Course report 2024

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 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 10,116

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 10,263

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	2,419	Percentage	23.6	Cumulative percentage	23.6	Minimum mark required	75
B	Number of candidates	2,306	Percentage	22.5	Cumulative percentage	46.0	Minimum mark required	64
C	Number of candidates	2,014	Percentage	19.6	Cumulative percentage	65.7	Minimum mark required	53
D	Number of candidates	1,558	Percentage	15.2	Cumulative percentage	80.8	Minimum mark required	42
No award	Number of candidates	1,966	Percentage	19.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

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 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 were given 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 6). 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, questions 25 (issue 2) and 27 (issue 6), and Part G — USA, 1918–1968, questions 34 (issue 2) and 36 (issue 6).

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

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

Some candidates completed evaluation well.

Candidates must answer the question asked. A few candidates appeared to give a pre-prepared response that did not answer the question and therefore could not access the range of marks available.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

The question paper was accessible and in line with previous years.

Candidates performed 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.

Some candidates had difficulty answering the ‘two source' and ‘how fully’ questions in parts A, B, C, D and E. Most candidates found it challenging to access the full range of marks for the ‘evaluate the usefulness’ questions.

Assignment

The assignment was re-introduced this year, having last been assessed in 2019. 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.

Many candidates produced assignments of a high standard. 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 or evaluation.

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. Candidates used relevant knowledge to support the factors and demonstrated good use of analysis, which addressed the issues.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

Many candidates successfully demonstrated the required skills and structures. Markers noted good practice where candidates demonstrated Scottish history to answer the question, particularly when they used local knowledge or exemplification from previous marking instructions.

Assignment

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).

Most 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

Not all candidates were consistent in both essays. Higher History has two separate question papers, both 1 hour and 30 minutes. Candidates should note they have 45 minutes per essay.

Many markers observed that candidate performance was lower or much lower than in 2023. Many candidates were unable to access the full range of marks.

In the introduction, candidates should have a clear line of argument, factors, and two points of relevant background. For some candidates, use of analysis within 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. A few candidates did not complete two essays. A few candidates answered issue 5 Britain, 1851–1951, rather than issue 4 Britain, 1851–1951. A few candidates answered issue 1 Germany 1815–1939, rather than issue 2 Germany 1815–1939.

Question paper 2 — Scottish history

The course specification for Higher History states that the Scottish history question paper requires candidates to demonstrate 'a detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of complex historical issues in Scottish contexts'.

Most markers observed that candidate performance was lower or much lower than in 2023. This was partly because many candidates did not demonstrate the skills of source interpretation. Most candidates lifted the correct content from the sources. However, many candidates did not give the correct interpretations related to the content of the source, resulting in 0 marks, as the explanation given did not relate to the question asked.

The 'evaluate the usefulness' question

Many candidates gave generic responses to the author, type, purpose and timing of the source, rather than commenting on the usefulness of these aspects in relation to the specific question and Scottish issue asked. Candidates should provide evaluative comments about the author, type, purpose and timing separately, rather than combining them, to improve their chances of accessing the highest marks available. Candidates should make an evaluative comment about each of these areas.

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. This year many candidates misinterpreted the content points.

Question 1: Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of the problems caused by the death of Margaret, Maid of Norway.

Many candidates quoted the correct point; however, they did not give the correct evaluative comment.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many gave recall related to other areas from the description of content such as Edward I and Norham and the Great Cause, resulting in candidates not accessing the full range of marks as the question asked about the problems caused by the Maid of Norway's death.

Question 13: Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of the push factors which contributed to the emigration of Scots, 1830–1939.

Many candidates saw the word 'overcrowded' and gave evaluative comments about the houses being overcrowded as a push factor rather than the land being overcrowded, which was the point in the source.

Many candidates quoted the point about cattle becoming stuck in boggy land; however, they reworded the problem highlighted, rather than commenting that the poor quality of land was the reason pushing Scots to emigrate.

Many candidates quoted the point about poverty and suffering; however, they did not give the correct evaluative comment.

Many candidates gave the correct quote, but in their explanation of the quote, turned it into push factors for internal migration, rather than emigration as the question asked.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many gave examples of pull factors, resulting in 0 marks being awarded as the question asked for push factors.

Question 17: Evaluate the usefulness of Source A as evidence of why so many Scots volunteered to fight during the war.
Many candidates quoted the correct points; however, they did not give the correct evaluative comments.

Candidates provided very generic points that did not have Scottish examples.

The 'two source' question

Question 2: How much do Sources B and C reveal about differing interpretations of the subjugation of Scotland in 1296?
Some candidates struggled to recognise the overall viewpoint of Source B. Some candidates recognised that the superior English army crushed the Scots at Berwick, but did not comment that the Scots put up resistance.

Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoint of Source C that Edward used Berwick as an example to show his force.

Most candidates lifted the correct point from the source; however, their understanding and/or interpretation of the view(s) was often weak, resulting in 0 marks. Some candidates also lifted the distractor, rather than the views in the source, resulting in 0 marks.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many gave examples of Edward's over lordship, which resulted in 0 marks being awarded as the question asked about the subjugation of Scotland.

Question 14: How much do Sources B and C reveal about differing interpretations of the reactions of Scots to Irish immigrants?
Most candidates were successful in recognising the overall viewpoints of Sources B and C. However, many did not gain marks as their comments were too brief. For example, it is not enough to say, 'Source B shows that the Irish had a positive reaction'. Candidates need to extend their answer to access the mark for the overall viewpoint. For example, 'The Irish had a positive reaction in Dundee as they were liked for being good workers'. Many candidates also said that 'Source C describes the negative experience of the Irish'. Candidates need to extend their answer further to access the mark for the interpretation of the overall viewpoint of the source.

Most candidates lifted the correct point from the source; however, their understanding and/or interpretation of the view(s) was often weak, resulting in 0 marks. Some candidates also lifted the distractor, rather than the views in the source, resulting in 0 marks.

Many candidates gave the wrong recall. Many gave examples of the contribution of the Irish to Scotland such as building railways, the Glasgow subway, and the creation of Celtic Football Club, which resulted in 0 marks being awarded as the question asked about the reactions of Scots to the Irish.

Question 18: How much do Sources B and C reveal about differing interpretations of the changing role of women in wartime?
Some candidates managed to successfully recognise that the overall viewpoint of Source B was that women's role changed as they became more politically involved. Most candidates recognised the overall viewpoint of Source C that women's role changed as they had more opportunities in male jobs.

Most candidates lifted the correct point from the source; however, their understanding and/or interpretation of the view(s) was often weak, resulting in 0 marks. Some candidates also lifted the distractor, rather than the views in the source, resulting in 0 marks.

Candidates provided very generic points that did not have Scottish examples. Furthermore, candidates gave points on the role of women, but not on the changing role of women.

The 'explain' question

The main problem with the 'explain' question was that candidates did not answer the question asked.

Question 3: Explain the reasons why William Wallace and Scottish resistance were important between 1297–1305.
Many candidates gave descriptive examples of resistance but did not explain their importance. Many also gave points about the response of the English, rather than the resistance of the Scots.

Question 15: Explain the reasons why Scots had an impact on the empire.
Many candidates gave valid examples but did not comment or explain the impact the Scots had on the empire. Many points were also vague and generic.

Question 19: Explain the reasons why the war had an impact on Scottish industry and the economy.
Candidates wrote about industry and economy but did not explain the impact of the war on Scottish industry and the economy. Many candidates also gave generic points without any Scottish examples.

The 'how fully' question

Candidates can gain a maximum of 4 marks for identifying points from the source that support their judgement. Many candidates quoted and attempted to explain the correct points from the source but gave the wrong explanation or interpretation.

Some candidates did not interpret the points they quoted in relation to the question.

Question 4: How fully does Source D explain the reasons for the rise and triumph of Robert Bruce, to 1328?
Some candidates gave well-explained recall. However, other candidates gave vague knowledge that was not related to the question.

Question 16: How fully does Source D explain the effects of migration and empire on Scotland, to 1939?
Many candidates gave recall that did not relate to the question asked. Many gave recall related to the experience of immigrants in Scotland (issue 2) rather than the effects of migration and empire on Scotland (issue 4). Many also restated recall from question 15 and gave recall about the impact of Scots on the empire (issue 3), rather than the impact of migration and empire on Scotland.

Question 20: How fully does Source D explain the impact of the war on Scottish politics?
Many candidates quoted and attempted to explain the correct points from the source, however they gave the wrong explanation. Some also quoted distractors from the source.

Many candidates did not explain the points they quoted in relation to the question. Some candidates gave well-explained recall for this question. However, other candidates gave vague knowledge that was not related to the question, with no Scottish examples.

Assignment

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 issue 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.

Centres 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 pre-prepared answer. Those 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 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 purpose and origin, up to 2 marks for source points, and up to 3 marks for recalled knowledge at Higher level.

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 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.

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

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

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, which is linked to the question.

Candidates should also introduce recalled knowledge to develop the source points and/or contextualise the content of the source. Developed recall should be linked 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 that is linked to the line of argument. It is essential that candidates make a relative judgement between the different factors to access the full range of marks in a conclusion.

Referencing sources

- References should be used to support the argument.
- References should not be knowledge based; they should offer opinion.
- References should be used correctly and link to what is being discussed.
- Secondary sources should provide author, book title and quote.
- Primary sources should provide author, date and quote.
- Websites should provide author and website address (full website counts as one word).
- Candidates can use the same source twice (textbook or website and author).

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

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.

Resource sheet

Candidates should use the resource sheet as an essay plan, for example providing a summary of the factors, key knowledge points, and detailed referencing such as author, book title (website) and full quote.

The word limit for the resource sheet is 250 words, and it must only be one side of A4.

The purpose of the resource sheet is to help candidates use their evidence and references, collected during the research stage, to address their chosen topic, question or issue. Candidates will not gain marks for extended pieces of text or narrative copied directly from the resource sheet. However, candidates may copy quotations in full, provided they acknowledge the sources.

Centres must ensure that resource sheets are submitted for each candidate for the 2024–25 session. Resource sheets are not marked but must be submitted to SQA with the candidate's assignment. If a candidate does not submit a resource sheet, a penalty of 6 marks out of the total 30 marks is applied.

Further information is included in the coursework for external assessment document and the coursework assessment task on the Higher History subject page on SQA's website.

Supporting documentation

Centres should ensure that they submit all relevant supporting documentation with candidate assignments. This includes checking the following:

- candidate's name and the full question being answered is noted on both the flyleaf and the first page of the assignment
- every typed or handwritten page is numbered
- the flyleaf is signed, with the marking sheet included
- the completed resource sheet is included

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, SQA aims 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, SQA holds 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 SQA's 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. SQA 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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in March 2024 and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report.