

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION IN HISTORY 2025

REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS

I. Statistical Overview

(Commentary on Statistical Overview, and Other General Matters)

The report concerns the Main School, although statistics for individual paper categories and candidate numbers for each paper include figures for the Joint Schools.

The share of Distinctions in 2025 was largely similar to 2024, with a slight upward tick (28% compared to 27%). This is well below the pandemic average of more than 30% (in 2021 and 2022) and the post-pandemic peak of Distinctions at more than 34% (2023). Reports on individual papers provide further insights into the classification and its different aspects.

As shown in Table 1, by comparison to 2024, the gap between male and female Distinctions *as a proportion of the total number of candidates of each gender* has somewhat shrunk. In 2025, Distinction was awarded to 26% of female candidates (24% in 2024) and 30% of male candidates (31% in 2024). Despite significant fluctuation in 2022 and 2023, the data seem to suggest a long-term coalescing of female and male Distinction rates (as a proportion of candidate numbers of each gender) between 25% and 30%.

Table 2, concerning individual papers (and categories of paper) includes Joint Schools candidates, whereas Table 1 is restricted to the Main School. The general trends remain largely the same, despite a drop in the number of candidates taking our most popular Optional Subject, Theories of the State, from 45 in 2024 to 39 in 2025. Joint School students constitute, as last year, a small majority among the candidates who take this OS. The other popular Optional Subjects are Conquest and Colonisation, Haiti and Louisiana, The Mongols, Witch-craft and Witch-Hunting, and When Neighbours Became Strangers (all with more than 20 candidates).

A positive change is the substantial increase in the number of candidates taking the Tocqueville Foreign Texts paper (21 in 2025 compared to 11 in 2024). While Tocqueville has traditionally been the most popular Foreign Texts option, in recent years the number of students has been closer to 10 (in all other Foreign Texts papers, candidate numbers are so small that a change of 1-2 students could amount to a significant statistical fluctuation). We are uncertain about the reasons for the sudden peak in the number of Tocqueville candidates (who came mostly from the Main School). The Association for Language Learning has noted a [6.8% rise in French A-level entries](#) in summer 2024, which may have been over-represented in Oxford's intake of freshers for 2024-25. Our hopes for a continuation of this trend might be dashed by a reported [9.8% decrease in French A-level entries](#) in summer 2025.

The percentage of female candidates in each mark band in Table 2, dealing with individual categories of paper (including Joint Schools), represents **women as a proportion of the relevant mark band**. While on the whole, women achieved around 51% of Distinctions, there is a marked fluctuation in their performance in different paper categories. Women account for 53.6% of the 70+ marks in BIP papers and 54.8% in Optional Subjects, yet they constitute 47.1% of the students achieving marks of 70+ in EWP papers. The differences are greater in Paper IV: women achieved 70.45% of the 70+ marks in Approaches to History but only 36.84% in Historiography and 40% in Foreign Texts and Quantification. (We are not sure why Foreign Texts and Quantification are counted together; it would have been useful to receive separate data for each.) Altogether, women accounted for 56.4%

of the distinction marks in Paper IV. Since first-class marks for female candidates on Foreign Texts and Quantification were fewer than in EWP papers, typing does not seem to have played a significant role in the performance of either gender across the board. We would, however, recommend a thorough re-assessment of the impact of typing in a year or two, once the Faculty has comparable data sets from three-four years of typed EWP exams.

The final group of tables (Table 3) compares gender statistics among different paper categories since 2021. The most notable point is that in 2025 the differences between the average marks of male and female candidates were minimal, between 0.1% and 0.4% (0.3% overall). This is the lowest rate of difference between the achievements of male and female candidates in the last five years, especially in comparison to 2022 and 2024, when it stood at 1% or higher.

Table 1: Distinctions and Passes by gender, 2021-2025

Year	All HIST candds	No + % of Ds, all	No + % of Ps, all	F	No + % of Ds, F	No + % of Ps, F	M	No + % of Ds, M	No + % of Ps, M
2025	216	61 28%	154 71%	117	31 26%	85 73%	99	30 30%	69 70%
2024	204	55 27%	149 73%	117	28 24%	89 76.1%	87	27 31%	60 69%
2023	216	74 34.3%	142 incl 4 LVs 65.7%	129	48 37.2%	81 (inc 2 LV) 62.8%	87	26 29.9%	61 (inc 2 LV) 70.1%
2022	228	70 30.7%	158 69.3%	114	23 20.2%	91 79.8%	114	47 41.2%	67 58.8%
2021	252	71 30.5%	181 71.82%	146	37 25.34%	109 74.65%	106	34 32.07%	72 67.92%

Table 2: Number of candidates for each paper in 2025

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
BIP 1 (History of the British Isles - c.300-1100)	38	10	48
BIP 2 (History of the British Isles – 1000-1330)	29	5	34
BIP 3 (History of the British Isles - 1330-1550)	36	4	40

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
BIP 4 (History of the British Isles – 1500-1700)	37	11	48
BIP 5 (History of the British Isles V– 1688-1848)	29	5	34
BIP 6 (History of the British Isles – 1830-1951)	47	16	63
EWP 1: The Transformation of the Ancient World, 370-900	51	13	64
EWP 2: Communities, Connections and Confrontations, 1000-1300	58	15	73
EWP 3: Renaissance, Recovery & Reform, 1400-1650	50	24	74
EWP 4: Society, Nation & Empire, 1815-1914	57	20	77
OS 1 – Theories of the State (Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx)	17	22	39
OS 2 – Alfred and the Vikings	9	3	12
OS 3 – Early Gothic France c.1100-c.1150	5	2	7
OS 4. The Mongols	19	5	24
OS 5 - Sexuality, Climate and Politics: the world of Edward II, 1307-27	4	0	4
OS 6 – Crime and Punishment in England c.1280-c.1450	4	1	5
OS 7 – Nature and Art in the Renaissance	6	1	7
OS 8– Witch-craft & Witch-hunting in early modern Europe	20	1	21
OS 10 – Conquest & Colonization: Spain & America in the 16 th Century	20	2	22
OS 12 - Women, Gender and the Nation: Britain, 1789-1825	7	2	9
OS 13 – Brigands in a Landscape: Banditry, Rural Crime & Rebellion in the Mediterranean & Black Sea regions c.1750-1950	7	3	10
OS 14 – When Neighbours Became Strangers: Violence, Community & Identity in Late Ottoman Syria, c.1840-1900	13	8	21
OS 15 – Haiti and Louisiana: The problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery	20	7	27

Paper	Main School	Joint Schools	Total
OS 16 – Imperial Republic: The US and Global Imperialism, 1867-1914	10	2	12
OS 17- The New Women in Britain & Ireland, c.1880-1920	8	1	9
OS 18 - The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1881-1921	11	2	13
OS 19 - 1919: Remaking the World	13	3	16
OS 20 – Living with the Enemy: The Experience of the Second World War in Europe	8	3	11
OS 21 - Global USSR: Empires, Borders and Identities	11	1	12
OS 23 – The World of Homer and Hesiod (AMH)	1	4	5
OS 24 – Augustan Rome	2	6	8
OS [25] – Industrialization in Britain & France 1750-1870 (HECO only)	1	7	8
Approaches to History	122	50	172
Historiography: Tacitus to Weber	122	50	172
Herodotus	1	0	1
Sallust (no takers in 2024-25)			
Einhard and Asser	1	0	1
Tocqueville	16	5	21
Meinecke and Kehr	3	2	5
Machiavelli	1	0	1
Vicens Vives	6	3	9
Trotsky (no takers in 2024-25)			
Quantification	9	2	11

History of the British Isles (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	56	21.1%	26	22.4%	30	20.1%	53.6%
40-69	209	78.9%	90	77.6%	119	79.9%	56.9%
0-39	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	-
Total	265	100%	116	100%	149	100%	-

*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

European & World History (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	70	24.5%	37	28.5%	33	21.2%	47.1%
40-69	216	75.5%	93	71.5%	123	78.8%	56.9%
0-39	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	-
Total	286	100%	130	100%	156	100%	-

*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

Optional Subjects (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	84	28.8%	38	29.9%	46	27.9%	54.8%
40-69	208	71.2%	89	70.1%	119	72.1%	57.2%
0-39	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	-
Total	292	100%	127	100%	165	100%	-

Paper IV (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	78	25.8%	34	24.6%	44	26.8%	56.4%
40-69	224	74.2%	104	75.4%	120	73.2%	53.6%
0-39	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	-
Total	302	100%	138	100%	164	100%	-

Approaches to History (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	44	25.73%	13	18.57%	31	30.69%	70.45%
40-69	127	74.27%	57	81.43%	70	69.31%	55.12%
0-39	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	

Total	171	100%	70	100%	101	100%	
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*Some candidates have their marks disregarded

Historiography (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	19	23.17%	12	26.67%	7	18.92%	36.84%
40-69	63	76.83%	33	73.33%	30	81.08%	47.62%
0-39	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	
Total	82	100%	45	100%	37	100%	

Quantification and Foreign Texts (Sex/paper by paper) Main and Joint Schools

Class	Nos (both sexes)	%	Men		Women		Women as % of total in each class
			Nos	%	Nos	%	
70+	15	30.6%	9	39.1%	6	23.1%	40.0%
40-69	34	69.4%	14	60.9%	20	76.9%	58.8%
0-39	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	-
Total	49	100%	23	100%	26	100%	-

TABLE 3: Gender stats by paper

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2025

99M 117F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avg	M Avg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	66.1	66.4	0.3					11 (9%)	14 (14%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
BH	65.4	65.8	0.4	30	28	45	33	19 (16%)	23 (23%)	9 (8%)	9 (9%)
EWB	66.3	66.6	0.3	37	36	29	24	26 (22%)	25 (25%)	6 (5%)	6 (6%)
OS	66.8	66.9	0.1	39	31	20	21	33 (28%)	30 (30%)	4 (3%)	5 (5%)

IV	65.7	66.1	0.4	36	28	41	33	33 (28%)	22 (22%)	13 (11%)	9 (9%)
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Distinctions

Women	31	26.5%
Men	30	30.3%

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2024

87M 117F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avg	M Avg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.3	66.3	1					10 (8.8)	11 (12.6)	6 (5.1)	1 (1.2)
BH	64.5	65.7	1.2	29	21	42	31	21 (18.4)	19 (21.8)	21 (18)	6 (6.9)
EWB	64.9	67.2	2.3	42	34	33	16	17 (14)	26 (30)	15 (12.8)	2 (2.3)
OS	66.4	66.5	0.1	40	26	22	22	28 (24.6)	27 (31)	4 (3.4)	6 (6.9)
IV	65	65.7	0.7	31	18	36	28	24 (21.1)	19 (21.8)	16 (13.7)	7 (8.1)

Distinctions

Women	28	24.6%
Men	27	31.0%

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2023

87M 129F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avg	M Avg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.6	66	0.4								
BH	65.5	66	0.5	34	20	33	22	30 (23.3)	17 (19.5)	12 (9.3)	4 (4.6)
EWB	65.9	65.9	0	34	26	27	24	32 (24.8)	23 (26.4)	14 (10.9)	7 (8.1)
OS	66.1	66.5	0.4	34	28	27	18	37 (28.7)	24 (27.6)	11 (8.5)	4 (4.6)
IV	64.8	65.6	0.8	27	13	41	23	30 (23.3)	17 (19.5)	19 (14.7)	5 (5.8)

Distinctions

Women	48	37.2%
Men	26	29.9%

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2022

114M 114F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avg	M Avg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60
ALL	65.09	66.66	1.57					7 (6.3)	17 (14.9)	6 (5.4)

BH	65.33	67	1.67	33	28	27	24	21 (18.8)	35 (30.7)	8 (7.1)
EWH	64.2	65.6	1.4	19	14	44	33	14 (12.5)	29 (25.4)	16 (14.3)
OS	66.1	67.06	0.96	44	40	14	29	28 (25)	37 (32.5)	8 (7.1)
IV	64.68	66.7	2.02	25	31	32	27	21 (18.8)	37 (32.5)	14 (12.5)

Distinctions

Women 23 20.54%

Men 47 41.23%

GENDER STATS BY PAPER Prelims 2021

108M 150F

Main School Only

Paper	F Avg	M Avg	DIFF	F High	M High	F Low	M Low	F 70 +	M 70 +	F < 60	M < 60
ALL	65.56	66.23	0.67					11 (7.3)	17 (15.7)	5 (3.3)	3 (2.8)
BH	64.91	65.36	0.45	44	19	54	48	33 (22)	21 (19.4)	19 (12.7)	10 (9.3)
EWH	65.59	66.57	0.98	42	32	39	26	31 (20.7)	32 (29.6)	19 (12.7)	8 (7.4)
OS	66.07	66.5	0.43	43	34	35	19	34 (22.7)	35 (32.4)	10 (6.7)	7 (6.5)
IV	65.63	66.44	0.81	46	34	41	31	31 (20.7)	34 (31.5)	10 (6.7)	12 (11.1)

Distinctions

Women 37 24.7%

Men 34 31.5%

II. Marking & Classification

A. General Comments on the Examination

Administration

As in most years, the administration of the Preliminary Examination was complex, involving numerous colleagues working under tight deadlines. The timings were particularly tight in 2025 because of a delay in the appointment of the Exam Board, with the Chair and Secretary of the Exam Board not confirmed until the end of Michaelmas Term. Given the situation, the Chair and Secretary judged it prudent to wait until after the Undergraduate Admissions interviews before sending invitation letters to examiners. Due to the usual challenges of securing willing markers for specialist papers and for papers with large numbers of candidates (namely Approaches to History), the complete list of examiners could not be finalised until the start of Hilary term. Exam Boards might consider recruiting more JRFs in future (with appropriate training and support for first-time markers).

The task of determining which members of the Faculty had the capacity to take on additional marking was further complicated by the fact that the current marking-burden totals were stored in a database that neither the Chair nor the Secretary could access due to software incompatibility. We were grateful to the Chair of Examiners for FHS for supplying us with information from this database upon request, though needless to say, such a situation would be better avoided altogether in future. In the event, all exam setters and revisers worked expeditiously, and all exam scripts were finalised no later than usual.

The Prelims Exam Board were grateful to all History Faculty Office staff for their support and assistance throughout the process, including Vicky Anderton, Callum Kelly, Isabelle Moriceau and Rowan Ritchie. Last year's report noted several difficulties regarding the University's Exam Facilities Team, including the timely distribution of exam scripts. Various procedural changes helped to avoid those issues this year.

A small number of candidates sat examinations in the Long Vacation. These exams were set, revised, marked, and scrutinised over the summer. The Exam Board confirmed final classifications over email.

82 scripts were re-read according to the established procedures for scrutiny during classification. In every case, the new mark was substituted for the original one.

The Prelims Exam Board also scrutinised mark profiles for individual papers and individual markers. Particular attention was paid to papers marked by several different markers, where the distribution of marks can range considerably. No scaling or adjustment of marks was deemed necessary.

A question was raised concerning the length of scripts, especially by candidates with SpLD. Members of the Prelims Board felt that SpLD candidates should be advised to write more focused and concise answers.

In addition, the Board recommends a re-thinking or better communication of the scrutiny rules for joint schools candidates. Currently, other faculties do not appear to be following the shared scrutiny rules as closely as History does. (English Faculty colleagues on the HENG Board refused to re-read English scripts for borderline candidates, while Economics colleagues on the HECO Board re-read scripts for *non*-borderline candidates and asked History to do the same: we declined.) We would suggest a discussion of shared scrutiny rules in the Joint School committees.

Finally, the Prelims Exam Board was concerned about the lack of a single overall Distinction for female candidates on the HECO degree. This might have complex reasons that should probably be discussed by the degree committee.

Medical Certificates and Mitigating Circumstances

22 MCEs were submitted by candidates for the Main School, 18 of them female and 4 male. These were considered by a small subcommittee, which classified them in terms of the prescribed grading system. The Prelims Exam Board was presented with these classifications, which it accepted. In addition, three group MCEs were submitted (for BIP 3, 5 and 6), all for a delayed exam start of 2-3 minutes. As affected candidates were compensated by the same amount of time at the end of their exams, no action was taken on this front.

III. Comments on Individual Papers

History of the British Isles (BIP)

History of the British Isles I

Forty-seven candidates offered this paper, of whom 5 were reading History & English and 4 History & Politics; the rest were in the Main School.

Nine scripts secured First Class marks, 10 Lower Second marks, and 2 Third Class marks.

All questions on the paper attracted at least one attempt, other than that on St Columba – a surprising omission, given the ready availability of Richard Sharpe's heavily annotated and illuminating translation of Adomnán's *Life*. The most popular questions were on Roman Britain (1), the archaeology of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (3), comparing the West-Saxon and Mercian hegemonies (7), the making of kings (10), the cultural unity and political division of Ireland (13 – no-one took the opportunity to discuss Wales), and the transformation of the English kingdom between 1066 and 1100 (20 – few were brave enough to essay the more specific alternative on Domesday Book).

As the spread of marks suggests, there were plenty of competent, and some impressive, scripts on what must for most candidates be very unfamiliar ground. The large number of answers in the earliest bits of the paper revealed that candidates were much more confident in handling archaeological than written evidence. This is presumably because they can reproduce the views of scholars, rather than having to wrestle with the material themselves. Interestingly, only one person who answered the question on Roman Britain which was based on the speech Tacitus attributes to Calgacus revealed any sense of Tacitus's meaning, despite the fact that at least some are likely to have read the *Agricola* for the historiography paper. Calgacus' alleged words were otherwise always taken literally: thus, in a strong script, 'since there was no unified British identity, the extent to which Britain became a wasteland varied significantly from region to region'. Other candidates simply objected that Britain was not a wasteland, but economically developed by the Romans, thereby entirely missing Tacitus' point. This didn't mean that the answers were poor. Many were good. But, with that one exception, even the most able candidates missed a trick.

The impression of deference to the views of scholars was confirmed by the relative lack of assurance in dealing with law codes, charters, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the *Encomium Emmae*, Domesday Book, etc, etc. It seemed that few candidates who attempted questions relating to these sources had read them in any detail; they were instead parroting what historians had written about them. Undergraduates must learn to question and often subvert, not simply reproduce, the views of historians. In order to do so, they must themselves draw on evidence, mainly written evidence. Most of the most important evidence for this period is readily accessible in translation.

Most candidates who answered the question on how kings were made just talked in general terms about royal power; many simply re-purposed essays on particular kings, the most common one being Alfred. Few touched on how kings were made, that is to say, succession, election, and consecration. The question on self-government at the king's command (15) was almost always

answered in terms of royal government, ignoring the prefix, which was the main point of the question. There were some moments of light relief. Monastic Reform in the late tenth century 'involved wearing scratchy or uncomfortable clothing'; the 'exiles' (SIC) of Emma and Edith were 'caused by the male prerogative' (SIC); Alfred was the son of Edward the Elder.

The adverb 'incredibly' is becoming distressingly common. It should be excised from the vocabulary of every candidate. Modish phrases such as 'lived experience' raise questions in the examiner's mind: what other sort of experience is there? Don't just reproduce verbiage, eg. 'kingship as a societal paradigm'. That an historian you have read may have used it does not render it any the less vacuous. Do not, GCSE-style, tell the examiner that sources are biased. All sources are by definition biased. Do not use names which you have only heard in lectures. References to 'Bishop Wolfson' and 'Bishop Warin of Malmesbury' are likely to make the examiner suspicious. Examiners are paid to be suspicious.

History of the British Isles II

34 candidates sat this paper, 5 of whom were given overall first-class marks (although 3 more had one first-class essay within their script) and only one was graded at a 2:2. The standard of answers was generally high and covered a significant proportion of the questions on offer (only 4 out of a total of 22 – on the natural environment, the peasant economy, marcher lordships, and towns – remained without a single respondent). As ever, the strongest and most convincing answers succeeded in integrating thoughtful and perceptive generalisation with a sensitive handling of carefully-selected primary evidence. The weaker answers limited themselves to broad generalisations. The weakest answers refused to engage with the specific terms of reference set by the examiner's phrasing of the question and simply recycled a pre-prepared answer to a different question on the same general topic.

History of the British Isles III

39 students took this paper. Overall, the standard was very good. The average mark was 65. There were 9 first class marks, and only one mark below 60.

A range of questions were answered. Questions on Scotland and Ireland were notably popular, a large number of students answered questions 8 ('Was the success of rulership dependent on military prowess?' – 23 students), 13 ('How constraining were ideas about gender AND/OR sexuality in this period?' – 13 students), 9 ('What did Lollardy offer that mainstream Catholicism did not?' – 11 students), 11 ('Did popular revolts achieve anything?' – 13 students). Very pleasingly, all other answers were spread across the whole range of questions (except questions 7 on common law, and 20 on political thought).

The best answers engaged carefully with the terms of the questions, showed an evaluative awareness of the historiography, and substantiated their arguments with careful reference to primary sources. Interestingly, there was a good sense of the importance of a whole range of sources – from legal, to chronicle evidence etc, to material culture also. Weaker essays failed to engage in this kind of evaluative work, presenting instead descriptions of the evidence. Some of the questions invited careful integration of methodological challenges into the argument too eg. The question on Lollards; weaker answers here simply assumed that sources work at face value. The best answers also showed an awareness that this is a long period of change, whereas weaker answers presented a rather static picture – this was particularly evident in answers about Scotland and Ireland. Many candidates engaged in comparative work – eg. comparisons of different revolts, or

comparisons of monarchs: here the weaker answers simply juxtaposed different case studies, whereas stronger answers used the comparison itself to shed light on the question.

History of the British Isles IV

48 students took this paper, though one of them did not sit the exam. The level of the cohort was quite mixed. Factoring in changes due to re-reads, there were nine 2.2 marks, with the lowest at 53; four first-class marks, with the highest at 71; and 34 2.1 marks, of which nine just below a first-class mark (seven candidates attained 68 and two attained 69). The average mark was 63.62, while the most frequently assigned marks (seven candidates respectively) were 65 and 68. Three scripts were short-weighted.

The students showed a clear preference for certain questions. The most popular by far was Q. 16 ('How significant was Laudianism in precipitating the British Civil Wars?'), chosen by 22 candidates; Q. 1 ('To what extent did the experience of early modern women vary depending on social status?') and Q. 2 ('How transformative was the impact of the Reformation on everyday religious practices?') were chosen by 17 candidates each, followed closely by Q. 4 ('What was the primary driving force behind early modern rebellions?'), which was chosen by 15. There was a notable tendency to choose questions with significant thematic overlap, with seven out of the 10 students who answered Q. 8 ('How successfully did Elizabethan and early Stuart governments deal with Puritanism?') also answering Q. 16; in some cases, this resulted in repetition across different essays within the same script.

No student answered Q. 11 ('How effective was royal propaganda?') or Q. 18 ('To what extent were universities resistant to new scientific developments?'). Q. 14 ('How powerful was xenophobia as a factor in political life?') was attempted by only one student; the same goes for questions specifically focussing on regions other than England (Q. 9, 'Why was the implementation of religious reform so much more successful in Wales than in Ireland?', and Q. 12, 'What was the main reason for the limited success of chief governors of Ireland?'), although, encouragingly, the students did generally seek to discuss different areas of the British Isles when answering more general questions. Q. 7 ('How much of an impact did court factionalism have on the effectiveness of rule? Answer with reference to AT LEAST TWO regimes.') and Q. 17 ('Before 1640, Parliament was not powerful, and it did not contain an 'opposition' (CONRAD RUSSELL). Do you agree?') also proved unpopular, with only three and two takers respectively.

One question in particular, Q. 13 ('Why were ideas about EITHER resistance to tyranny OR absolute kingship so controversial?'), caused a degree of confusion: while four candidates answered on absolute kingship and two on resistance to tyranny, one candidate combined the two parts of the question and answered on 'resistance to absolute kingship'; more generally, candidates largely tended to focus more on political practice than on 'ideas', with only few showing good knowledge of the main currents of political theory of the time. The quality of the answers provided, nonetheless, was otherwise mostly good in terms of sophistication of argument and use of historical examples. Two of the eight answers to Q. 6 ('Why did Catholicism remain such an urgent political threat?') likewise failed to fully engage with the question, focussing on analysing or demonstrating the enduring relevance of Catholicism, rather than on its specifically political consequences; and an otherwise very good answer to Q. 10, 'How far did James I's experience as king of Scotland shape his rule in England?', focussed on James's Scottish identity, rather than on his past experience as a ruler.

The strongest answers handled historical evidence with care and detail, addressed a range of different points, were perceptive in their assessment of historical issues (e.g. stressing the material and visual aspects of pre-modern religiosity), and showed good knowledge of the main historiographical contributions and debates around each topic; where relevant, they also often reflected convincingly on the key categories behind the set questions (e.g. 'social status' for Q. 1). Weaker answers, on the other hand, presented a limited amount of historical evidence, or handled the evidence presented superficially, and in some cases cited few or no secondary sources. There were also a number of very competent essays which, however, made little or no attempt to engage with the relevant historiography; this is a shame, as in some cases it prevented candidates from attaining a much higher mark. In future, it may be worth reminding students, as they prepare for their exams, that critical engagement with secondary sources is explicitly included among the essential marking criteria, and should not be neglected.

History of the British Isles V

Though only 33 candidates sat the paper this year, a significant decline from 2024 (44), many of the scripts were of high quality, as reflected in the number of first-class marks (9). 11 candidates received a high 2:1 mark (65-69); 10 were in the low 2:1 territory (60-64); 2 received a 2:2 mark (50-59); and a single candidate received a third-class mark (40-49). 18 female students and 15 male candidates sat the paper. The number of first-class marks awarded to female candidates (6) was double that of male candidates (3), although this was balanced by the stronger presence of male candidates in the 65-69 category (8 compared to 3 female students).

The most popular questions concerned the Revolution settlement of 1688/89, the 1707 Act of Union, parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery. To a large extent, candidates who ventured beyond these well-trodden topics did very well, though there were some outstanding answers on the popular subjects. The best answers demonstrated research and reading that went beyond the occasional tutorial essay or a template-based answer, engaging seriously with phenomena and events in the 18th century while situating their arguments against the background of historiographical debates.

History of the British Isles VI

61 candidates sat this exam in 2025. Before scrutiny, the markers awarded 15 marks that were 70 or above; 31 marks in the 65-69 range; 14 marks in the 60-64 range; and one mark in the 50-59 range.

This was a pleasing set of answers on the whole, with half of all candidates achieving a mark in the upper 2.1 range, and a further quarter of candidates achieving a mark of 70 or above. The distribution of answers indicates that candidates are not overly bunching around certain topics, though imperialism, gender, and religion remain the most popular topics overall. The best answers were well structured and well-organised, covering much of the time period and showing attention to scale and geography. They prioritised information and were able to speak to the relative significance of factors/events/conditions. They demonstrated good historical judgment, evaluating a range of perspectives and justifying a particular approach or argument effectively.

That said, many otherwise excellent answers were brought down, sometimes by an entire marking band, by the failure to engage with secondary sources or demonstrate any historiographical awareness. Candidates are reminded that one of the essential criteria in the descriptor for essays in the 65-69 band is 'contextualization in historical debate'. Moreover, few candidates were willing to broach any conceptual, theoretical, or methodological issues. This absence was most conspicuous in

answers on gender discourse and class consciousness but was notable throughout. Relatedly, few candidates addressed terminology or paid close attention to phrasing. The most popular question – Q. 7(a) on how Britain was ‘transformed’ by interactions with empire – elicited many answers on types of impact but did not tackle what ‘transformation’ might require. Several answers focused solely on popular imperialism and consciousness of empire, at the expense of wider social, political, and economic dimensions. One final issue to draw attention to is excessive narrowing: candidates are generally welcome to define the scope of their Outline paper answers, but several answers this year adopted a narrow focus without discussing a rationale. For instance, Q. 17, on the adaptiveness of the Conservative Party, elicited some answers that only discussed the party in the nineteenth century without addressing why.

Summary of distribution of answers:

Questions 7, 11, 12, 15, 18, and 19 each elicited fifteen or more answers.

Questions 1, 2, 12, and 17 elicited between ten and fourteen answers.

Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, and 20 elicited between one and nine answers.

Only question 9 (on rural and/or urban environments) elicited no answers at all.

European and World History (EWP)

European and World History I

I marked a run of 18 scripts of which 6 were AMH, 4 were HECO, 2 were HML, 1 was HPOL and 5 were History. 2 scripts received a mark of 70 or more, 6 of 65-69, 7 of 60-64 and 3 scripts were below 60. This was the second year of the trial of typed EWP scripts and a notable number of final essays were unfinished, even on quite strong scripts, suggesting that typing is less forgiving of minor overruns of time than handwriting. Q2 on Islamic conquests and conversion was by far and away the most popular question, although most questions received at least one answer. Questions with a social history dimension concerning non-elites (notably Qs 10 and 19) received no answers. The focus was overwhelmingly Western Eurasian. Unexpected formulations of familiar questions seem to have posed real challenges to candidates: a few too many students wanted to talk mostly about the Western Roman Empire in Q1 on the Eastern Roman Empire, most struggled to engage with the implications of asking about the 'Roman state' in Q6 and the gender question Q7 clearly scared many away from a usually popular topic. All this is a reminder of just how important it is that students prepare for EWP 1 by expecting to have to think creatively in the exam hall itself, rather than just regurgitate tutorial essays. That thinking requires close focus on the specific question asked and its terminology. As always, this was impressive when seen and the failure to do this held marks down on many otherwise solid answers. The best essays had clear and coherent arguments grounded in specific historical detail which was analysed, rather than simply described.

European and World History II

71 students took this paper, and the standard was really high: the average mark was 67; the lowest mark was 58 and the highest 74; there were 2 2.2 marks, 24 first-class marks, and 45 2.1 marks.

Students wrote a series of engaged and engaging answers which demonstrated detailed knowledge and understanding of the period. Candidates achieving lower marks within the range also

demonstrated solid command of the themes and problems of the paper. The global reach of many of the answers was particularly impressive.

There was a certain amount of bunching around some questions: for example, question 2 ('How did emperors maintain meaningful power across disparate territories?') attracted a very large number of students; as did question 8 ('What motivated crusaders?'). Questions 16 (popes), 13 (women's roles) and 18 (religious co-existence) were also popular.

No students answered the question on Jewish communities (qu. 4) and very few showed an interest in visual sources per se (qu. 21), law (qu. 9), or monastic orders (qu. 10). Relatively few candidates tackled questions 5 (towns) or 18 (long-distance trade). It was great to see candidates tackling topics which have been less studied in the past, particularly with regard to qu. 11 on archaeological remains.

On the whole, students were willing and able to think about how to marshal their knowledge about e.g. the Mongols, to deal with a range of questions which didn't necessarily directly address this topic: so question 19 on trading connections, question 20 on family structures, and question 13 elicited some particularly thoughtful responses.

Some questions were not always fully understood by the candidates, especially qu. 12 and 17, which referred to 'popular heresies and their intellectual iterations' (that is to say, academic heresies). Where candidates explained how they had interpreted a question and set up definitions, the arguments tended to be convincing on their own terms and were marked on their merits (e.g. a very capacious definition of 'history writing' for qu. 7; tangled understandings of historiography and historical evidence in relation to feudalism for qu. 12; some kingdoms rebranded as 'empires' for qu. 2; definitions of 'intellectual iterations' as the theology and thought underlying heresies). Nevertheless, there were some problematic misreadings, especially when candidates did not stop to define their terms, leading to awkward arguments. Closer attention to the implications of terms such as 'meaningful' power in qu. 2 would have strengthened the generally good answers to this question further.

The best answers were able to delve into detailed analysis of particular pieces of evidence, but to use this to illustrate and to complicate an overarching argument. On the other hand, the weaker essays tended to be descriptive rather than evaluative when discussing both historiography and primary material. It would also be nice to see more students engaging with the contemporary concepts behind some of the questions (e.g. answers to qu. 16 on conflicts between papacy and secular rulers tended to focus on the practical manifestations of those conflicts and to avoid the political/religious theories underpinning the debates).

Some candidates wrote at great length, submitting essays of 1700 words or more, up to almost 1900 words. If the typed mode of assessment continues, fast typists should remember to focus on delivering analytic quality rather than narrative quantity. Slower typists should be reassured that the great majority of essays are between 1000 and 1500 words long, and it is possible to deliver a very effective essay in this compass.

European and World History III

74 candidates sat this paper. The quality ranged, with only one mark below 50 (47), 5 marks between 50 and 59, 21 marks between 60-64, 33 marks between 65-69, and 13 scripts between 70 and 74. With more than half at high 2.1 or 1st level, the overall level of performance was very good, with candidates mostly writing informed and clearly structured answers to the questions set. A large

proportion of candidates managed to score a first in one or more of their answers but not to sustain that level across the three.

Students answered across the first three sections of the paper in roughly equal measure, but fewer students chose the fourth section on politics. The preferred questions were as follows: in section A, gender (19 answers), urbanisation (17), economic interconnections (11, all but one on global interconnections); in section B, contacts with other continents (22 answers), communications revolution (12), humanism and art production (11 each); in section C, Protestant reformation (33) and 15th-century Christianity (13); in section D revolts (27 answers) and military revolution (11). Only one question (on local politics) attracted no answers; next year it will be important to phrase it so that it captures more clearly the wealth of recent literature about politics from below and at the community level.

In terms of geographical range, candidates answered based on a notable spread of European countries and, as mentioned, many pleasingly highlighted interconnections between Europe and the wider world. Some excellent answers focused on two or three countries alone and attempted a comparative answer to capture differences across the continent. The weakest made vague references to either Europe as a whole or a multiplicity of countries, without providing specific details. In fortunately few cases, some candidates answered on the basis of one country alone, in one case England.

The best answers were those that addressed a good range of themes or points, supporting their claims through a wealth of relevant and specific historical examples from different areas of Europe, and that handled the historiography confidently, discussing it critically and with reference to particular historians. The weakest answers, on the other hand, handled the material superficially or inaccurately, presented little detailed evidence, made generalising claims that were based on commonplace logic and/or unsupported by concrete examples, and made little or no attempt to engage with the relevant scholarship.

In general, the engagement with the historiography varied substantially across the board. There were a number of essays that showed very good knowledge of the subject and were well argued, but failed to address or cite any scholarship, and earned a lower mark than they could have as a result; these candidates would have benefitted from asking themselves about the point or points of specific questions (why are examiners asking a particular question?), which often has to do with one or more historiographical debates. In numerous cases, moreover, candidates addressed the historiography only in passing or in extremely vague terms, stating e.g. that 'some historians have argued' or that 'historians disagree' over particular questions—they should note that this will earn them no marks unless they can identify specific schools and approaches, if not names. It was startling how many referred to very old debates (e.g. Porsnev-Mousnier on rebellions, from the 1950s, when so many fresher and richer interpretations of the sources have been published over the last 30 years). Another point that sometimes affected the overall quality of essays was a tendency to handle the central categories in the question (e.g. 'radical' for Q. 12, or 'class conflict' for Q. 20) in an unclear or inconsistent fashion.

One question (7, 'How controversial were ideas about absolute kingship?') caused some confusion in one case, as the student interpreted it as if it related to historiographical controversy; it may be helpful to occasionally specify 'in this period' in phrasing certain questions in future. Q. 19 ('To what extent did the chief foundations of state power change?') also seems to have been read a bit superficially, as both the candidates I marked focussed on the ways in which it changed, but said

nothing about the extent to which it changed. Too many candidates treated the question on gender as if it related to women alone.

Typing seemed to pose no problems and made the scripts a lot more readable.

European and World History IV

78 candidates entered this exam in 2025. There were two late withdrawals, leaving a total of 76 scripts. Before scrutiny, 21 candidates achieved a mark of 70 or above; 45 candidates achieved a mark in the 65-69 range; 8 candidates achieved a mark in the 60-64 range; and two candidates were awarded a mark in the 50-59 range. The average mark achieved was 67, consistent with the average in 2024.

There were 20 questions to choose from, and the distribution of answers (detailed below) was good overall. All questions were attempted. The most popular questions were Q. 1 (industrialisation), Q. 9 (1848), Q. 11 (national identity), and Q. 18 (non-European responses to colonialism). The least popular, eliciting fewer than five answers each, were Q. 8 (urban life) and Q. 10 (emancipation). A question on the environment, new to last year's exam paper, elicited seven answers this year, indicating that this topic is bedding in well.

This was a strong performing cohort, with 87% of candidates achieving at least a 65, and a quarter of all candidates achieving a Distinction-level mark. This demonstrates that students were well-prepared for the exam and performing well under the still rather new typed mode of assessment. Answers were generally well organised and marshalled an impressive amount of relevant and detailed information. The sheer range of case studies often made for lively and engaging answers that showed real breadth and imagination. The best answers were wide-ranging and took into account change over time, as well as differences across the countries and regions of Europe. Often, the strongest answers were those that could also situate Europe in the world and draw links to global phenomena. Many answers impressed with the seriousness with which they engaged with the terms of the question, and the sharpness of their arguments.

A recurring issue, noted in last year's examiner's report, too, was a lack of engagement with secondary sources and historical debate. Candidates seem to be unaware that showing knowledge of relevant historiographical issues and context is an essential part of the marking criteria. Demonstrating this requirement entails more than simply noting the name of a historian or theorist, though even that was often sparse and/or rote – for instance, almost every answer in response to very popular Q. 11 (national identity) referred to Benedict Anderson and most to Hobsbawm and Breuille. It was particularly striking how many answers to the also very popular Q. 1 (on industrialisation) seemed entirely unaware of the significant debates that have occurred in that field over the past 25 years. Another issue was insufficient contextualisation or justification of case studies. While, in general, candidates were very good at drawing from a wide pool of examples, weaker scripts tended to do so without explaining either why those examples had been chosen or how comparable they were.

As noted in last year's report, the high average mark for this paper may be attributable to the fact that typed exams enable all candidates to write legibly and to do a certain amount of editing along the way. In general, this seems to be a good thing. As also noted last year, however, some candidates wrote answers that were far longer than either necessary or, in several cases, helpful to them.

Summary of distribution of answers:

Questions 1, 9, 11, and 18 each elicited twenty or more answers.

Questions 13 and 17 elicited between fifteen and nineteen answers.

Questions 5, 6, 14, 15, and 16 elicited between ten and fourteen answers.

Questions 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, and 19 elicited between one and nine answers.

Optional Subjects

Theories of the State

38 candidates sat the paper this summer. The quality of the scripts was, on the whole, encouraging. Eight candidates (four male, four female) received marks of 70 and above, 25 scripts were marked in the range of 60-69, and five in the 50s. All questions on the paper received answers, although the last one – on the authors' attitudes to religious strife – was taken up by only two candidates. The questions on Hobbes's state of nature, Rousseau's general will and Aristotle on human flourishing were the most popular. As usual, the best answers were those demonstrating close acquaintance with the structure of the set texts and engagement with the ways in which the authors developed their arguments (rather than simple regurgitation of general points), as well an attempt to situate the arguments in their historical contexts. Some candidates have also managed to channel their analysis of the texts into a broader engagement with scholarly interpretations in the secondary literature. Weaker answers remained on a general level, descriptively repeating the authors' points while ignoring the intricate architecture of the arguments and their relationship to contemporary debates or other works by the same author. Among the comparative questions, those on economic inequality and the exclusion of certain groups elicited some astute answers. Most answers to the question on the significance of the state in Marx's writings tended to assume its importance rather than problematise it. Some candidates who answered the question on Rousseau's utopianism failed to provide a clear working definition of what they meant by the term.

Alfred and the Vikings

The paper was taken by a healthy 12 students: 1 AMH; 2 HECO; 9 History. There was a noticeable breadth of interest in the resulting scripts with every question receiving at least one answer, although the favourite topics were very similar to previous years: sources for the Great Army; Æthelflæd; Englishness. The question on the Alfredian literary corpus was more popular than similar questions have been in the past.

The standard of answers was very high with plentiful evidence of good knowledge of the primary sources on display, and in some cases quite striking levels of command of the detail. 25% of scripts received a distinction mark and several more were notably close. Students are to be congratulated on their command of the material and their willingness to respond closely to the questions asked. The latter is a point that bears repeating: some essays stood out for their close engagement with the particular wording of their questions, a few felt a little bit more generic, something particularly noticeable on the most popular topics and sources. Candidates should be alert to the potential significance of distinguishing between questions that ask about the Great Army in particular and those that ask about Scandinavians in ninth-century Britain in general. It is important also to

consider the full range of material on some of the key proscribed archaeological sites: those who spoke about the more recent work on the connections between Repton, Foremark and Heath Wood, as well as the original excavations at Repton, tended to do well.

Early Gothic France

This was an exceptionally strong series of scripts – 7 candidates sat the paper, of whom 5 were given first-class marks. This profile was a measure of the way in which so many candidates succeeded in integrating a close reading of the primary texts with a broader understanding of the general themes of the course (in effect, tying together their tutorial work with the classes). The real intellectual challenge – and joy – of this paper lies in appreciating that the set-texts are much more complex and nuanced primary sources than they might appear at first sight. In this respect, this year's cohort was exemplary.

The Mongols

There were 24 candidates: of these, 7 achieved distinction-level marks. Most other candidates achieved at least the equivalent to a 2.1 level, with many producing scripts in the higher 2.1-level band. All questions attracted at least one response, with questions on The Secret History of the Mongols, military strategy and tactics, women, travel, and conversion proving particularly popular. Almost all candidates recognised that close engagement with the set texts was crucial, with very few relying exclusively on the secondary literature to develop their arguments. A pleasing number of candidates were sensitive to the relevance of the compositional contexts and authorial agendas of the set texts. The most impressive responses came from candidates who were able to compare and cross-reference between different texts, in some cases at a level more usually seen in FHS.

Sexuality, Climate, and Politics: The World of Edward II

Four candidates sat this new paper, and wrote good answers, which dealt knowledgeably with the themes in the questions and cited the set-texts to support relevant arguments. Two scripts were 2.1 in quality and two first-class, the latter being even sharper, better-structured, better-illustrated and sometimes original. Answers were concentrated in five questions, with all four candidates writing about love and sex between men and about Queen Isabella, two on Gaveston, and one each on saints and kingship.

Crime and Punishment in England, c.1280-1450

5 students took the optional subject Crime and Punishment this year. The students wrote a series of extremely thought-provoking essays and the level was high. A range of questions were answered – though there was particular focus on questions 1 ('Why is it often assumed by historians that the late medieval period was particularly dangerous?'), 5 ('What were the main dangers for women?'), and 8 ('Why were communities often involved in punishment?').

The best answers relied on detailed analysis of particular primary evidence to sustain and sometimes to complicate an overarching argument. All answers engaged carefully with the precise terms of the question. Weaker answers (particularly on question 1) tended to rely a little too heavily on unsubstantiated commentary without such detailed engagement with the primary sources.

Most encouraging in this paper was a sense that candidates were thinking carefully about the nature of the primary sources they were working with (how layers of voices can be heard in the documents; the importance of understanding the legal procedures which gave rise to the documents etc). Also particularly striking was the attention given by all candidates to the experiences and subjectivities of victim-survivors: there was a real sensitivity evident in all the essays.

Nature and Art in the Renaissance

Of the six candidates sitting this examination, one received an outstanding distinction, another a borderline distinction, three received marks in the high 60s, and one slightly lower. The outstanding paper ranged far beyond the prescribed primary and recommended secondary reading in pursuing erudite and accurate answers to challenging questions. Several other candidates also demonstrated gratifying knowledge of material beyond what was discussed in class and tutorial. Disappointing, on the other hand, were occasional failures to grasp some of the key distinctions underlying the paper as a whole: for instance, two candidates confused the liberal arts with the *studia humanitatis*. The basic formula for success in this examination is to grasp clearly the set of definitions and distinctions which structure this paper. Likewise, while a few students successfully argued against the grain of the lectures, a much less welcome tendency was to ignore issues discussed (such as the tedious tendency to explain the collecting mania of the period merely as an attempt to enhance social status). Strong engagement with visual and material sources was the exception than the rule: close engagement is an easy avenue for distinguishing oneself. Students ranged widely, attempting most of the questions set and not clustering on specific topics any more than one might expect. In general, a very satisfactory set of scripts.

Witchcraft and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe

21 candidates sat the paper. Marks ranged from low 2.1 to 1st class, with four distinctions awarded. Candidates showed a very marked preference for questions on the gendering of witchcraft practices (Q.4), witchcraft sceptics (Q.5), and possession (Q.1). A few candidates tackled questions on visual images (Q.3), demonologists (Q.2), and the Bible and witchcraft beliefs (Q.14). Even fewer wrote on Q.8 on harmful magic, Q.11 on the judicial process, and Q.9 about practitioners of magic. Five questions attracted no takers.

Overall candidates engaged with the prescribed authorities and analysed them in some detail. Stronger candidates were also able to situate the prescribed authorities within wider historical and historiographical contexts. Candidates are encouraged to widen and deepen their knowledge of the paper's themes by exploring more of the secondary literature; this will also help them to answer a greater range of questions in the examination and equip them to approach the paper in a more intellectually imaginative way. The majority of candidates wrote on Q.4 'Why were witchcraft practices seen as gendered?'. Some candidates took this as a prompt to focus exclusively on accusations made against women rather than also analyse the gendering of men accused of witchcraft. This was particularly surprising given the rich recent literature on men accused of witchcraft. Coverage of Q.5 on witchcraft sceptics was sometimes uneven, with certain key authors omitted by some candidates. The question on possession (Q.1) was generally well-handled but candidates should make sure they have an assured grasp of the possession cases included within the prescribed texts as well as within the secondary literature. Candidates are urged to ensure greater chronological precision in their scripts, especially when dating case-studies and publications.

Conquest & Colonization: Spain and America in the Sixteenth Century

Twenty-two candidates took this paper. Four candidates gained a mark of 70 or 71, eleven were marked between 65 and 69, five achieved marks between 60 and 64, and two got marks lower than 60. The general standard therefore was good, though there were no really outstanding scripts, and there were plenty of risk-averse, well-drilled answers that took the most straightforward options in response to the questions. Only two questions attracted no answers: question 5 on the role of women in the New World, and 12, on silver mining, despite one of the course lectures on this subject. By far the most favoured questions were 1, a comparison of the Aztec and Inca Empires, with 14 answers and question 6, on the crown's control of the debate about indigenous rights, also with 14 takers. Many of the answers to question 1 were disappointing and left the impression that few candidates had read much about either empire beyond a handful of the most obvious secondary works. In the next tier, question 9 on the *encomienda* system attracted six answers, as did question 13 on the Catholic church in the post-conquest New World – though the besetting weakness of many answers to 13 was the failure to distinguish between the work of the missionary orders and the subsequent role of the institutional church and the secular clergy. Other popular questions, each with five takers, were 8, on extirpation versus assimilation in Christianization, question 14 on perceptions of civility and barbarism, question 3 on the two Peruvian sources' accounts of Cajamarca. It was interesting that last year's examiner's report noted the better performance of candidates who chose questions involving the use of the indigenous sources, whereas this year question 2 on this topic attracted only one answer.

On the positive side, almost all the scripts demonstrated some degree of familiarity with the prescribed sources, and an awareness that they needed to be drawn into the essays, though there was a gulf between those who simply dropped references to the texts into answers that were essentially constructed through secondary reading and lectures, and those who knew the sources in detail and could engage critically with their content. This was particularly marked in the numerous answers to question 6 about indigenous rights, where those who had a detailed understanding of the arguments of Vitoria, the commentaries of Cortes, Las Casas, etc., had a substantial advantage. As ever, better marks went to those candidates who read the questions carefully and reflected on what the question actually required: many answers to question 1 failed to ask what systems of military coercion looked like, whether they were all alike, and what the alternatives to coercive authority in these societies might have been; a number of the answers to question 8 on extirpation/assimilation contented themselves with an undifferentiated account of missionary strategy, while several candidates seemed unaware of the Huarochiri manuscript as source. The best answers to question 6 not only explored in detail the arguments of Vitoria, Sepúlveda, Las Casas, but engaged with whether the crown controlled the terms of the debate, and if not, then who did?

It is a challenge for tutors and students to achieve breadth in only six essays/tutorials, but overall engagement was respectably wide-ranging: socio-economic issues like the *encomienda*, collaboration between colonists and indigenous elites, the cultural contexts of the conquest, and close readings of texts (questions 3, 4, 14), all generated essays that were typically of a higher quality than those answering the two most popular questions.

Women, Gender, and the Nation: Britain, 1789-1825

Nine students took this paper and, on the whole, results indicated a pleasingly high standard, with three first class marks and several others receiving very good upper second-class marks. Strong candidates took advantage of the opportunity to make their own choices about the texts for

analysis, making not only sensible, but often creative selections which allowed them to make imaginative connections. Questions 2 and 12 were particularly effective in this regard.

No candidate answered question 4, 5, 8, 10 or 11. Given the relatively small numbers taking the paper, this is not necessarily surprising, but is indicative of some other notable points. No one answered the question on Ireland, and references to Irish authors rarely identified the specifics of the Irish context. A strong understanding of women and femininity was rarely matched with similar attention to men and masculinity. Candidates could also have been more mindful of the importance of form and genre.

As ever, candidates should be careful to answer the question being set, not the one they hoped for. Question 9 was particularly popular, but did not necessarily generate the most effective answers, since few candidates responded to the prompt to examine the nature of the abolitionist movement.

On the whole, understanding of the set texts was very strong, but use of the historiographical literature rather less so. While candidates should absolutely make their own interpretation of the material central to their response, an understanding of how other scholars have considered these texts and issues is invaluable in deepening understanding. This sometimes made the difference between a decent and an excellent mark.

Brigands in a Landscape: Banditry, Rural Crime and Rebellion in the Mediterranean and Black Sea Regions c.1750-1950

Nine students attempted this paper, four of whom earned distinctions. Most of the fourteen questions were attempted at least once, with questions on pastoralism and representations proving the most popular. There were no weak scripts, or even weak individual answers: the quality in general was very good, and noticeably better than the examiners had anticipated. The reason for this strong showing is that every student engaged regularly, and in depth, with the primary sources. They were widely quoted, and students were finding information and insight from these sources that were new to the examiner. More to the point, the sources were used to address the question asked in a direct, analytical and imaginative manner. Where some scripts proved weaker was in their engagement with the secondary literature, even in response to questions that directly mentioned scholars' work (eg Dabove). As questions were often set in response to debates raised in that secondary literature, this absence meant that, even where answers were interesting, they were in danger of missing important points.

When Neighbours became Strangers: Violence, Community and Identity in Late Ottoman Syria, c. 1840-1900

This is the second year in which this paper has been examined: 20 students sat the exam in comparison to 13 in 2024. Overall, the results were very good: 7 candidates received a mark of 70 or above, and the rest were awarded a mark in the 60s. All but three of the questions were attempted by at least one student (Qs 5, 11, 12). The most popular questions were those on European and Ottoman intervention (Q7) and the relationship between race and the experience of Syrians in America (Q10), each of which attracted ten responses. Otherwise, the responses were distributed as follows: Q4 on the perspectives of chroniclers of 1860 (8 responses); Q3 on the causes of the Damascus events (6); Q8 on anti-sectarianism among Arab intellectuals (5); Q1 on the Tanzimat edicts, Q9 on Butrus al-Bustani, and Q14 on globalization (4 responses each); and the questions on protégés (Q2), concepts of barbarism (Q6), and education (Q13) all received three responses each. Generally, candidates consistently had command of the main set texts, with frequent reference to

the writings of Mishaqa, al-Hasibi, Arbeely, and al-Bustani. Conversely, there were no attempts to write about Norman Duncan or the Syrian lecturers in America. Similarly, the emphasis on youth and children in the set texts did not translate into a single answer to the open-ended question on 'children's perspectives' (Q5). All of this suggests candidates could do more in future years to find ways of incorporating these set texts into their vision of the period, even if they have not been asked to write tutorial essays on these topics. In general, the Examiners were very impressed by the attention candidates gave to demonstrating their answers with reference to the set texts. At their best, responses conveyed a precise and analytical knowledge of the set texts which often used the language of contemporaries to frame arguments in response to the questions. The very best answers managed to incorporate set texts and case studies in thoughtful and surprising ways, for example, by using Sabunji to explore globalization or by incorporating the set texts into larger conceptual frameworks like the idea of 'imagined communities'. These attempts showed the ability of candidates to make connections across different parts of the paper, and they reflected well a very close engagement with the secondary literature (Makdisi, Abu Manneh, Rogan, Fawaz, Rafeq, Massot). In contrast, weaker answers tended to be those that referred to set texts in only an indicative or illustrative way, or mentioned them in passing without making clear why the set text was relevant to their argument. Overall, candidates demonstrated a very good ability to consider different perspectives among contemporaries. Where candidates reflected on issues of genre, the passage of time, and the workings of memory, they managed to construct distinctive, engaging, and thoughtful responses that reflected an insightful understanding of the multiple possibilities of the period when it came to questions of sectarianism, intercommunal relations, and communal identity.

Haiti and Louisiana: The Problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery

The continuing popularity of this paper ensured another large cohort of 27 candidates, ranging across four joint-schools and the main History school. Their performance was also strong, with 5 clear first-class marks, and another 12 scoring in the 66-68 range, while only 2 candidates scored under 60. Their interests ranged across all the themes of the paper, with every question attracting several takers. It was also encouraging to see students willing to attempt questions not only on St Domingue/Haiti but also on American and European developments too. There were also some thoughtful reviews on the historiography of the Haitian revolution, which the course has always promoted. The best scripts were prepared to engage the question constructively, and they were also creative in embedding the primary texts in their arguments. Mid-range answers also could also be energetic in their approach to the question, but they could not maintain this momentum across the essay, or they neglected to take advantages of useful sources for the question at hand. Weaker answers lacked such ambition of engagement, and they were also tentative in their deployment of the set sources, often overlooking important contexts for understanding the significance of such material. Nonetheless, the overall range of interests and the general quality of the field suggests that the course continues to invigorate first-year students, and hopefully they will continue to pursue such interests in their FHS choices.

Imperial Republic: The United States and Global Imperialism

Twelve candidates sat this paper, with 6 candidates achieving Distinctions. The standard of response was very high – candidates displayed excellent knowledge and a strong grasp of the conceptual approaches to empire discussed in the paper. Even questions that received lower marks also displayed strong knowledge, but simply lapsed into description. Candidates attempted all but one question (10. What role did women play in representing foreign cultures at World's Fairs?) but

showed strong preferences for questions 9 (which half of candidates answered) and 5, indicating a preference for cultural approaches to empire. Students showed demonstrable strengths in epitomising the arguments of key texts and discussing categories of evidence and in approaching empire as a flexible, variable form of power. Some responses showed a distinctive lack of historiographical engagement limiting the precision and incisiveness of the argument – the very best answers demonstrated that candidates were thinking historiographically, rather than approaching its deployment as a mere technical act of writing.

The New Women in Britain and Ireland, 1880-1920

Eight students took this paper in 2024-25; one was a joint school candidate. There was one Distinction this year and all candidates achieved marks above 65. Several candidates produced individual essays which were clearly first-class, but could not sustain this standard across the paper. It was good to see candidates attempting a wide range of questions; only 2 of the 14 went unanswered. The most popular questions related to marriage, culture and political and social change, though several candidates also wrote engagingly about critics of New Woman. Interest in Ireland and empire was apparent and those who wrote on Ireland in particular, worked well with the set texts. The very best answers demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the set texts and the relevant historiography, and were able to demonstrate change over time. Weaker answers tended to linger too long over the terms of the question or referred to only a small number of set texts.

I want to reiterate a couple of points that have been made in previous Reports. The first is that the strongest answers always display a comprehensive understanding of the political context in which New Women campaigned and wrote, as well as the details of their demands. The second is that it is vital to distinguish between different types of texts, and in particular to distinguish between fiction and political texts.

The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1883-1921

Thirteen candidates sat the paper 'The Rise and Crises of European Socialisms: 1883-1921 (A17147H1)'. The paper continues to attract students up to cap, and those signing up are usually strongly motivated and very engaged. It is a very rewarding paper to teach and (I hope) to study. Five distinction level marks were awarded pre-moderation, which reflects the quality of work. There were other marks in the high 60s and no script lacked aspects of originality and insight. The 'feminism' question remains popular as ever, followed by nationalism and religion. It would be interesting to consider whether a 'class' or 'sex' based understanding of the fundamentality polarity of society was (or is) ever compatible. 'Imperialism' always attracts interesting reflection, though it would be useful to tease out its various and only over-lapping aspects: imperialism as 'finance capital', as a 'stage' of capitalism, as productive of militarism and national chauvinism, as a question of colonies. Good use was made of set Texts. Students would do well to 'categorise' different kinds of Set Texts as a means to considering Primary Sources as multi-valent and multi-vocal.

1919: Remaking the World

The spread of questions answered was quite wide with all questions attracting at least one answer except for the one on reparations. The most popular questions were Q.2 on 'Open Diplomacy' and Q.9 on Mandates. Both questions saw a wide range of quality in the answers with the better answers carefully interrogating the question and deploying a range of evidence from the sources. Q.7 on Japan attracted a surprisingly high take up and a good quality of answer – interestingly

candidates seemed more drawn to nuanced and complex answers on Japan than on the USA or European powers which were sometimes marred by moralising polemic. Q.11 on the LON and international law and Q.4 on national boundaries and 'facts on the ground' saw candidates having problems in clearly defining the subject of their answers. There was also a failure to grasp the idea that actors other than 'Great Powers' might have exercised agency. This was also notable in some lack of clarity about what the minorities treaties were in Q.6. Answers on Q.8 about the PAC were very DuBois centred – possibly understandably given the current sources but they perhaps needed to think a bit more about the evidentiary/historiographic problems of that version. Answers on 'women's politics' in Q.3 showed a good awareness of both texts and historiography. Answers on arms limitation in Q.13 quite a lot of variability in engagement with both texts and historiography.

A general issue was candidates often fall back on simplistic generalisations about 'Wilsonian self-determination' and in many cases don't reflect much on it, despite a rich historiography around the topic.

Overall the performance on this paper was good with a significant number of individual first class essays and a decent number of distinctions awarded.

Living with the Enemy: The Experience of the Second World War in Europe

This popular Optional Subject was again capped at 12. The students responded well to unfamiliar and challenging primary texts on the subjective experiences in Europe during the Second World War. 11 students completed the examination, and the quality was generally very good. The candidates tended to write on German and Soviet soldiers, women, and collaboration. Responses were sometimes of mixed quality. There was an overrepresentation of the Eastern and Italian theatres, and no one wrote on urban and rural experiences. The less accomplished scripts tended towards narrow and uncritical analysis which overlooked or underplayed context, whilst the better answers were more thoughtful and comparative on the texts and showed signs of wider secondary reading.

Global USSR: Empires, Borders, and Identities

Twelve candidates attempted the examination for the 'Global USSR' option in Trinity Term 2025. The marks were 62, 63, 65, 65, 67, 67, 68, 68, 68, 70, 71, and 73. The mean mark was 67, the median mark was 68.

The candidates attempted all questions except 9. The political history of the USSR in the 1970s and the 1980s will receive close attention in future iterations of the paper. Several candidates tackled the questions which invited them to reflect on broad methodological and conceptual questions arising out of the paper (12-14). Questions 3, 4, 5 and 7 attracted most candidates. This is encouraging as it suggests that students engage with various aspects of the paper, looking at the USSR's relations with the capitalist West, socialist Eastern Europe, as well as countries emerging from colonial rule. Question 2, which required candidates to think across weekly themes and conventional periodisations, produced some strong answers, but it only attracted two candidates.

The key strength of many answers was the candidates' engagement with the global scope of the paper, evidence of meticulous research about the origins and context in which key primary sources were produced, and/or critical analysis of key methodological trends in the study of Soviet and Cold War history. Multiple candidates based their analysis on the non-European parts of the USSR and examined Soviet relations with countries of the Global South and, in contrast with previous iterations of the paper, with China (which was foregrounded more strongly this year).

All answers engaged with the set primary texts. Candidates with marks in the lower 60s did not introduce the sources with sufficient care and/or did not situate their arguments within a historiographical context. At the upper end of the marking scale, candidates brought diverse primary sources in dialogue with each other.

Industrialisation in Britain and France, 1750-1870

Eight candidates sat the exam, one of them returning for exams after withdrawing last year.¹ Six were from History & Economics, one from History & Politics, and one from the main school. All performed well, with scores averaging 67 and distributed as follows.

60-64: 2

65-69: 3

70-71: 3

This fairly narrow range is typical for the course, which has had a fairly stable content (hence fairly predictable exam questions) for a long time, and which has small numbers of students, all taught by the same tutor (so no one falls through the cracks or is unfamiliar with the expectations of the examiner).

Of the fourteen questions on the exam paper, nine were attempted by at least one candidate. There was some tendency to pick questions on which tutorial essays had been written. Encouragingly, that was true even for topics that weren't easy and weren't discussed much in lecture (such as Question 1, about popular protests). Student interest – or maybe just tactical choice of question - this year seemed attracted by topics with a social aspect (demography, protest, urbanisation and living standards, slavery) relative to, say, technological or financial matters. The small numbers make it impossible to discern meaningful patterns in question-specific scores.

As ever, candidates displayed excellence in different ways. Some were encyclopaedic, covering all the relevant issues, authors, and ideas. Others were more partial, original, and argumentative. So long as they were well written and anchored their arguments in historical evidence, both approaches earned high marks.

Paper IV

Meinecke and Kehr

Five candidates took Meinecke and Kehr in 2025. Scripts tended overall either to be excellent or to be comparatively weak, with relatively few marks in between. The better scripts were lifted up more by the essays than by the gobbet commentaries: the latter of which were comparatively disappointing across the board. Candidates need to act in accordance with the precept that gobbet commentaries must unpack the specific details about the events, categories, and people mentioned in the gobbet itself: gobbets which immediately veer off into a more general set of musings will be penalised, as this is a type of commentary which suggests a lack of specific knowledge of the particular subject at hand. The essay answers tended, on the whole, to be rather better than the

¹ I have no direct information on this, but infer it from the numbers who had tutorials last year and this, and the numbers who sat the exam last year and this.

gobbet commentaries. Candidates attempted a good range of the questions, but question two – on Kehr’s account of Tirpitz – and question five – on Meinecke’s view of the Bürgertum – garnered no responses. Distinction-level essays all showed precise engagement with the categories in the question; a strong grasp of the historiography; and interesting arguments supported with specific facts and evidence. The less these qualities were in evidence in the essay component of the scripts, the lower the resulting marks.

Tocqueville

It was very satisfying to witness a significant surge in the number of candidates sitting the summer exam for this paper (18). The quality of the scripts was fairly high: six candidates received marks of 70 and above (three female, three male). Ten scripts were in the 60-69 category. A single candidate received a mark in the 50s and another in the 40s.

The questions on centralisation, religion and the *philosophes* attracted the attention of most candidates, though some outstanding answers were composed on landed property and Tocqueville’s views of liberty. As usual, candidates who mobilised in the service of their arguments a thorough acquaintance with the structure of the text and its precise argumentation were rewarded for their efforts. Less persuasive answers made general gestures towards Tocqueville’s broad arguments without demonstrating close engagement with the nuances of the text.

While most candidates did well in their gobbet commentaries, weaker comments jumped straight to general themes without engaging closely with issues that were explicitly mentioned in the gobbets. More effective commentaries analysed patiently the specific topics of the gobbets before linking them to broader issues.

Vicens Vives

Eight candidates sat the Vicens Vives paper this year. There was one mark above 69 and two below 59 (one of which was short-weight) while the majority of candidates received a mark in the 60s. Candidates showed a preference for gobbets a, d, e, f and g. Candidates usually showed solid wider knowledge, but weaker answers did not tailor the context to the gobbet itself. Another area of weakness was homing in on a detail without doing justice to the whole extract. Performance in essays was generally very good with students keen to answer on the Annales; question three on objectivity only received one response. Better responses marshalled their evidence into sharper, more cohesive answers and avoided errors. Overall, candidates managed to draw effectively on a combination of thorough knowledge of the text and their understanding of the wider context.

Historiography

Seventy-nine candidates (HECO 4; HPOL 11; AMH 8; HML 2) offered this paper, of whom 18 secured First Class marks, 14 Lower Second marks, and 1 a Third Class mark.

On the whole, as last year, the quality was pleasing, and tended to be better than that of the outlines scripts. The obvious explanation is that this paper is more focussed in scope, and that it is based on a clear body of texts which most candidates had made some attempt to read and reflect upon.

The most popular questions by some margin were 6 (Machiavelli) and 7 (Gibbon). Interestingly, the questions on Machiavelli’s and Gibbon’s use of ancient historians (5, 8) attracted far fewer

candidates, the Gibbon one spectacularly so – only three attempts. Yet an important aspect of this paper is that candidates should think about how these historians responded to those who had written before them.

After Machiavelli and Gibbon, Tacitus and Augustine were almost on level pegging in terms of popularity. Ranke was by a considerable margin the least popular, with only six answers. (I was delighted to be told by one of these unusual candidates that Ranke was ‘the Mr Gradgrind of History’.) Exceptionally, one of the comparative questions (17) prompted quite a few responses, perhaps because versions of it have been set several times before in recent years. With a few impressive exceptions, these attempts were, nevertheless, not very successful: historical writing has improved, I read, because bias on the part of historians has declined ‘and the increased statistical and empirical evidence’. Candidates seem baffled by the invitation to write about historical imagination. No-one wrote about Tacitus and Machiavelli during the Renaissance (15), or about footnotes (16).

The courageous who tried the question on Machiavelli and ancient historians tended to do it well – some even knew about the problems with attributing a great deal of influence to Polybius. (However, a second marker, who read fewer scripts, thought precisely the opposite). Although Tacitus was a popular author, many candidates seemed thrown by the wording of the questions, even though one (2) was standard. They were particularly bemused by the less conventional q. 1, perhaps because it was to some extent about style, and it is noticeable that candidates do not want to address that subject, even in the cases of Gibbon and Macaulay. It was shocking to be told by a candidate that ‘Tacitus was writing in the midsts [sic] of the Roman republic’, *a fortiori* because he or she is reading AMH. Answers on Augustine fell, appropriately, into two categories. What distinguished the good ones was a plausible grasp of the underlying theology. Without that, candidates can get almost nowhere: eg. the ‘ultimate goal’ of bishops is ‘earthly suffering’. Even the better candidates could brush up on providence. Answers on Weber appeared to evince a higher than average level of competence.

Memorably, Gibbon was accused of ‘unconscious biases towards Christianity’. If only the University had been running its training courses in his day, the *Decline and Fall* might have turned out quite differently. He provoked quite a few other remarkable assertions, eg. that at the age of 16 he was convinced that Catholicism was ‘an older more coherent and altogether better religion than Christianity’.

Candidates should not, A-level style, insistently repeat the terms of the question at the beginning of each paragraph. But they should answer the question set. Many do not yet seem to have learned to write in paragraphs. A paragraph is a step in a structured argument, not a vast dumping ground for any material even vaguely related to a particular topic. These are obviously not problems specific to this paper, but across the board. With respect to this paper in particular, candidates should not just repeat contemporary vacuities, and foist them on the authors. To the example of Gibbon’s unconscious bias, I might add Machiavelli’s invention of ‘strong and stable leadership’. (Who knew that that was who Theresa May was reading in 2017?) If you have only heard a name in a lecture, and have not bothered to look at the author’s work, don’t mention it: a reference to the views of ‘Popcock’ on Gibbon did not dispose me favourably towards the candidate.

The best scripts were written with a fluent verve, as well as displaying an impressive command of the set texts, and others of relevance. They understood the role of context. This paper is playing an important part in the historical education of a large phalanx of undergraduates.

Quantification in History

In 2025, 11 students sat the Quantification in History exam (history main school and history and politics). As for the last four years, History and Economics students were excluded from the course because of overlap with their Economics curriculum.

Quantification in History is a specialised course, and the students who choose to take it therefore tend to be interested in statistical methods and their application and motivated to learn. This was evident from the exam results. Marks ranged between 61 and 71 with a mean of 65, with all students demonstrating at least a basic command of the core statistical tests and ability to interpret quantitative evidence.

As in past years, the marks in this course were quite clustered in the 60s, albeit with a bit more variation in performance than in 2024. This was in part a consequence of comparatively weak correlation between performance on Section 1 and 2; some students perform and discuss statistical tests carefully and systematically, while others show more flair and originality in their essay question answers. Some of the essay answers showed particular sophistication by relating the evidence in interesting and original ways to historical events or processes.

As in previous years, the exam paper included a mixture of definitional questions and practical application of statistical tests to historical data (section 1) and short essays on sources and methods (section 2). The students showed a strong grasp of how to apply statistical tests to historical data, answers in section 1 of the exam were mostly correct, and they generally showed all the steps in their calculations. The main weaknesses were in failures to develop full essay answers (section 2 of the exam). Some also made some mistakes in their interpretation of quantitative results (particularly in correctly interpreting all dimensions of a regression table).

There was a reasonably good spread in the choice of questions answered. In Section 2 there was a slight preference for the questions requiring students to interpret regression results (rather than design a model or interpret summary statistics), and students also answered these questions more confidently.

In Section 1, there was (unsurprisingly) a greater tendency for mistakes in the questions that required a large number of mathematical calculations (e.g. Q3b), and students tended towards the questions requiring fewer calculations. Marking did take this into account, and students were not penalised for making smaller mathematical errors in calculations with many steps.

Examiners:

F de Vivo

G Garnett

A Lifschitz (Chair)

O Panetta

H Skoda

F Zaman (Secretary)