

Course report 2026

Higher History, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 9,869

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 9,470

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	3,132	33.1	33.1	77
B	2,738	28.9	62.0	66
C	1,770	18.7	80.7	55
D	1,080	11.4	92.1	44
No award	750	7.9	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper 1 — British, European and world history

The question paper performed as expected. 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 3) and question 12 (issue 4). Many candidates answered questions from Part E — Britain and Ireland, 1900–1985 this year.

In Section 2 — European and world, many candidates answered questions from Part D — Germany, 1815–1939, question 25 (issue 1) and question 26 (issue 3), Part F — Russia, 1881–1921, question 31 (issue 1) and question 33 (issue 4), Part G — USA, 1918–1968, question 34 (issue 1) and Part I — The Cold War, 1945–1989, question 41 (issue 3) and question 42 (issue 4).

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

The question paper was accessible.

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

Assignment

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.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

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. Many candidates completed two essays, 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. In the 'Explain' question, candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of Scottish history. Many candidates provided well-explained recall that answered the question.

Assignment

Many candidates produced assignments of a high standard.

Most candidates selected an appropriate question relevant to their area of study. Candidates who produced the most effective assignments 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. Candidates who achieved the highest marks 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 where candidates did not perform well

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. Some candidates' 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.

Few candidates attempted the 'Evaluation' section.

Few candidates achieved the full 3 marks available for their conclusions.

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.

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 continuing hostilities, 1314–1328

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 evidence of continuing hostilities.

Question 16: Evaluate the usefulness of Source D as evidence of the contribution of immigrants to the Scottish economy, to 1939

Many candidates' recall related to experience of immigrants, rather than their economic contribution, meaning that they could not access the full range of marks as the question asked about the contribution of immigrants to the Scottish economy.

Question 20: Evaluate the usefulness of Source D as evidence of the reasons for the development of the Scottish Unionist Party

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 development of the Scottish Unionist Party.

The 'two-source' question

Question 1: How much do Sources A and B reveal about differing interpretations of the Scottish appeal to Edward I and Norham?

Many candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoint of Source A that Edward posed a threat. Some candidates had difficulty recognising the overall viewpoint of Source B that Edward posed no threat.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of recall on the guardians, the death of the Maid of Norway and the Great Cause.

Question 13: How much do Sources A and B reveal about differing interpretations of the push factors which contributed to the emigration of Scots, 1830–1939?

Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoints of Sources A and B. However, many candidates did not gain marks as their comments were too general and did not mention the specific locality of each source. Source A was on push factors from urban and industrial city areas and Source B was on push factors from countryside, rural and highland areas.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of pull factors and therefore could not access the full range of marks.

Some candidates' interpretations and recall did not relate to emigration, clearly stating factors leading to migration to Scottish cities (internal migration).

Question 17: How much do Sources A and B reveal about differing interpretations of the Scots and the Battle of the Somme?

Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoints of Sources A and B. However, many candidates did not gain marks as their comments were too brief. For example, it is not enough to say that Source A shows that the Scots were unsuccessful at the battle as candidates need to extend their answer to access the mark for the overall viewpoint by recognising what caused the Scots to be unsuccessful. For example, 'Source A believes that the Scots were defeated and suffered a large number of casualties due to a lack of planning and the environment of the battlefield'.

Many candidates did not gain the mark for the overall viewpoint for Source B as their comments were too brief. For example, it is not enough to say that Source B shows that the Scots were successful at the battle as candidates need to extend their answer to access the mark for the overall viewpoint by recognising what caused the Scots to be successful. For example, 'Overall, Source B believes that the Scots (51st division) were successful in battle because of the tactics and bravery and determination of the soldiers'.

Some candidates gave the wrong recall. Many candidates gave examples of the Battle of Loos and therefore could not access the full range of marks. Some candidates gave generic evidence on trench conditions with no reference to the Scots at the Somme.

Assignment

Some candidates did not perform 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.

Some candidates lacked precision and consistency in their use of references.

Preparing candidates for 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. You must ensure 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 demonstrated 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. Few candidates attempted the ‘evaluation’ section. You should encourage candidates to refer to Higher History course reports and materials on our [Understanding Standards](#) website for guidance on the expected standards.

Candidates should be prepared to write a reasoned conclusion that is linked to the line of argument. Candidates must 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.

We recommend that candidates 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.

Some candidates would benefit from further support in recalling and applying relevant knowledge to sub-issue questions. You can help candidates feel more confident in selecting and using the most relevant evidence in their responses through continued practice in class and by reinforcing key content.

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.

Some candidates would benefit from further support in recalling and applying relevant knowledge to sub-issue questions. You can help candidates feel more confident in selecting and using the most relevant evidence in their responses through continued practice in class and by reinforcing key content.

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 their 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.

You should ensure that candidates complete their assignments in either blue or black pen. We recommend you avoid using A4 booklets. You should use single A4 sheets of paper (candidates can write on both sides of A4 paper).

Structure

Introduction

In the introduction, candidates 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

You should encourage candidates to develop their use of references to ensure they are precise and consistent, reflecting the standard expected at Higher level. Understanding Standards materials and course reports provide helpful guidance on the expected standard and are available on our [website](#). You can encourage candidates to practise their referencing skills by selecting and integrating relevant references to become confident and effective in this area.

You should ensure candidates are aware of the following requirements:

- 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.