

Course report 2026

National 5 History, SCQF level 5

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: 16,552

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 17,217

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

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	7,027	40.8	40.8	70
B	3,174	18.4	59.2	60
C	2,636	15.3	74.6	50
D	2,013	11.7	86.3	40
No award	2,367	13.7	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

The question paper performed as expected.

The most popular options in the Scottish section were: The Era of the Great War, 1900–1928, and Migration and Empire, 1830–1939. The most popular options in the British section were: The Trade in Enslaved African People, 1770–1807, Changing Britain, 1760–1914, and The Making of Modern Britain, 1880–1951. In the European and World section, the most popular options were: Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939, Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA, 1918–1968, and Red Flag: Lenin and the Russian Revolution, 1894–1921.

Most candidates completed all three sections. Across the question paper, individual questions mostly provided an appropriate level of differentiation.

Many candidates were presented at both National 4 and National 5 level this year and some candidates did not demonstrate the required literacy skills in the ‘How fully’ questions and the 9-mark response. These issues raised concerns about whether candidates were presented at the correct level.

We considered the above information when determining the grade boundaries.

Assignment

The assignment performed as intended and allowed candidates to show their best work. Candidates displayed personalisation and choice. Most candidates presented their assignments as well-structured, organised responses.

Sections B (references), E (evaluation) and G (conclusion) provided an appropriate level of differentiation between candidates.

Most candidates selected appropriate historical issues.

We considered the above information when determining the grade boundaries.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

Most candidates performed well in the question paper, completing all questions in time. Candidates performed as well in the popular options as they did in the other options across the three contexts.

Some candidates demonstrated excellent breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding in their responses.

Most candidates coped well with 9-mark questions in the Scottish and European and world sections. They demonstrated secure understanding of skills and knowledge, writing well-structured responses.

Many candidates provided appropriate evaluative comments for provenance marks in the 'Evaluate the usefulness' and 'Compare' questions.

Candidates completed the following questions very well: question 21 (The Era of the Great War, 1900–1928), question 36 (The Trade in Enslaved African People, 1770–1807), question 63 (Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939), and question 75 (Free at Last? Civil Rights in the USA, 1918–1968).

Assignment

Most candidates made effective use of their resource sheets.

Most candidates chose issue-based questions that allowed them to access the full range of marks.

Most candidates gave well-structured, organised responses.

Many candidates attempted and achieved marks for evaluative comments.

Most candidates were able to give a clear overall conclusion on their chosen question along with a supporting reason.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

Some candidates did not demonstrate the required literacy skills for the 'How fully' questions, for example, accurately interpreting source points. Instead of showing understanding of the relevant source point, a few candidates provided a link to the question or topic.

A few candidates made statements of historical fact rather than giving reasons in the 'Explain' question and/or did not fully explain historical points in relation to the question asked. For example, in question 63 (Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939), a few candidates simply stated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles rather than giving a reason as to why it led to some Germans opposing the treaty.

A few candidates did not structure the 9-mark response as an essay. A few candidates missed out this question while providing long answers for questions worth fewer marks, missing out on marks when their answers responded to the topic rather than the question. A few candidates structured their 9-mark response as an 'Explain' question. This made it difficult for them, in exam conditions, to demonstrate the skills of the introduction, balance between factors, conclusion, and supporting reason.

A few candidates did not correctly identify knowledge relevant to the Nazi consolidation of power in question 64 (Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939). Instead, they discussed reasons for the Nazi rise to power and/or how the Nazis maintained power.

A few candidates interpreted source points rather than making evaluative comments relating to the content of the course in the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question. Some candidates did not provide appropriate evaluative comments in relation to timing, author and source content. For example, in question 65, a few candidates gave generic responses for the author and type rather than making appropriate source specific comments relevant to its origins from a SS officer and an official Nazi government document.

A few candidates did not correctly identify the subject of a detailed comparison in the 'Compare' question. Instead, they focused on the topic. For example, in question 39,

the sources disagreed on whether families tried to stay together when escaping. A few candidates overgeneralised, expressing the point of disagreement as: 'The sources disagreed on families escaping'.

A few candidates lacked specific historical knowledge for question 20 (Migration and Empire, 1830–1939), question 25 (The Era of the Great War, 1900–1928), questions 37 and 38 (The Trade in Enslaved African People, 1770–1807), and question 43 (Changing Britain, 1760–1914).

Assignment

A few candidates did not submit a resource sheet with their assignment, leading to a 4-mark penalty.

A few candidates did not select appropriate historical issues to investigate. For example, choosing titles from modern-day contexts or issues of questionable historical merit.

A few candidates did not write their assignments in blue or black pen.

A few candidates exceeded the word limit in their resource sheets or wrote full sentences in their plan, which they then copied into their assignment. Where markers identified excessive copying in candidate assignments, they did not allocate marks to those sections.

A few candidates did not reference sources properly. For example, they did not clearly identify the quote or, for primary sources, provide the source or date of the quote.

A few candidates did not gain marks for their references because they cited an AI search engine as their source, not the website URL. A few candidates had not verified the origins of the quotes found in the results of an AI search. While an AI search always generates answers, these are not always accurate, and candidates who cited an incorrect URL could not achieve the mark.

A few candidates chose questions that were not issue-based and/or had more than one issue to explore. This made it more difficult for them to access the marks for analysis, evaluation, and a relative conclusion.

Some candidates did not follow the advice in appendix 1 of the course specification on how to demonstrate the skill of evaluation.

A few candidates did not make a relative conclusion in section G, preventing them from accessing the full range of marks for this skill.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

Assessment

You should ensure that candidates understand that each question is based on a specific section of the National 5 History course specification and revise the full content for the sections studied. Only content relevant to that part of the course specification can gain marks. For example, in question 23 (The Era of the Great War, 1900–1928), evidence relevant to the changing role of women gained marks, not women’s war work or the domestic impact of the war on politics, both of which could be assessed separately. Likewise, in question 38, a few candidates included evidence about living conditions, not working conditions. For help and guidance, centres should review past papers and marking instructions available on our [website](#).

You should ensure candidates write their responses to the question paper in blue or black pen unless using digital answer booklets.

In May 2024, we updated some of the language in Migration and Empire, 1830–1939 and The Trade in Enslaved African People, 1770–1807. You should ensure that, wherever possible, candidates use a respectful and balanced approach to analysing the past.

You should review your literacy strategies for teaching source interpretation in the ‘How fully’ question, and for teaching the subject of a detailed point of comparison in the ‘Compare’ question. For example, some centres find it helpful to use ‘show-me’ boards to break down the process of correctly identifying and explaining the subject of a source point, or for correctly identifying and explaining the subject of a detailed comparison.

You should ensure that candidates develop their source specific analytical skills rather than learning prepared answers. For example, in question 65 (Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919–1939), a few candidates stated that the authorship was trustworthy because it came from an SS officer, and that the question type was accurate because it came from an official Nazi government document. In both these examples,

candidates made unsupported generic statements rather than specific evaluative comments.

Candidates who achieved high marks included comments stating: 'The author of this source is useful because it is by an SS officer who would have insight as someone issuing an official document on behalf of the Nazis.' or 'The type is useful because as an official government document it shows the instructions of the Nazis in how they intended to treat Jewish people.' You should review past papers and marking instructions available on our website for guidance.

You should ensure that candidates are familiar with how the 'Evaluate the usefulness' question will be assessed in the 2027 exam. From 2027, candidates must make source-specific evaluative comments on the author of the source and will not gain marks for generic comments. The specimen question paper marking instructions and Understanding Standards webinar recordings provide further information. Webinars are available under the 'Understanding Standards' heading on the [National 5 History](#) subject page.

Knowledge and understanding

You should ensure that candidates have specific historical knowledge as detailed in the course specification. For help and guidance, you should review past papers and marking instructions and encourage candidates to use past paper questions as part of their revision for the question paper. This helps them stay focused on demonstrating knowledge relevant to the question asked. These resources are available on our [website](#).

Understanding Standards resources on the National 5 History subject page provide guidance on the variety of ways in which candidates can structure the 9-mark essay. Further examples are given in the detailed marking instructions on our [website](#).

Understanding Standards materials on the National 5 History subject page provide guidance on how candidates can ensure that they provide valid explained reasons for the 'explain' question, and the detailed marking instructions provide further examples.

Assignment

In the assignment, candidates need to choose an appropriate historical issue. This means that candidates should avoid contexts where there could be crossover with other social subjects. A commonly accepted way of distinguishing between historical and current affairs issues is to consider the date (approximately 20 years). This allows for appropriate hindsight to develop based on the availability of a variety of primary and secondary written sources.

Candidates should consider whether the topic is historically significant when choosing their issue. Candidates who investigated a historical issue related to broader political, social, economic or military change often achieved more marks than those who researched a niche interest. Candidates who selected questions assessing an issue with an isolated factor did well. You might find it helpful to direct candidates to the course specification as a starting point for this part of the assignment.

You should advise candidates that the 'evidence' part of the resource sheet should contain key words only, not full sentences. The key words might include specific historical facts, dates or statistics. Candidates should avoid using non-standard abbreviations in the resource sheet to avoid going over the word limit. Candidates should structure their resource sheet as an essay plan and cite references as shown in the National 5 History assignment resource sheet template. Many candidates made good use of the references section of the resource sheet to include the origin and full quotes. In the assignment, it is good practice to cite the author, title and quote. For websites, it is not necessary to cite the full URL as the title of the web page is sufficient. For primary sources, candidates need to ensure that they provide the source and date of the quote. The instructions for candidates in the National 5 History coursework assessment task provide further advice.

For the 'evaluation' section, you should communicate the advice on appropriate evaluative comments given in appendix 1 in the course specification. Some candidates made good use of evaluative language when analysing the importance of factors.