

Modern History

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

In 2015, the overall quality of student responses across all assessment components was consistent with previous years. The number of students who studied Modern History in 2015 was 1616, which was an approximately 14% increase on 2014 enrolments.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Folio

It was evident during the moderation process that many teachers and students accessed the 2014 Chief Assessor’s report and, where appropriate, amended and improved practices based on the advice provided. Moderators commented on an overall improvement in teachers’ understanding of performance standards and what types of evidence student achievement should reflect at the different grade bands. This was evident in a number of ways, with more teachers having the confidence to make clear and specific reference to individual performance standards by providing annotations on student work. It was noted that this helped moderators in confirming their standards, as did the inclusion of written feedback on individual tasks.

Moderators observed that most teachers arranged their materials in clearly organised and labelled packages that included marks sheets for the individual tasks of each student. The most effective way to organise materials is by arranging materials by student, rather than separating each folio task into separate groups for a whole class. It was pleasing that many teachers are now including a summary sheet of student’s grade levels for each individual folio task against particular performance standards and an overall collated grade. This greatly assisted moderators in confirming their standards.

In the majority of folios, the types and designs of tasks allowed students to achieve at the highest grade levels in each specific feature. Moderators noted that folios requiring students to present their knowledge and understanding of topics in a variety of ways provided the opportunity to achieve more consistently across all performance standards. As in previous years, the knowledge and understanding criterion was demonstrated the most clearly and generally saw students achieve at their highest grade level. This suggested the effective use of teaching and learning strategies employed to consolidate the knowledge and understanding of students, specific to the thematic and depth topics chosen. Students had a better chance of showing a comprehensive understanding in relation to the performance standards if they were given tasks that required them to demonstrate depth and variety; for example, by referring to a range of places, people, events, and ideas linked to specific topics. In contrast, tasks that simply asked students to recount how a specific event unfolded often lacked evidence of a deeper understanding that historical events, places, people, and phenomena are intrinsically interchangeable. It was pleasing to see some highly effective multimedia tasks that allowed students to successfully demonstrate knowledge and understanding at the A grade band. As in previous years, the second knowledge and understanding specific feature (KU2) was often assessed in folio tasks that did not allow students to successfully formulate their own inquiry and apply this to historical concepts.

Of all the standards, the criterion of inquiry and analysis (IA1 and IA2) was the most lacking in student work. Sources analysis tasks were once again the most popular way of demonstrating this criterion, but the quality of critical analysis varied greatly. Students were often able to demonstrate these skills in extended tasks. Open-ended research and report-style tasks did not give students the opportunity to show the reflection and evaluation, and inquiry and analysis criteria. It was particularly difficult for students to demonstrate these criteria when there was too much scaffolding of tasks that directed them to answer a series of research-type questions, rather than develop their own argument and analysis.

The most popular topics continue to be Topic 3 (Revolutions), Topic 8 (the First World War), Topic 9 (an Age of Catastrophes), and Topic 10 (Postwar Rivalries). Teachers are reminded that all four issues of the topic should be covered. Moderators noted that there were some effective tasks that allowed students to draw on their knowledge and understanding of all issues related to a topic, demonstrating an in-depth understanding of continuity and change. It is vital that students learn all four issues so they can show a broad and sophisticated understanding of forces and change over an extended time. Moderators also noted that many teachers were still dealing with more than one case study in the thematic study. This sometimes led to students lacking detailed knowledge and understanding of each case study, and seldom presenting work in the top range of the performance standards. While it is useful to draw comparison with other case studies to establish trends and unique characteristics, the study of one case study in depth allows more complex knowledge and understanding to be communicated.

Moderators were pleased to see a greater variety of types of tasks in the folio. Although the most popular tasks continue to be essay-based or sources analysis tasks, there has been an increase in the number of multimedia tasks being submitted. Empathy-type tasks continue to be popular and it was noted that such tasks require a strong grounding in knowledge and understanding to effectively demonstrate reflection and evaluation. Explicit teaching of how to incorporate multiple perspectives in these types of tasks may allow students to achieve at the higher grade bands. It was refreshing to see a number of interesting tasks that required students to conduct an interview with various people from historical periods and analyse different individuals’ motivations and actions. These tasks allowed students to achieve at the higher levels of inquiry and analysis, and reflection and evaluation. Other inventive tasks included photo stories, biographies, and creating and analysing propaganda.

It was felt that students were disadvantaged in cases when the folio comprised essays and sources analysis completed under test conditions. Students should be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and skills in a variety of conditions and task types. Although preparing students for the examination is critical, spreading these types of tasks across the year in formative and summative tasks was the most effective preparation. There was more evidence that teachers created their own sources analysis rather than relying on past examination papers. Teachers once again noted that this helps to ensure that readily accessed answer sheets are not used to prepare answers.

Task design was seen as vitally important in giving students the opportunity to achieve at the higher grade bands. The most effective tasks included clear instructions on word limit, conditions, and explicit detail on which specific features were being assessed. Further, effective tasks allowed students to develop and demonstrate a selection of the specific features in each task, rather than assessing the complete range. Tasks that assessed all specific features tended to demonstrate uneven and superficial evidence against some of the standards. Generally, the word count of a maximum of 1000 words for tasks was adhered to, although there was a pattern within some folios of tasks being consistently 100 to 200 words over the word limit. Students who demonstrated evidence up to 1000 words were better able to display knowledge and understanding and to communicate analysis, reflection, or evaluation skills. Teachers are reminded that oral presentations or multimedia tasks have a maximum time limit of 6 minutes.

Essay tasks continued to be the most popular form of assessing a student’s achievement against the performance standards. Task sheets that provided clear instruction and expectations of all components of this type of task gave students a clear understanding of the individual specific features being assessed. Moderators noted that, as in previous years, the construction of essay questions is vital to students achieving at the higher levels of the performance standards. Essay questions that invite reasoned historical argument are most effective in allowing students to show a perceptive application of historical skills. As in previous years, there is still a tendency to set essay questions that invite a narrative of events. This significantly limits the ability of students to achieve at the higher level of the inquiry and analysis criterion and to demonstrate clearly the correct use of history essay writing conventions, which are assessed in the communication criterion.

The first communication specific feature regarding informed and relevant arguments (C1) was generally consistent across most samples. Students structured essays well, although some did not use paragraphs effectively. The second communication specific feature (C2) was often inconsistent. Students were able to use subject-specific language effectively, but referencing was quite variable in quality.

Some essay tasks required students to discuss a broad range of factors — economic, social, and political — in reference to a number of cases studied. These tasks were noted as being too complex and challenging for students to show an
in-depth understanding within a 1000-word essay.

A pleasing trend was evidence of greater engagement in the use of historiography, which suggests some explicit teaching of this skill set. Tasks explicitly requiring a consistent form of referencing and a bibliography allowed students to achieve the second communication specific feature. Students who provided evidence of research through the use of bibliographies and referencing ─ undertaken in tasks throughout a folio ─ tended to achieve at the higher grade band levels.

Assessment Type 2: Essay

Moderators noted that students chose a good variety of topics for the essay. More students in 2015 attempted to extend themselves and focus on developing a historical essay on a clearly defined and specific topic. However, it is important that topics are not selected from time frames preceding 1500, because these do not meet the requirements of the subject outline.

The majority of students still tended to link their chosen topic to the thematic or depth topic studies. However, it is pleasing that more students saw this as a good opportunity to construct an independent academic historical inquiry by focusing on an area of particular interest.

As noted in previous years, the formulation and construction of the essay question is the most critical factor influencing success in this assessment type. Teachers are encouraged to work closely and guide students in the initial stages of this task to help in the formulation of effective historical essay questions. The most effective essay questions have a clear specific focus, including the time frame and place. In order to achieve at the higher levels of the performance standards, the essay questions must allow students to engage in reasoned historical argument.

Essay questions that are formulated to elicit a narrative response are the least effective in giving students the opportunity to show evidence in the higher grade bands for knowledge and understanding, inquiry and analysis, and communication. Film analysis style questions were common; however, these were often not completed effectively and relied too heavily on providing a film review. Teachers are reminded that questions inviting students to analyse the reliability and limitations of a historical film or literary texts give students the best opportunity to achieve at the higher levels of the performance standards.

Moderators also noted that many questions were still not of a historical nature, making it difficult for students to show the necessary understanding and skills required for a historical inquiry. Topics of a contemporary nature do not meet the assessment design criteria. It was pleasing to see the majority of students using the maximum of five sources in their essays, as well as a consistent form of referencing and a bibliography identifying the main sources and any background reading. Moderators noted some excellent evidence of students carefully choosing and evaluating the most effective sources on which to centre their research. Pleasingly, more students are choosing to use a variety of primary sources, including speeches, diaries, artwork, and propaganda. Students who identified a variety of source types tended to engage more effectively and show a critical understanding of evidence to help substantiate conclusions and arguments.

Moderators noted that careful interpretation of what constitutes a source is important when students chose their five sources. Using a historical film or literary piece such as *Schindler’s List* constitutes one source, as does using individual documents such as the ‘Treaty of Versailles’ or Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ speech. However, using sources that constitute a whole work as potential sources — for example, secondary sources such as Orlando Figes’s *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991*, textbooks such as *Republic or Reich 1918–1939* by K. J. Mason and Phillip Fielden*,* or carefully chosen websites such as Yad Vashem — can be highly effective. There continues to be an overuse of internet sources, which makes it vital that students critically evaluate the types of sources they use.

It was noted by moderators that some students still use too many sources, or fail to provide any evidence of referencing, which makes it difficult for moderators to confirm grades. It was also identified that there was an overuse of non-academic websites. Successful students used five appropriate sources directly (often several times) within the essay to support the development of a reasoned historical argument.

The most effective essays were those that used the correct conventions of history essay writing, with clearly defined and relevant arguments. Essays that offered a clear counter-argument tended to achieve at the higher level of the performance standards. There was a trend of some students showing a sophisticated use and engagement of historiography in a number of individual history essays. This demonstrated a high level of academic research being undertaken.

Some essays required students to answer a number of sub-questions, which made it difficult to effectively show evidence of achievement against the second knowledge and understanding specific feature or sustain a reasoned historical argument. Essays that used sub-headings also hindered students’ ability to perform in higher grade bands of the second inquiry and analysis, and communication specific features.

The word count was well observed overall.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

The 2015 examination provided opportunities for students at all ability levels to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Students were presented with a broad scope of questions that challenged students to apply what they had learned during the year.

Students found the sources analysis question (Question 45) on the theme of the Easter Rising of 1916 well-balanced between visual and text sources. The diversity of source types provided students with opportunities for deeper analysis and comparisons between sources.

Once again, students are advised to clearly write the numbers of the questions they have answered on the front cover of their script book. However, the markers did appreciate the vast majority of students clearly identifying the question they were answering at the top of their answer.

The pattern from previous years of students answering questions from a particular few topics continued this year. The revolutions topic (Topic 3) dominated once again and, of those responses, the majority addressed the Russian Revolution while many others based their responses on the French Revolution. There was a noticeable number of students who used both Iran and Cuba as their case studies but, in most cases, their responses tended to lack detail on either revolution even though their knowledge base appeared solid. There were some responses to Question 1 that seemed to be written by students who had studied Russia up to *c.* 1921 but struggled to find a question from Topic 3 that suited their knowledge. These students delivered disappointing answers because the focus of their studies was more on revolution than on modernisation.

In Part 2, most students addressed questions from Topic 8 (Dictators) and focused on Hitler as the key figure, which has also been the case in recent years. Many students attempted questions from Topic 9 (First World War). There was a noticeable increase in the number of students answering questions from Topic 10 (Cold War). The responses to questions in Topic 10 were far more original and diverse than responses to questions from Topics 8 and 9.

A feature of a significant number of responses was the lack of specific examples to support points made by students. Too many students provided detailed narratives of events when endeavouring to answer the question or support a point. This tended to result in generalised answers that could not be given high marks. Students need to ensure that they answer the question by responding to a proposition, determining the accuracy of that proposition, and clarifying the degree to which they agree with it or the extent to which it is correct by providing both an argument and a counter-argument.

In all parts, there were repeated examples of students lacking a clear understanding of key terms such as ‘the people’ (Question 10), ‘internal opponents’ (Question 12), ‘improvisation’ (Question 30), ‘intimidation’ (Question 34), and ‘rebels’ and ‘nationalists’ (Question 45). This influenced the quality of their answers, while students who provided successful answers were obviously clear about the meaning of key terms. They specified which parts of ‘the people’ (e.g. the army) or identified the ‘internal opponents’ (e.g. monarchists or the White Army) as part of their answer. Less successful answers were prone to generalisations.

A concerning feature of many answers from both parts was the lack of argument related to the focus of the question (e.g. Austria-Hungary’s ultimatum in Question 29 and intimidation in Question 34) or a lack of counter-argument (e.g. resisted change in Question 9 and leadership in Question 40). Students who achieved higher marks addressed the focus of the question in detail and then proposed at least one detailed counter-argument. Of most concern were students who largely or completely overlooked or ignored the focus of the question, in order to present a pre-determined argument.

Specific comments in relation to the assessment design criteria

Knowledge and Understanding

Students’ level of knowledge and understanding ranged from patchy to comprehensive. A greater number of students included quotes than in previous years. Students should ensure that they use quotes to consolidate or clarify the point they’re making, rather than using the quote as the point itself. Some quotes were not relevant to the point being made. Students who tended to rely primarily on their level of knowledge and use detailed narrative to answer the question were not able to achieve at the higher levels of the performance standards. These narratives created lengthy paragraphs. Students need to select relevant knowledge to support aspects of their argument.

As in previous years, when students attempted a structured argument, a significant number used prepared answers and seemed to hope that this would address the focus of the question. As a result, their answers were in the lower grade bands. For example, most students provided commonly accepted reasons for Hitler’s rise to the dictatorship (for example, charisma, oratory skills, propaganda) as the bulk of their answer to Question 34 or pre-1914 events (e.g. Moroccan Crisis, Balkan Crisis, imperialism, nationalism) without discussing the role, nature, and extent of intimidation when answering Question 29.

Inquiry and Analysis

Most students failed to gain high marks in this section because their response lacked a clear argument and/or counter-argument. Better answers contained clear and detailed arguments with relevant evidence that was succinctly explained. The best answers contained both a detailed and relevant argument as well as at least one counter-argument that clarified the student’s position regarding the question.

Better answers were also able to clearly articulate both sides of an issue (e.g. resistance to change) and recognised that the course of events was more complex and varied over time. These students also provided reasons why and in what ways pre-revolutionary governments responded to pressure for change. For example, a number of students gave Louis XVI credit for being willing to change the French taxation system but explained that he was prevented from doing so by the First and Second Estates of the old regime. Simpler answers used a ‘broad-brush’ argument that the pre-revolutionary government always resisted change, with little justification other than that the government wanted to maintain power.

Reflection and Evaluation

Students who recognised short-term and long-term causes and consequences achieved better results. They provided more comprehensive and balanced responses that acknowledged how and why changes varied over time. While many students were quite well-informed about individuals and events, their understanding of phenomena was less detailed. Many students could demonstrate their understanding of individuals, events, and phenomena. However, they often had difficulty relating them to the question and showing how they impacted separately, the inter-relationship between them, and their combined impact. Students consistently provided a conclusion in which they attempted to sum up their argument. Markers rewarded better essays that concluded with the focus of the question being placed in a broader context and showing its connections with future developments.

Communication

Most essays were well structured in that they contained an introduction, body, and conclusion. They were generally easy to understand and used formal language where necessary.

Unfortunately too many essays contained extended narratives. Many students used unnecessary padding (e.g. ‘In this essay’, ‘In this paragraph’, ‘In conclusion’) and a few even used first person (e.g. ‘In my opinion’). Better answers clearly set the parameters of their argument and counter-argument and displayed a clear understanding of key terms in their introduction. They also used topic sentences to begin their body paragraphs, followed by clear explanations using brief and relevant examples, and then summed up their argument within a future-oriented context in their conclusion. This created a consistent, comprehensive, and cohesive argument that was easy to follow.

Few markers noted inappropriate vocabulary, poor spelling, or lack of clarity of expression. The standard of handwriting varied greatly. While there were many examples of superb handwriting, there were also others that made it very difficult for markers to follow the argument. Once again, students would benefit from opportunities throughout the year to write sustained pieces by hand so that a suitable standard of handwriting can be maintained throughout the examination.

Specific comments about individual questions

Part 1: Thematic Study

**Topic 1: Pain and Gain: Modernisation and Society since *c*. 1700**

(Questions 1–4)

Question 1

Too many of these responses seemed to be written by students who had studied the Russian Revolution and unsuccessfully attempted to apply this knowledge to a question on modernisation in Russia. Successful responses clearly identified which groups of people faced a challenging life, as well as describing the extent and nature of the challenges.

Question 2

Students needed to establish the relationship between inventions and modernisation, identifying the way in which they impacted on each the other while also considering other impacts on modernisation.

Question 3

For this question, students needed to consider the nature and extent of the employment of women before determining whether or not it was the most significant outcome of modernisation by comparing it with other outcomes.

Question 4

There were no responses to this question.

**Topic 2: Intruders and Resisters: Imperialism and Its Impact since *c.* 1500**

(Questions 5–8)

Question 5

There were a few responses to this question. Students needed to be clear about the meaning of the word ‘honourable’ as well as understanding the intentions and motivations behind imperial expansion so that they could determine whether or not any of them were honourable.

Question 6

Students attempting this question needed a clear understanding of the conditions of traditional society at the time of imperial intrusion and how, if at all, any of those conditions made such an intrusion possible.

Question 7

For a successful answer to this question, students needed to clearly articulate the degree and nature of change in the traditional society for which the imperial power was responsible. They could also consider other reasons for a transformation or a lesser degree of change.

Question 8

Students needed to examine the range of responses that members of the traditional society — individually or collectively — had to different aspects of the culture of the imperial power, and look at the motivations for those responses. Students could then decide what, if any, cultural aspects were embraced by members of the traditional society.

**Topic 3: Revolutions and Turmoil: Social and Political Upheavals since *c.* 1500**

(Questions 9–12)

Question 9

This was an extremely popular question. Most students found and explained examples, especially in the case of Russia, of pre-revolutionary governments resisting change. However, most were unable to cite examples of failed or short-term attempts to introduce change. Most students centred their argument around the events of 1905 with little, if any, consideration of changes between 1905 and 1917. More successful answers included counter-arguments that discussed the introduction of the Duma (State assembly) by the Tsar, while acknowledging its lack of real power. They also discussed the agricultural reforms implemented by Witte and Stolypin and the impacts they had at the time. Students who focused on the French Revolution referred to Louis XVI’s support for tax reform that was strongly opposed by the First and Second Estates of the old regime. There were some interesting and effective answers based on the Iranian and Cuban Revolutions. These dealt with changes instituted by the pre-revolutionary government that were unpopular with a significant percentage of the population and contributed to the government’s downfall. In some cases, students may have been better served by considering one of those revolutions in depth.

Question 10

This was also quite a popular question. The answers by a majority of students were limited because they didn’t clearly identify who the ‘revolutionaries’ were and generalised regarding the term ‘the people’. Whether writing about the French or Russian revolutions, students grouped ‘the people’ together as homogenous and united only according to their socioeconomic status and standard of living. Students needed to differentiate between specific groups (e.g. the army, factory workers, political party members) and the extent to which they supported the revolutionaries at a particular place and given time to help them seize power and spread that power base across the country. Few students did this. Other groups of people (e.g. the peasants) may have been included in the revolution later, perhaps by force, by the revolutionaries. Many students who used the Russian Revolution as their case study focused extensively on the declining support for the Tsarist regime and the level of support for the Bolsheviks, while disregarding the February revolutionaries almost completely. Students needed to clearly state which revolution (February or October) they were discussing, rather than attempting to merge aspects of both. Students could address both revolutions but they needed to clearly differentiate factors that were common to both or unique to each.

Question 11

There were quite a few answers to this question and the standard of answers varied. Better answers clearly stated the revolutionaries’ promises prior to the revolution, which ones were kept, broken, or modified after the revolution and how, if at all, the keeping of those promises contributed to the consolidation of the revolutionaries’ power. Students basing their answers on the Russian Revolution handled this question better than those who had studied the French Revolution. Successful answers also considered whether promises were kept over the short and long term and the factors that contributed to the keeping, breaking, or modifying of those promises. Students may also have examined other factors, such as force used or support given by the armed forces, which helped the revolutionaries to consolidate their power.

Question 12

There seemed to be some misunderstanding about who the ‘internal opponents’ of the revolution were. These students considered the internal opponents to be the pre-revolutionary government or even the revolutionaries themselves, and argued their case. Students needed to clearly identify the external forces and how and why they supported the internal opponents of the revolution (e.g. monarchists). Students then needed to evaluate whether or not the internal opponents relied on external assistance.

**Topic 4: A Sense of Belonging: Groups and Nations since *c.* 1500**

(Questions 13–16)

Question 13

This question required students to clearly examine how and why nationalism developed and the role that widespread political resentment may have played.

Question 14

For this question, students needed to clearly state what the ‘glorious past’ was before they determined the extent to which it, along with other factors, shaped nationalism.

Question 15

There were few responses to this question. Those who did respond addressed inspirational leadership in India but did not evaluate the role of that leadership or explore other factors in India’s successful transition to independence.

Question 16

This question required students to identify the tensions that existed within society and the impact that nation-forming had on those tensions.

**Topic 5: The Captives, the Unwanted, and the Seekers: Forced and Free Migration since *c.* 1500**

(Questions 17–20)

Question 17

In order to successfully answer this question, students needed to demonstrate why migrants were reluctant to leave yet still left their country of origin.

Question 18

In answering this question, students needed to be clear about the impediments and opportunities that skilled migrants faced in their country of origin and how that influenced their decision to leave.

Question 19

For this question, students needed to be familiar with the nature of the responses that migrants faced upon their arrival in their new lands and why those responses happened, before determining the extent of any welcome they received.

Question 20

To successfully answer this question, students needed to evaluate the impacts that migration had on the receiving country and the factors affecting the type and extent of those impacts.

**Topic 6: Slaves, Serfs, and Emancipation: Forced Labour since *c.* 1500**

(Questions 21–24)

Question 21

Very few of the answers to this question focused solely on economic reasons for the establishment of forced labour.

Question 22

There were few answers to this question. Most discussed how slaves in the United States were able to develop a culture and how this was resisted or prevented by slave owners.

Question 23

There were very few answers to this question; most provided general descriptions of why forced labour became unpopular.

Question 24

There were very few answers to this question, which required students to be familiar with the consequences, both expected and unexpected, of emancipation.

Part 2: Depth Study

**Topic 7: Public and Private Lives: A Social and Political History of Women since *c.* 1750**

(Questions 25–28)

Question 25

There were no responses to this question.

Question 26

There were no responses to this question.

Question 27

There were no responses to this question.

Question 28

There were no responses to this question.

**Topic 8: The War to End All Wars: The First World War and Its Consequences, *c.* 1870–1929**

(Questions 29–32)

Question 29

This was a very popular answer; however, unfortunately — as has happened for many years — too many answers appeared formulaic by highlighting causes such as nationalism, imperialism, and militarism. Students needed to create an argument in response to the question provided, rather than trying to make a pre-prepared answer fit. These students too often delivered a narrative of those causes, rather than using them to develop a counter-argument. Most of those students did not achieve at the higher grade bands for inquiry and analysis, because they made reference to the ultimatum in their introduction and conclusion without developing an argument to support or reject the proposition. Students seemed to be unfamiliar with the conditions in the ultimatum, particularly the condition that Serbia rejected. Better responses addressed the immediate causes, such as the background hostility between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and the initial involvement by Russia and Germany that escalated this localised conflict from a new Balkans crisis to a world war. A few also connected the severity of the ultimatum and its rejection to other causes (e.g. Austro-Hungarian and Serbian nationalism, and Austro-Hungarian militarism backed by German financial and military support).

Question 30

To successfully answer this question, students needed to have a clear understanding of the term ‘improvisation’ as it applied to the First World War and articulate what they meant by the ‘nature of the First World War’. Many students referred to the use of new weapons as an example of improvisation, while better responses described modifications to those weapons or the way they were used (e.g. aircraft) as an example of improvisation. In most cases, there was no counter-argument that considered the reasons why improvisation, at the Front or at home, was so difficult throughout the war.

Question 31

There were few answers to this question and they were generally well done. Adequate answers simply described aspects of change in the 1920s. Their argument would have been more effective had they connected those changes, where possible, to the war and then presented counter-arguments that there were some aspects of the war that did not linger beyond the war. Better answers considered a range of social and political impacts (e.g. the fall of pre-war governments) and linked them to the rise of fascism.

Question 32

There were very few answers to this question. Many students did not clearly state what ‘the problems’ were before discussing the role of one or a number of treaties in solving them during the 1920s. The lack of comprehensive responses seems to indicate that most students still only study the Treaty of Versailles. Students needed to be clear about whether or not the treaties helped or hindered the postwar problems and to develop a counter-argument considering other factors that contributed to the solution or a continuation of those problems.

**Topic 9: An Age of Catastrophes: Depression, Dictators, and the Second World War, *c.* 1929–45**

(Questions 33–36)

Question 33

There were few answers to this question. Most were centred on the United States and were very generalised and vague. Some students extended the time frame of the question beyond 1929 by describing political responses to the onset of the Great Depression. Better answers included discussion of economic causes such as speculation, individual decisions, government laissez-faire policies, and international economies.

Question 34

This was an extremely popular question, with most students using Hitler as their case study; however, unfortunately only a few answers were at the higher grade bands. Too many responses seemed pre-prepared by including other factors responsible for the dictator’s rise to power, such as his oratorical skills, charisma, the use of propaganda, and the weakness of the Weimar government, without adequately creating an argument around the role of intimidation. Most students had a vague and, in some cases, inaccurate idea of what intimidation was and so struggled to explain how it was used, which groups (e.g. S.A., S.S.) used it, and who the targets were. Some responses mentioned intimidation in the introduction and conclusion but failed to discuss it in the body of the answer. Some students wrote in detail about Hitler or Stalin’s use of intimidation after they seized power. Others distinguished between the role that other factors played in Hitler’s rise to the chancellorship and as a dictator.

Question 35

There were only a few answers to this question, all of them based on Hitler’s regime, and most gained only average marks. It seemed as if students had only studied Hitler’s regime up to 1939 even though the scope of the topic extends to 1945. As a result, students mainly argued that there was little change to the regime except for the acceleration of the Holocaust as German conquests expanded.

Question 36

Most answers were narratives describing how technologies determined the outcome of the war, rather than evaluating the impact of specific technologies on the nature of the war. There seemed to be a lack of knowledge of influential technologies — such as radar, long-distance bombers, and rockets — developed prior to and during the war and influencing the way that the war was fought.

**Topic 10: Postwar Rivalries and Mentalities: Superpowers and Social Change since *c.* 1945**

(Questions 37–40)

Question 37

This was the most popular question in this topic but the main deficiency was students’ lack of knowledge of rivalries between the superpowers during and before the Second World War (e.g. German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, war-time conferences, delay in opening a second front), which limited students’ abilities to construct an argument. One feature that students needed to clarify is when they believe the Cold War started, because that will determine which events and factors (e.g. Truman Doctrine, Berlin Blockade) fit within this context. Most students were familiar with other causes (e.g. mutual mistrust between superpower leadership, Stalin’s broken promises, Stalin’s desire to create a buffer zone in Eastern Europe) which enabled them to mount counter-arguments.

Question 38

There were quite a few responses to this question; however, again most students had a vague understanding of ‘propaganda’ and the ‘nature’ of the Cold War which limited their ability to successfully examine how and to what extent propaganda was an influence. Instead, students reverted to generalised responses that often seemed pre-prepared. Better answers considered the simplification of the Cold War by governments and media (e.g. film, television) and the impact of propaganda on public attitudes within both superpower nations. Few students included other features of the Cold War such as proxy wars, espionage, and the arms race.

Question 39

There were few answers to this question. Some took a global perspective while others focused on one particular nation.

Question 40

Most students demonstrated a clear understanding of Gorbachev’s role in the collapse of Soviet-style communism but less so regarding other leaders (e.g. Reagan, Walesa, Honecker, Ceausescu). A few better answers included strong leadership in Eastern European countries that aroused greater public opposition. Most answers tended to describe general factors that caused the collapse of Soviet-style communism. Students needed to clarify what they meant by ‘strong leadership’ — perhaps including civilian leadership and the Catholic Church — and show how it ‘accelerated’ rather than caused the collapse of Soviet-style communism.

**Topic 11: Persecution and Hope: Power and Powerlessness in Society since *c.*1500**

(Questions 41–44)

Question 41

There were few responses to this question. Those who did answer demonstrated a strong knowledge of various acts that allowed for persecution in South Africa. Better responses considered other factors that helped maintain political power.

Question 42

There were few responses to this question.

Question 43

There were few responses to this question.

Question 44

There were few answers to this question but many were well answered. Students were able to describe the ways in which apartheid was reversed in South Africa. Better answers considered promises that were not met but argued that they were not met in order to achieve a peaceful transition.

Part 3: Sources Analysis

Question 45

Students are encouraged to read the introductory section as well as all aspects of each source. Many students seemed confused about the terms ‘rebels’ and ‘nationalists’, although these were clearly explained in the introductory section. This also set the Easter Rising in the broader context, especially by describing the eventual outcome in 1923.

1. This question was very well answered.
2. On the whole, this was better answered than in previous years. Almost all students were able to distinguish between a conclusion and a fact and they successfully used examples from the source to support their conclusion (e.g. the rebels were well-organised because they had prepared a proclamation, uniforms and weapons, the rebels were peaceful even though they carried weapons because there was no interruption to daily life).
3. Most students answered this question well although most referred to bias and inaccuracy as the limitations. Many students used examples from the source (e.g. ‘crazy rebellion’, ‘no exact information has been received’) rather than explaining each limitation for newspapers generally.
4. The quality of answers to this question varied considerably. Most students received less than full marks either because they didn’t state the extent to which Source 5 supported Source 6 or give enough examples of how the sources supported or were different from each other. Too many students were non-committal by stating that one source supported the other ‘to some extent’, ‘to an extent’, or ‘to a certain extent’. Answers tended to be disorganised which often made it difficult for markers to identify points. A common mistake made by students was their misinterpretation of the phrase ‘most disgusting of all to Irish minds, Connolly ...’. Those students saw this as Irish opposition to the rebel Connolly when in fact it meant that many Irish people were disgusted at the way he was treated and executed by the British authorities. As a result, many students mistakenly deduced from Source 5 that the Irish people opposed the rebels. This distorted their comparison of public attitudes towards the rebels and the British in both sources. Many students missed that there were differing points made in Source 6 about public attitudes to the rebels (‘most people were appalled by the death and destruction unleashed by the rebels’ and ‘the defeated rebels were jeered and attacked by some onlookers’). Yet later the historian notes some support for the rebels and growing opposition to their treatment by the British (‘Britain’s response … provoked indignation and sympathy for the rebels’ and ‘the sacrifice of the rebels converted previously unsympathetic nationalists to the republican cause’).

More successful students clearly evaluated the extent to which the sources supported each other at the start or finish of their answer and clearly justified their position in two separate paragraphs. In one paragraph, they described the ways that Source 5 supported Source 6 with quotes, while in the other paragraph they described the ways that the sources differed, again with quotes.

1. Most students demonstrated a clear understanding of the value and limitations of photographs but less so for a secondary source like Source 6. Many students displayed a simple distinction that primary sources are good and secondary sources are not, without closely analysing and acknowledging the value and limitations of each type of source. Many students accused Source 6 of being biased simply because it was published on a British website ([www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)) without appreciating that there are possible benefits from such a source. All students would benefit from spending time understanding how historians work so that they can better appreciate the value and limitations of their productions. Better answers acknowledged that a historian can provide a clearer, detailed, and balanced view by synthesising research of a range of primary sources over a period of time.
2. Most students showed an understanding of all the sources but the main problems were students describing each source, omitting one or more sources, and not using the sources to answer the question. Most students drew a conclusion based on how many sources supported or opposed the proposition. They tended to view each source as simply supporting one side or the other without considering that aspects of a given source (e.g. Source 6 and Source 7) contained information supporting both sides of the argument. More succesful students clearly evaluated the extent to which the sources supported or opposed the proposition at the start or finish of their answer and then justified their position in two separate paragraphs. Their justifications grouped sources together according to whether they supported or opposed the proposition and included brief but relevant quotes or specific descriptions of features of the visual sources. They also considered different time frames included in some sources (i.e. the Easter Rising was a short-term defeat that ultimately resulted in victory). A few noted that the key outcome of the Rising was that ‘after Easter week 1916 permanent English rule in Ireland became an impossibility’. Few noted from Source 3 that the Rising was a defeat because ‘no disturbances of any kind have occurred in these localities’ (i.e. outside Dublin).

## Operational Advice

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teacher grades/marks should be evident on all student school assessment work.

Assessment Type 1: Folio

It was pleasing to see that most teachers ensured that they included the learning and assessment plan (LAP) in their moderation packages. Teachers are reminded that any amendments made to tasks should be recorded on the learning and assessment plan and be consistent with evidence presented. Most teachers included in their packages a complete set of the tasks given, which was appreciated by moderators. Teachers are reminded that they should include copies of sources analysis tasks and their accompanying questions. Moderators noted that most teachers are now completing a variations form when applicable. This made it easier for moderators to confirm grades.

This year continued the trend with more teachers setting oral presentations or multimedia assignments as part of the folio. More teachers are submitting audio or visual recordings to provide evidence of student achievement, which is the preferred type of evidence rather than simply submitting scripts.

More teachers have acted on feedback from last year’s Chief Assessor’s report and are providing work on USB drives which is a more accessible way for work to be viewed. Teachers should ensure that they test USBs on several devices so that they can be easily accessed at moderation.

Teachers are reminded that it is desirable for work to be sorted by individual student, where each task is clearly labelled with the student’s name and SACE number, because this assists in identification. More teachers are also now using cardboard or single plastic folders to package each student’s folio work, which again helps during the moderation process. There has been a significant increase in the number of teachers providing a cover sheet that includes an overall breakdown of student’s grades for each task set and performance standards. Additionally, when teachers include their feedback on individual tasks, this assists moderators in locating evidence to support teachers’ judgments.

Assessment Type 2: Individual Essay

Both the folio and the individual essay for each selected student need to be submitted for moderation. The most desirable way to present the essay is to prepare a separate package that contains the essays of all selected students. Each essay should be clearly labelled with the student’s name and SACE number. Essays that provide a cover sheet with the essay question, student’s name, SACE number, and word count are also desirable.

## General Comments

It was pleasing to see that more teachers and students made the effort to access the 2014 Chief Assessor’s report and, where appropriate, take measures to amend and improve practices based on explicit feedback provided. This was specifically evident in the folio. There was some excellent evidence of high quality teaching taking place to provide students with a clear understanding of conventions and concepts related to the course. Task design and student evidence suggested that teachers were focused on teaching the historiography of topics and ensuring that there was explicit focus on the greater historical context of topics.

As was the case in 2014, the learning and assessment plans showed that course design was good. More teachers are choosing to set six or seven folio tasks and are therefore using formative type tasks as a way of providing opportunities to practise important skill sets such as sources analysis and essay writing, in preparation for the exam. Limiting the number of folio tasks completed under test conditions seems to provide students with the best opportunity to maximise their overall grade for the folio.

Teachers should recognise that task design and the types of task being set are critical in providing students with opportunities to attain the highest levels of achievement against each performance standard. There was a number of examples of folios where teachers clearly provided opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and understanding beyond the content being taught in class. Comparison tasks that are too heavily scaffolded can lead to a generic set of student evidence being presented.

Teachers are reminded to read all advice carefully regarding the packaging of materials and the number of essay questions and from which sections these can be chosen in relation to the thematic and depth topics studied.

Teachers are encouraged to take full advantage of the SACE clarifying workshop and to access the materials provided on the website.

Modern History

Chief Assessor