



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

Leaving Certificate Examination 2017

History

Chief Examiner's Report

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1. Introduction

This report provides a review of the performance of candidates in the 2017 Leaving Certificate History examinations. It offers an analysis of candidate achievement at both Higher and Ordinary levels for the two components assessed: the Research Study Report (RSR) and the written examination. Tables of statistical information are given in an appendix.

The report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers, the published marking schemes and the syllabus and accompanying guidelines for teachers of this subject. The examination papers and marking schemes are available on the SEC website at www.examinations.ie/exammaterialarchive/ and the syllabus and teacher guidelines are available at www.curriculumonline.ie.

The present Leaving Certificate History syllabus was first examined in 2006. Its stated *General Aims* are set out under three broad headings: knowledge and understanding of human activity in the past; a range of research skills essential for the study of history; preparation for life and citizenship.

Knowledge and understanding of human activity in the past

Students are expected to acquire knowledge and develop understanding of specific listed elements of the topics studied. The elements in each topic conform to three perspectives: politics and administration; society and economy; culture, religion and science. Students are also expected to understand and apply a range of procedural, interpretative, and substantive concepts which are fundamental to this subject.

A range of research skills essential for the study of history

The practice of historical research and working with documentary evidence are key objectives of the syllabus. In particular they are central to the planning and execution of the RSR under the supervision and guidance of the teacher as well as the documents-based question (DBQ) which forms the opening section of the written examination.

Preparation for life and citizenship.

Students are expected to think critically by making judgements based on an evaluation of evidence and to develop positive historical values which should stand them in good stead as Irish citizens in the future.

2. What does the examination test?

The examination at each level comprises two components. The RSR, submitted to the school authorities in advance of the examination, is a chance for the candidate to showcase his/her research skills. The written examination tests the candidate's document-handling skills as well as his/her general knowledge and understanding of the specific elements listed in the syllabus topics.

2.1. Research Study Report

Candidates are required to choose a suitable topic to research personally and, having completed that research under the supervision and guidance of their teacher, they should write up their findings in the RSR booklet provided by the SEC.

There are three headings set out in the RSR booklets for presentation for assessment: Outline Plan (15 marks); Evaluation of the Sources (25 marks); Extended Essay with a review of the research process (60 marks). Guidelines for Candidates recommended a range of appropriate length for the Extended Essay as 1200-1500 at Higher level and 600-800 at Ordinary level. The total mark allocation of 100 marks amounts to 20% of the overall examination.

2.2. Written examination

At both levels, Higher and Ordinary, the written examination is of 150 minutes' duration with an extra allowance of twenty minutes available. It is allocated a maximum of 400 marks, which is 80% of the overall mark allocation. The examination consists of three sections. Section One, the DBQ, has four questions, all of which should be attempted.

		Higher	Ordinary
Question 1	Comprehension	(20 mks)	(40 mks)
Question 2	Comparison	(20 mks)	(20 mks)
Question 3	Criticism	(20 mks)	(20 mks)
Question 4	Contextualisation	(40 mks)	(20 mks)

Section 2 contained questions on all six Irish history topics from which the candidate had to choose two. Section 3 contained five of the topics from the history of Europe and the wider world from which the candidate had to choose one.

Higher level candidates were asked to write an essay-length answer to one of four questions on each of their chosen topics. For Ordinary level candidates each topic was divided into three parts:

- A Brief extract from a document source with five short questions to be answered
- B A short paragraph on one of four syllabus elements or key personalities
- C An extended paragraph on one of four questions case studies or key personalities.

3. How well did the 2017 candidates achieve the objectives of the course, and how do we know?

The History examination is designed to focus on the extent to which candidates can:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of some of the specific elements of historical content as prescribed in the syllabus
- demonstrate the ability to emulate the procedures of the historian in undertaking historical research and in engaging with document sources.

3.1 The Research Study Report (RSR)

The RSR has been a successful and popular vehicle for candidates to practise the job of the historian since it was first introduced for assessment alongside a newly-revised History syllabus in 2006.

The average mark in 2017 for the RSR remains very high at 89%, having ranged between 88.7% and 91.5% since 2008. It is by far the highest-scoring section of the examination, so much so that at both Higher and Ordinary levels, it has greatly reduced the numbers now achieving the lowest grades when compared with what was observed for the pre-2006 examinations and has contributed to a degree of increase of achievement of the higher grades. The exceptionally high average mark of around 90 can be put down to several factors. The candidate is expected to make his/her personal choice of what topic to research and that often results in great passion and enthusiasm. As well as taking ownership of the research process, the candidate avails of the guidance and support of his/her teacher without the imposition of urgent deadlines or the stress of presenting the research findings under examination conditions.

While the vast majority of candidates present their own original research, a small number are reported each year by examiners for suspected plagiarism. It can sometimes be difficult to detect plagiarism, but where it is not, an examiner will report any such suspicion to the advising examiner and, in cases confirmed by the SEC, the candidate's RSR mark will be withheld.

The most common problems with RSRs at both levels are as follows:

- Defining the subject chosen by them, but failing to justify its historical significance
- Not clearly identifying all of their intended aims
- Giving generic, that is non-specific, points about their intended approach
- Failing to cite sources, especially internet sources, with full validation
- Evaluating sources they claim to have used but showing no probative references to these in the Extended Essay
- Giving no review of the research process or giving a generic review which shows no specific connection to his/her own particular and individual research
- Presenting essays which are in excess of the recommended word count.

All of the examiners at Ordinary level found scripts with no accompanying RSR. There were at least 184 without RSRs, which is 5.7% of the total candidature. It is not known why more than one in twenty did not submit this high-scoring practical work which is worth 20% of the examination.

3.2 The documents-based question (DBQ)

The documents-based questions for 2017 were based on case studies from *Europe Topic 3: Dictatorship and democracy, 1920-1945*. At Higher level the case study was *The Jarrow March, October 1936* and at Ordinary level it was *The Nuremberg Rallies*.

The structure and response requirements of these questions exemplify how the examination paper moves from testing the relatively lower order skills of plain comprehension to questions which require higher order skills of comparison, criticism and contextualisation. In general the

high-achieving candidates show strong performance across this hierarchy of skills and are awarded accordingly.

Although the average mark for the Higher level DBQ in recent years has been just under 70%, the 2017 cohort's average mark was the lowest recorded at 65.5%. There were several contributory factors to this low score. Some candidates lost marks due to mediocre answering to Question 2 (comparison) and/or Question 3 (criticism). The greater cause of the lower-than-average mark seems to have been disappointing answers to Question 4 (contextualisation).

Question 4, at 40 marks, is the highest-value section of the DBQ. Examiners reported that a considerable number of candidates either did not write enough to garner marks or wrote a plain narrative account of the daily marching and not addressing the question asked: *What were the aims of the Jarrow March and to what extent were they achieved?* There were two parts to this question, neither of which can be answered by a narrative account of the march.

Candidates at Ordinary level fared better with their DBQ with an average mark in the low 70s. Their document sources were a very short and very readable piece about how a Nuremberg rally was organised and a photograph of a rally as seen from the top stage. The marks weighting at Ordinary level probably helps these candidate to score better overall than those at Higher level. For Ordinary level Question 1 is allocated 40 marks and Question 4 is allocated 20 marks, the other way round from the Higher level. Overall, the Ordinary level candidates negotiated quite well through their DBQ.

3.3 The most popular topics chosen by candidates

In Section 2 of the examination at both levels candidates had to choose two topics from the six Irish topics on offer. In Section 3 candidates had to choose one of five topics from Europe and the wider world.

The most popularly chosen topics from Irish history were:

Higher level

- 90% Topic 3: The pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912-1949
- 56% Topic 5: Politics and society in Northern Ireland, 1949-1993
- 34% Topic 2: Movements for political and social reform, 1870-1914
- 9% Topic 6: Government, economy and society in the Republic of Ireland, 1949-1989

Ordinary level

- 75% Topic 3: The pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912-1949
- 55% Topic 5: Politics and society in Northern Ireland, 1949-1993
- 35% Topic 2: Movements for political and social reform, 1870-1914
- 20% Topic 6: Government, economy and society in the Republic of Ireland, 1949-1989

The most popularly chosen topics from the history of Europe and the wider world were:

Higher level

- 83% Topic 6: The United States and the world, 1945-1989
- 9% Topic 2: Nation states and international tensions, 1871-1920
- 5% Topic 4: Division and realignment in Europe, 1945-1992
- 1% Topic 5: European retreat from empire and the aftermath, 1945-1990

Ordinary level

- 85% Topic 6: The United States and the world, 1945-1989
- 10% Topic 2: Nation states and international tensions, 1871-1920
- 5% Topic 4: Division and realignment in Europe, 1945-1992

Despite the fact that the syllabus and the examination offer a wide range of topics to choose from – eleven different topics in Sections 2 and 3 of the examination – the national candidature of 12,000 plus chooses a very narrow range of topics. Almost all of the candidates selected:

Ireland: Topic 3 **and** either Topic 2 or 5

Europe and the wider world: Topic 6

Topics such as Ireland 1 and 4 and Europe 1 and 5 have few, if any takers.

This report offers no commentary on the performance of candidates who chose to follow the Early Modern Field of Study because the numbers were so few. Only 69 candidates, 0.57% of the total, sat the Early Modern paper, 35 at Ordinary level and 34 at Higher level.

3.4 The most popular questions attempted by candidates

The most popular question on the Higher level paper was Europe and the wider world Topic 6 Question 2: *What was the contribution of Martin Luther King to the events of the Montgomery bus boycott and to other aspects of US life?* This was attempted by 56% of the candidates and earned an average mark of 58%. This proved very popular because the bus boycott is a case study and Martin Luther King is a key personality. Weaker answers confined themselves to recounting the events of the bus boycott, but many went on to deal with other aspects of American life. Some candidates devoted too much time to telling about Martin Luther King's early life which was not really relevant to the question.

The next three most-answered questions on this paper all came from the immensely popular Ireland Topic 3:

Topic 3 Question 3: *During the period 1922-1949, how did the 1932 Eucharistic Congress and/or the state's language and education policies contribute to Irish identity?* 39% of candidates tried

this question and earned an average mark of 53%. This was popular because the Eucharistic Congress is a case study, but it was not as well answered as the other two popular questions below. There were plenty of answers which went no further than offering a narrative of the events of the Congress without any real reference to the crux of the question, Irish national identity.

Topic 3 Question 4: *What was the impact of World War II on Ireland, North and South?* 24% of candidates tried this question and earned an average mark of 65%. This was popular due to the case study of Belfast during World War II. Most candidates showed a very good knowledge and understanding of many elements of life in wartime Ireland. The average mark earned was very high, almost on a par with the DBQ.

Topic 3 Question 2: *During the period 1922-1939, who achieved more in Anglo-Irish relations, Cosgrave or de Valera?* Argue your case, referring to both. 19% of candidates tried this question and earned an average mark of 61%. There were many long answers from candidates who showed very good knowledge and understanding of Anglo-Irish relations. While some candidates seemed to be more comfortable with dealing with de Valera, most of them succeeded in comparing the two men and arguing their case.

The most popular questions on the Ordinary level paper were also those on the two most popular topics, Ireland Topics 3 and 5 and Europe and the wider world Topic 6.

Ireland Topic 3

Section A comprised five questions on a short extract about the early years of the Irish Free State. Questions 1-4 were all answered with ease by the vast majority and Question 5, although not directly answerable from the extract, was nonetheless well attempted.

Section B asked for a short paragraph on one of the following: The Home Rule Bill, 1912-1914; Patrick Pearse; Anglo-Irish relations under de Valera, 1932-1939; James J. McElligott. The most popular choice here was Pearse and there were many good answers. Although, many did not touch on Pearse's contribution to Irish literature and education, there was often enough material on his direct association with the 1916 Rising.

The questions on the Home Rule Bill and on Anglo-Irish relations were sometimes answered quite well, but they also elicited confusion in some candidates who wrote about one instead of the other. Examiners reported that it was not unusual for candidates to confuse the Home Rule Bill with either the Anglo-Irish Treaty or Anglo-Irish relations. It can be difficult for candidates at this level not to inappropriately regard such concepts as interchangeable.

Even though James J. McElligott is a key personality in the syllabus, he was very much a non-runner in this examination as far as attracting responses was concerned. The appearance of Pearse in this section gave many candidates the opportunity to show their good knowledge and understanding of at least one other key personality.

Section C asked for longer paragraph answers to one of the following: Terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty; Preparations for Eucharistic Congress; Countess Markievicz and/or Evie Hone. There was a fairly even spread of popularity across the Treaty, the Congress and Countess Markievicz.

Candidates seemed well prepared for these and showed a good knowledge and understanding of them. Evie Hone and James Craig were rarely and, even then, poorly attempted.

The structure of all these questions required candidates to possess basic knowledge, understand it and draw on it to develop cogent responses to specific questions, thus presenting an assessment platform which allowed engagement from the lowest level of bare knowledge to formulating informed and well-constructed responses.

The marking scheme is developed and applied so as to reward those who demonstrate highest levels of engagement with the question presented using an in-depth knowledge and comprehension of all factors involved. This was particularly evident in responses to the questions about the Treaty and the Eucharistic Congress which are both case studies and to the question about Countess Markievicz who is a key personality in the syllabus.

4. What can current and future students and their teachers learn from this?

The above observations lead to the following advice for students and teachers.

- Choose suitable historical subjects for research when planning for the RSR. Consult the *Guidelines for Teachers* (page 14).
- Produce your own original and individual research from which to write up your RSR. Do not resort to plagiarism during the course of your research.
- Stay within the recommended word length for the RSR Extended Essay and do include a review of the research process as required.
- Students should adopt time-management strategies to ensure full, but not excessive, coverage of the DBQ in the examination.
- While case studies are important features of the syllabus, they should not become the exclusive basis for the answering of questions in Sections 2 and 3.
- Candidates should be aware from what perspective(s) a question is being asked and what narrative and/or analytical demands the question is making.
- Candidates, particularly at Higher level, should be prepared to engage in historical argument as part of their engagement with examination questions.
- Teachers and students should adopt strategies to avoid the various shortcomings alluded to in this report.

Final note of thanks

The SEC acknowledges and thanks History teachers and school authorities for their assistance in: giving encouragement, advice and support to their students in researching for their RSRs; facilitating and supervising their student's writing-up of their research findings in the RSR booklet; and ensuring by their sign-off the integrity of the RSRs submitted for assessment.

Appendix: statistics & trends

Participation trends

Year	<i>History</i> candidature	Total Leaving Certificate candidature*	<i>History</i> as % of total
2013	11822	52772	22.40
2014	12181	54025	22.55
2015	12185	55047	22.14
2016	12381	55707	22.23
2017	12194	55770	21.86

*Total Leaving Certificate candidature excludes Leaving Certificate Applied candidates.

Table 1: participation in Leaving Certificate *History*, 2013 to 2017

Year	Total <i>History</i> candidature	Number at Ordinary Level	Number at Higher Level	% Ordinary Level	% Higher Level
2013	11822	4037	7785	34.15	65.85
2014	12181	3711	8470	30.47	69.53
2015	12185	3744	8441	30.73	69.27
2016	12381	3629	8752	29.31	70.69
2017	12194	3200	8994	26.24	73.76

Table 2: number and percentage of candidates at each Level, 2013 to 2017

Year	Total Higher Level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2013	7785	3489	4296	44.8	55.2%
2014	8470	3697	4773	43.6%	56.4%
2015	8441	3850	4591	45.6%	54.4%
2016	8752	4164	4588	47.6%	52.4%
2017	8994	4050	4944	45.0%	55.0%

Table 3: gender composition of Higher Level *History* cohort, 2013 to 2017

Year	Total Ordinary Level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2013	4037	1472	2565	36.5%	63.5%
2014	3711	1335	2376	36.0%	64.0%
2015	3744	1410	2334	37.7%	62.3%
2016	3629	1378	2251	38.0%	62.0%
2017	3200	1181	2019	34.7%	65.3%

Table 4: gender composition of Ordinary Level *History* cohort, 2013 to 2017

Overall performance of candidates

The grading scale for Leaving Certificate examinations changed in 2017. Direct comparison with all aspects of the grade distributions from previous years is not possible. Nevertheless, data from 2016 and 2015 are presented in as comparable a way as is possible. The column widths in tables 5 to 10 below reflect the widths of the corresponding grade bands, so that the boundaries between these columns are aligned according to the corresponding grade boundaries. For example, the layout reflects the fact that grade 6 in 2017 is directly comparable with grades D2 and D3 combined in 2016 and 2015, but grade 7 in 2017 is not directly comparable to any grade band(s) from 2016 and 2015.

Year	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2017	8994	6.1	15.4	22.6	23.7	16.8	10.1	4.0	
		A1	A2 + B1	B2 + B3	C1 + C2	C3 + D1	D2 + D3	E	
2016	8752	6.2	16.1	23.3	23.3	16.6	10.8	3.0	
2015	8441	7.5	17.2	22.2	24.0	16.8	9.8	2.1	

Table 5 Percentage of candidates awarded each grade in *History* at Higher Level, 2017, with comparative data from 2016 and 2015

Year	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2017	4050	7.5	17.5	23.6	23.9	15.3	8.2	3.2	
		A1	A2 + B1	B2 + B3	C1 + C2	C3 + D1	D2 + D3	E	
2016	4164	7.7	18.5	23.9	22.4	15.2	9.3	2.7	
2015	3850	8.8	19.0	23.0	23.0	15.7	8.7	1.6	

Table 6 Percentage of female candidates awarded each grade in *History* at Higher Level, 2017, with comparative data from 2016 and 2015

Year	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2017	4944	5.0	13.7	21.8	23.5	18.0	11.7	4.6	
		A1	A2 + B1	B2 + B3	C1 + C2	C3 + D1	D2 + D3	E	
2016	4588	4.9	13.9	22.8	24.3	17.9	12.1	3.4	
2015	4591	6.4	15.7	21.4	24.8	17.9	10.8	2.6	

Table 7 Percentage of male candidates awarded each grade in *History* at Higher Level, 2017, with comparative data from 2016 and 2015

Year	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2017	3200	7.1	15.8	21.4	22.4	17.7	10.5	2.9	
		A1	A2 + B1	B2 + B3	C1 + C2	C3 + D1	D2 + D3	E	
2016	3629	5.4	15.3	23.6	22.4	17.5	12.1	2.9	
2015	3744	5.7	15.7	22.3	20.6	18.3	13.3	3.0	

Table 8 Percentage of candidates awarded each grade in *History* at Ordinary Level, 2017, with comparative data from 2016 and 2015

Year	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2017	1181	9.3	17.4	21.8	20.1	17.4	10.4	2.1	
		A1	A2 + B1	B2 + B3	C1 + C2	C3 + D1	D2 + D3	E	
2016	1378	6.0	16.5	27.7	21.7	15.3	10.3	2.1	
2015	1410	6.0	16.0	22.8	20.8	19.3	12.1	2.6	

Table 9 Percentage of female candidates awarded each grade in *History* at Ordinary Level, 2017, with comparative data from 2016 and 2015

Year	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2017	2019	5.8	14.9	21.2	23.7	17.9	10.6	3.	
		A1	A2 + B1	B2 + B3	C1 + C2	C3 + D1	D2 + D3	E	
2016	2251	5.1	14.7	21.0	22.8	18.8	13.2	3.3	
2015	2334	5.6	15.6	22.0	20.6	17.7	14.0	3.3	

Table 10 Percentage of male candidates awarded each grade in *History* at Ordinary Level, 2017, with comparative data from 2016 and 2015

Engagement with and performance on individual questions

The data in tables 11 and 12 are based on an analysis of a random selection of scripts and/or rough tallies supplied by advising examiners.

Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark, out of question total (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
	99.9	2	89 (89%)	1	RSR (compulsory)
	100.0	1	66 (66%)	2	DBQ (compulsory)
	55.7	3	58 (58%)	6	Europe T6 Q2
	39.3	4	53 (53%)	8	Ireland T3 Q3
	24.1	5	65 (65%)	3	Ireland T3 Q4
	19.4	6	61 (61%)	5	Ireland T3 Q2
	17.0	7	64 (64%)	4	Ireland T2 Q1
	16.6	8	55 (55%)	7	Ireland T5 Q1

Table 11: Popularity of and average mark for most popular questions, Higher Level *History*

Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark, out of question total (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
	95	2	85-90%	1	RSR (compulsory)
	100	1	80%	2	DBQ (compulsory)
	85	3	75%	3	Europe Topic 6
	75	4	70%	4	Ireland Topic 3
	55	5	65-70%	5	Ireland Topic 5
	35	6	65%	6	Ireland Topic 2
	20	7	60-65%	7	Ireland Topic 6

Table 12: Popularity of and average mark for each question, Ordinary Level *History*