



Course report 2024

Advanced 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: 1,408

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,379

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	423	Percentage	30.7	Cumulative percentage	30.7	Minimum mark required	97
B	Number of candidates	340	Percentage	24.7	Cumulative percentage	55.3	Minimum mark required	83
C	Number of candidates	321	Percentage	23.3	Cumulative percentage	78.6	Minimum mark required	69
D	Number of candidates	163	Percentage	11.8	Cumulative percentage	90.4	Minimum mark required	55
No award	Number of candidates	132	Percentage	9.6	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

The question paper has 10 sections recognising the 10 fields of study. Each section has five essay questions and three source questions. There were no modifications this session. The question paper conformed to the requirements of three source questions from the six italicised areas, and two responses from five essay questions.

The question paper produced a wide range of responses. Markers noted that a few candidates did not complete the paper, choosing to answer one essay and the source questions. A few also missed out a source answer. Candidates found the 'Evaluate the usefulness ...' source question the most challenging but responses improved from last year.

Grade boundaries recognised the removal of modifications.

Project-dissertation

Most candidates chose suitable titles with a clear issue. The technical expectations were, on the whole, good. Some candidates did not adhere to the criteria in the marking grid regarding footnoting and the engagement with primary evidence.

The word count for the dissertation is 4,000 words and most candidates adhered to this. A few candidates wrote over the 10% word limit and incurred a 5-mark penalty.

Overall, this part of the assessment performed very much as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Part A: Historical issues — essays

Most candidates gave considered answers to two essay questions and identified the key areas in the topic and the issue to be discussed. Some did not address the term given in the question or the quote, both provided to help give a focus to the topic in the question. A few candidates wrote about the topic and not the question. Successful essays contained robust factual evidence to back up the argument. Balance is key. Historiographical essays with little evidence tend to lose the ‘writer’s voice’, which is key to this task. With limited detail it is difficult for candidates to confidently say ‘this clearly shows...’ when it does not.

Part B: Historical sources — source-based questions

There are three distinct types of source question and the distinct question stems intend to focus on each type. The skill set is similar, but the application is not. In all three the underpinning task is to contextualise the source.

- ◆ In the ‘How fully...?’ question, the candidate is required to contextualise the event being discussed, that is, its fullness — what does the source bring to the topic and issue and what is omitted? This was the most successful question.
- ◆ In the ‘two-source’ historians’ interpretations question, the candidate is required to contextualise the views of historians on an issue that might be similar and different. Candidates can show evidence to justify or criticise these views, and those views omitted. Most candidates tackled this question well.
- ◆ In the ‘Evaluate the usefulness ...’ question, the candidate is required to contextualise the views of a document in terms of its usefulness to a particular topic or issue. That value is assessed by commenting on rubric provenance (RP). Many candidates found this challenging. Many candidates did not access the full range of marks, but markers noted an improvement in this area. Some candidates made generic comments and a very small number wrote about the ‘type’ of source. Content provenance interpretation (CPI) was better, but some candidates interpreted without making any comment on the value of the source. The skill is to consider the value that the source commentary brings to the topic, such as a formal recognition of a situation, a letter from a participant and their view. For example, the source might conform to an ‘official view’ or be biased because of the views of the writer.

It is important to recognise in the question the three core aspects of the topic or issue being discussed. The question asks for only one of these:

- ◆ the causes of — asking for an assessment of the reasons why something happened
- ◆ the impact of — asking for an assessment of the effects of something
- ◆ the nature of — asking for an assessment of the way in which an event unfolds, or of how a topic or issue was considered at the time and how that relates to our current understanding of it

Most candidates understood ‘cause’ and ‘impact’ but had difficulty with ‘nature’, although more candidates managed this well this session.

In all source answers there are many opportunities for candidates to add in recalled knowledge as wider contextual development (WCD). The candidate is relating that knowledge to the context of the source and the question. Overall, candidates linked knowledge to source points well. However, when adding omitted points, it is vital to relate this information to the question asked and not to list points by stating ‘another point is ...’ as a list is not answering the question.

Historians’ views are allocated 2 marks in each question, but more can become WCD. Most candidates gave historians’ views, but a few did not.

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034: essays

Structure

Most candidates structured their answers around relevant factors. Question 1 on Iron Age and question 4 on Vikings were most popular. Most candidates did well in question 4.

However, some candidates struggled with the wording of a question and did not respond correctly, which affected the mark they attained, for example in question 2 where a few candidates confused methods with reasons for invasion. Some able candidates with good knowledge did not gain marks because answers were not focused on the question, for example in question 1 (Iron Age settlements) and question 4 (Viking motives). In question 2 a few candidates wrote about Rome's aims not methods of control. In question 4 a few candidates were confused by the word ‘lured’ and it was not taken in the way it was intended. A few candidates struggled with evaluation in this question. A few candidates omitted debate from the introduction.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

The best responses were detailed, showing impressive breadth and depth of knowledge. Some included an impressive number of points in question 1 on the Iron Age and question 4 on Vikings. Markers noted excellent examples of a very specialised knowledge base. Overall, candidates approached essays well and almost all avoided irrelevance.

However, a few candidates had issues addressing the isolated factor in question 2. A few responses were light on factual evidence.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates demonstrated good practice in linking knowledge to analysis. Some made very good use of sub-conclusions and/or their final conclusion to make links and evaluate the relative importance of factors to pursue the line of argument to create a coherent response. Most candidates presented their own opinions and evaluation on points, while a few relied on historians’ interpretations to do this for them.

However, not all candidates opted to make sub-conclusions, with some strong responses leaving this until their final conclusion. Several candidates did not make their lines of argument clear in their introduction, giving limited factors and being inconclusive at the end.

It is not necessary to decide one factor is most important, but it is important to make your position clear in the introduction to give the response greater authority. Sometimes conclusions were just basic summaries. Some candidates began with a strong line of argument but did not carry it through their essay.

Historical sources and interpretations

The strongest responses used historians effectively to support or refute key points, advancing their own argument. Markers noted some very impressive use of historians. Many candidates were aware of variations in debate including traditional and contemporary views, and some engaged with lesser-known historians and archaeologists. Many were aware of the current thinking on questions 1 and 4.

However, a few candidates clearly knew the viewpoints and/or debates but attributed them in a random manner (inaccurately) to historians. In others, use of historians was very limited but enough to reach the 13–14 mark range. Some responses made no reference to historical debate, for example traditional versus contemporary views.

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Markers noted that Bede was a good and accessible source choice. Some candidates made perceptive comments on Bede in the rubric provenance (RP). Most candidates were able to pick out content provenance interpretation (CPI) and then comment effectively on the nature of Pictish society. The question gave candidates a good opportunity to discuss wider Pictish society in the wider contextual development (WCD) and many candidates did very well. Many candidates provided more than four points of WCD.

However, some candidates made comments about Bede that were too generalised to gain marks. Candidates were less successful in their attempts at rubric provenance — time (RPT) — and mentioned fewer historians overall. Some referred to the claim that the Picts were from Scythia, but the question was not on the origins of the Picts, it was about the nature of Pictish society in Northern Britain. The aim of the question was to consider the structures of Pictish society in Northern Britain.

How fully ...?

The question was very accessible to those who had studied this area. Most candidates were able to present fully detailed WCD on a wide range of evidence surrounding the historical debate and many connected points to prevalent archaeological evidence and historians.

Two-source historical interpretations

The sources gave two contrasting views — the traditional view that Agricola was successful versus the contemporary view that Agricola's achievements were exaggerated. Most candidates interpreted the sources well, and many got interpretation marks. Many were very aware of Tacitus' bias, which enhanced WCD.

However, many candidates lacked detailed knowledge on the contemporary view. A few were still treating it as a comparison question.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: independence and kingship, 1249–1334: essays

Structure

Almost all candidates responded to the questions set and not the question they might have prepared for. Most had well-structured essays and demonstrated understanding of questions. However, some candidates struggled with the ‘How valid is this view?’ question.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Overall, markers noted that evidence was good and there was little irrelevance. The strongest responses included detailed, high-quality evidence, taken from a range of reading. Most candidates demonstrated an awareness of what they needed to write and used relevant information.

However, sometimes essays lacked depth and there were a few cases where essays were very similar. A few candidates wrote outside the dates of the question.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates were clear what the question was asking of them throughout and stuck to it and, overall, had a good understanding of the questions. Markers noted some superb analysis, which was consistent throughout essays, showing that candidates were clearly confident in the use of their knowledge of the argument. Most attempted sub-conclusions. The most successful responses used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument to create a coherent response.

However, one or two candidates labelled the parts of their essay, which made the line of argument difficult to follow and not very analytical.

Historical sources and interpretations

Markers noted that most candidates interpreted historians’ views well and most candidates had a good awareness of a range of historians. Many candidates accurately named historians, however some candidates wrote ‘some historians ...’, which limited attainment to a maximum of 12 marks. Since 2020 the marking instructions indicated that historians should be cited. A few essays cited none, which means the maximum award is 9 marks, as noted on the marking grid.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: independence and kingship, 1249–1334: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Generally, candidates did very well with content provenance interpretation (CPI). Many candidates were able to access wider contextual development (WCD).

However, rubric provenance (RP) proved more challenging. Most candidates struggled with the contextual nature of this to give the source value or otherwise by linking to the author, purpose and timing of the source relevant to the question.

How fully ...?

Most candidates did very well in this question, demonstrating accurate interpretation, and many provided excellent, relevant WCD.

Two-source historical interpretations

Some candidates interpreted historians' views very well, and many candidates provided excellent WCD. Markers noted there was no misunderstanding of question type.

However, some candidates misinterpreted source C. Markers noted that incomplete answers suggested time may have been a factor for a few.

Field of study 3 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to Enlightenment, 1701–1815: essays

Structure

Most candidates structured their essays appropriately. No candidates attempted question 18 or question 20 (industrialisation or the Kirk). Overall, candidates produced a good mix of essays and question 17 proved popular and accessible.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Most candidates had at least a good understanding of the relevant core concepts.

However, in question 17 candidates had a tendency not to deal with the impact of religiosity and its relationship to dynastic motivations.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

There was a clear link between the quality of analysis and the use of many conclusions. The most successful responses used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument to create a coherent response. However, evaluation was inconsistent in terms of quality, which separated the very highest quality responses.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates used historians' viewpoints very impressively, which helped to actively drive forward the arguments.

Field of study 3 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to Enlightenment, 1701–1815: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Many candidates were aware of the requirements of this question. Many wrote WCD and historiography significantly beyond the marks available.

However, provenance points remained the most challenging.

How fully ...?

Candidates did very well in this question. Most candidates achieved more than half marks.

Two-source historical interpretations

Generally, candidates were able to identify the viewpoints of both sources and added good WCD.

However, some took a lot of time to write out long quotes, which is not required. A part of the quote might be noted but the mark is allocated for the interpretation of it. A few candidates made overall comparisons and a few did not finish this question.

Field of study 4 — USA: ‘a house divided’, 1850–1865: essays

Structure

Markers noted a good choice in essays, well-worded, varied, and with a good level of challenge. Candidates clearly know the structure of an essay and developing on from the Higher structure may have helped. Candidates did very well in question 26 on the abolitionist movement. Responses covered the isolated factor, ‘lack of unity’, quite thoroughly, and then covered other reasons. Candidates also answered question 28 on Lincoln’s election well.

However, some candidates found isolated factors challenging and struggled with question 25 (disagreements over the Tariff) and question 29 (the issue of States’ rights). Responses to these questions tended to be stronger on the other factors. Some candidates ignored the named factor completely, which severely limited their attainment potential. A few candidates wrote one essay or partly attempted the second.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Most candidates presented evidence that was relevant to the question. Some responses were incredibly in-depth, with an excellent quality of knowledge, for example names of generals and supporting evidence or using primary source quotes embedded accurately in the response. Most candidates were able to present strong answers with good, relevant evidence.

However, while candidates were strong on the more well-known areas, they found it challenging when other factors were used, for example sectionalism, culture, economy and ideology, but Tariff proved more challenging. This was particularly true for question 25 and question 29. In the latter, a considerable number of candidates discussed the Emancipation Proclamation. Some candidates went off-track at times, had a lot of repetition or added explanation without evidence. A few were dominated by narrative, but this was less evident than in previous years.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates produced good examples across all essay responses and skilfully used historians’ views to further their line of argument. Well-prepared candidates adapted their preparation to the question. Generally, candidates make a good attempt to answer questions

and most showed sustained analysis. Most were successful when the basic line of argument was very clear. There were some excellent examples of sub-conclusions being used to advance the line of argument. The most successful responses used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument to create a coherent response.

However, some candidates did not build their line of argument or provide a rebuttal. Others did not have any sort of prioritising of factors or lacked analysis and tried to fit learned essays into the question. Some had no evaluation at all or did not link commentary to the line of argument.

Historical source and interpretations

Many candidates presented a good range of historians' views. Markers noted some impressive use of historians' views, accurately named and embedded in the essays. Almost all candidates provided a good variation of historical interpretations.

However, many used views as illustrative points to support their analysis. Few candidates used multiple historians per paragraph or considered the relationship between the views. Some essays had one or two historians. Very few candidates had no historians at all. Those who did could only gain a maximum of 9 marks and those who mentioned 'some historians' could only gain a maximum of 12 marks.

Field of study 4 — USA: 'a house divided', 1850–1865: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Rubric provenance (RP) was accessible for well-read learners, and purpose seemed the most accessible. Content provenance interpretation (CPI) was done well. Responses accurately identified source points and interpreted views. There was evidence of detailed wider contextual development (WCD).

However, candidates found provenance difficult, and many struggled to get more than 1 mark for provenance. The author and date had potential for clear development, but some candidates continued with generic statements. Some candidates found WCD about secession, rather than causes of the war, challenging.

How fully ...?

Candidates provided very good responses to this question on the Emancipation Proclamation. They identified source points and most candidates provided accurate interpretations. Many candidates presented substantial evidence to gain WCD marks on the consequences of the proclamation.

However, some took a lot of time to write out long quotes, which is not required. A part of the quote might be noted but the mark is allocated for the interpretation of it. Some candidates were drawn into reasons for emancipation, rather than consequences of emancipation. Some did not include historians' views, which prevented them getting full marks.

Two-source historical interpretations

Candidates engaged well with both sources. Responses included a wide range of knowledge. Many candidates used knowledge effectively to enhance interpretation points. Many had excellent knowledge of Lincoln's military leadership. Markers noted candidates did well with a narrower focus on Lincoln's military role, clearly using their knowledge of strategies and generals to provide an informed range of WCD.

However, some repeated the points in their interpretation. Good knowledge often stopped short and lacked development which could have secured marks. Some candidates did not focus on 'Lincoln's developing military role' and WCD was limited. A few answers still considered the comparison of the sources.

Field of study 5 — Japan: the modernisation of a nation, 1840–1920: essays

Structure

Essays were good and offered candidates the scope to demonstrate breadth and depth of knowledge. Candidates tackled question 34 and question 36 well.

However, there were responses that focused more heavily on recall compared to argument. Candidate responses to question 33 had some structural issues when they only covered one social group.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

The most successful responses had strong command of the detail.

However, many argued well but were light on factual support. Some candidates approached question 34 as a 'how successful...?' question.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Many candidates adopted an analytical approach and had a clear line of argument. Well-argued responses acknowledged the need to keep referencing the question, and clear focus drove the strongest responses. The most successful responses used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument throughout the response.

However, some candidates approached question 33 as a force for change question, which hindered the analytical relevance of all the points in relation to the question. There was a lack of depth with regards to how the Daimyo operated as a control mechanism within the Tokugawa regime.

Historical sources and interpretations

All candidates supported their work with historians' views, and a few engaged with them in the debate. Fewer candidates this session added in historians' views without explanation, and some nicely integrated their perspectives to strengthen and support lines of argument. However, for some it was still slightly illustrative.

Field of study 5 — Japan: the modernisation of a nation, 1840–1920: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

All candidates used a correct structural approach throughout.

However, some still struggled to pick up the provenance marks. Most candidates did not access all rubric provenance (RP) points.

How fully ...?

Candidates tackled this question well.

Two-source historical interpretations

Most candidates were reasonably competent in handling both sources.

However, a few candidates picked up the wrong points from sources to interpret. Sometimes candidates used information from the second source as wider contextual development (WCD) for the first, a reminder to read both sources before starting an answer. A few struggled to find enough WCD points.

Field of study 6 — Germany: from democracy to dictatorship, 1918–1939: essays

Structure

Popular questions this year were question 41 on the German Revolution, question 42 on Versailles and question 43 on the consolidation of power. Question 42 responses demonstrated its accessibility. In question 43 all candidates included evidence related to the consolidation of Nazi power. Candidates consistently did well in their introductions and conclusions and adopted a suitable structure in most responses. Most candidates tackled issues well.

However, some candidates tried to answer their own question, not the one asked. In the Treaty of Versailles response, some candidates focused only on two terms, leading to a narrow approach. In question 41 on the German Revolution the focus was on the revolutionary situation, which a number of candidates did not fully understand. Some gave the reasons for revolution rather than tackle the nature of the situation as the question asked. Others answered it as an isolated factor and a few candidates struggled to evaluate and produced a narrative response. A few struggled with structure, particularly in question 43 and question 44. They considered question 43 as maintenance of power instead of consolidation and tried to 'fit in' what they knew. There was little evidence about opposition activities. Candidates found question 44 examining the assertion of the 'chaotic state' challenging.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Some candidates displayed excellent understanding of the course content in their responses. Markers praised the depth of knowledge included in the Treaty of Versailles responses and German Revolution responses, which was particularly impressive.

Candidates included relevant knowledge to substantiate reasons related to the Nazis not successfully consolidating power. The few who attempted economic policies (question 45) also gained high marks.

However, some candidates struggled to get to grips with what was required in the consolidation of power essay, which often read as a summary of key events such as the Enabling Act, Reichstag Fire and Night of the Long Knives. Few candidates wrote about opposition in this essay. The dates set were 1930–34 but candidates attempted to fit in the maintenance of power to this question. Several answered the German Revolution question as if they were being asked about the causes of the revolution. A few candidates wrote about Volksgemeinschaft rather than the economy in question 45, therefore there were examples of irrelevance in this response. Markers noted too many responses lacked specific knowledge. Some responses did not go beyond two factors. Some candidates had what seemed like learned essays that they tried to adapt to the question. In addition, some candidates were not doing what the essay was asking them to do, for example question 43. Some candidates did not finish their essays.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Some candidates showed excellent work, with clear and consistent arguments. The Higher approach to analysis structure may have helped some candidates have focus. The most successful responses used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument throughout the response.

However, some candidates did not state the line of argument in the introduction and therefore struggled to build a clear line of argument. Many candidates responded to question 41 as a ‘causes’ of revolution rather than the ‘nature’ of revolution, which was what the question asked. Others did not consider alternative arguments and markers noticed a lot of analysis with no factual evidence.

Historical sources and interpretations

The strongest responses included historical debate and discussion. Many candidates used historians effectively. Some very skilled candidates embedded views within the essay to help advance their argument. Some candidates were excellent in their use and understanding of ‘intentionalist’ and ‘structuralist’ debates.

However, a significant minority of very reasonable essays, which might have achieved 13 marks and above, attained 12 marks because of generalisations and the use of ‘some historians’, or 9 marks if they had no mention of any historians. Very few compared two historians’ opinions or synthesised viewpoints. Many did not use more than one historian and others added quotes but did nothing with them.

Field of study 6 — Germany: from democracy to dictatorship, 1918–1939: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Overall, the rubric provenance (RP) responses had improved this session. Many candidates gained marks for the timing of the source. The content provenance interpretation (CPI)

points were generally well done. Wider contextual development (WCD) was generally strong this year with a detailed focus on the exclusion of Jewish people.

However, for some candidates RP was difficult and author (RPA) and purpose (RPP) were least successful. Some gave generalisations rather than specific comments. In CPI some linked interpretation to the question but did not evaluate the usefulness of the point or lacked specific details. Many did not achieve all WCD points, despite relative popularity of the topic. Many candidates did not make good use of historians in this question.

How fully ...?

Markers noted that candidate responses for this question were the strongest. The interpretation points were accurate and WCD was strong, and most did well. Most focused on the Fulbrook and Peukert idea of the ‘psychological shock’ of crisis.

However, some candidates did not target the points in the source or chose other parts that were inaccurate. WCD lacked specificity and historians’ views were inconsistent.

Two-source historical interpretations

Candidates effectively used both sources in response to this question. Markers noted source B was very accessible.

However, some candidates misinterpreted the question. Some answered it as a question relating to the ‘growth’ of the Nazi Party, not Hitler becoming Chancellor. Some candidates produced evidence outside the timeframe, pre- and post-1933. A few candidates answered it as a comparison question. Candidates were not as strong as expected in presenting historians’ viewpoints and some made no reference to historians.

Field of study 7 — South Africa: race and power, 1902–1984: essays

Structure

Markers noted no difficulty in understanding the aims of the questions. Most candidates understood and attempted two questions. Responses had clear introductions, at least three paragraphs and conclusions. Question 50 on the growth of Afrikaner nationalism was popular. The responses were confident in structure, breadth and line of argument.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Responses contained a good breadth of knowledge and most demonstrated both breadth and depth. Knowledge tended to be focused on the question and evidence linked to analysis, even in less successful responses.

However, some candidates were not as thorough on the isolated factor, instead opting to write about the issue in general as opposed to answering the question. A few were let down by not going into more depth as this prevented substantiated analysis, which might take them into the next mark range in the marking grid.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Some candidates committed to a line of argument in the introduction and built on it in each of the factors. Responses were well-balanced and analysis was based on evidence. It demonstrated understanding and was strong and assured. Markers noted excellent, sophisticated analysis when responses were clearly focused on the question. Most candidates set out a line of argument but not always in the introduction.

However, some candidates assessed factors in isolation. This had an impact on the line of argument running through the response, which affected the analysis mark. Markers noted that evaluation was not seen as frequently. Some candidates did not fully address the question asked.

Historical sources and interpretations

More candidates used specific historians, named accurately, to advance the argument and to actively engage with debates. There were fewer instances of candidates writing ‘some historians’, which limits the award to a maximum of 12 marks. Markers noted that in the strongest responses, named historians’ views were used to further or counter the argument.

However, there were still a few examples of candidates missing any mention of historians’ views. This limits the award to a maximum of 9 marks.

Field of study 7 — South Africa: race and power, 1902–1984: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Many candidates did well in rubric provenance (RP), especially author (RPA) and timing (RPT).

Content provenance interpretation (CPI) was, at times, excellent where provenance commentary was managed well, with most candidates dealing with the value of the points. A few candidates were generally better at discussing wider contextual development (WCD).

However, some candidates discussed the type of source rather than its purpose. Discussion of the date could have been more insightful. Some responses did not include historians and their views. It is important to look carefully at the wording of the question. It was on the obstacles to union and some points of WCD did not gain marks as they gave reasons for union.

How fully ...?

Candidates answered this question consistently well, gaining most interpretation marks, and accessed full WCD marks.

However, not all responses stayed within the dates in the question and some evidence was outwith the timeframe. A few lacked historians’ viewpoints and a small number were incomplete.

Two-source historical interpretations

Most candidates structured their answers very well. Good use of WCD demonstrated that candidates had undertaken wide research on this topic.

However, candidates struggled most with interpretation of this source question and some repeated source points. In source C, candidates often selected wrong points, for example the ‘tilt towards Moscow’. Some struggled with the point about Gumele and the CPSA, his approach, and the threat of state repression of the ANC.

Field of study 8 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–1945: essays

Structure

Overall, many candidates structured the essays very well. Question 61 was popular and proved accessible. Most candidates grasped the aim of the questions they tackled.

However, for many candidates, question 57 on the nature of the February Revolution was challenging. Many candidates did not recognise the key argument given in the word ‘spontaneous’ and so dealt with this as a causes question looking at long-term causes with little on the immediate nature of the revolution. In question 58 some found it challenging to define ‘responsible for its own downfall’ regarding the Provisional Government, manipulating content that might answer the causes of October, even assessing coup d’etat or popular revolution. A few responses appeared to conform to an essay template, which was rewritten and manipulated to try to fit the question set.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Most responses covered a good breadth of knowledge. Many went into superb detail consistently throughout. Most work was thorough. Candidates covered the relevant factors well in most cases and used robust and detailed relevant knowledge.

However, relevance of approach was noted in question 57 due to some confusion about the issue. Most candidates discussed long-term factors that led to the February Revolution rather than addressing the immediate nature of the events. Some candidates did not answer the question set.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates performed analysis well, particularly in question 61 on the Purges where there was some highly-skilled sustained analysis. A few candidates wrote an excellent essay from the historical perspective with ongoing evaluation that carried the line of argument throughout. Markers noted some very good practice of consistent lines of argument referring back to the questions and being robust. The most successful candidates used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument throughout the response. Most were able to keep to the argument rather than a narrative and demonstrated link analysis at the end of each paragraph. The best responses showed synthesis in their conclusion.

However, some candidates provided very light analysis of points. In question 57, some candidates used their line of argument to write a different response to that of the question. Candidates sometimes struggled to develop their analysis into evaluation. A few had

inconsistencies where there was a lack depth but some very good analysis and evaluation. Some candidates did not have a line of argument in their introduction.

Historical sources and interpretations

In the most successful responses historians were used to drive the arguments. Candidates referred to a range of historians' viewpoints, some beyond the usual, and presented fresh historiography to advance excellent lines of argument. Most were able to accurately name historians, necessary to achieve 13 marks and above. Generally, candidates' use of historians' views was very effective.

However, several used historians illustratively, and few showed similarities or contradictions between or among historians. An essay response with no mention of any historians or the historical debate can gain a maximum of 9 marks. Furthermore, several candidates wrongly identified the historian associated with the quote.

Field of study 8 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–1945: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Most candidates accessed the wider contextual development (WCD) and content provenance interpretation (CPI) marks. Some candidates gained the rubric provenance purpose (RPP) mark by identifying the bitterness of Trotsky. Able candidates noted RPP and rubric provenance timing (RPT) and did it very well. Almost all candidates managed to identify the three quotes from the source, which were then well-handled, producing relevant interpretation.

However, while some candidates realised they should assess the value of the author on this topic such as Trotsky, some got confused and wrote about Stalin. Many candidates made generalised comments, and a few on the type of source rather than the purpose, expected in this response. Some candidates struggled with timing and purpose — purpose being revenge or timing going into exile. Even in the author of the source, many candidates did not make meaningful comments regarding Trotsky's value as a source of evidence. Several talked about Stalin while the source was about Stalin but by Trotsky. In many responses, provenance was very generic, even among the strongest candidates. Also, at times CPI was very brief. Some candidates added historians but did not engage with the historians' views to further their points.

How fully ...?

This was the most consistently well-answered source question, which posed the least difficulty. Clear interpretation points were well identified, and most candidates had a good deal of knowledge.

However, for some the land quotes were not understood as peasant land but were seen as territorial control, and the church quotes focused on a financial benefit rather than the pragmatic working with church. At times, interpretation was brief.

Two-source historical interpretations

Many candidates had a great deal of knowledge on the topic, which markers deemed a fair question. Accessible sources meant many gained WCD marks and included historians' viewpoints. The best responses developed comments with detailed WCD as well as adding other historians. Some candidates did not answer all the questions.

Field of study 9 — The Spanish Civil War: causes, conflict and consequences, 1923–1945: essays

Structure

Most candidates wrote good introductions and had very good structure throughout. Most addressed questions appropriately.

However, the isolated factor in question 68 proved challenging. There was evidence that some candidates misunderstood question 67 and question 68. Some candidates did not recognise that question 67 really required them to compare assistance from the Right to resistance from the Left.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Candidates produced some exceptionally detailed and thorough responses, and most candidates were very knowledgeable. Markers noted exceptional knowledge in question 66 and question 67.

However, some essay responses did not focus on the issue in the question.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates produced some very good analysis and convincing argumentation. Most attempted to link all paragraphs back to the question and line of argument. The most successful used analysis and evaluation to pursue the line of argument throughout the response.

However, a few candidates did not link to the question enough and as a result the line of argument was sometimes lost. There were examples of analysis based on little or no evidence.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates included a range of robust historians and almost all referred to historical views. Some candidates were able to show excellent knowledge of the historical debates.

However, candidates often ascribed quotes to the wrong historians.

Field of study 9 — The Spanish Civil War: causes, conflict and consequences, 1923–1945: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Most candidates made a good attempt at all aspects of the question, and in general, they performed very well. They made good comments on the rubric provenance on timing (RPT)

and author (RPA), and good analysis of source content, content provenance interpretation (CPI), and good knowledge (WCD).

However, some candidates did not link the knowledge, the wider contextual development (WCD), to non-intervention and purpose was not always well achieved. There was some irrelevant WCD.

How fully ...?

Most candidates showed very impressive knowledge of reasons for Republican defeat and there was good analysis and content and relevant WCD.

Two-source historical interpretations

Some candidates had extremely impressive knowledge of the events of the coup, and had well-considered analysis backed by excellent WCD.

However, some gave many reasons why the coup was not completely crushed, which is not what the question was about. There was some irrelevant WCD, for example on the reasons why the uprising succeeded.

Field of study 10 — Britain: at war and peace, 1938–1951: essays

Structure

Most candidates coped well. Some were able to successfully explore key areas for question 75. Questions provided a range of opportunities to demonstrate breadth and depth of knowledge. Most candidate responses had a strong structure.

However, some introductions did not achieve the upper mark ranges because of a lack of discussion of the debate. Some candidates struggled to choose appropriate essay paragraph areas and had too many ideas in each. Some candidates found the isolated factor in question 73 challenging and were unable to demonstrate understanding of the key strands of foreign policy and, rather, focused on appeasement.

Thoroughness, relevance of information and approach

Some candidates absolutely excelled and conveyed comprehensive coverage, had impressive knowledge and level of reading. Overall, there was a good understanding, which was well demonstrated.

However, some candidates demonstrated confusion between appeasement and foreign policy and in question 73, relevance was an issue in the Labour election essay. There was evidence of responses not providing sufficient content or simply missing it out.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates understood the requirements of analysis. There was some excellent analysis and evaluation, with the most successful responses providing counter arguments to help further their own line of argument. Markers noted that candidates had real opportunities to develop their independent lines of thought.

However, some candidates did not always evaluate throughout the essay and therefore did not focus on building an argument. In other cases, candidate knowledge of events surrounding issues was good, but it did not really answer the question. On occasion the main thrust of the question was not addressed. Some candidates had issues linking analysis and evaluation to the specific question.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates showed excellent evidence of wider reading.

However, there were some examples of over-reliance on historians for analysis. A few candidates provided historiography with no link to the question. A few candidates named historians in the introduction and did not use them in the body of the essay. In some cases it was missing. It is important to remember that an accurately named historian's viewpoint is required for the 13–14 mark range. 'Some historians' is not enough and vague reference to schools of thought, if accurate, would gain a maximum of 10–12 marks.

Field of study 10 — Britain: at war and peace, 1938–1951: source-based questions

Evaluate the usefulness

Many candidates made good evaluative comments on the purpose of the Home Intelligence Report and gave relatively strong provenance.

However, some had difficulty with rubric provenance (RP), for example identifying timing (RPT), as 'at the time of the Blitz'. Also, content provenance interpretation (CPI) saw source content interpreted as 'How fully...?' rather than discussing the usefulness of it and assessing its value for the topic. Some candidates made good comments on the type of source but unfortunately, this did not relate to the purpose (RPP). A few included too much wider contextual development (WCD) and did not focus on the usefulness of points in the source.

How fully ...?

Generally, candidates did well with interpretations, accompanied by a range of WCD. There were some excellent examples of candidates using the source, WCD, and a historian's viewpoint linking them all together.

Two-source historical interpretations

The majority of candidates produced well-considered responses. There were excellent examples of extensive WCD used to complement historians' viewpoints in the sources.

However, some candidates had difficulty dealing with source B, which was more critical. Markers noted that candidates seemed to automatically steer towards positive arguments. A few candidates did not link their points to British strategies.

Project-dissertation

Most candidates performed well, demonstrating a clear line of argument and relevant knowledge. This session, markers noted an improvement in recognising the demand of the abstract introduction. Most candidates adhered to the new structure guidelines: giving their rationale for the study, outlining their research methodology, discussing the historical debate(s), giving context to the topic or issue, noting the key areas prioritised in the dissertation and giving a clear line of argument.

Field of study 1 — Northern Britain: from the Iron Age to 1034

Titles

Dissertations had a broad selection of titles this session, including Picts, Romans, and Vikings. Most candidates chose straightforward titles from the approved list. Most selected from Iron Age Viking and Roman sections. Pictish and unification dissertations were generally well done.

However, a few titles were not from the list and for some candidates the choice of wording limited their scope, for example role of the frontiers in Roman invasions. This lends itself to narrative description rather than analysis, and Hadrian's Wall is a symbol of consolidation not expansion.

Structure: abstract introduction

Most candidates adhered to the new structure guidelines: giving their rationale for the study, outlining their research methodology, discussing the historical debate(s), giving context to the topic or issue, noting the key areas prioritised in the dissertation and giving a clear line of argument. Most candidates had an effective discussion of the relative strengths of the source materials available. Most candidates outlined their approach with a clear line of argument.

However, those candidates who struggled with the abstract introduction tended to complete a traditional introduction. Others wrote separate abstracts and introductions that resulted in unnecessary repetition. A few focused overly on context.

Thoroughness, and relevance of information and approach

Markers noted a high standard of effectively structured clear evidence. Candidates referred to a wide range of sources, including websites for archaeological surveys. Most dissertations had significant amounts of detailed and factual content. Some candidates were clearly focused on the question throughout. In more successful responses, there was a good balance between knowledge and analysis.

However, some candidates had five or even six factors or chapters, which they focused on at the expense of depth. Some factors were poorly chosen, for example a discussion of Hadrian's Wall is not relevant to an analysis of Roman invasions of Scotland, which is entirely north of the wall. Some were overly narrative or descriptive. Roman dissertations tended to be the least well researched, where narrative dominated without much insight into the aims of the question. Markers noted concern about excessive use of web-based sources designed primarily for reference only, for example candidates using websites for factual

detail on the Roman walls and invasions, using historical sources purely as a source of knowledge with little attempt to engage with the historical debate.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

There were some good examples of candidates linking back to the line of argument, similarly with evaluation. Overall, the standard of analysis was good with some excellent responses using evidence and/or historiography to advance the argument. Some candidates demonstrated good synthesis, with several conclusions that advanced an exceptionally good quality of line of argument, which was sustained throughout.

However, some candidates tended to leave all the analysis to the sub-conclusions of each section, reducing its effectiveness. Others did not attempt counter argument or points. Several candidates failed to build their argument throughout, not attempting synthesis. Some candidates used sub-conclusions inconsistently and some candidates had none. Less successful responses tended to focus on narrative with insufficient analysis.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of schools and eras of thought. Some candidates considered historians' differing views before reaching their conclusions.

While fairly good in many cases, a few candidates relied on a minimal number of sources. Historiography was severely limited in weaker responses and/or was not used to critically engage with modern contemporary interpretations and instead used to confirm more traditional views. Some candidates appeared to be restricted in terms of their ability to access a range of contemporary historical sources.

Referencing and bibliography

Often candidates used primary evidence to engage with the argument, most attempting to critique specific items or works, for example reliability of classical writers in Iron Age dissertations, and reliability of monastic annals as evidence of Viking impact. There was some particularly effective use of archaeological evidence, for example Pictish symbol stones.

A few candidates were uncritical in their use of web-based sources, and primary evidence tended to be illustrative.

Field of study 2 — Scotland: independence and kingship, 1249–1334

Titles

The selection of titles displayed a wide range of questions. Many candidates chose to address questions about Alexander III, the most popular topic, while a considerable number focused on John Balliol. Candidates demonstrated diverse approaches to these topics, considering broader perspectives.

However, there was a noticeable clustering around similar titles, with multiple candidates choosing the same area, leading to a lack of variety. Fewer candidates opted to focus on Bruce, and if they did, a considerable number considered the issue of luck. Additionally,

some candidates set themselves specific date ranges but then went outside these parameters, undermining the coherence of their dissertations.

Structure: abstract introduction

Most candidates wrote effective abstract introductions. Most engaged with historians' views, with well-set parameters, and arguments that were clearly highlighted. Most adhered to the new structure guidelines and conventions: rationale, methodology, historical debate(s), context, key areas prioritised in the dissertation and clear line of argument.

However, some candidates did not prioritise their arguments within the abstract, which could have strengthened the responses.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

In general, candidates produced detailed accounts of events. Most demonstrated a good balance of breadth and depth, showing evidence of thorough research and engagement with primary evidence. Candidates discussed historians' works well, with many referencing newer research such as Norman H Reid (2023) and engaging in wide reading, referencing multiple texts like Watson and Brown. Candidates did well when using a thematic approach to structure.

However, some candidates set themselves challenging questions but struggled to meet these challenges due to weak structure and chapter organisation, for example selecting to cover longer periods of time looking at the Comyn family or Edward I. Candidates struggled to cover wider periods effectively, especially if they took a chronological approach. A few used dates outside the specified range, for example referencing 1306 in a 1307–1309 question, particularly noted in questions about John Balliol. Additionally, some candidates produced excellent responses that were undermined by referencing only one primary source without using it effectively.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Many candidates used sub-conclusions successfully, which helped sustain their line of argument throughout their dissertations. Some candidates were excellent in building their arguments and consistently linking back to the question. The quality of argument was good in most responses, containing insights beyond the obvious. Evaluation was generally adequate, with most candidates summarising their chapters and linking their arguments to the question.

However, some candidates self-penalised by choosing overly tricky questions, which contained the overview of longer periods of time. While most candidates used historians' views accurately and sustained their arguments, a few did not fully develop their analysis, resulting in less successful responses.

Historical sources and interpretations

Historians' interpretations were consistent throughout responses and well-referenced. Candidates tended to use these interpretations to illustrate points. There were excellent examples of incorporating newer research, such as Norman H Reid or Dauvit Broun, showing an engagement with current scholarship.

However, many candidates used historians' interpretations primarily to illustrate points rather than to advance their arguments. This limited the depth of their analysis and the originality of their dissertations.

Referencing and bibliography

Candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of different primary evidence, and good engagement in some responses. All candidates used at least one primary source, and some had excellent use of primary evidence. References to sources like the Schøyen Chronicle and newer thinking were evident, showing depth in primary source engagement.

Some candidates used primary evidence only illustratively, which restricted their attainment and the critical depth of their dissertations.

Field of study 3 — Scotland: from the Treaty of Union to Enlightenment, 1701–1815

Titles

Popular titles included those on the Jacobite risings and the importance of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Structure: abstract introduction

Most candidates adhered to the new structure guidelines: rationale, methodology, historical debate(s), context, key areas prioritised in the dissertation and clear line of argument. Most did not follow a set formula, which worked well.

However, a couple of responses had a separate abstract and introduction, which splits the demand and consequently made a less compelling case.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Generally, candidates demonstrated an excellent breadth of relevant knowledge. Candidates took care to ensure that key points were made, and main factors were raised for analysis. However, in very few cases, breadth took prevalence over depth of analysis. Some candidates used alternative sources, for example websites and podcasts, and general histories prevailed over specialist works.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates produced dissertations in which the quality of argument was excellent. Markers noted fluent presentations with consistently applied evaluation. Candidates demonstrated a particularly high level of evaluation in work on the Treaty of Union using clauses of the document, which were critically driving the argument in some of the best responses. Some candidates made a sophisticated and compelling argument by gradually building the line of argument through chapter conclusions.

Historical sources and interpretations

Perspectives and research that candidates drew from general histories were supported by viewpoints from specialists.

Some candidates included historians' quotes in a solely illustrative way and then restated them as interpretation, which led to repetition.

Referencing and bibliography

Many candidates used this evidence and commented on its value.

However, some candidates superficially included a range of sources online from textbooks, archives, and fieldwork.

Field of study 4 — USA: 'a house divided', 1850–1865

Titles

Candidates chose titles this year that covered a broad spectrum of topics. Many focused on common themes such as the causes of the war, the role of women, the rise of the Republicans, and the Emancipation Proclamation. These were well-researched, and many candidates demonstrated an awareness of key debates and schools of thought. It was evident that most candidates were encouraged to follow their enthusiasm, which resulted in well-engaged dissertations.

However, some centres presented candidates who had focused on the same question, for example revolving around the single cause, or turning point of the struggles, leading to a lack of diversity in responses. A few candidates misunderstood the question or interpreted it differently, resulting in incomplete answers. Over-reliance on sources like Fogel and Engelmann was also observed, leading to less original analysis.

Structure: abstract introduction

Most candidates clearly identified and understood the importance of presenting a clear line of argument, resulting in well laid out abstract introductions to effectively guide their dissertations. Most candidates adhered to the new structure guidelines: rationale, methodology, historical debate(s), context, key areas prioritised in the dissertation and clear line of argument.

However, some candidates did not include sufficient historians' views or relevant factors, leading to generic statements about research methods. Some candidates lacked a clear line of argument, making it difficult to steer the dissertation effectively. Some confused abstracts with introductions, following the structure of the latter and missing key elements like the rationale for topic choice and methods used.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Markers noted depth of knowledge, especially on the causes of the American Civil War. Most candidates used evidence effectively, with strong structures and a wide range of reading was evident. Many dissertations benefited from the use of JSTOR, Google Scholar, and academic texts, leading to well-supported arguments and detailed research, for example titles that focused on the pre-war period and causes of the Civil War. Only a few dissertations were under 3,600 words. Most wrote to the expected 4,000 words of the task. In terms of structure, having too many chapters led to a lighter touch in detailed knowledge.

However, some dissertations included irrelevant details, for example extensive descriptions of military leaders' early careers without linking it to the main question, which was the case with Grant, Lee and, to some extent, Lincoln. Markers noted an over-reliance on traditional texts and generic websites. While most candidates had a solid understanding of their topics, there were instances of superficial reading and over-dependence on specific sources, such as Alan Farmer. Some dissertations lacked depth.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates produced dissertations in which the general standard of analysis was high, and many responses provided helpful mini-conclusions and synthesis of evidence. Candidates used sub-conclusions effectively to strengthen the analysis, and produced excellent examples of nuanced arguments and assured, consistent analysis. Markers noted strong links to sophisticated evaluation and less reliance on narrative.

However, some candidates still depended heavily on narrative approaches and did not integrate evaluation effectively. Markers noted some instances of over-reliance on historians' opinions without deeper analysis. Some candidates did not attempt sub-conclusions, which limited the depth of their analysis. Evaluation remained a challenge for some, with difficulties in linking knowledge and analysis. A few candidates struggled to answer the question directly, often missing key aspects or changing their line of argument throughout the dissertation.

Historical sources and interpretations

Many candidates used historical interpretations effectively to support their arguments, moving away from merely illustrative uses. Some candidates gave good examples of comparing historians critically and discussing schools of thought. These included the use of up-to-date articles, which were used in dissertations on the role of women in the Civil War, which helped further the arguments significantly.

However, candidates sometimes used historical interpretations superficially, with a lack of critical engagement and debate. There was limited evidence of new or emerging historical interpretations.

Referencing and bibliography

Some candidates used primary evidence effectively to criticise or support historians' views, for example testimonies of formerly enslaved people and the role of the abolitionists. Better responses critically engaged with primary sources, integrating them well into their arguments, for example titles specific to the abolitionists. Candidates commonly used more than one primary source, which is commendable.

However, many candidates did not engage critically with primary evidence, using it as illustration of evidence, and some did not reference primary evidence clearly. A few did not contain primary evidence at all, significantly affecting the marks they could attain.

Field of study 5 — Japan: the modernisation of a nation, 1840–1920

Titles

Candidates tackled a range of titles. The extent to which Japan was westernised was more popular this session.

However, some candidates had titles not on the approved list, or had amended the existing titles. In general, this did not successfully enhance their marks.

Structure: abstract introduction

Markers noted better structured abstract introductions this session. The most successful adhered to the new structure guidelines: giving their rationale for the study, outlining their research methodology, discussing the historical debate(s), giving context to the topic or issue, noting the key areas prioritised in the dissertation and giving a clear line of argument. Many referred to their ability to access primary sources when discussing their areas of research, which is helpful and included critiques. Some candidates made insightful comments about sources.

However, not enough candidates have adapted to the abstract introduction. Quite a few dissertations have no commentary about research methods, materials or rationale for the study. Some lines of arguments were indistinct.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Markers noted some impressive breadth of reading as a much wider range of online resources have become more accessible. Of note were a couple of original and inventive approaches to the title covering religion and philosophy.

Where many questions covered a long time period, some struggled to find a balance between breadth and depth.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates have learned to link analysis back to the line of argument. Candidates mainly took an analytical approach. Some spent time really developing and considering the nuances within their line of argument and embedded this in their responses very successfully.

However, for some candidates the chronological structure resulted in narrative. For a few the linking of analysis to their line of argument became a bit repetitive and formulaic. For a few, evaluation was not sustained throughout. Markers noted that there seemed to be more summative conclusions than usual, both at the end of chapters and overall. In some dissertations there was an absence of the synthesis of historians' interpretations and the overall conclusion.

Historical sources and interpretations

In the best responses, historians' viewpoints were used to build analysis throughout. Candidates included a lot of illustrative quotes and some footnotes that were not necessary, for example, single words.

Referencing and bibliography

Some candidates were impressive in using primary source material to advance an argument.

Many candidates however included a primary source but did not engage with the primary evidence to add value to their argument.

Field of study 6 — Germany: from democracy to dictatorship, 1918–1939

Titles

Candidates selected a broader range of titles this session. Most chose from the approved list, which generally led to better outcomes. Popular titles included Volksgemeinschaft, Adolf Hitler: A Strong Leader or Weak Dictator, and The Importance of the SS and Gestapo. A significant number focused on the Nazi period from 1933 to 1939, although candidates also covered topics like the collapse of Weimar and the Treaty of Versailles.

However, some candidates self-penalised by not choosing a title from the approved list and not having their title approved by SQA. Some interpretations of approved titles did not help candidates reach a clear judgement, for example by limiting or extending time periods or subtly altering existing titles. These either limited or overly extended the parameters of the dissertation.

Structure: abstract introduction

Most candidates adhered to the new structure guidelines: rationale, methodology, historical debate(s), context, key areas prioritised in the dissertation and clear line of argument. While 500 words tends to be the allocation for this section, shorter abstracts (300–350 words) were equally effective, avoiding excessive contextual information.

However, some candidates struggled with the abstract introduction, either by making it too long or producing only an introduction. Others provided too much narrative background. Some did not set out methodologies or had no prioritisation of evidence and arguments. Others mentioned historians' names, even quoting them, but without proper referencing. Some candidates had consulted a range of primary and secondary sources, but did not examine them well, which did not add anything to the dissertation. A few candidates did not develop the argument with relevant discussion of evidence — often going off the focus of the question. Markers suggested that careful consideration of chapter headings would help. A few candidates used the first person, 'I will'.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Most candidates demonstrated thorough research and supported their arguments with a wide range of sources. The majority stayed within their chosen timeframe and used relevant chapter headings to maintain focus. More were working to the expected 4,000 word limit.

However, the quality was variable, and some candidates included irrelevant content, outwith the scope of the question, or misinterpreted the focus of their titles. Candidates increasingly used non-academic websites this session, which sometimes hindered their depth and understanding, and some candidates demonstrated an over-reliance on the core text — Hite and Hinton. Using such websites and the core text is not enough to satisfy the depth required in this task. Others relied on very few historians used uncritically — rather they

used them as illustrative knowledge. A few candidates had no reference to primary evidence or, if used, did not footnote them.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Many candidates used clear and directed arguments, with sub-conclusions at the end of each chapter, to enhance analysis and evaluation. Most reached a well-considered final judgement and maintained a consistent line of argument throughout their dissertations.

However, some candidates' analyses were basic, with limited evaluation. A few relied heavily on narrative without effectively linking back to the question. Some struggled to find sufficient evidence for analysis, and their line of argument became superficial. A few misinterpreted the focus or the leading focus of the title, which lead to irrelevant arguments. In some the evaluation was bolted-on, rather than an argument review.

Historical sources and interpretations

Candidates used a variety of historians and sources, showing good engagement with historical interpretations. Some responses highlighted contrasting interpretations effectively, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the topic, using recent academic research. Some candidates were aware of the authority of key historians, rather than using any, and all, they found.

Engagement with the historiographical debate was often illustrative rather than analytical, limiting the sustained argument. A few candidates did not use any books, for example, having no footnotes or bibliography, or not having any reference to historians.

Referencing and bibliography

Some candidates used primary evidence effectively to advance their arguments, with a few excellent examples of critical use. Candidates used a wide range of sources to enrich their arguments including speeches, interviews, testimonies of individuals involved in events or those impacted by events. Primary evidence helped reflect contemporary feelings and events when used well to develop and enhance the impact of key events on individuals involved.

However, overall, candidate engagement with primary evidence was limited, and not used effectively. Some excellent pieces suffered by only referencing one primary source and not using this particularly well. Markers remarked on missed opportunities for primary evidence to be used to help reflect the feelings of people at the time. Some candidates used no primary evidence, which meant gaining a maximum of 20 marks of the 50 available.

Field of study 7 — South Africa: race and power, 1902–1984

Titles

Many candidates chose earlier topics from the first half of the course. The most popular responses were on the growth of Afrikaner nationalism and the 1948 election.

However, some candidates self-penalised by limiting the areas of debate to explore in their chosen dissertation question, for example work on the origins of segregation. A few slightly

misinterpreted their question or did not establish the definition of terms used such as 'effective' or 'significant', which impacted on analysis, evaluation and synthesis.

Structure: abstract introduction

Abstract introductions were better structured this session. The most successful candidates adhered to the new structure guidelines: giving their rationale for the study, outlining their research methodology, discussing the historical debate(s), giving context to the topic or issue, noting the key areas prioritised in the dissertation and giving a clear line of argument.

However, some candidates did not prioritise interpretations, which meant pushing into higher mark ranges was very difficult.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Candidates kept within the parameters of the question and were thorough in their approach and application of knowledge. Going more in depth was advantageous as it helped to demonstrate the relevance of the knowledge to the issue being researched. Candidates were able to show evidence of serious reading and most successful dissertations made good use of journals. Increasingly candidates focused on websites for research, but overall, these were very good, of high quality and carefully used.

However, some candidates approached questions unsuccessfully, for example when assessing significance of resistance, candidates struggled to grasp the issue. A few fell short by not addressing the isolated factor adequately, for example, Malan's role in the growth of Afrikaner nationalism or World War Two's impact on the outcome of the 1948 election. A few repeated information in more than one chapter and lacked alternative analysis, which suggested limited research. Several candidates would benefit from more in-depth supporting evidence and more critical engagement with primary evidence.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Candidates produced some very good responses, with excellent sustained analysis and evaluation, which built a convincing line of argument. The Higher approach to analysis structure may have helped some candidates have focus. Most candidates linked back well to the argument and substantiated with evidence. Most outlined their approach in the abstract introduction and brought sub-conclusions back to it. Candidates were willing to commit to an argument, but analysis was greater than the appearance of evaluation. The latter helps to differentiate candidates.

All candidates made efforts to sustain a line of argument, however, some did not prioritise and have this in the abstract introduction. Doing so might have helped make sub-conclusions more effective.

Historical sources and interpretations

Some candidates made excellent use of contemporary historians, for example recent works by Thula Simpson and Richard Steyn.

Most candidates used the works of historians in an illustrative manner.

Referencing and bibliography

Most candidates tried to engage with primary evidence. Markers noted some significant evaluation of primary evidence, which was particularly impressive.

The use of primary evidence in some cases was illustrative and not necessarily used critically. Overall, few candidates accessed the upper mark ranges for critical engagement with primary evidence.

Field of study 8 — Russia: from Tsarism to Stalinism, 1914–1945

Titles

Popular topics included the Civil War, the leadership struggle, Purges, and the Great Patriotic War, with some candidates also focusing on the February Revolution and October Revolution. Generally, candidates chose titles from the current SQA list, which facilitated a structured approach to research and writing.

In instances where candidates had significantly altered titles, it proved unhelpful. Some candidates misunderstood the nature of their chosen topics, leading to off-track dissertations.

Structure: abstract introduction

The very best dissertations clearly outlined their approach. Many candidates demonstrated an improved approach to abstract introductions. The most successful adhered to the new structure guidelines: giving their rationale for the study, outlining their research methodology, discussing the historical debate(s), giving context to the topic or issue, noting the key areas prioritised in the dissertation and giving a clear line of argument. Clarity of response improved this session. Introductions were mostly completed in 500 words, or even slightly fewer, in very succinct, directed abstract introductions.

However, some candidates struggled with the abstract introduction format, for example making it too long or not including a clear line of argument. Some candidates wrote traditional introductions, lacking rationale and methodology. A few candidates did not set relevant parameters or define terms in their questions, leading to superficial historiographical debates and an incomplete line of argument.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Candidates showed evidence of a wide range of reading, with increased use of podcasts and documentaries alongside traditional texts this session. Many dissertations showed clear evidence of preparation, a strong depth of research, and effective use of various resources, for example use of JSTOR. Impressive dissertations demonstrated detailed research and maintained a strong focus on the questions asked.

However, less successful responses often relied on generic websites and traditional texts without deeper analysis or evaluation. Some candidates included irrelevant information or did not use the full word count effectively. Dissertations under 2,500 words in length, for example, resulted in a lack of depth used to advance the arguments. Markers noted over-reliance on core texts such as Corin and Fiehn and insufficient integration of diverse sources.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates demonstrated a clear line of argument, with strong analysis and evaluation skills. Many candidates integrated primary evidence effectively and advanced their arguments with sustained reasoning and counter-arguments. Markers noted good practice with use of viewpoints integrated into the text. The overall standard of analysis and evaluation showed improvement compared to previous years.

However, a few candidates did not develop an evaluative argument consistently throughout their response. Some struggled with questions related to specific historical contexts, leading to one-sided approaches or superficial analysis. Markers noted a failure to link arguments back to the main question. There were examples of conjecture without substance to back them up. Some dissertations became very narrative. A few responses contained detailed knowledge not always relevant to the question, for example overemphasis on Stalin's childhood. A few candidates made conclusions but they were a little too short to really do the work justice. Sometimes candidates added a line of argument but did not integrate it throughout the response. A few candidates took one-sided approaches focusing almost entirely on the named aspect of the question. A few candidates did not engage with the question.

Historical sources and interpretations

The most successful responses used historical interpretations to drive the arguments, moving away from merely illustrative uses. Many candidates demonstrated a convincing understanding of various historical interpretations and integrated them effectively into their analysis. This went beyond 'schools of thought' and considered the time of writing, for example W H Chamberlin in 1935, Richard Pipes during the Cold War and recent works from Anthony Beevor.

Outstanding work compared views that had altered over time or those that had not altered, to prove their hypothesis.

However, some candidates treated historical interpretations superficially or relied too heavily on a few sources. Some candidates made incorrect use of historians' views, worsened by inaccurate footnoting, or over-reliance on anonymous websites. Some candidates did not critically engage with historical interpretations and did not adequately address their context. Some candidates included schools of thought but really did not understand what this meant, did not assess their value to the issue being examined, and so it brought little to their work.

Referencing and bibliography

Some candidates used primary evidence as illustrative evidence with no commentary on it, taking it at face value and therefore presuming accuracy. While this might be the case, a comment should be more overt rather than implicit. A few candidates did not use any primary evidence, which resulted in a maximum of 20 marks out of a possible 50 being awarded.

Field of study 9 — The Spanish Civil War: causes, conflict and consequences, 1923–1945

Titles

Markers noted a wider range of questions attempted than previous years. Popular titles included German, Italian and Soviet titles as well as those on Franco.

However, titles on women, divisions with the Left, and attitudes of the British government were more popular than previous years.

Structure: abstract introduction

Most candidates were good at justifying research methodologies, providing context outlining line of argument and factors. Almost all candidates outlined the key areas of research.

However, quite a few candidates did not give a clear line of argument, and some did not outline the sub-factors. Also a few did not lay out the key aspects of the study to be examined.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

In most cases thoroughness was good. Some candidates quickly grasped the question's meaning and brought in relevant evidence. Most candidates demonstrated wide reading, including reference to contemporary works. Bibliographies reflected this and an excellent range of primary evidence and secondary sources.

A few candidates included evidence not overtly relevant. They spent too long on what was not directly relevant and did not link it to the issue, for example too much historical context or biographical detail. A few went outside the timeframe of the question. There were some examples of candidates broadening the usual scope of titles, which sometimes led to irrelevant points.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates argued points well and linked them to their title and there was strong analysis throughout. Almost all candidates made an extremely good attempt to build a clear and interesting argument.

Some candidates, but not all, included evaluation. Some candidates did not consistently produce a strong line of argument throughout, but it was good when they did. However, there were some examples of candidates not evaluating factors and synthesising.

Historical sources and interpretations

Most candidates used more than two sources. Some considered a strong range of established historians' viewpoints.

However, some candidates used historians to highlight a point, to exemplify rather than advance the argument.

Referencing and bibliography

In the strongest dissertations, candidates integrated primary evidence, which they critically commented on to advance the point they were making.

A few candidates made very little reference to primary evidence or did not use it in a critical manner.

Field of study 10 — Britain: at war and peace, 1938–1951

Titles

Markers noted a good variety of titles with a noticeable increase this session in the number of candidates choosing to tackle war as a locomotive of social change.

However, a few candidates had titles that had not been approved. Candidates have an open choice of title. SQA offers a service where advice can be requested on a title, but this is voluntary.

Structure: abstract introduction

Many candidates demonstrated an improved approach to abstract introductions, and most looked at the context and the historical debate. The most successful adhered to the new structure guidelines: giving their rationale for the study, outlining their research methodology, discussing the historical debate(s), giving context to the topic or issue, noting the key areas prioritised in the dissertation and giving a clear line of argument.

However, some candidates wrote a traditional introduction and not what is required for an abstract. Some candidates had issues around formulating a line of argument that fully addressed the question rather than the general issue or topic.

Thoroughness and relevance of information and approach

Some excellent candidates engaged in detailed research. In the most successful responses candidates undertook a serious level of engagement.

Some responses did not extend to the full 4,000 word count, which can adversely impact on thoroughness.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

Most candidates understood the role of analysis in historical writing.

However, some responses did not engage with the requisite debate and poorer responses offered bolt-on statements without exploration or explanation.

Historical sources and interpretations

Markers noted some exceptional engagement with historians' interpretations and treatment of evidence addressing the schools of thought and historical debate.

However, some used quotes as illustrative knowledge rather than argument.

Referencing and bibliography

Some candidates demonstrated excellent engagement with primary evidence and, in the most successful dissertations, used it to advance the argument.

However, some candidates did not engage with primary evidence.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Part A: Historical issues — essays

Candidates should be reminded of the following:

- ◆ Read the question very carefully. One word can change the response expectation. The topic may appear, but the question is worded specifically to invite a particular type of debate. Notice the terms being used or the wording of the quote. Perhaps define what is being asked if it is a significant term.
- ◆ The isolated factor means that significant attention should be given to it, not just a cursory comment. It should be given due attention because it is highlighted in the question. It is usual to address this in the first paragraph of the development.
- ◆ It is important to refer back to the question and line of argument in discussion of subsequent factors. Use sub-conclusions to build argument as the essay progresses.
- ◆ Historians' views are vital to attain more than 9 out of 25 marks. Try to provide names and views, not generalisations. Generalised references might attain up to 12 out of 25 marks.
- ◆ Try to include historians' views to back up arguments, not as factual illustration, and try to cross-reference views.
- ◆ 'Balance' in the discussion is vital. This means considering more than one view. It does not mean equity. Counter-points do not always exist. Use historians to highlight the range, or not, of arguments — not as 'history' but as evidence of the arguments. Views can be challenged as long as they can be justified. Candidates should come to a reasoned conclusion.
- ◆ Make sure the reader reads the writer's view, not a synopsis of the viewpoints currently held. Candidates' own conclusions are vital.

Candidates should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the marking instructions.

Part B: Historical sources — source-based questions

To ensure the best answers to source questions, candidates should prepare by using the guidance in the course specification. Candidates should be reminded of the following:

- ◆ The aim of source analysis is to contextualise the evidence in the source in three differing ways. This is what is meant by the term wider contextual development (WCD). Interpretation of the source might also lead the candidate to add context WCD and gain marks for this.
- ◆ Interpretation is more than repetition of sources — there needs to be an explanation about why the selected point is important to the issue being discussed. It does not mean selecting the correct quote and leaving it at that. Quoting part might help the candidate focus on the answer but the mark is given for the interpretation — what is written in their own words.

- ◆ Adding further recall (WCD) will gain more marks. However, a maximum of 2 marks is given for any developed WCD.
- ◆ Historians' views carry 2 marks. Two relevant historians' viewpoints should be provided, not a list of names and one view. However additional historians' views can gain WCD marks.

'Evaluate the usefulness ...' question

For the 'Evaluate the usefulness ...' question the intention is to contextualise the views of the document in terms of its usefulness, its value, to help understand the topic and issue in the question. That value is assessed by commenting on rubric provenance (RP):

- ◆ author — whether official document or personal memoir or letter or speech, comment can be made on what this brings, or limits, in terms of the value of the source author (RPA)
- ◆ purpose — what is the intention of the source? What audience and what impact is wanted? (RPP)
- ◆ time — does the timing of the source have value in relation to the event, topic, issue being discussed? (RPT)

It is a primary source of evidence.

All sources are useful, not just the ones that agree with the candidate's thinking. It might give a critical or positive view at the time — both are still useful.

The content is considered in terms of its value — content provenance — and is to be interpreted (CPI). Three points are in the source, which should be contextualised in terms of their value as evidence, and in this way commenting on the provenance of the source text.

Wider contextual development (WCD) means recall that adds something to the content points or is something important that is omitted. In this question 4 marks are allocated. It is important to know that a maximum of 2 marks is available for any WCD. Overwriting will not gain more marks. This applies to all three types of source question.

'Two-source' question

Candidates should note the following for the two-source question:

- ◆ This question has the viewpoints of two historians in an academic work that they have written.
- ◆ The sources are not set out to contrast with one another. Candidates should look for nuances rather than distinctly opposed views.
- ◆ The two-source question is not a comparison question.
- ◆ Candidates could use comments such as 'This view given by the historian is', rather than state it as if it is a matter of factual accuracy.
- ◆ This question requires a substantial amount of wider contextual development — 8 marks is available for this.

'How fully ...?' question

Candidates should note the following for the 'How fully ...?' question:

- ◆ This is about a topic and/or issue and how fully the source answers the question. There is no need to comment on the rubric.
- ◆ The content contains three points that should be interpreted — in the candidate's own words — to get the 3 marks. Quoting a part might help candidates focus on the key message being given.
- ◆ The wider contextual development carries 7 marks, which can be either developed WCD from the content point or omitted points.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the marking instructions for the mark allocation for interpretation, contextualisation and historians' views.

Project-dissertation

The dissertation requires the same skills as the question paper, combining these into a self-driven research piece. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to familiarise themselves with the marking grid.

The following areas for improvement were highlighted:

- ◆ to include the hypothesis or line of argument
- ◆ be aware of overly dominating narrative that does not link to analysis and evaluation
- ◆ to have an engagement with primary evidence by considering its value to drive forward the argument
- ◆ to engage with and make critical use of historians' views
- ◆ to ensure thorough proofreading takes place as markers noted technical issues and the need for better proofreading
- ◆ to reference accurately. Referencing is noted on the marking grid and a bibliography is also an expectation of the task. It informs the reader of the research undertaken and justifies the views adopted

The maximum word count is 4,000 words. If the word count exceeds this by more than 10%, a penalty is applied. There was a mixture of responses in terms of length. Markers noted that a few were under 3,000 words in length and read more like an essay. A few wrote over the maximum word limit and incurred a penalty of 10%.

Titles

Centres are encouraged to read the 'Approved list of dissertations', which is updated annually. If the title diverges in a significant way, centres are encouraged to seek approval of the title from SQA.

Some titles do not give candidates enough scope to write 4,000 words or do not easily suit well-directed responses. It is important to keep in mind that the title should allow for the depth and breadth required. Equally it is important to allow this to be possible in 4,000 words. In the research phase more might be found than is possible to include in 4,000

words. Advice would be to limit the question, either by setting a specific timeframe, or by limiting the areas covered, or both. The question is very important. It can evolve over the year of research.

Abstract introduction

This should be concise. The Understanding Standards webinar on the project–dissertation and the associated exemplars give guidance on what is expected, including abstract requirements. Most aim for an allocation of around 500 words.

In the abstract introduction candidates should include:

- ◆ the rationale for the research — why it is important and can be justified as an exercise
- ◆ the methodology undertaken and key resources used — what was found and by what means

And, as expected in an essay introduction:

- ◆ context to the topic or issue
- ◆ a brief discussion of the key historical debate(s)
- ◆ note of the key areas prioritised in the dissertation
- ◆ a clear line of argument

Research

In terms of research, quality is as important as quantity and a very high standard can be reached from the detailed reading of a few good books.

Historians' viewpoints

Historical opinions or debates should be embedded throughout the dissertation. Quoting historians without footnoting or including their work in the bibliography and/or having an uncritical over-reliance on internet sites can hinder attainment.

Presentation and referencing

Candidates should be encouraged to follow these guidelines in terms of the presentation of work:

- ◆ proofread their final piece
- ◆ use font size 11 or 12
- ◆ double line space their work
- ◆ reference quotes, statistics and arguments using footnotes — this gives the work validity
- ◆ include a contents page that includes chapter titles
- ◆ number the pages — at the bottom is usual
- ◆ include a bibliography: primary evidence, secondary evidence, digital evidence — alphabetical order by author surname. URL where relevant

- ◆ include an annotated bibliography, which reinforces research undertaken — this should have a very small commentary by the candidate on the value, or usefulness, of the texts, primary evidence and other resources consulted
- ◆ include a word count on each page — usually at the bottom of the page
- ◆ do not staple
- ◆ print single-sided pages

Candidates and centres should refer to the detailed marking instructions in the coursework assessment task to help understand the progression in this assessment.

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](#).