



History Departments  
and the National Student Survey 2010



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## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results from the National Student Survey (NSS) 2010 for History. It was commissioned by the History Subject Centre in December 2010. The results for Humanities and NSS overall are also presented for comparative purposes. The results are presented using bar charts showing average scores by scale and question, which are accompanied by brief commentaries. In addition to showing overall results for each subject and in comparison to humanities and the NSS overall, the report presents the results broken down by institutional group and region. Further, average scores for each question broken down by gender are also presented. Notable changes compared to the results from the NSS 2009 survey are also mentioned. A summary of the results is provided at the end of each section.

## THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

The NSS contains 22 questions grouped into seven themes or 'scales'. Each question presents a statement to which students are asked to what extent they agree or disagree on a five-point scale. Responses are coded numerically, with one representing "definitely disagree" and five representing "definitely agree". The response option "Not applicable" is also offered.

The questionnaire also includes open-ended response questions inviting respondents to record 'positive' and 'negative' features of their university experience which they would like to highlight. The responses from the open-ended questions are not presented in this report.

The results presented in this report are based on average scores by course, which have been aggregated.



**Table 1: Contents of the National Student Survey 2010**

Scale	Question	Question Content
<b>1</b> <b>Teaching and Learning</b>	<b>1</b>	Staff are good at explaining things
	<b>2</b>	Staff have made the subject interesting
	<b>3</b>	Staff are enthusiastic
	<b>4</b>	Course is intellectually stimulating
<b>2</b> <b>Assessment and Feedback</b>	<b>5</b>	Criteria used in marking have been clear in advance
	<b>6</b>	Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair
	<b>7</b>	Feedback has been prompt
	<b>8</b>	I have received detailed comments on my work
	<b>9</b>	Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand
<b>3</b> <b>Academic Support</b>	<b>10</b>	I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies
	<b>11</b>	I have been able to contact staff when I needed to
	<b>12</b>	Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices
<b>4</b> <b>Organization and Management</b>	<b>13</b>	The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned
	<b>14</b>	Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively
	<b>15</b>	The course is well organised and is running smoothly
<b>5</b> <b>Learning Resources</b>	<b>16</b>	The library resources and services are good enough for my needs
	<b>17</b>	I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to
	<b>18</b>	I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to
<b>6</b> <b>Personal Development</b>	<b>19</b>	The course has helped me present myself with confidence
	<b>20</b>	My communication skills have improved
	<b>21</b>	As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems
<b>7</b> <b>Overall Satisfaction</b>	<b>22</b>	Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course

# HOW TO USE NSS DATA

The NSS has been conducted on an annual basis since 2005. It asks final year undergraduates to provide feedback on their courses through completion of the questionnaire presented in Table 1. All eligible students receive an e-mail inviting them to complete the questionnaire online. The independent company (Ipsos MORI) conducting the survey then follow up with those who do not respond to the e-mail in order to ensure the scope and rigor of the research. This takes place through post and then telephone. The results of the survey are published on the website Unistats.com, as well as being made available to relevant organizations via HEFCE and the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

There are three main methodological points to consider when evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the NSS dataset as a tool for quality enhancement:

1. The data is about student experience of the learning environment. This experience is limited, in the sense that students lack full insight into the objective features of this environment<sup>1</sup>. Responses may be shaped by a lack of personal understanding of the educational value of a particular aspect of the course or unrealistic estimations of prevailing standards within comparable institutions. Furthermore response will usually reflect partial knowledge of the institution itself e.g. a student may give low scores for scale 1 questions on the basis of having been taught by an unrepresentative series of unenthusiastic staff members in an otherwise exemplary department.
2. It is also important to note the potential variability in the learning styles of students and the role this plays in shaping responses. For instance two students with different orientations in relation to feedback (e.g. one prefers clear and concise feedback while the other prefers abundant and thorough feedback) are likely to give different answers to scale 2 (“Assessment and Feedback”) questions in spite of inhabiting the same learning environment. Given the heterogeneity of the student population, it is unavoidable that different respondents interpret the questions in different ways and that these differences may reflect divergent learning needs which educators must be sensitive to.
3. The experience students have of their learning environment will be shaped by its actual characteristics. So while it is important to recognize the aforementioned limitations of the data, it is important not to lose sight of the objective referents of questionnaire responses. Though responses are mediated through the subjective perception of students, it is still the case that students possess valuable insight into the characteristics of their learning environment. As Prosser (2005) puts it, “students on a course experience the same teaching and the same course, but they experience them in different ways. Becoming aware of those differences, and trying to understand them, is the key to improving students’ experiences of learning.”

While there are limitations to the data these should not be overstated. The scope of the NSS makes it a uniquely valuable resource for those seeking to enhance the student learning experience. All finalists at participating universities are invited to complete the questionnaire through a multi-stage process (e-mail, post, telephone) which aims to minimise non-response. Furthermore the survey is conducted in a standardised fashion across the UK each year by a hugely experienced market research company. As such the data can be taken to be as rigorous a sample of student opinion as is effectively feasible.

Even so, it is imperative that the data be interpreted in a way which is informed by an appreciation of the aforementioned methodological issues. An attempt to understand the data in terms of a single scale of student satisfaction would fall short in this respect: it would presuppose uniformity in respondents and their responses that could not be justified, as well as obscuring the knowledge able to be recovered from responses on the other six scales. Similarly courses should not be ranked hierarchically on the basis of NSS results, as the differences between particular courses are often very small. Furthermore it is a mistake to compare departments directly because of the varying student demographics and institutional characteristics represented on the NSS.

Prosser (2005) suggests that interpreting NSS results as satisfaction ratings can be counter-productive. He argues that the data is much more productively interpreted as indicators of how students experience their university and department as a context for learning. Such an understanding is best placed to generate practical insights from data in spite of its methodological weaknesses. Through identification of trends within a learning environment and comparative tendencies across them, it is possible for the NSS to ‘flag up’ relative strengths and weaknesses for particular disciplines, institutions or mission groups. As Williams and Kane (2008) argue, “data from such high-level surveys is best used for indicative purposes to identify areas for further investigation”.

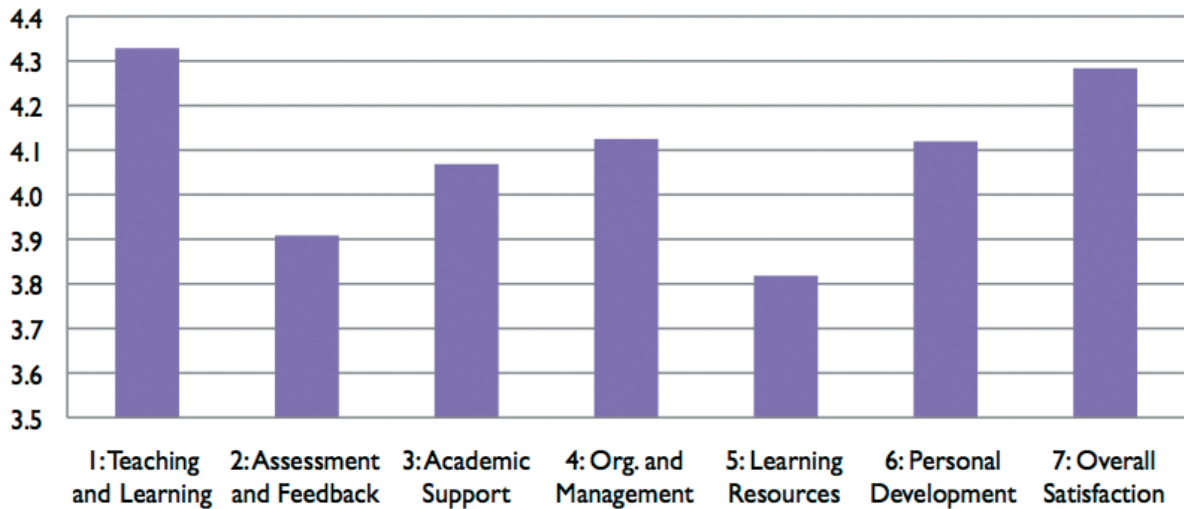
Through analysis of the NSS it is possible to identify apparent issues which invite further inquiry. While it is possible to construct hypotheses to explain patterning in NSS results, these are best construed as starting points for investigation rather than conclusive insights into student experience.

<sup>1</sup> This claim applies beyond the student population. Staff also lack full insight, albeit in different ways. This reciprocal lack of full penetration into the characteristics of the learning environment is why the NSS stands as a valuable addition to anecdotal evidence and personal experience.

# 1.1. OVERALL RESULTS FOR HISTORY

The following section presents the average scores for History by scale and question. The results achieved were generally high, which were also reflected by high overall satisfaction, but there was some variation in average score by scale and question. The scales with the highest average score were Scale 1 “Teaching and Learning” and Scale 7 “Overall Satisfaction” (both 4.3 points), whereas Scale 5 “Learning Resources” scored the lowest (3.8 points).

**Figure 1: Average Score for History Departments by Scale**



The average scores for individual questions closely reflected those of each scale overall. The questions with the highest average score were Q3 “Staff are enthusiastic” and Q4 “The course is intellectually stimulating” (both 4.4. points). The questions with the lowest average scores were Q7 “Feedback has been prompt” and Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs” (both 3.7 points).

**Figure 2: Average Score for History Departments by Question**

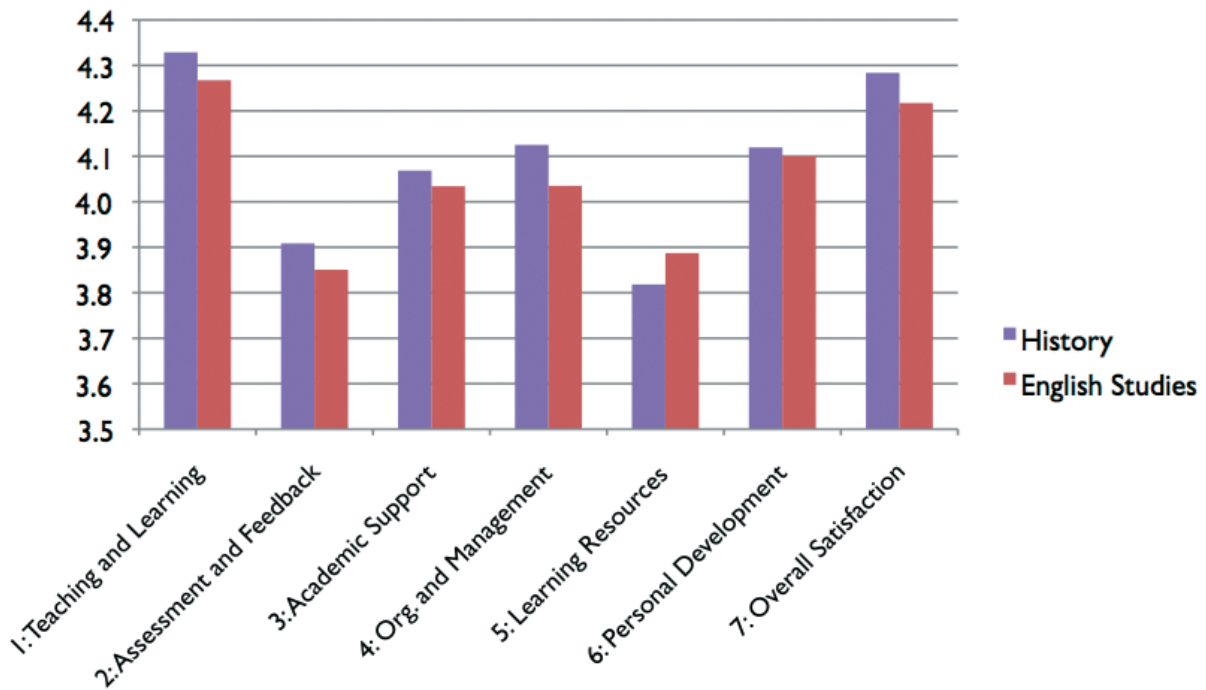


## 1.2. HISTORY RESULTS COMPARED TO ENGLISH STUDIES

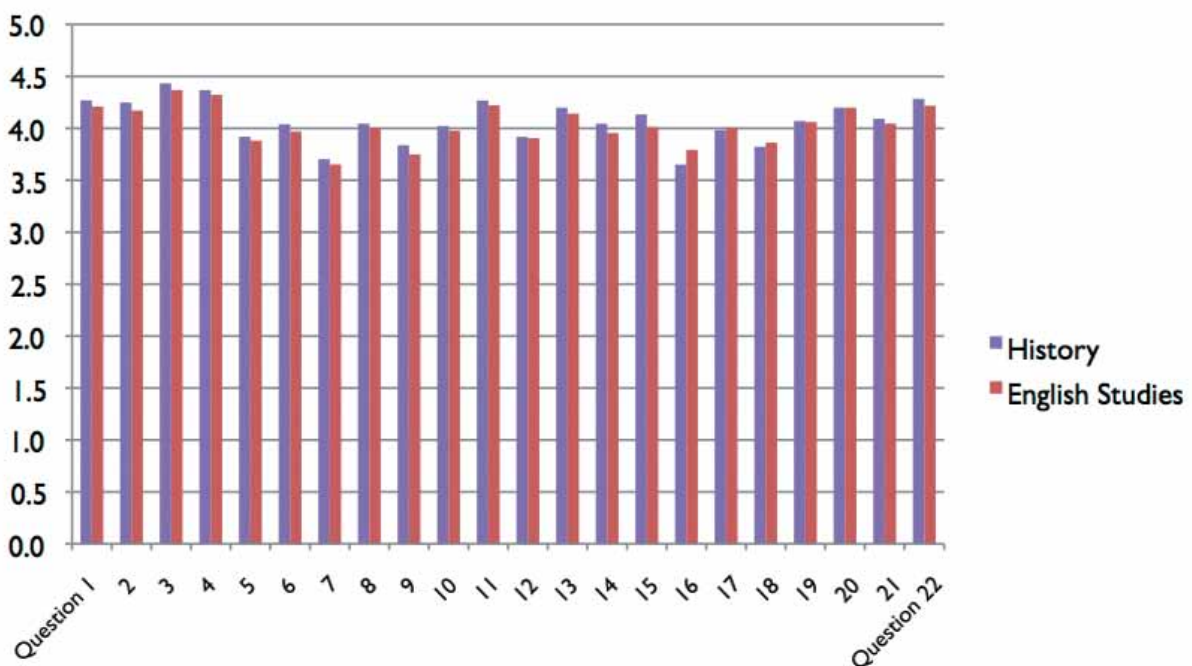
The following section compares the results from English Studies departments with those from History departments.

History achieved similar or higher average scores compared to English Studies on all scales, except Scale 5 “Learning Resources”, for which History achieved a marginally lower score. The differences between History and English Studies were small, however. The difference for individual questions was similarly small, with History achieving 0.1 points higher score on about half of all questions. The only question for which English Studies achieved a higher score than History was Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”. The magnitude of the difference was similarly small, however. There was no difference with respect to the remaining questions.

**Figure 3: Comparison of History and English Studies Averages by Scale**



**Figure 4: Comparison of History and English Studies Averages by Question**



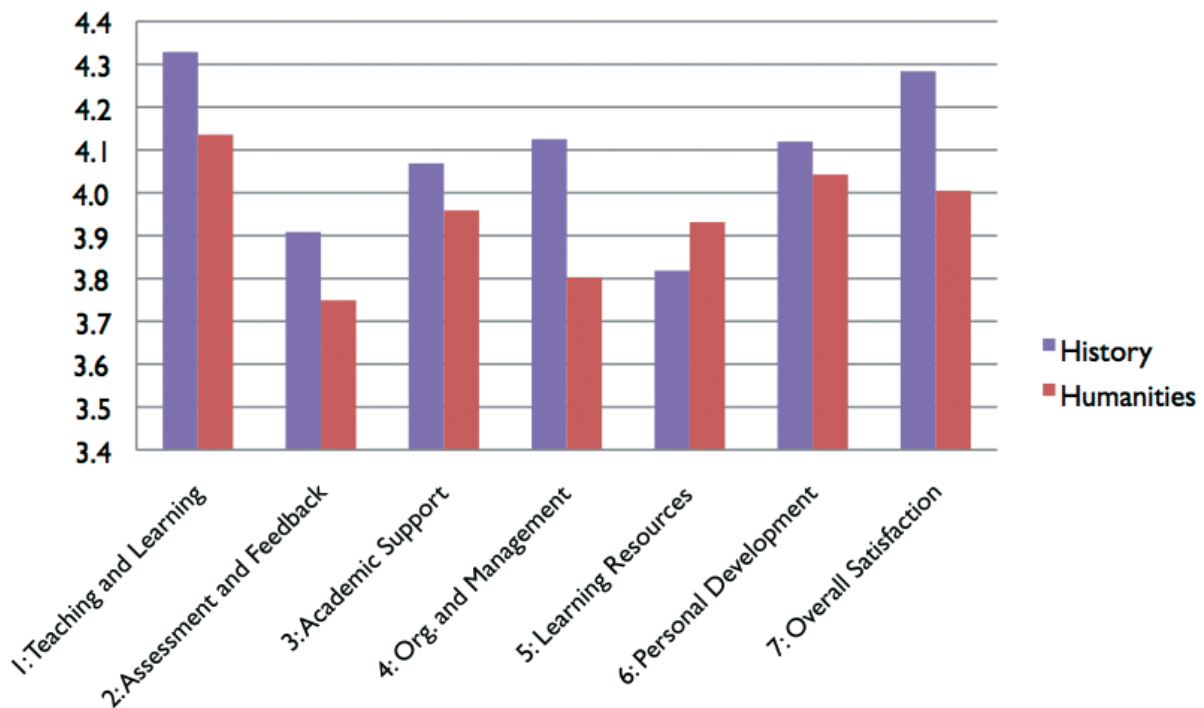
## 1.3. HISTORY RESULTS COMPARED TO HUMANITIES RESULTS

The following section presents the average scores for History departments compared to those for Humanities. There is no clearly defined Humanities sub-category on the NSS. For the purposes of this analysis, Humanities were taken to be constituted by the subject and disciplinary categories from the NSS listed below. The first two are included because they shared this category with History, rather than by utilising the general disciplinary category. The following seven are disciplinary categories encompassing a number of distinct subjects.

1. Archaeology
2. Others in Historical and Philosophical Studies
3. English-based studies
4. European Languages and Area studies
5. Other Languages and Area studies
6. Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies
7. Art and Design
8. Performing Arts
9. Other Creative Arts

The average scores for History departments tended to be marginally higher than the average for Humanities, with the most marked difference for Scale 4 “Organisation and Management” (4.1 versus 3.8 points) and Scale 7 “Overall Satisfaction” (4.3 versus 4.0 points). The exception was Scale 5 “Learning Resources”, for which History had a lower average score although the difference was small (3.8 versus 3.9 points). The pattern of highest and lowest scores with respect to scales was similar for History compared to Humanities.

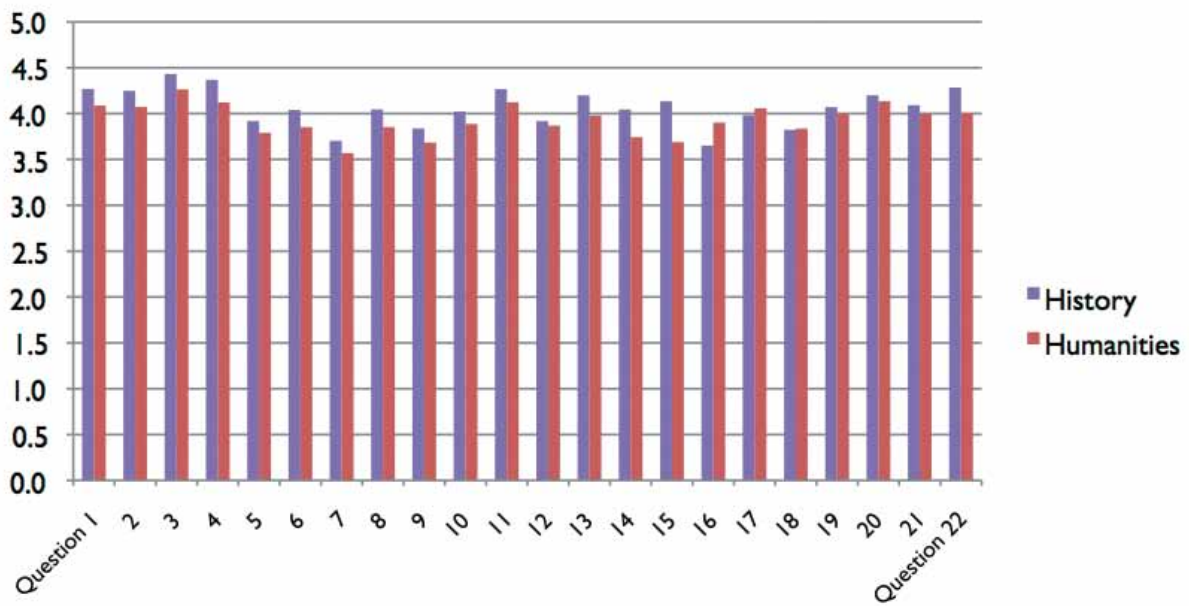
**Figure 5: Comparison of History and Humanities Averages by Scale**



With respect to individual questions, History had a higher average score for most of the questions compared to Humanities. The question with the most notable difference was Q15 “The course is well organised and is running smoothly” (4.1 versus 3.7 for Humanities). History had a lower average score than Humanities on only two questions (Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs” (3.7 versus 3.9 points) and Q17 “I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to” (4.0 versus 4.1 points).



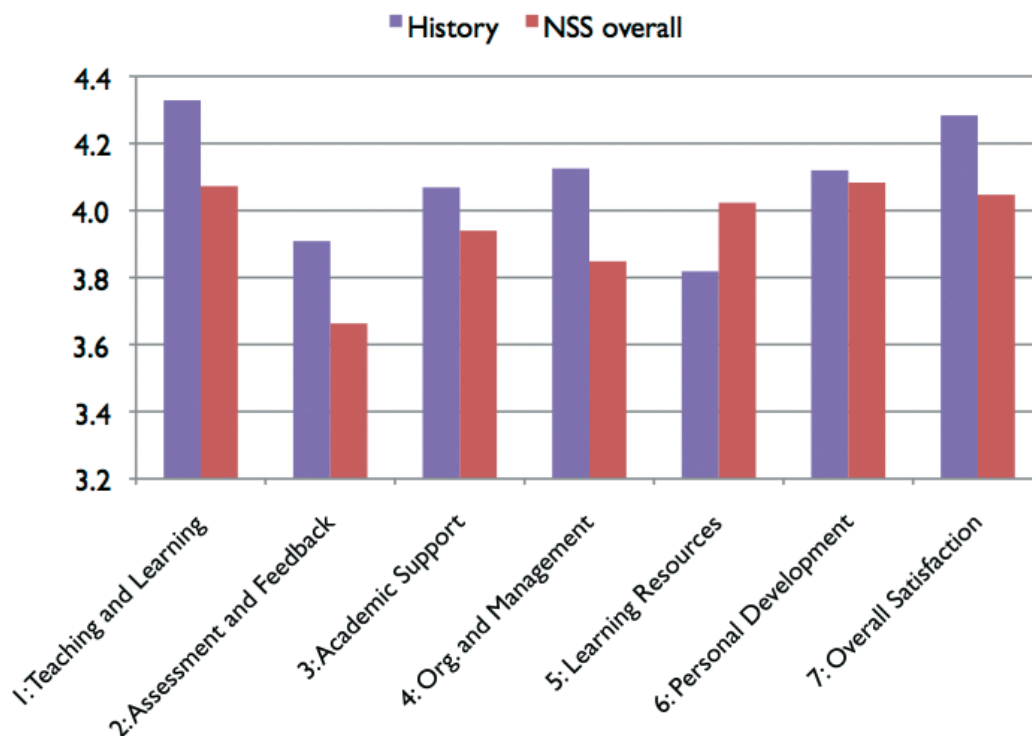
**Figure 6: Comparison of History and Humanities Averages by Question**



## 1.4. HISTORY RESULTS COMPARED TO OVERALL NSS RESULTS

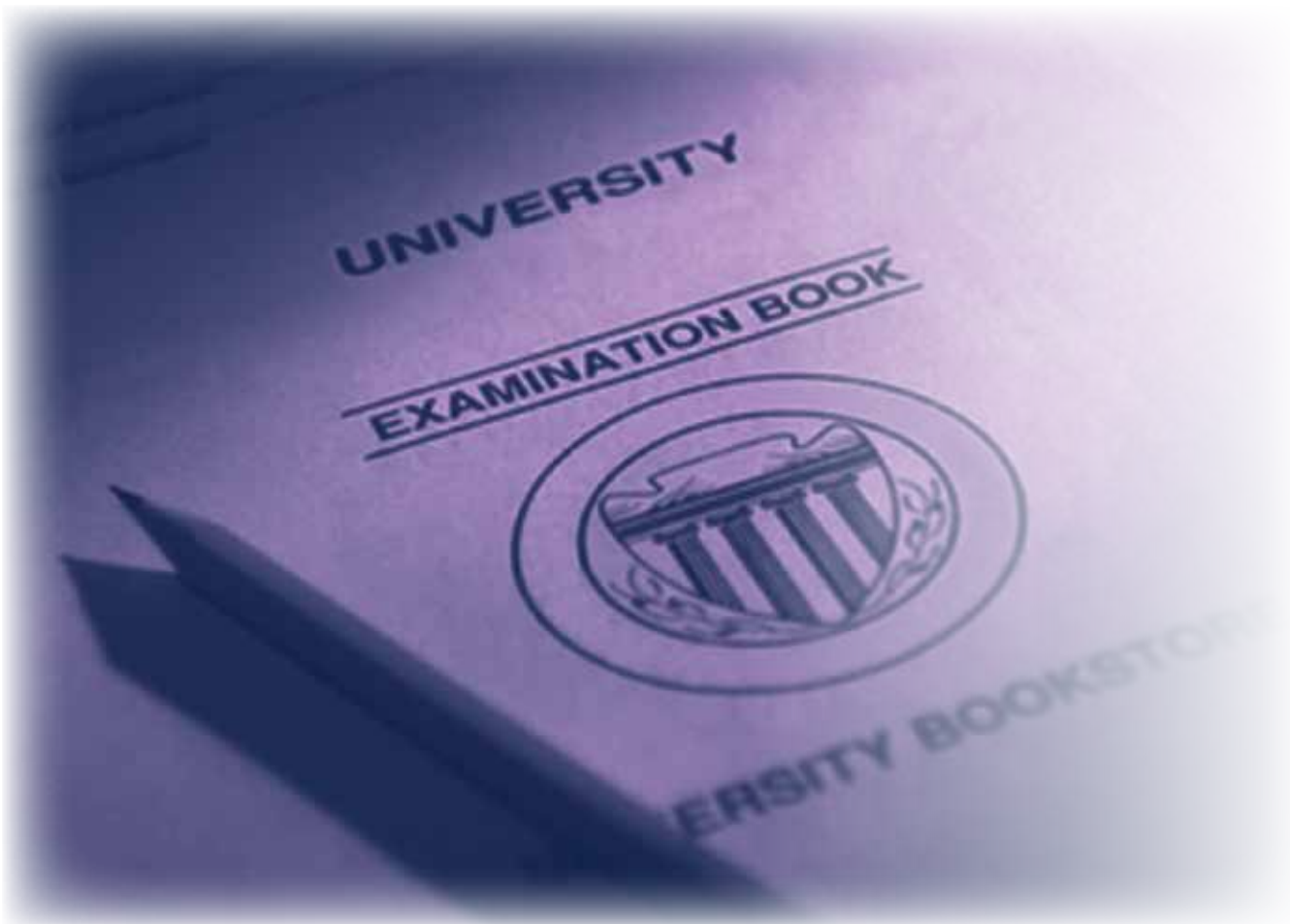
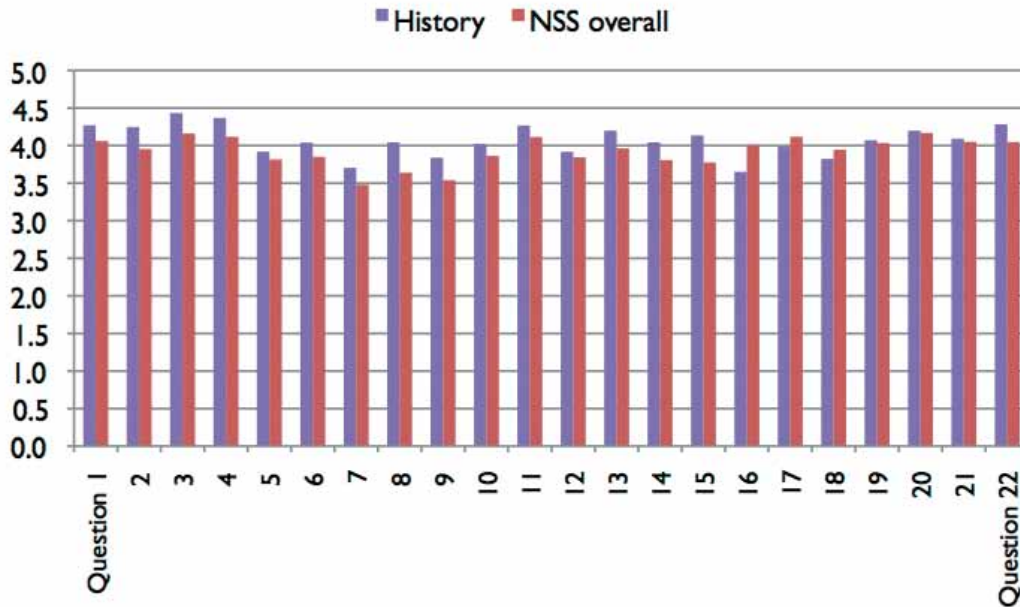
This section compares average results for all History departments with average results for all subjects across the NSS. It should be noted that there are a further six questions which are asked only to NHS funded students which have been excluded from this analysis. Comparing History with the NSS overall, History tended to achieve a higher average score, with Scale 1 “Teaching and Learning” (4.3 versus 4.1) and Scale 4 “Organisation and Management” (4.1 versus 3.8) showing the most marked differences. The average score for History was lower than the average for NSS overall on Scale 5 “Learning Resources” (3.8 versus 4.0).

**Figure 7: Comparison of History and Overall NSS Averages by Scale**



With respect to individual questions, History had a higher average score than the NSS average for all questions except for those in Scale 5 “Learning Resources”. The questions with the most marked differences were Q8 “I have received detailed feedback on my work” (where History scored 4.0 on average compared to 3.6 for NSS) and Q15 “The course is well organised and is running smoothly” (4.1 for History versus 3.8 for NSS). The average History score was lower than that for NSS overall for the questions in Scale 5. In particular, History scored comparatively low for Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs” (3.7 versus 4.0 points).

**Figure 8: Comparison of History and Overall NSS Averages by Question**



## 2.1. HISTORY RESULTS BY INSTITUTIONAL GROUPING

The following section compares average scores for History departments broken down by institutional group (Russell group, 1994 group, Million+ group, and University Alliance). Links to mission group websites are available at <http://tinyurl.com/5tlwldj>.

A number of institutions were not represented in the History component of the NSS dataset. These missing institutions spanned all four categories of institutional grouping. In some cases, such as Imperial College London, this was clearly due to the absence of history degrees at a predominately science-based university. However, the reasons for many of the other omissions are unknown. While these numbers were relatively insignificant within the Russell Group, 1994 Group and University Alliance (two, four and two missing respectively) a total of fourteen institutions were missing from the Million+ grouping.

**Table 2: Average History Scores across Institutional Groups by Scale**

Scale	History overall	1994 Group	Million+ Group	Russell Group	University Alliance
1 Teaching and Learning	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.3
2 Assessment and Feedback	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.9
3 Academic Support	4.1	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.1
4 Organization and Management	4.1	4.3	3.9	4.2	4.1
5 Learning Resources	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.1	3.7
6 Personal Development	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.1
7 Overall Satisfaction	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.3

There were some differences between the institutional groups when comparing average score by scale, although the differences were generally minor. The 1994 group tended to have the highest average score for each scale, whereas the Million+ group tended to have the lowest. The most marked difference was seen for Scale 4 “Organisation and Management”, for which the 1994 group scored 4.3 on average compared to 3.9 for the Million+ group.

The average scores for individual questions showed slightly more variation across the institutional groups compared to the results aggregated by scale. The largest difference was seen for Q14 “Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively”, where the Russell group scored the highest (4.2 points) and the University Alliance the lowest (3.8 points), and Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”, where the 1994 group scored the highest (4.0 points) and the Million+ group the lowest (3.5 points).

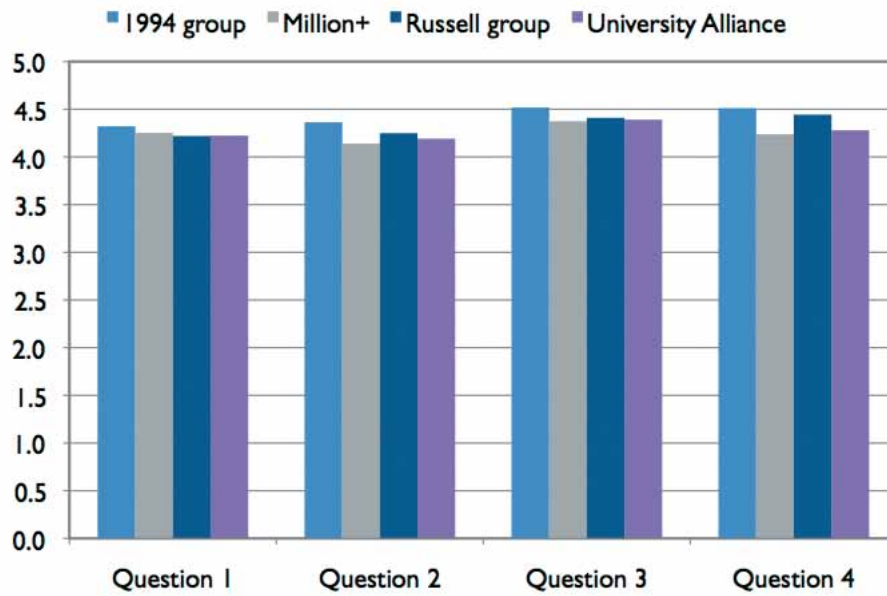
Teaching and learning was a comparative strength across all institutional groups (similar to History overall), as reflected in the high average scores for this scale. With respect to individual questions, all four groups achieved the highest score on Q3 “Staff are enthusiastic”. Additionally, both the Russell group and the 1994 group achieved equally high scores for Q4 “Course is intellectually stimulating”.

The questions for which the lowest average scores were achieved varied somewhat between the institutional groups. The 1994 group, the Million+ group, and the University Alliance achieved the lowest average score for Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs” (3.7, 3.6 and 3.5 points, respectively). The Million+ group achieved an equally low average score for Q7 “Feedback has been prompt” (3.6 points). In contrast, the Russell group achieved the lowest average scores for questions relating to assessment and feedback (Q5 “Criteria used in marking have been clear in advance”, Q7 “Feedback has been prompt”, and Q9 “Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand” (all 3.7 points).

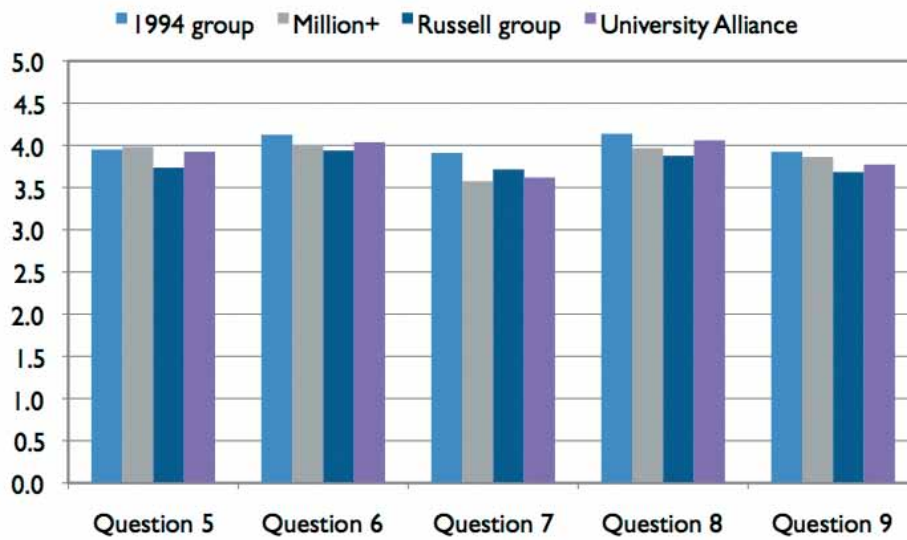
**Table 3: Average History Scores across Institutional Groups by Question**

Scale	Question	History Average	1994 Group	Million+ Group	Russell Group	University Alliance
1 Teaching and Learning	1	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2
	2	4.2	4.4	4.1	4.2	4.2
	3	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.4	4.4
	4	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.4	4.3
2 Assessment and Feedback	5	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.9
	6	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.0
	7	3.7	3.9	3.6	3.7	3.6
	8	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.1
	9	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.8
3 Academic Support	10	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.0
	11	4.3	4.3	4.1	4.3	4.3
	12	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.9
4 Organization and Management	13	4.2	4.4	4.0	4.2	4.2
	14	4.0	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.1
	15	4.1	4.3	3.9	4.1	4.1
5 Learning Resources	16	3.7	3.7	3.6	4.0	3.5
	17	4.0	4.1	3.9	4.2	3.9
	18	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.0	3.7
6 Personal Development	19	4.1	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.0
	20	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.1
	21	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.0	4.1
7 Overall Satisfaction	22	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.3

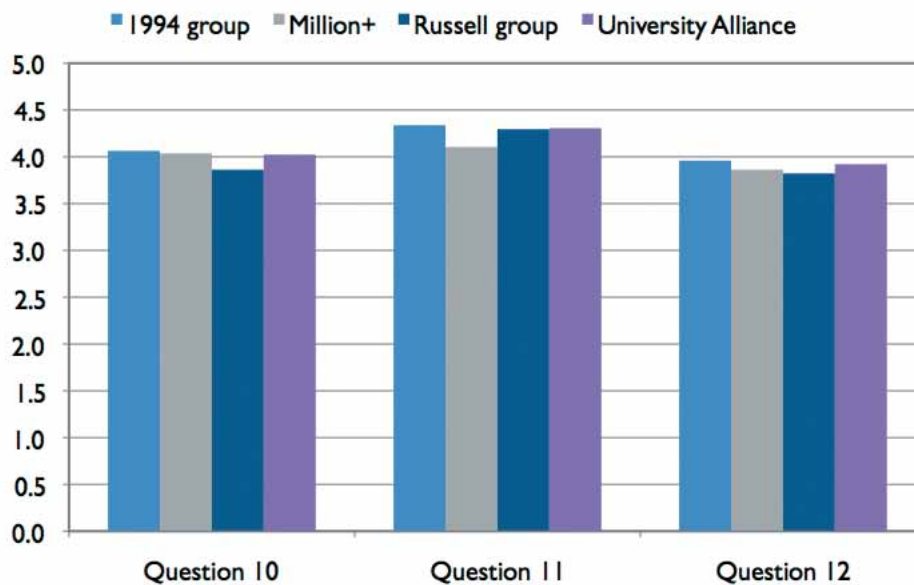
**Figure 9: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 1: Teaching and Learning)**



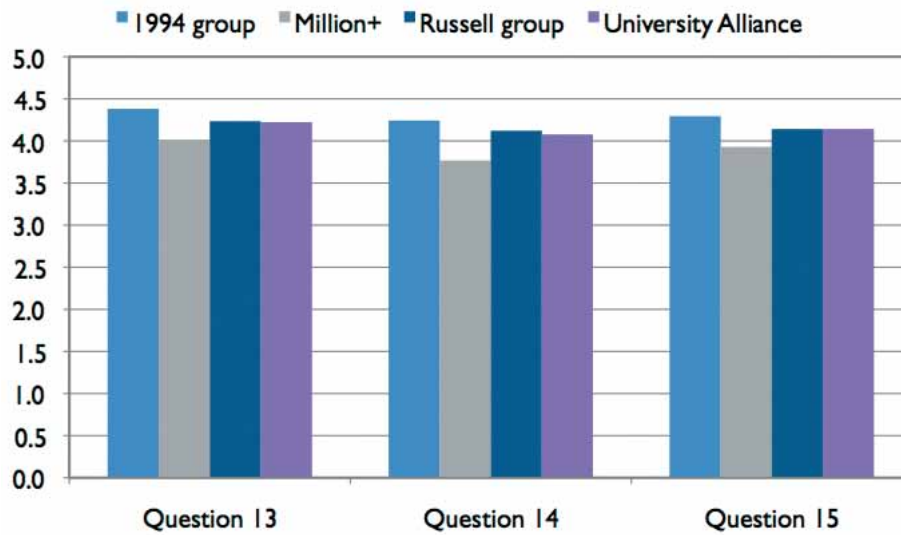
**Figure 10: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 2: Assessment and Feedback)**



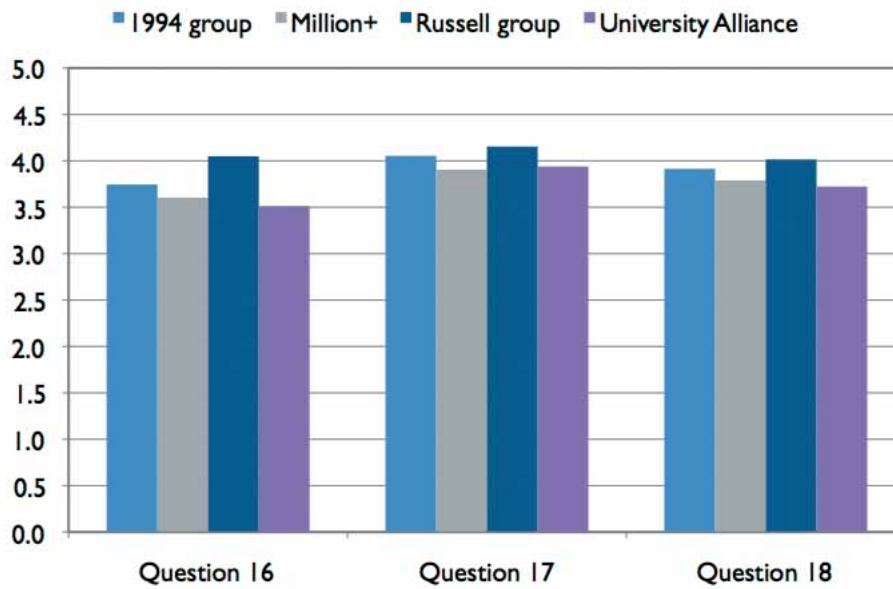
**Figure 11: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 3: Academic Support)**



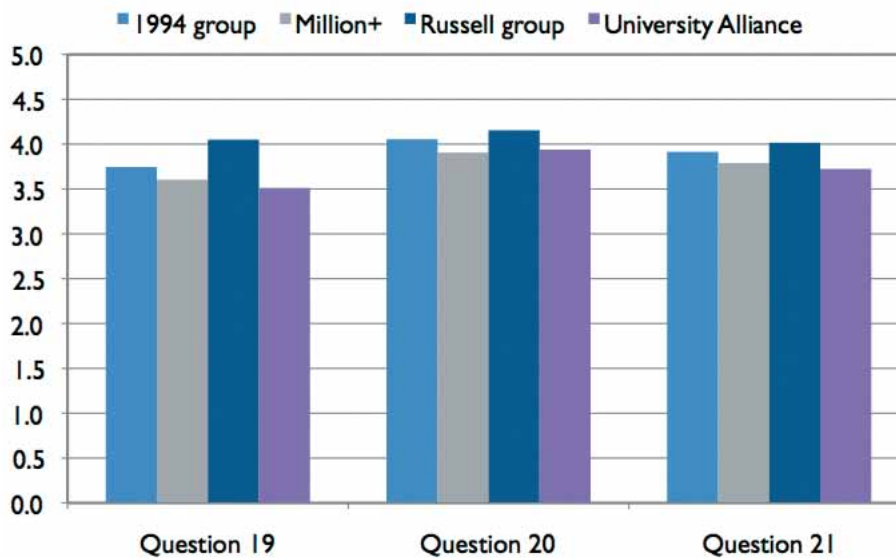
**Figure 12: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 4: Organisation and Management)**



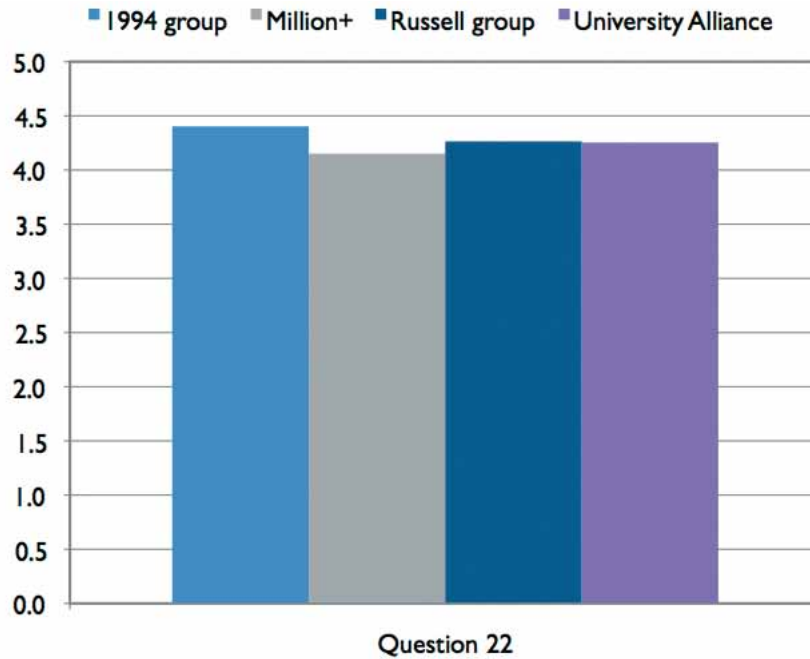
**Figure 13: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 5: Learning Resources)**



**Figure 14: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 6: Personal Development)**



**Figure 15: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groups (Scale 7: Overall Satisfaction)**



### 3.1. HISTORY RESULTS BY GENDER

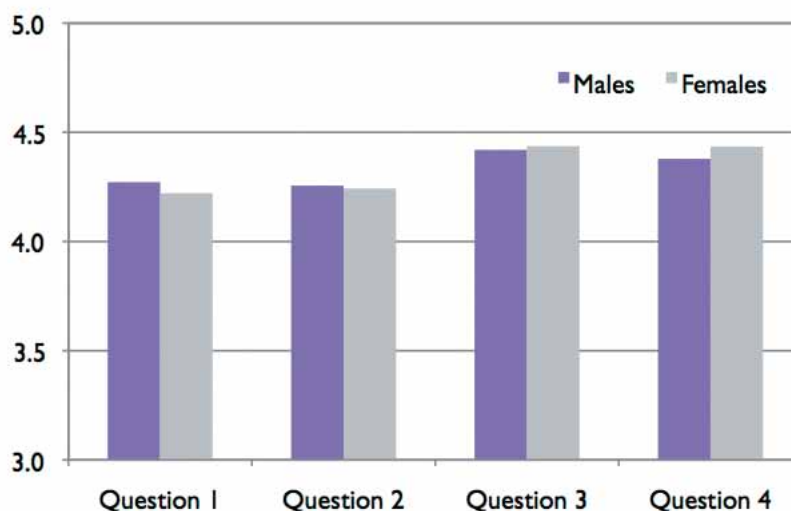
The following section shows the results for each question broken down by gender. It should be noted that these results have been generated using a slightly different methodology compared to the results shown elsewhere in this report. Whereas other results have been calculated based on the average score for each course, the results by gender have been calculated by simply aggregating all individual responses. Consequently there may be minor differences in the results presented in this section compared to those presented elsewhere.

The responses of males and females were largely very similar for History. Where there was a difference, males tended to give a slightly higher average score compared to females, although the difference was small (no more than 0.1 points).

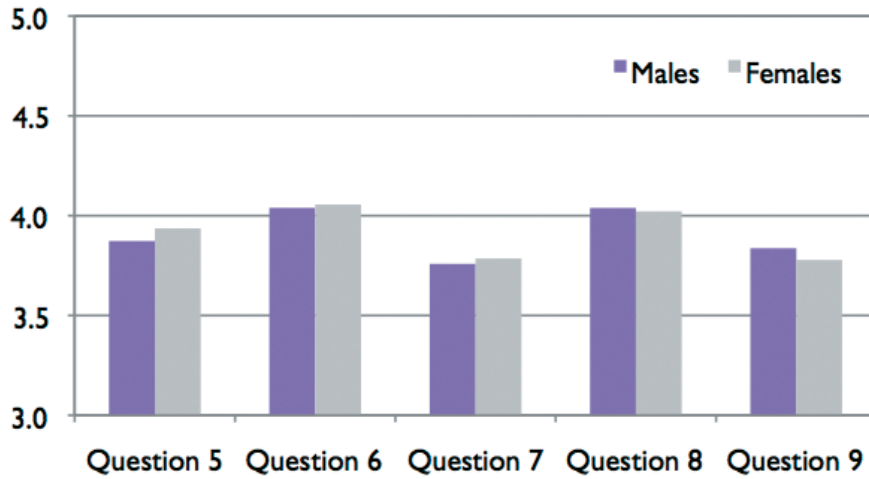
The questions where males gave a higher score than females included questions relating to explanation and feedback (Q1 “Staff are good at explaining things” and Q9 “Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand”). Other questions for which males gave higher average response were Q10 “I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies”, Q12 “Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices”, Q16 “The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”, and Q17 “I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to”.

Females gave a higher score than males on questions Q4 “Course is intellectually stimulating” and Q5 “Criteria used in marking have been clear in advance”, though again, the difference was small.

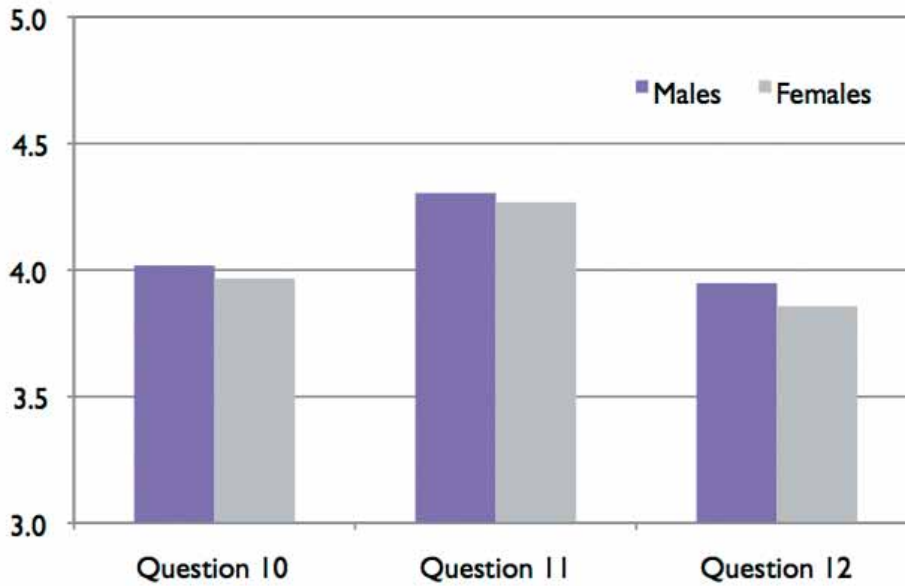
**Figure 16: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 1: Teaching and Learning)**



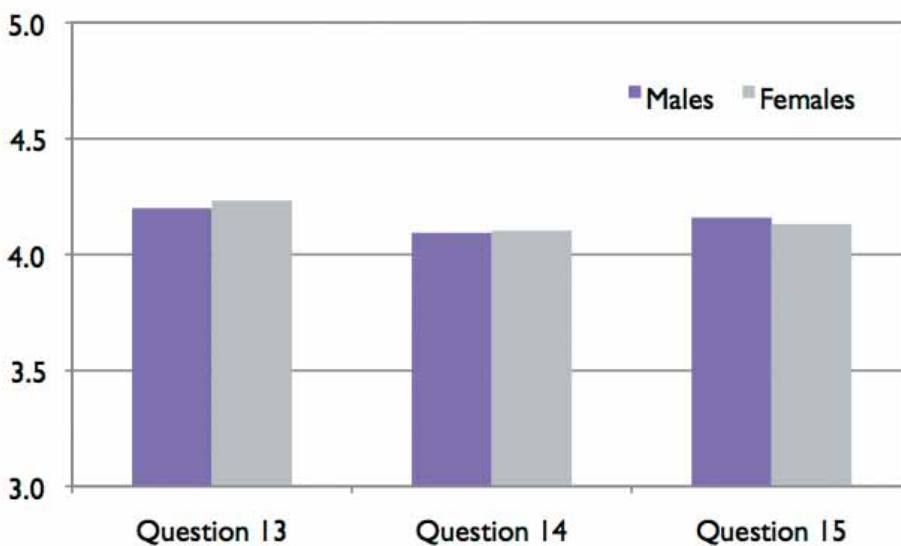
**Figure 17: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 2: Assessment and Feedback)**



**Figure 18: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 3: Academic Support)**

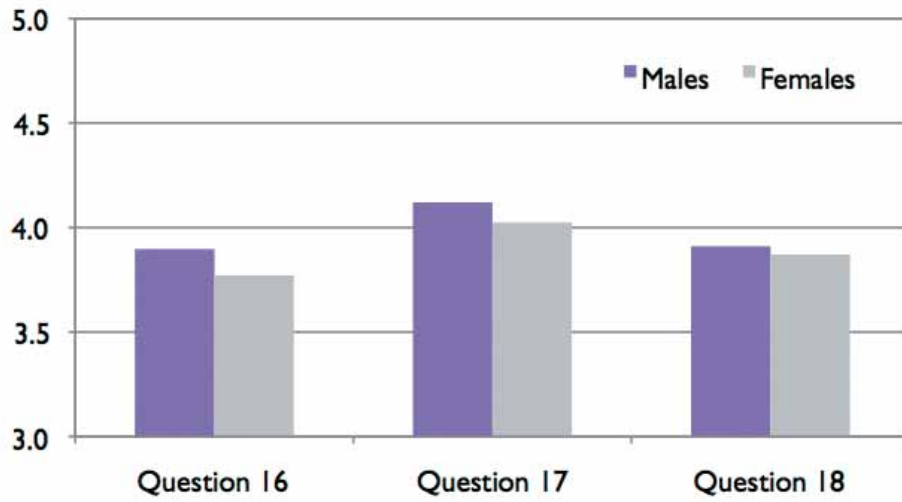


**Figure 19: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 4: Organisation and Management)**

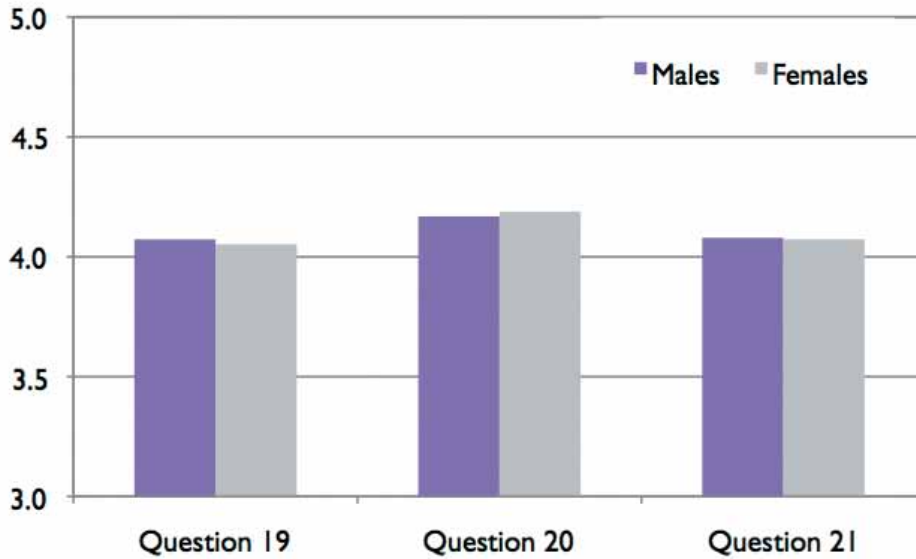




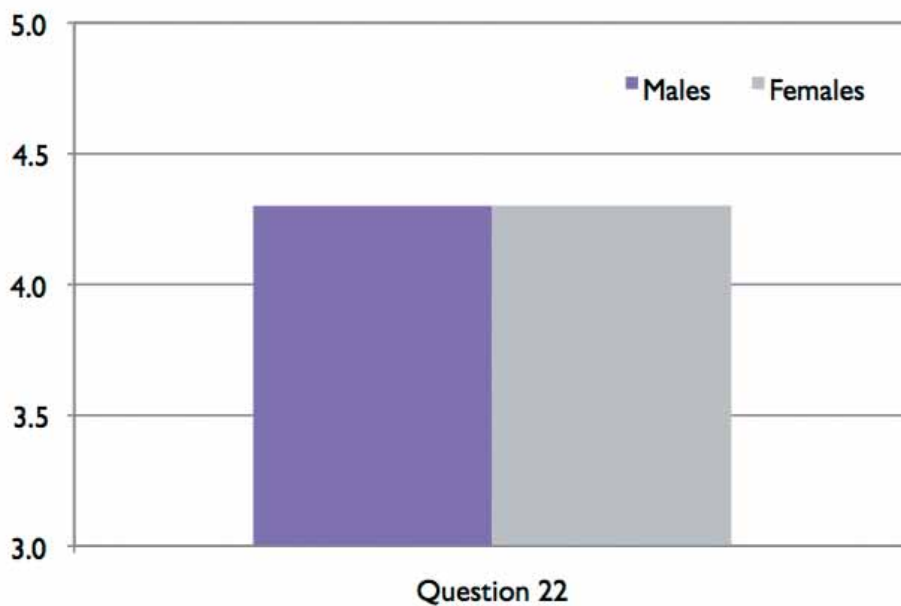
**Figure 20: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 5: Learning Resources)**



**Figure 21: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 6: Personal Development)**



**Figure 22: Comparative Scores for Gender (Scale 7: Overall satisfaction)**



## 4.1. HISTORY RESULTS BY REGION

The following section shows the average scores across History departments broken down by geographical region (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

There was some variation in average scores by region, but the differences were generally small (ranging between 0.1 and 0.2 points). While there was no region that consistently achieved the highest score, Northern Ireland tended to achieve the lowest score.

**Table 4: Comparative Averages by Region**

Scale	History Overall	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
1 Teaching and Learning	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.3
2 Assessment and Feedback	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.8
3 Academic Support	4.1	4.1	3.9	4.0	4.1
4 Organization and Management	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.2
5 Learning Resources	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8
6 Personal Development	4.1	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.0
7 Overall Satisfaction	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.3

There was somewhat more variation between regions when comparing individual questions rather than scales. The most marked difference was seen for Q8 “I have received detailed comments on my work” (3.7 for Northern Ireland versus 4.1 for both Scotland and Wales).

Figure 23: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 1: Teaching and Learning)

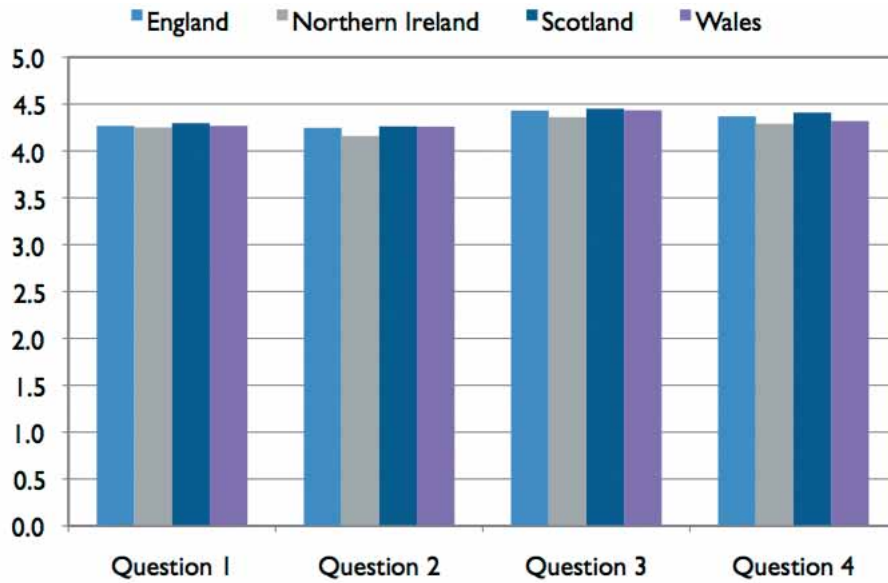


Figure 24: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 2: Assessment and Feedback)

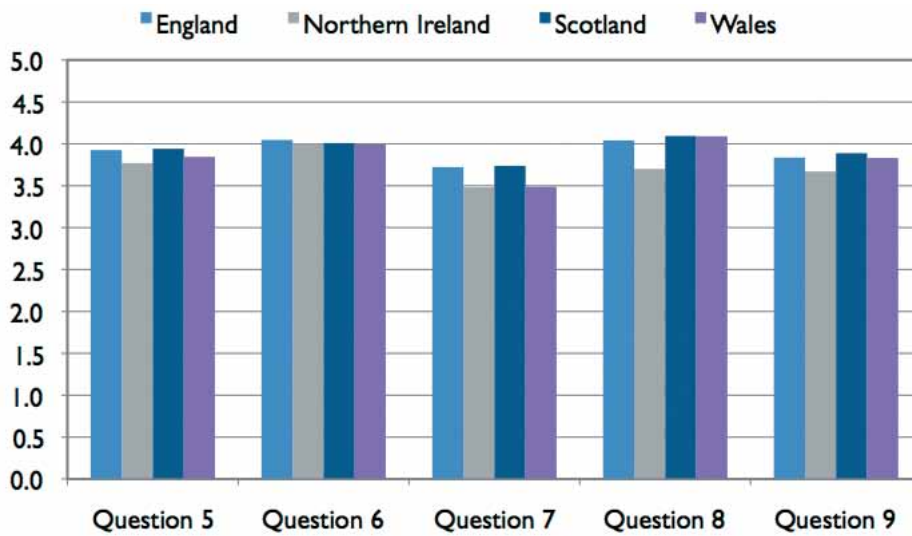


Figure 25: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 3: Academic Support)

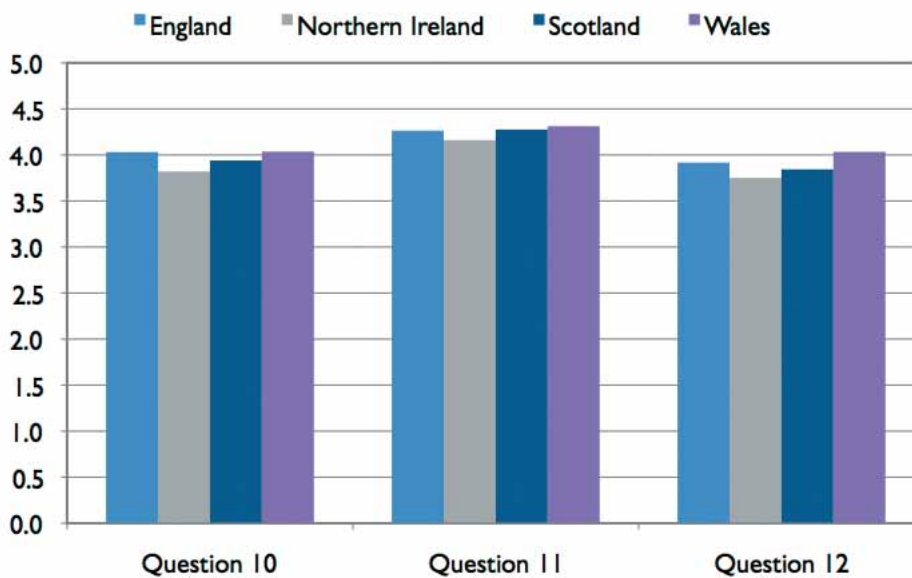


Figure 26: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 4: Organisation and Management)

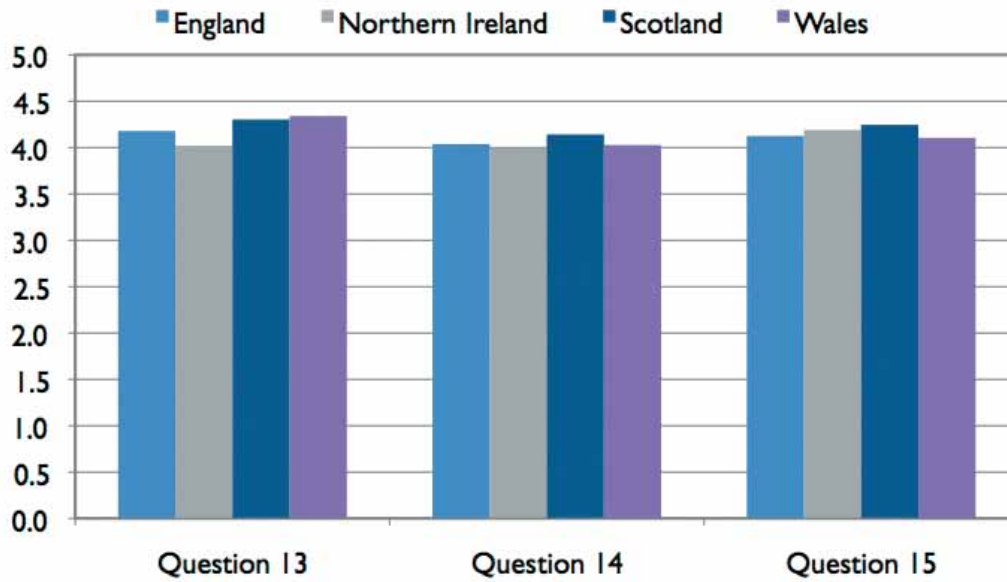


Figure 27: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 5: Learning Resources)

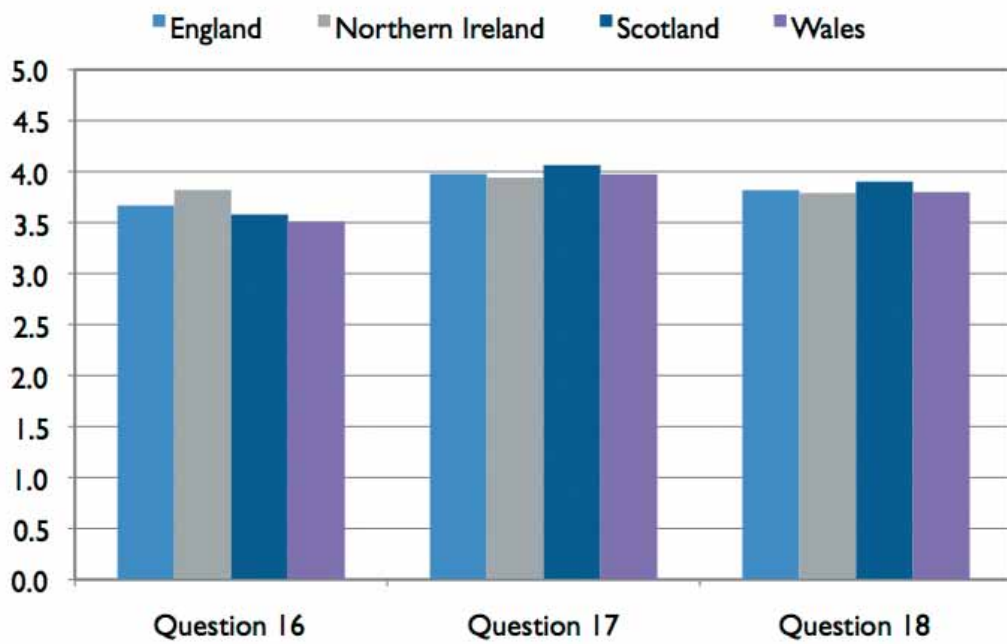


Figure 28: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 6: Personal Development)

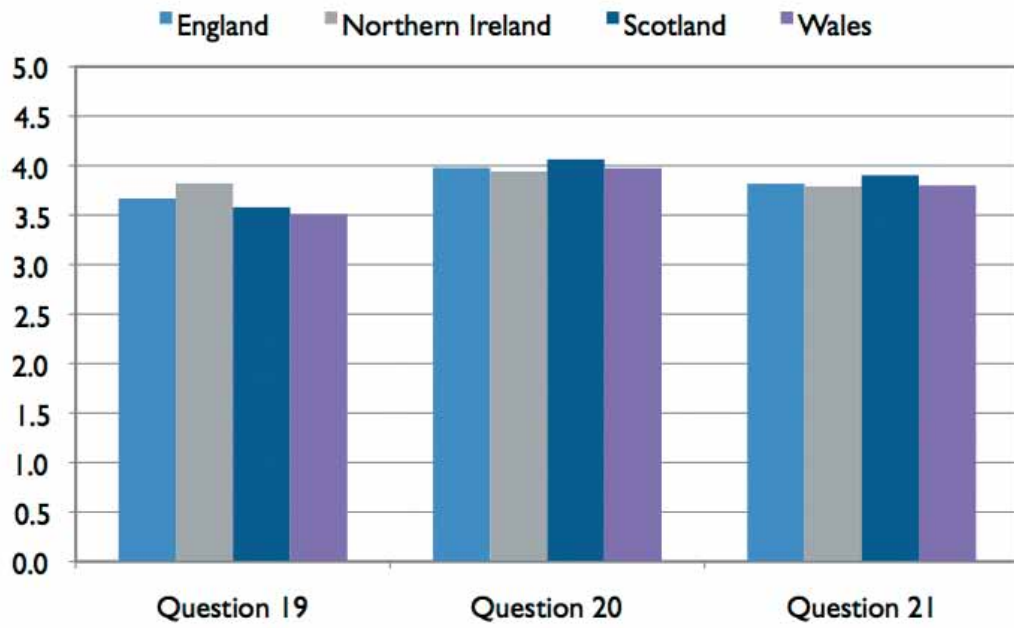
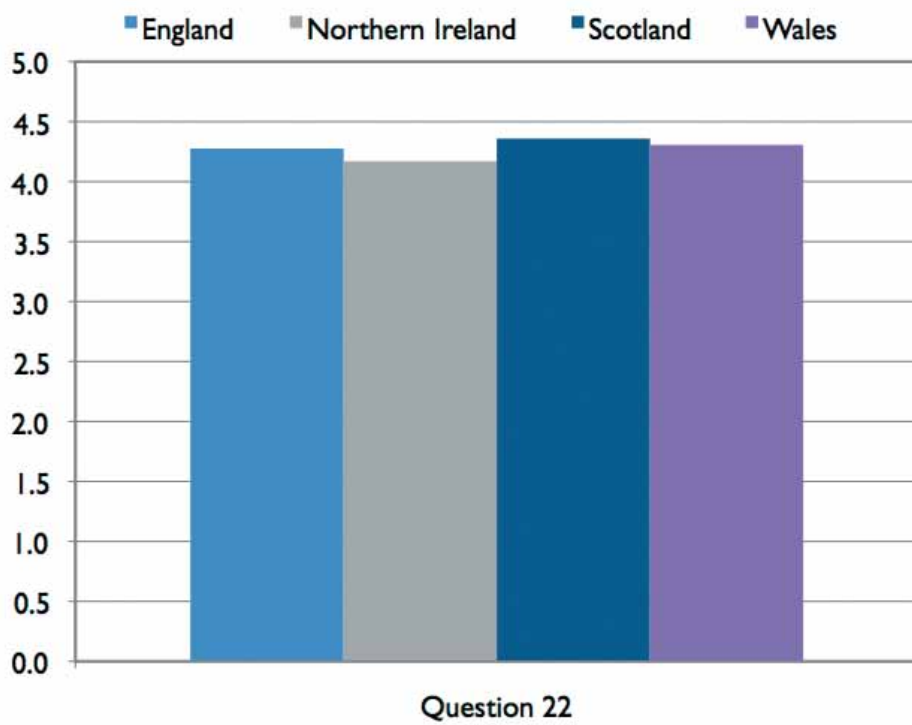


Figure 29: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 7: Overall Satisfaction)



## 5.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The average scores for History were generally fairly high, with teaching and learning and overall satisfaction being areas of particular strength.
- The area in which History scored comparatively poorly was Scale 5 “Learning Resources”.
- Average scores were higher for History compared to both Humanities and NSS overall for all scales, with the exception of Scale 5.
- The most marked differences compared to Humanities were seen for Scale 4 “Organisation and Management” and Scale 7 “Overall Satisfaction”.
- The most marked differences compared to the NSS overall were seen for Scale 1 “Teaching and Learning” and Scale 4 “Organisation and Management”.
- There were some differences between institutional groups. The 1994 group tended to achieve the highest average scores, whereas the Million+ group tended to achieve the lowest.
- There were some differences in average scores across regions, although there was no region that consistently achieved the highest average score. However, Northern Ireland tended to achieve the lowest average scores.
- The responses given by males and females were largely very similar.

## 6.1. CHANGES COMPARED TO NSS 2009

The results from NSS 2010 were largely similar to those from NSS 2009. History achieved a higher average score compared to Humanities and NSS overall on all scales except Scale 5 “Learning Resources” in both 2009 and 2010. The comparative strength of “Teaching and Learning” and “Overall Satisfaction” remained unchanged from 2009. A largely similar pattern was also seen across institutional groups and regions in 2010 compared to 2009.

It is notable, however, that there was a less marked difference in the responses of males and females in 2010 compared to 2009. The differences that did emerge in 2010 were also evident in 2009.





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