at Higher level.

Candidates can gain up to 4 marks for origin and purpose, up to 2 marks for source points, and up to 3 marks for recalled knowledge at Higher level.

Candidates should provide evaluative comments about the author, type, purpose and timing separately, rather than combining them, to improve their chances of accessing the marks available. Candidates should make an evaluative comment about each of these aspects.

The 'two-source' question (10 marks)

This question uses two sources showing differing interpretations of an issue or event.

Candidates should identify the overall viewpoint in each source. Additionally, candidates should carefully select up to two relevant views from each of the sources and interpret why the selected points are important to the issue.

Candidates should introduce recalled knowledge to develop the source points and/or identify relevant points of significant omission. Candidates should link developed, recalled knowledge to the question, and it should be at Higher level.

Candidates can gain up to 6 marks for the source points and up to 6 marks for recalled knowledge.

The 'explain' question (8 marks)

This question requires candidates to identify a key point from a historical issue and provide a relevant explanation in answer to the question. There is no source.

When providing recalled knowledge, candidates should develop each point of recalled knowledge by providing additional detail or examples at Higher level. Weak knowledge or knowledge that is not at Higher level will not gain marks. Candidates should not just give a fact. Candidates need to identify a key point from a historical issue and provide a relevant explanation, linked to the question, in sufficient depth for Higher level.

Candidates should use valid evidence that includes specific local or national examples, clearly linked to the Scottish context.

Each accurate, relevant reason is worth 1 mark. There is no additional mark for a developed explanation.

The 'how fully' question (10 marks)

Candidates are asked 'How fully does Source X explain …' and should remember that the question requires a judgement. For example, 'Source X partly explains …' or '…explains to an extent…'.

Candidates can include a judgement at any point in the answer. Candidates will gain a maximum of 2 marks in this type of question if they do not make a judgement.

It is good practice for candidates to quote from the source, although they can paraphrase a source point, taking care not to change its meaning. Candidates should support the selected source point with a detailed explanation, at Higher level, linked to the question. Candidates should introduce recalled knowledge to develop the source points and/or contextualise the content of the source. Candidates should link developed recall to the question.

Candidates can gain up to 4 marks for the source points, and up to 7 marks for recalled knowledge.

Assignment

Choosing an issue

Candidates should choose an issue that will allow them to access the full range of marks.

The most effective assignments use an assessment-type or evaluation-type question, for example 'How successful…' or 'How important…' or 'To what extent…'. It is not good practice for candidates from the same centre to use the same question, factors, recall and references.

Structure

Introduction

An introduction should have two points of relevant historical background, at least three relevant factors to be discussed, and a line of argument.

Body of assignment

In the body of the assignment, candidates should focus on demonstrating the skills of knowledge, analysis and evaluation.

Conclusion

Candidates should write a reasoned conclusion, linked to the line of argument. Candidates must make a relative judgement between the different factors to access the full range of marks in a conclusion.

Referencing sources

- References should be historians' views.
- Candidates should use references to support the argument.

- Candidates should use references that offer opinion, rather than knowledge.
- Candidates should use references correctly, linking them to the discussion.
- Secondary sources: provide the author, book title and quote.
- Primary sources: provide the author, date and quote.
- Websites: provide the author and website address (full website counts as one word).
- Candidates can use the same source twice (textbook or website and author).

References should be historians' views, or primary sources that provide opinion, that candidates use to support their analysis. A factual point made by a historian, primary source or website will not gain marks as a viewpoint.

Best practice is for candidates to use references to support the analysis they have demonstrated.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).