



Review of Higher History 2024

In strictest confidence

Context

- Concerns raised by teachers, parents/carers, MSPs about the marking standard for Higher History (specifically the Scottish History paper), in media, on social media and directly with SQA
- In interests of public confidence, Chief Examiner commissioned SQA's Head of Standards to review the standard of marking on 11th Sept
- The review was extended to cover the full end-to-end process for Higher History in 2024, lengthening the review process
- Head of Standards was supported by the Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards – neither had any prior involvement in marking or grading of Higher History
- External scrutiny of report and conclusions carried out by WJEC, Wales' largest awarding body



Conclusions

“All stages of SQA’s normal processes were followed rigorously and robustly and in accordance with SQA’s established processes and procedures, included embedded safeguards. The Higher History exam team acted with integrity throughout this process.”

“The standard set in the Higher History assessments...was not higher than that set in previous years that this examination has run.”

“Feedback from markers provided in their reports to SQA was overwhelmingly focused on the poor standard of responses provided by learners in this year’s examinations.”



Standard-setting

- There will always be a range of views about what the standard should be in any subject - SQA's role is to define and maintain a standard that reflects this range of views
- Our assessments are based on this standard
- Marking instructions are a key component of standard setting
- Awarding of National Qualifications is a complex and multi-stage process
- The process involves judgements at a number of stages made within a robust framework set and managed by SQA



Review process

- Review of:
 - documents setting the standard for Higher History, including course specification and this year's assessments and marking instructions
 - records relating to the processes of developing and marking this year's question papers, including marking instructions
 - a sample of candidate evidence for Question Paper 2, Scottish History
 - qualitative and quantitative evidence used at the awarding meeting for Higher History
 - markers' reports
 - correspondence from stakeholders on the outcomes of Higher History
- Interviews with senior appointees, including Principal Assessor (PA), and key members of staff
- External expert scrutiny of draft report



Conclusions - rationale

- ◆ This year's assessments were set and marked by an experienced and established exam team; while the PA was new to the role this year, they had been promoted from within the team; the Qualifications Manager, who was previously a history teacher, and their Head of Service are also highly experienced
- ◆ Whilst the course specification was updated in 2023, this was to ensure parity across the options in the Scottish history section and did not impact on course content or the standard of the assessment; all the questions were valid based on the course specification
- ◆ The team took no action to change the standard of marking this year

Conclusions - rationale

- ◆ Marking instructions included more points of detail and exemplification in 2024 than in previous years, to ensure better consistency of marking; this is normal practice and supported by academic research
- ◆ Learners were not required to provide more detailed responses to gain marks than in previous years
- ◆ SQA's marker check procedure ensured that all marking was on standard – this is an important part of SQA's 'checks and balances'

Conclusions - rationale

- ◆ While some markers provided feedback on the standard they were asked to apply in the marking, the overwhelming feedback from feedback was on the poor standard of learner performance – 81% said the performance was lower or much lower than in 2023
- ◆ The marks from both Higher History question papers and the coursework assignment this year confirmed this feedback from markers on the standard of performance
- ◆ The grade boundary meeting was conducted in accordance with SQA's prescribed procedures - the meeting considered a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information before making its decision

Independent external review

Richard Harry, Executive Director of Qualifications and Assessment at WJEC, Wales' largest awarding body:

“On behalf of WJEC, I have undertaken a review of the report produced by SQA regarding their History Higher qualification this summer. I have engaged with those producing the report on the extent to which the evidence and analysis set out in the report supports its conclusions and recommendations. To this end, I have engaged with the review team on several occasions prior to the publication of the report, and I thank the team for their candour and openness to challenge through this process.

“Any assessment process relies on the judgements of key individuals at each stage, to ensure valid and fair outcomes. In line with the feedback received regarding this summer's results, the focus of the review was on the marking standard and related processes. I am content that the report's conclusions are supported sufficiently.”



Wider reflections

Some areas for continuous improvement, including:

- How and when feedback is gathered from markers and how the feedback loop is closed so markers know what action has been taken in response
- Teachers' understanding of changes to course specifications
- Layout and presentation of marking instructions
- Approach to assessment of Higher History and in particular the use of options
- As part of ongoing improvements to engagement, strengthen understanding of the operation of the exam system

Questions

