

## **FOI Request (FOI 24-25 163)**

### **Request:**

The government and SQA recently met with representatives of the Scottish Association for Teaching of History (SATH) to discuss their survey of teachers.

Please release:

- A list of attendees
- Any briefing notes, papers, analysis, advice, lines to take etc prepared in advance of the meeting
- Any notes from the meeting, including personal notes
- The minutes of the meeting

### **Response**

#### Attendees:

██████████, President of SATH

Donna Stewart, Interim Director of Qualifications Development, SQA

John Booth, Director of Communications, SQA

Iain Morrison, Head of Qualifications Development – Humanities, Care & Services, SQA

██████████, Deputy Director, Curriculum & Qualifications, Scottish Government

██████████, Head of School Qualifications Unit, Scottish Government

██████████, National Qualifications Policy Team Leader, Scottish Government

#### Briefing notes, etc:

### **SATH Higher History Survey – Summary of Key points**

**What do teachers need from SQA to support delivery of Higher History, moving forward?**

**The top 5 key themes which emerged from this question have been highlighted in yellow.**

Area/Theme	Action points
Understanding Standards Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>54 responses identified a need for Understanding Standards Events</b>; the key points raised were:</li><li>○ These events need to happen earlier in the session to support delivery of the qualification.</li><li>○ Currently the US event for 12<sup>th</sup> December is full – in response to the issues raised, we would request additional events, with no limit of one person per school, to ensure that every History teacher who wants to attend is able to.</li><li>○ A number of teachers requested that events are held both online and in person; online events can be recorded and accessed by everyone after the event which is very valuable, however, the ability to ask questions and engage in meaningful discussion is limited.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cover issues in school can prevent teachers from attending – it is requested that there is a twilight option.</li> <li>○ In addition to US events, it has been suggested that members of the senior team attend local authority network meetings to improve engagement with History teachers.</li> </ul>
Sharing of exemplar materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>37 responses discussed the sharing of exemplars</b> and the need for these to be more extensive and up to date with current course specs and sub topics. Key points were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Exemplars need to be shared early in the course.</li> <li>○ All Scottish topics should be represented.</li> <li>○ Outdated examples must be removed, ie questions that are not based on the revised sub issues for Paper 2.</li> <li>○ Exemplars of candidates achieving different grades should be shared in order to understand the minimum standard as well as best practice.</li> <li>○ A few responses requested briefing and qualification scripts from markers' meetings shared – a couple specifically asked for the 2024 examples, but it was pointed out that these would be of great value to all teachers each session.</li> <li>○ A theme has come through of teachers feeling that markers have privileged information on the standard that is not available to everyone – more extensive sharing of exemplars would help to address this.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Clarity of expectations/clear standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>40 responses mentioned the need for clarity of expectations/clear standards.</b></li> <li>○ This would be addressed through improving Understanding Standards events as detailed above, and putting in place a rigorous programme of professional development opportunities.</li> <li>○ Expanding on the exemplar materials as detailed above would also address this issue.</li> <li>○ In Paper 1, evaluation and conclusions were mentioned as an area where teachers are not clear on the standard. Further support and exemplification on these skills is requested.</li> </ul>
Consistency of messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>17 responses mentioned consistency of messages regarding marking and the standard</b> – it has been noted that different messages have been shared by 2024 Paper 2 markers.</li> <li>○ Gathering marker feedback immediately after markers meetings, as proposed in the investigation findings, would provide data as to the understanding and confidence of markers before they begin marking.</li> <li>○ Further training of markers, particularly first time markers, and Team Leaders is requested.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An more open forum for questions from markers and responses from the leadership team during the marking process would improve consistency – currently markers e-mail their Team Leader with any questions they have, but only they can see the response. Could all questions and answers be available to all markers? Could a version of helpful Q and As be shared after the marking process with all teachers?</li> <li>○ Several responses noted that the course report has been shared too late this session. Sharing course reports earlier would also support consistent key messages.</li> </ul>
Open communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>28 responses commented on the need for better, more open communication.</b> Key points were:</li> <li>○ Updates need to happen in a timely fashion, and teachers need to be alerted to these.</li> <li>○ A more consultative approach is requested, particularly as we move towards changes from SQA to QS.</li> <li>○ For example, an open forum where questions can be asked regarding marking standards and responses given by SQA has been requested.</li> <li>○ There is a perception that teachers are unable to openly challenge SQA – teacher feedback should be invited and engaged with to change this perception.</li> </ul>
Acknowledge mistakes/accept that there are issues to be addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Approximately 10 responses expressed anger at the 2024 results and made the following points:</b></li> <li>○ SQA should be disbanded/resignations should be made/a new team with fresh leadership is required.</li> <li>○ A few responses wanted grade boundaries altered to upgrade 2024 candidates, and an admission from SQA that the standard was inflated.</li> <li>○ A few responses called for a further review of the 2024 exam to be carried out.</li> <li>○ A few responses highlighted the need for a clear plan moving forward and assurances that candidates in 2025 would not be disadvantaged.</li> <li>○ A few responses said that the culture of markers meetings needs to change, with less of a top down approach.</li> <li>○ One response felt that clearer regulation of practices is needed.</li> <li>○ 10 responses referred to the need for honesty and fairness from SQA, highlighting that there has been a loss of trust.</li> </ul>
Standards did not change/current level of support is good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>12 respondents expressed that they disagree that the standard changed in 2024.</b> Key points were:</li> <li>○ SQA is open and transparent.</li> <li>○ Current provision is robust.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2024 markers and members of the History team should be supported.</li> </ul>
Review the Higher History course/changes required to course structure and/or assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>2 respondents stated that a whole new Higher History course is needed.</b> Key points on this theme:</li> <li>○ Comment was made on the structures required to answer questions being unnecessary.</li> <li>○ 5 respondents argued that the standard needs to be lowered. A few comments were made throughout the survey about expectations of candidates being unreasonable.</li> <li>○ There are calls to revisit the course specification for Paper 2 to review the sub issues, to ensure that it is clear what is relevant for each sub issue.</li> <li>○ The need for straightforward questions and equal sources across the Scottish History Paper has been raised. Parity across the different contexts was mentioned. Teachers do not support the reduction in options proposed by the investigation.</li> <li>○ Three respondents proposed a reduction in course content; others proposed four essay options rather than three. One respondent suggested removing evaluation marks for essays.</li> <li>○ Reference is made at different points in the survey feedback to comparisons across the Social Subjects; it has been suggested that parity between the Social Subjects is reviewed.</li> </ul>
Other comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Markers pay was discussed – after tax, the pay for marking does not compensate for the time and workload involved. There had been discussion and concerns raised in other forums that there may be an issue in the future with recruiting markers.</li> <li>○ A few requests to access the exam scripts for Higher History, as was trialled in geography this session. Some want 2024 papers released, others would welcome this moving forward.</li> <li>○ Further practice questions would be welcomed, particularly for the newer skill ‘how much...’.</li> <li>○ Marking schemes were criticised for being vague. They have also been criticised for changing to contain more detail. SQA have clarified that the level of detail in the MIs is to support markers – could it be clearer within the MIs that candidates do not need to include all of the examples given within a section to gain a mark?</li> <li>○ Professional development and resources have been requested on specific topics. This would not be something that SQA would provide, but can potentially be picked up by Education Scotland/SATH.</li> </ul>

## Recommendations/Questions Raised in SATH Committee Meeting – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2024

- There is an urgent need to improve trust and confidence, and to engage as widely as possible with History teachers. To this end, we would ask for **further dates for Understanding Standards events, with all teachers able to attend** (ie not limited to one person per school).
- We would suggest in person events to allow for discussion, and for teachers to feel listened to. These could be Understanding Standards **in person** events, or perhaps smaller CLPL opportunities at local authority level. (Visits could be requested, or SATH would be happy to organise in person events in Glasgow and Edinburgh.)
- We would recommend improving opportunities for teachers and markers to give feedback to the SQA. **Teacher focus groups** would be a good opportunity to improve two way communication and work towards positive change. **Gathering feedback** from teachers (and candidates) post exam re fairness of paper would provide a forum for teachers to be heard in a more productive way than the social media pile ons of the past few years. It would allow SQA to respond to comments/concerns.
- The findings of the investigation have been dismissed by many – is there any scope for independent scrutiny of the report from an independent body in order to address this?
- Teachers are still questioning what went wrong to lead to this drop in results in History, without other literacy based subjects facing the same drop. There is a need for a wider conversation, in a respectful manner.
- There is a perception of a two tier system, with markers having inside information on how to pass the exam that other teachers don't have. Improving the exemplars available on the Understanding Standards website would help to change this perception. What would prevent the briefing and qualification scripts being shared with everyone, not only markers? These are anonymous.
- We would recommend exemplars of answers illustrating different standards across all topics are shared as soon as possible to support teachers presenting learners for the 2025 exam. Almost half of the teachers surveyed expressed that they did not feel confident in their understanding of the standard, which needs to be addressed urgently.

### Notes:

No personal notes were taken.

### Minute:

## **NOTE OF MEETING BETWEEN SATH, SQA AND SG OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS SATH SURVEY ON HIGHER HISTORY**

### **VIA TEAMS**

**12:30 – 13:30, 9 DECEMBER 2024**

**In attendance:**

██████████, President of SATH

Donna Stewart, Interim Director of Qualifications Development, SQA

John Booth, Director of Communications, SQA

Iain Morrison, Head of Qualifications Development - Humanities, SQA

██████████, Deputy Director, Curriculum & Qualifications, Scottish Government

██████████, Head of School Qualifications Unit, Scottish Government

██████████, National Qualifications Policy Team Leader, Scottish Government

**Note of Discussion:**

- ██████ provided an overview of the SATH survey responses, indicating that there were entrenched and contrasting opinions expressed and that it is difficult for SATH to speak with a unified voice on the Higher History position. It was set out that the majority of responses indicated a lack of confidence in the standard expected with suggestion that some of this may be due to misinformation.
- It was agreed that focus should be on looking forward and what support was needed.
- JB suggested a joint statement would be helpful and it was agreed that an overarching statement with individual quotes should be prepared.
- IM set out the existing support available - with Understanding Standards events being extended both in terms of duration and capacity, and the option of an additional session being explored. They are also being recorded for wider access.
- KM indicated that an additional session would be welcomed and suggested that breakout sessions would also be helpful as well as a wide range of exemplifications.
- IM agreed to look at what would be possible in terms of breakout options and indicated that a summarised Q&A to address all questions raised at these sessions would be published along with recordings of the session to maximise reach.

**ACTION:**

- SQA to work with SATH to agree joint statement
- SQA to consider what additional support could be put in place

I Morrison  
19 December 2024