

**Education, Children and Young People Committee**

**Wednesday 4 December 2024  
32nd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)**

## **Higher History Review 2024**

### **Introduction**

1. Following publication of the outcomes of this year's National Qualifications on 6 August 2024, concerns were raised about the standards applied in the marking of examinations in Higher History. Following these concerns, the SQA Chief Examiner commissioned SQA's Head of Standards to carry out a review.
2. On 6 November 2024, the SQA wrote to the Committee highlighting the publication of the findings of that review. This letter is attached in Annexe A. [The findings are published in full on the SQA website.](#)

### **Meeting**

3. At this meeting the Committee will hear from the following witnesses—
  - Jenny Gilruth, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
  - Clare Hicks, Director, Educational Reform, Scottish Government
  - Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive, SQA

**Committee Clerks  
November 2024**

## Annexe A

Dear Mr Ross

Firstly, may I congratulate you on your appointment to Convenor of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. I look forward to meeting you in due course.

I am writing to let you and your fellow Committee members know that today we have published the findings of the review of Higher History in 2024.

The review has concluded that the marking standard in 2024 did not change and that the marking and grading processes worked as intended. Learners were not disadvantaged and can be confident that the attainment rate for Higher History accurately reflected their performance.

Independent, external scrutiny of the review was carried out by Richard Harry, Executive Director of Qualifications and Assessment at WJEC, Wales' largest awarding body. Mr Harry, an expert in standard-setting and exams, has endorsed the findings and confirmed the evidence supports the report's conclusions.

As I reported to the Committee in September, I commissioned the review of Higher History after a number of concerns were raised about the marking standard, in the media, on social media and directly with SQA. The review was important to provide reassurance to learners and teachers and to provide confidence in the results and the processes that underpinned them.

The review was conducted by SQA's Head of Standards with support and oversight from the Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards, neither of whom had any prior involvement in the marking or grading of Higher History.

The evidence-led review report concludes that:

*"All stages of SQA's normal processes were followed rigorously and robustly, and in accordance with SQA's established processes and procedures. The Higher History exam team acted with integrity throughout this process."*

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

*"Feedback from markers, who are all teachers, provided in their reports to SQA was overwhelmingly focused on the poor standard of responses provided by learners in this year's examinations."*

While I acknowledge that the review has taken longer than anticipated, it was important to ensure it was robust and rigorous, in the interests of learners. We also had to ensure the external reviewer had sufficient time to analyse, assess and audit the evidence and conclusions.

There are always lessons for us to learn and this report highlights some areas for wider reflection, which I welcome. In particular, we need to improve how we deal

with feedback we receive from markers so that they know that their concerns are being listened to and, where necessary, dealt with. We are committed to giving all learners and educators a stronger voice as we transition into Qualifications Scotland.

In conclusion, learners can be confident that their Higher History qualifications are credible and fair, and reflect the knowledge, understanding and skills they have acquired.

I hope this is helpful. I would, of course be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Robertson

SQA Chief Executive and Scotland's Chief Examining Officer

The report and supporting materials are available on the [Higher History subject page](#) of SQA's website:

[Higher History Review 2024](#)

[Higher History Review 2024 – Summary version](#)

[SQA's process for awarding graded National Courses - infographic](#)