

Appendix A : Coding SEQs from national examinations (2014–2019)

For the dataset, I took all the structured-essay questions (SEQs) from all ‘O’- and ‘N’-level papers between 2014 and 2020. 2014 is the first year when the 2013 syllabus was implemented at national examinations. Each paper has 4 SEQs, so this comes to 90 questions for both the ‘O’-levels and ‘N’-levels, for a total of 180 SEQs.

The Upper Secondary History TLG suggests that SEQs should assess for the “key concepts” of “causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance” (MOE, 2012, p. 220). Thus, I coded each question according to four categories based on the concepts cited in the TLG: ‘causation’, ‘consequence’, ‘change and continuity’, and ‘significance’.

O-levels: coding procedure and findings

There are generally four ways that ‘O-level’ SEQs are framed. The following table outlines the common framings and my coding for the framing.

Framing	Example	Code
“Why” question	“Explain why the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were unpopular in Germany.” (Elective, 2017)	Causation
Success/failure	The League of Nations failed to provide collective security in the 1920s.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.” (Elective, 2017)	Consequence
Impact*	‘The most important impact of British colonial rule in Malay up to c.1900 was the establishment of the Federated Malay States.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. (Pure, 2016)	Change and Continuity
Improvement/worsening	‘Nazi rule in Germany brought about an improvement in the lives of the German people.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.” (Elective, 2015)	Change and Continuity

Amongst 90 SEQ questions in Humanities (History) papers for ‘O’ levels since 2014, 69 assessed causation, 3 assessed consequence, 17 assessed change and continuity, and 1 assessed significance¹.

Arguably, ‘impact’ questions could be coded as assessing ‘consequence’ rather than ‘change and continuity’. If we re-code the 8 **impact*** framing as a question on **consequence**, the number of ‘consequence’ questions would *increase* from 3 to 11, and the number of ‘change and continuity’ questions would *reduce* from 17 to 9. The proportion of causation and consequence questions combined would rise from 80% to 89%, which throws the paucity of change and continuity questions into even starker relief. In both cases, causation takes the

lion’s share.

N-levels: coding procedure and findings

There are three ways that ‘N-level’ SEQs are framed:

Framing	Example	Code
Explain how/why	Explain how each of the following undermined the League of Nations: (i) structural weaknesses; (ii) post-war attitudes of the major powers.” (Elective, 2016)	Causation
“Describe” question	Describe Germany’s territorial losses both inside and outside Europe as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. (Elective, 2016)	Consequence
Impact*	Describe the political impact of the extension of French colonial rule in Vietnam in 1870s–1900. (Pure, 2015)	Change and Continuity

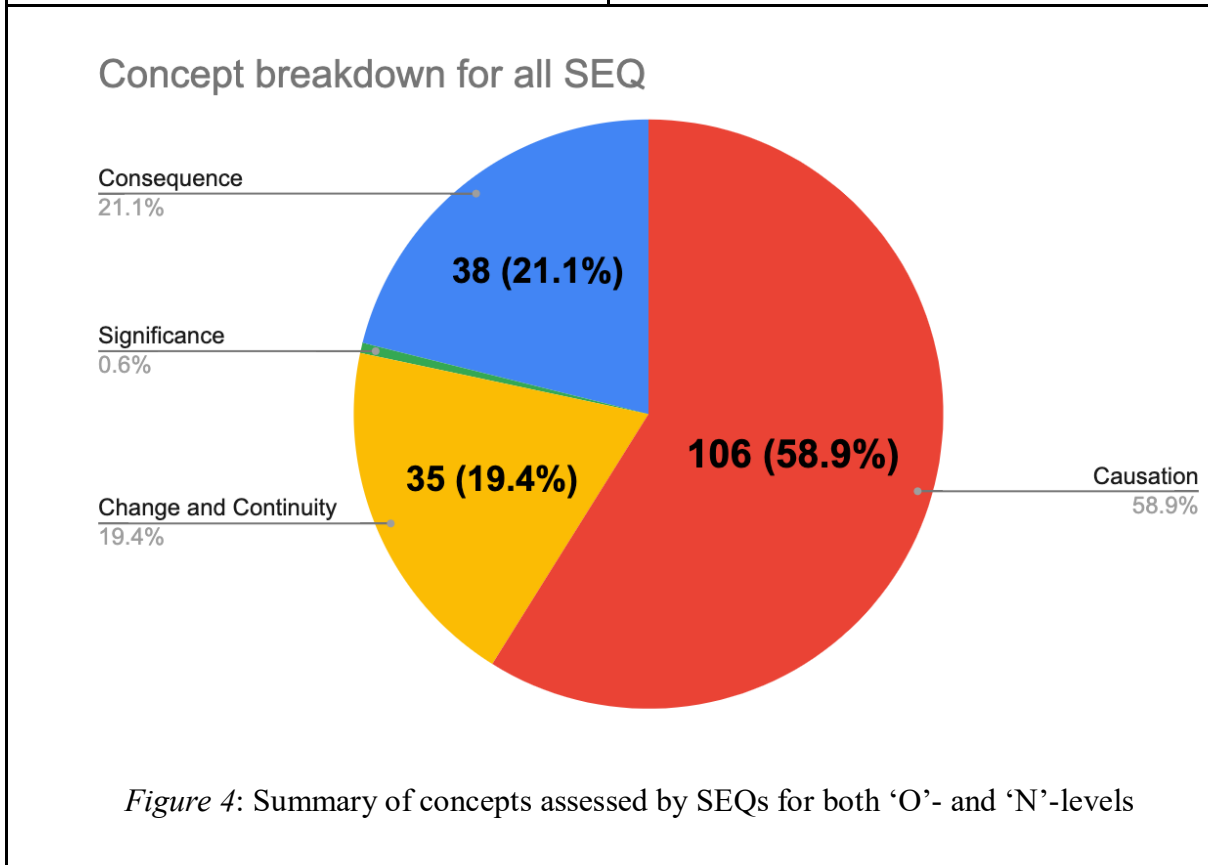
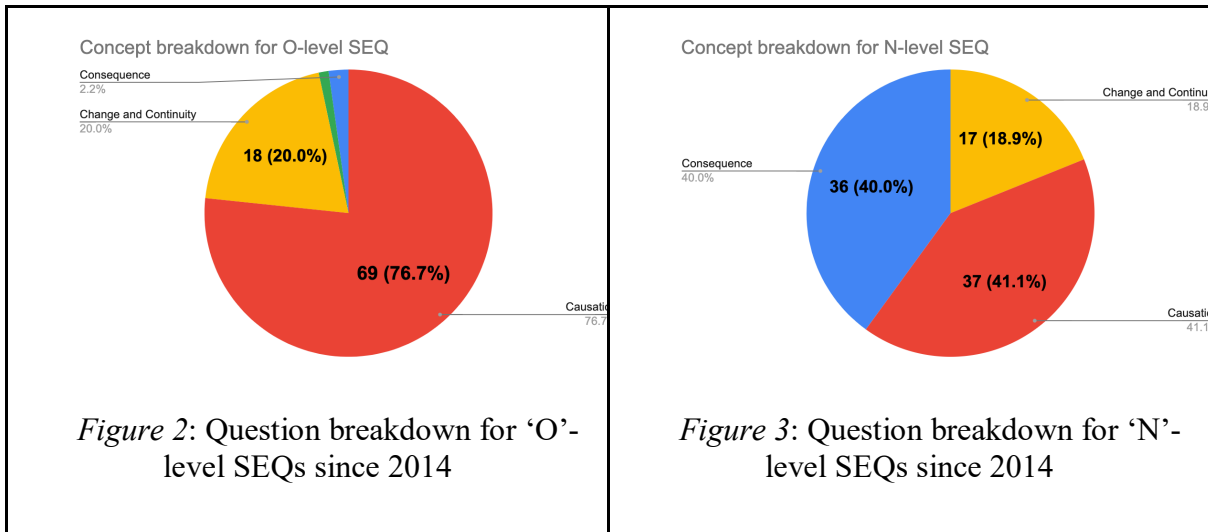
Amongst 90 SEQ questions in Humanities (History) papers for ‘N’ levels since 2014, 37 assessed causation, 36 assessed consequence, 17 assessed change and continuity, and 0 assessed significance.

As with the O-level papers, we could argue that ‘impact’ questions should be coded as assessing ‘consequence’ rather than ‘change and continuity’. If we re-code the 13 **impact*** framing as a question on **consequence**, the number of ‘consequence’ questions would *increase* from 36 to 49, and the number of ‘change and continuity’ questions would *reduce* from 17 to 4. The proportion of causation and consequence questions combined would rise from 81% to 96%, which throws the paucity of change and continuity questions into even starker relief.

Summary of findings

Adding the findings for the ‘O’- and ‘N’-level SEQs for Humanities (History), I find that since the implementation of the 2013 syllabus, in 180 SEQs, 106 assess causation, 38 assess

consequence, 35 assess change and continuity, and 1 assesses significance. As I discussed in Section 2.4, this means that 80% of SEQs since 2014 have assessed either causation or change and continuity.



ⁱ This is the 2020 O-level question in the elective paper: “Explain why the years 1934–38 were known as the 'Great Terror'.”