

SATH Higher History Survey 2024

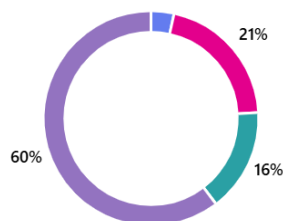
Summary of Responses

- 174 History teachers have responded to the survey. In 2023 there were 1004 History teachers in Scotland according to Scottish Government statistics.
- 142 centres across Scotland are represented in the survey. 6 responses did not share the centre where they work. 375 centres presented candidates for the Higher History exam in session 2023-24.
- 96% of respondents (167) taught Higher History in 2023-24.
- Survey results have been anonymised and shared with SQA, the Scottish Government and Scottish History Teachers. The Excel spreadsheet containing every response with names, schools and e-mails removed has been shared along with this summary.
- Dr Joe Smith from Stirling University can verify that the data shared represents the survey results with nothing other than personal details edited or removed.

5. How long have you been teaching Higher History?

[More details](#)

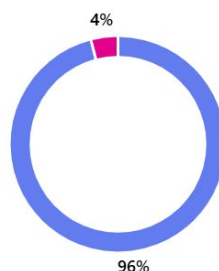
• 2024 was my first year teaching the course	6
• 0-5 years	36
• 5-10 years	27
• More than 10 years	105



4. Did you deliver Higher History in session 2023-24

[More details](#)

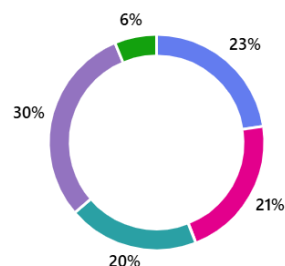
• Yes	167
• No	7



6. Have you ever marked Higher History for the SQA?

[More details](#)

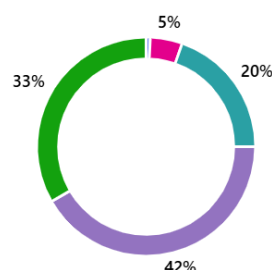
● Yes, Paper One	61
● Yes, Paper Two (Scottish)	58
● Yes, Assignment	53
● No, I have never marked	81
● I'd prefer not to say	17



7. If you delivered the course in 2023-24, based on progress and your assessments through the session, did your learners perform...

[More details](#)

● Significantly better than expected	1
● Better than expected	8
● As expected	33
● Below the expected outcomes	70
● Significantly below the expected outcomes	56



Question 8: Please share if you have any further comment on the performance of your classes in the final exam:

Theme	Responses
Paper 1 and Assignment marks as expected, results brought down by Paper 2.	28 responses noted that Paper 2 marks were significantly lower than Paper 1 and Assignments, and that this pulled down overall results. One school noted a drop in the average mark from 21.5 in 2023 to 8.5, for example.
Pupils performed below expectations in Paper 2.	12 responses commented on performances in Paper 2 falling below expectations based on performance through the year.
Pupils performed below expectations across the components.	7 responses noted that pupils performed below the standard achieved in class assessments; 15 responses noted that pupil results were far lower than expected across both papers; 8 responses noted a lack of A band 1s and concern over this; 7 responses noted that pupils performed 1 or 2 bands below expected results; 9 responses noted that pupils expected to gain A passes achieved B grades or below; one response noted that they had no As for the first

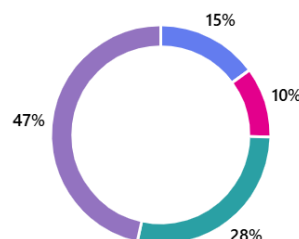
	time ever; one response expressed the opinion that candidates would have achieved at least a grade better in any other year.
Pupils performed better in other subjects	2 responses noted that pupils underperformed in History in comparison to their other subjects; 7 responses noted that pupils achieving As in their other subjects did not achieve A passes in History;
Pupils performed well or in line with expectations	10 responses noted that their classes performed well in the final exam; 2 responses noted that learners did not perform significantly below expectations; 9 responses noted that pupils performed as expected
Anomalies or mixed results	7 responses commented on anomalies in their results, eg pupils achieving far better results than expected alongside other pupils performing far worse; 3 responses noted that their results were mixed.
Poor cohort	2 responses commented on pupils who had not passed National 5 being presented for Higher, resulting in a lot of no awards; 5 responses commented on having a poor cohort, with issues with attendance and resilience; 1 response highlighted that the National 5 grade boundaries were lowered in 2023 which meant that some Higher candidates struggled to achieve at Higher level.
Goalposts moved	3 responses felt that the goalposts had been moved impacting on their results; 3 responses commented on an increased level of detail in 2024 marking instructions as evidence of a move in goalposts.

Overall, responses indicated that the majority of teachers who responded to the survey felt that the learners presented for the 2024 exam performed below their expectations based on their assessments and knowledge of their learners; paper 2 was identified as a particular issue with candidates performing very poorly in this part of the exam. Many respondents expressed concern over a drop in results in their own centres which had not been anticipated.

10. Do you feel confident in your understanding of standards at Higher History level this session?

[More details](#)

● Yes, very confident	26
● Confident	18
● Mostly confident but less sure of aspects of the course	49
● Not confident	81



Question 11: If you would like to add further comment on your understanding of standards at Higher level please do so below:

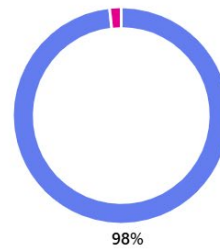
Theme	Responses
Concerns over lack of course report/Understanding Standards dates	20 responses noted concern that the course report was significantly delayed/not available at time of writing, and that dates for Understanding Standards sessions had not been released. This meant courses were past the halfway point without this key information.
Not confident of standard required for Paper 2	9 responses commented on a lack of confidence in the standard required for Paper 2; 18 responses expressed uncertainty over the level of detail required in Paper 2 to gain knowledge marks; 3 responses highlighted concerns with the 2024 Migration and Empire paper, with reference to the named Scot issue and the question about the reaction of Scots to Irish immigrants not matching updated course descriptors; 1 response commented on concerns regarding sources, MIs and the course spec for Scottish Wars of Independence; 3 responses commented that examples on the Understanding Standards website are out of date for the Scottish Paper, and would not gain full marks after the changes to the course spec.
General lack of confidence/confidence impacted by 2024 results	15 responses indicated that they did not feel confident in their understanding of the standard; 15 responses commented on previously feeling confident but no longer feeling that way following the 2024 exam; 6 responses indicated that they felt that standards were unclear, particularly with regards to how best to support weaker candidates.

Not confident in evaluation/conclusions	26 responses highlighted evaluation and conclusions in essays as aspects of the essay writing components that they considered unclear, some mentioned that this is due to a lack of exemplification; 2 responses said that they were not clear on the standard required for the assignment.
Confident in understanding of standard	4 responses noted that they were confident in their understanding of essays and the assignment; 4 responses noted that they felt confident in general; 14 responses commented that there has been no change to the standard, that the standard is fair and transparent
Concerns regarding standard of pupil responses	6 responses discussed poor literacy amongst learners as a major barrier, particularly to Paper 2; 1 response noted that MIs were not inconsistent, that the quality of knowledge in the Scottish paper was poor; 2 responses highlighted concerns over the poor standard of pupil response in 2024 experienced by markers; 1 response referred to issues post-Covid impacting pupil progress and attainment.
Concerns related to the process of marking in 2024	9 responses commented on the increased level of detail in the MIs in 2024, and found this confusing; 3 responses mentioned markers sharing mixed messages following markers' meetings; 1 response discussed markers' meetings moving online and the negative impact of this on the conversations that are held surrounding the standard;

12. Have you read the investigation on Higher History that was produced recently?

[More details](#)

● Yes 171
● No 3



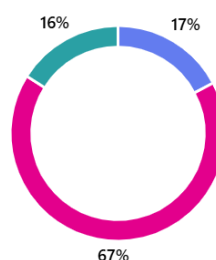
Question 13: Please share your thoughts on the findings of the investigation below: |

Theme	Responses
Disagree/don't accept the findings of the investigation	36 responses commented that they disagreed with the findings of the investigation; 18 responses described the investigation as a "whitewash"; 1 response commented that grades from 2024 should be changed;
The investigation should have been carried out independently, not by the SQA	23 responses commented on the fact that the investigation was carried out by the SQA, and felt that it should have been carried out by an independent body.
The investigation should have taken teachers and markers views into account and was too narrow in its' scope as only senior members of the team were interviewed.	21 responses commented that teachers and/or markers should have had their views taken into account as part of the investigation; 9 responses mentioned that the senior team had a vested interest and questioned this evidence.
The investigation blamed teachers and pupils unfairly for the drop in pass rate.	28 responses felt that the investigation blamed teachers and pupils for the drop in pass rate and disagreed with this strongly; 4 responses commented that they found this insulting.
The investigation did not adequately answer questions raised by the 2024 exam and results.	5 responses mentioned that the explanations given were not credible, and 3 responses felt that the investigation was not detailed enough; 6 responses felt that more is needed to address the issues and concerns raised, particularly around Paper 2; 10 responses queried why other literacy based subjects did not also experience a significant drop in pass rate; 6 responses commented that they felt that there should have been an admission on the part of the SQA that mistakes have been made; 2 responses mentioned that there are issues that have not been dealt with, and this is a concern;

	2 responses commented on grade boundaries and queried why these were not changed.
The investigation was fair and thorough, and findings reflected the experience of markers who reported a weaker cohort.	23 responses felt that the investigation was fair and rigorous and agreed with the findings; 13 responses agreed that literacy was an issue for candidates in the exam this year; 1 response noted that finding were as expected; 2 responses commented that the impact of Covid has contributed to a drop in pass rates, and that the return of the assignment along with the reduction of four essays to three in Paper One has contributed to the decline in results.
A number of responses referred to markers sharing that there had been a change in standards in 2024.	20 responses felt that anecdotal evidence from markers indicated that the goalposts had been moved and that marking standards were inflated from previous years; 4 responses said that markers feel that they cannot speak out about issues, and that they are not listened to.
Issues were raised with the standard, including the level of detail required to gain a mark, discrepancies between topics, and a question in the Migration and Empire section of Paper 2 which was worded according to the older course specification.	5 responses queried the Migration and Empire question asking about the Scots' reaction to Irish Immigrants, given that this is not the detailed descriptor in the new, updated course specification; 3 responses mentioned that concerns around Paper 2 and changes to the course spec have not been addressed; 1 response felt that the drop in pass rate in Paper 2 has been partly as a result of an attempt to "level out" the level of difficulty between different options, with Migration and Empire previously perceived as an easy option; 7 responses commented that the standard is unreasonable, with too much detail required to gain marks.
Clear communication of key messages and standards required	9 responses felt that there is a need for clearer communication of key messages; 4 responses commented on the delay of course reports and Understanding Standards events which has created further uncertainty.

14. Do you feel that the Higher History course and assessment is fit for purpose? (Is it fair, does it measure what we need it to measure, is the standard appropriate at Higher level and on a par with other subjects at the same level?) [More details](#)

● Yes 30
 ● No 116
 ● Unsure 28



Question 15: What changes do you feel are needed to improve the course and assessment at Higher level?

Theme	Responses
Rethink evaluation marks	14 responses felt that the difficulty of gaining evaluation marks prevents excellent candidates from gaining high marks/A Band 1s; 4 responses mentioned that it is too difficult to gain an A pass.
Parity needed with other subjects, particularly other Social Subjects	40 responses felt that History is more difficult than other Social Subjects, and that it is more demanding to gain marks for similar skills. The concern was raised that learners will not want to choose History if they feel it is “too hard”.
Issues with amount of knowledge required, structure and literacy demands	30 responses felt that there is too much content in the Higher History course, leading to pupils rote learning essays rather than developing independent thought; 11 responses felt that there is too much emphasis on structure in the exam; 13 responses commented on the literacy demands of the course being too high, and that pupils are expected to write too much; 3 responses felt that too much detail is needed for 1 mark; 2 responses suggested reinstating 4 essay options rather than 3 in Paper 1.
Parity in level of difficulty across the different sections of Paper 2 needed	10 responses felt that the level of difficulty across the different options in Paper 2 vary, and that they should be more in line with one another.
Communication/guidance/exemplification	26 responses felt that clearer guidance on skills and better exemplification is required, particularly in Paper 2; 3 responses mentioned issues with the Course Spec in Paper 2.
Teacher consultation/review	4 responses felt that a review of the Higher course is required to address the issues.

Clearer progression from National 5 to Higher	5 responses mentioned the progression from National 5 to Higher, and that there is too big a jump, and a lack of progression with some skills eg source comparison at National 5, but a two source question at Higher where the sources are not compared.
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Question 16: Moving forward, what do you need from SQA to support your delivery of Higher History?

Area/Theme	Action points
Understanding Standards Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 54 responses identified a need for Understanding Standards Events; the key points raised were: ○ These events need to happen earlier in the session to support delivery of the qualification. ○ Currently the US event for 12th December is full – in response to the issues raised, we would request additional events, with no limit of one person per school, to ensure that every History teacher who wants to attend is able to. ○ A number of teachers requested that events are held both online and in person; online events can be recorded and accessed by everyone after the event which is very valuable, however, the ability to ask questions and engage in meaningful discussion is limited. ○ Cover issues in school can prevent teachers from attending – it is requested that there is a twilight option. ○ In addition to US events, it has been suggested that members of the senior team attend local authority network meetings to improve engagement with History teachers.
Sharing of exemplar materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 37 responses discussed the sharing of exemplars and the need for these to be more extensive and up to date with current course specs and sub topics. Key points were: ○ Exemplars need to be shared early in the course. ○ All Scottish topics should be represented. ○ Outdated examples must be removed, ie questions that are not based on the revised sub issues for Paper 2. ○ Exemplars of candidates achieving different grades should be shared in order to understand the minimum standard as well as best practice. ○ A few responses requested briefing and qualification scripts from markers' meetings shared – a couple specifically asked for the 2024 examples, but it was pointed out that these would be of great value to all teachers each session.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A theme has come through of teachers feeling that markers have privileged information on the standard that is not available to everyone – more extensive sharing of exemplars would help to address this.
Clarity of expectations/clear standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 40 responses mentioned the need for clarity of expectations/clear standards. ○ This would be addressed through improving Understanding Standards events as detailed above, and putting in place a rigorous programme of professional development opportunities. ○ Expanding on the exemplar materials as detailed above would also address this issue. ○ In Paper 1, evaluation and conclusions were mentioned as an area where teachers are not clear on the standard. Further support and exemplification on these skills is requested.
Consistency of messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 17 responses mentioned consistency of messages regarding marking and the standard – it has been noted that different messages have been shared by 2024 Paper 2 markers. ○ Gathering marker feedback immediately after markers meetings, as proposed in the investigation findings, would provide data as to the understanding and confidence of markers before they begin marking. ○ Further training of markers, particularly first time markers, and Team Leaders is requested. ○ An more open forum for questions from markers and responses from the leadership team during the marking process would improve consistency – currently markers e-mail their Team Leader with any questions they have, but only they can see the response. Could all questions and answers be available to all markers? Could a version of helpful Q and As be shared after the marking process with all teachers? ○ Several responses noted that the course report has been shared too late this session. Sharing course reports earlier would also support consistent key messages.
Open communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 28 responses commented on the need for better, more open communication. Key points were: ○ Updates need to happen in a timely fashion, and teachers need to be alerted to these. ○ A more consultative approach is requested, particularly as we move towards changes from SQA to QS. ○ For example, an open forum where questions can be asked regarding marking standards and responses given by SQA has been requested. ○ There is a perception that teachers are unable to openly challenge SQA – teacher feedback should be invited and engaged with to change this perception.

<p>Acknowledge mistakes/accept that there are issues to be addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Approximately 10 responses expressed anger at the 2024 results and made the following points: ○ SQA should be disbanded/resignations should be made/a new team with fresh leadership is required. ○ A few responses wanted grade boundaries altered to upgrade 2024 candidates, and an admission from SQA that the standard was inflated. ○ A few responses called for a further review of the 2024 exam to be carried out. ○ A few responses highlighted the need for a clear plan moving forward and assurances that candidates in 2025 would not be disadvantaged. ○ A few responses said that the culture of markers meetings needs to change, with less of a top down approach. ○ One response felt that clearer regulation of practices is needed. ○ 10 responses referred to the need for honesty and fairness from SQA, highlighting that there has been a loss of trust.
<p>Standards did not change/current level of support is good</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 12 respondents expressed that they disagree that the standard changed in 2024. Key points were: ○ SQA is open and transparent. ○ Current provision is robust. ○ 2024 markers and members of the History team should be supported.
<p>Review the Higher History course/changes required to course structure and/or assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 respondents stated that a whole new Higher History course is needed. Key points on this theme: ○ Comment was made on the structures required to answer questions being unnecessary. ○ 5 respondents argued that the standard needs to be lowered. A few comments were made throughout the survey about expectations of candidates being unreasonable. ○ There are calls to revisit the course specification for Paper 2 to review the sub issues, to ensure that it is clear what is relevant for each sub issue. ○ The need for straightforward questions and equal sources across the Scottish History Paper has been raised. Parity across the different contexts was mentioned. Teachers do not support the reduction in options proposed by the investigation. ○ Three respondents proposed a reduction in course content; others proposed four essay options rather than three. One respondent suggested removing evaluation marks for essays. ○ Reference is made at different points in the survey feedback to comparisons across the Social Subjects; it has been suggested that parity between the Social Subjects is reviewed.

Other comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Markers pay was discussed – after tax, the pay for marking does not compensate for the time and workload involved. There had been discussion and concerns raised in other forums that there may be an issue in the future with recruiting markers. ○ A few requests to access the exam scripts for Higher History, as was trialled in geography this session. Some want 2024 papers released, others would welcome this moving forward. ○ Further practice questions would be welcomed, particularly for the newer skill ‘how much...’. ○ Marking schemes were criticised for being vague. They have also been criticised for changing to contain more detail. SQA have clarified that the level of detail in the MIs is to support markers – could it be clearer within the MIs that candidates do not need to include all of the examples given within a section to gain a mark? ○ Professional development and resources have been requested on specific topics. This would not be something that SQA would provide, but can potentially be picked up by Education Scotland/SATH.
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Recommendations/Questions Raised in SATH Committee Meeting – 8th December 2024

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

Almost half of the teachers surveyed expressed that they did not feel confident in their understanding of the standard, which needs to be addressed urgently.

Question 17: What can SATH do to support teachers to deliver qualifications successfully?

Theme	Responses
Pressure SQA/hold SQA accountable/communicate with SQA	36 responses commented that SATH should pressure SQA or hold SQA accountable; 6 responses commented that SATH should work with SQA/Qualifications Scotland to communicate views of History teachers; 9 responses commented that SATH should speak for History teachers; 1 response suggested that SATH should organise a marking boycott; 3 responses commented on listening to members and publicly backing them, however, this comment about backing members was made by both those who are critical of SQA and those who are supportive.
Critical of SATH	8 responses commented that SATH should have acted earlier on this issue; 6 comments called SATH spineless/gutless/cowards; 2 comments said that SATH should not have any involvement with the SQA; 3 responses thought that there were members of the SQA senior team who are part of the SATH committee, incorrectly.
Support History teachers/continue to support by providing networks, organising events, sharing good practice	16 responses felt that SATH should continue to organise events; 14 responses asked SATH to support teachers by sharing examples of exam answers; 20 responses mentioned continuing to share practice, provide networks, share resources; 4 responses wanted SQA input at SATH Conferences, others mentioned SATH holding workshops or markers events.
Issue is with SQA, not SATH	2 responses highlighted that SATH are not part of this issue, it lies with the SQA; 2 responses mentioned that SATH should continue as we are

Question 18: If there is anything further that you wish to add, please enter below:

In this section respondents expressed:

- Anxiety about the future
- The feeling that SQA is not reflective
- High levels of stress relating to this issue
- No confidence in the SQA
- Low morale
- Negative impacts on wellbeing
- Thoughts of leaving teaching
- That change is needed
- Frustration
- That 2024 grades should be changed
- Anger
- That events of 2024 have brought the subject into disrepute
- Concerns over literacy issues (mentioned in several comments)
- Concerns over the social media “pile on”
- That SQA colleagues have felt denigrated
- The issue has gone on too long
- the accusation that there is a toxic culture at SQA
- that SQA need to listen to feedback