

GCE

History B

Advanced GCE **A2 H508**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H108**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

OCR is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

© OCR 2016

CONTENTS

Advanced GCE History B (H508)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE History B (H108)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
F981, F982 Historical Explanation	4
F983 Using Historical Evidence - British History	7
F984 Using Historical Evidence - Non-British History	10
F985, Historical controversies - British	12
F986, Historical controversies – Non-British	15
F987 Historical Significance	18

F981, F982 Historical Explanation

F981 and F982 Report

This was, of course, the final sitting for these Historical Explanations papers and, as expected, the entry for each was small, with fewer than 200 candidates per paper. The aim of Specification B was to offer something different and challenging to more conventional A Level courses and to ask students to consider not only the traditional ‘what’ but also the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of historians’ work. The purpose of this was, as the Specification states, to offer ‘an effective introduction to the new ways in which the subject is now taught and studied in Higher Education.’ To that end, the Historical Explanations unit has contributed by asking students to consider different modes of explanation: empathetic, intentional and causal.

Centres, hopefully guided by clear steers in successive Reports to Centres, soon realised that common-sense working definitions of these terms simply required greater thought to be given within essays to how plausible accounts of the past might be constructed. One way to do this is to look at states of affairs and circumstances, which themselves depend on an impact on the motives and intentions of key players, which themselves relate closely to the ideas, attitudes and beliefs held by those individuals. Students who have been able to marshal these elements have indeed flourished. Some superb examples of historical writing have been offered at every sitting of these two papers, and such essays have been rewarded to the maximum extent allowed by the mark scheme.

It is certainly hoped that, when the history of History assessment comes to be written, the role of OCR Specification B in offering ‘a distinct alternative to conventional specifications’ is acknowledged. It has raised the bar of expectation, and has shown that Centres and candidates can meet challenges more often found in past years in university History courses.

F981

As always, there was some first-rate essay writing in the Lancastrians and Yorkists unit, with Question 1 proving more popular than Question 2. Candidates could explain with relish why Jack Cade’s Rebellion happened and likewise showed, in many cases, excellent understanding of why dynastic rivalry turned to blows at St Albans in 1455. As is the case throughout F981 and F982, one benchmark for examiners in applying the appropriate level to an answer was the quality and quantity of supporting information offered in the form, as is traditional in a History A Level essay, of factual information: events, key individuals, decisive moments, widely-held ideas. Lancastrians and Yorkists answers showed knowledge of patronage and bastard feudalism, failures in France, overmighty subjects and overbearing families, and it was this underpinning of knowledge which added weight and conviction to the best responses. Candidates knew their faction from their fiction. The Elizabeth questions were, as ever, the most popular choice for F981 Centres.

Q 3(a) and (b) were most commonly tackled and, as with all questions for F981 and F982, there was a lenient attitude among examiners to overlap in subject matter between candidates’ responses to the two questions. This has always been the case, and candidates are not penalised for repeating examples or evidence, provided that it is appropriate and relevant, of course. The Religious Settlement of 1558-9 was well-known in terms of details and reception; what was less successfully tackled was why some Catholics were not happy with it. Better responses were able to distinguish between church papists on the one hand and families and individuals with greater grievances on the other; weaker answers focussed excessively on the Reformation policies of Henry VIII, Edward and Mary. By the end of Elizabeth’s reign, there was arguably much less opposition, and this question invited candidates to discuss change over time

and to bring in key events (the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Spanish Armada) and actions (Elizabeth's hard line against Jesuits and seminary priests), taking their answers right into the seventeenth century.

Q4 on poverty was less successfully addressed overall because students were less willing or able to look at changing beliefs about poverty and vagrancy in the period 1558-1603. Where Poor Law legislation itself was explained, the reasons behind it were not always made clear nor the changing circumstances which produced it.

Gladstonian Liberalism is only briefly mentioned in the Specification for 'Liberal Sunset' and so it was only fitting that responses to Q5a needed to make only a fleeting reference to its key tenets. On the whole, Q5 demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of emergent New Liberalism and no small grasp of the complexities surrounding the 'People's Budget'. It is a tribute to Centres that they have been consistently able to teach demanding content on constitutional and economic issues to such a high standard.

There were fewer narrative and weak responses on Women and the Vote in this session, with particularly good responses seen to Q6b on why the vote was not given to all women in 1918. Some of the best answers explored, for example, the Conciliation Bill and the role of Keir Hardie; in other words they again had a depth and breadth of subject content which was more likely to earn a higher level mark. The Heath Government responses largely fell into two camps, those which showed a sound background knowledge of major content such as 'Selsdon' policies and attitudes towards Northern Ireland and the EEC respectively and those which had only a vague notion of industrial action, for example. Some candidates were able to cite examples such as interventions with Rolls Royce or the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders as clear evidence of intentions on behalf of Heath and his ministers. There were very few responses in this session to the Thatcher questions.

F982

No responses were seen in this session on Charlemagne or Luther. Q5 on the French Revolution attracted a number of candidates, and responses here were refreshingly less narrative or descriptive than in past years. The Ancien Regime's failings were well explained both in general and particular terms, with a sound knowledge of repeated financial failings in particular, but some candidates struggled to relate this material specifically to 1785-9 in Q5a or to 1789 in Q5b. As has previously been advised, an approach of starting at the specified event with the meeting of the Estates-General in 1789 and working back to explain how and why this could possibly have come about might have been more successful in some cases. As in past years, Russia in Turmoil attracted most entries, and, as is nothing new, a careful reading of the demands of the question can only have helped candidates to focus their knowledge appropriately. This applies because Q7a specifically asks 'Why did the unpopularity of Tsarism have important consequences *by 1905*', thereby allowing discussion of the October Manifesto and the closing down of the St Petersburg Soviet, for example. So the consequences of 'Bloody Sunday' might fruitfully have been explored, minimising potential overlap with Q7b on the causes of 'Bloody Sunday'.

As has already been stated, in practice examiners were as generous as the mark scheme allowed with overlap in responses, where it could be considered appropriate, given the pressures of exam conditions. As always, what distinguished able and less able responses on Russia was the extent of factual knowledge offered in support of the skills required by analysis of intentions, circumstances and ideas. The unpopularity of Tsarism itself was identified by some candidates, as a means of distinguishing this from the relative popularity of the Tsar himself among many Russians in 1905.

Responses on Russia were not free of some of the inaccurate generalisations which have plagued particular interpretations of the period. It is simply not the case that Russian agriculture was in a permanent state of poor harvests and famine. It is simply not the case, as some responses averred, that the whole of Russia opposed the Tsar in 1905; nor is it the case that masses of peasants marched in St Petersburg on 'Bloody Sunday'.

Q8 was less popular but was generally well attempted. Some candidates were able to look at consequences, plausibly, for a range of political and social groups and were able to distinguish beneficial and harmful effects of Nicholas II's unpopularity. They were also able to separate triggers such as the revolt of the Czech Legion in May 1918 from a more general Bolshevik anxiety about what to do with the Tsar and his family. The role of Trotsky was especially well explained in Q8b, a 'classic' question which allowed scope to outline both positive factors in Bolshevik success and negative reasons for opponents' failures.

F983 Using Historical Evidence - British History

General Comments:

The entry was limited as most candidates were re-sitting the Unit.

In (a) answers the best candidates started by identifying what was meant by the interpretation. This provided a useful, if not essential, route into the analysis of sources. The least successful approach was a source by source analysis matching each point to the interpretation, as this made it very difficult to reach a satisfactory conclusion that took all the evidence into account. Those who analysed a source at a time, completing their comments on each source by questioning its reliability, were least likely to construct a valid amended interpretation. Equally unsuccessful were those who presented an amendment at the start that was based on previously formed ideas rather than on the source evidence presented.

Few had recognised what part (b) required and this meant that only a limited number performed at the highest level. This reflects the demanding conceptual requirements of (b). Most candidates engaged at a mechanical level with a tick list of approaches to be used. This did not allow them to score well, since most revealed that they had not progressed beyond the idea that sources provide information for historians. On this basis, sources were designated as more or less useful according to the quantity of information and the subject matter, rather than on the basis of evaluation for purpose, reliability and typicality. Most candidates see sources as an historian's first call for finding out information, so that the questions they suggest historians might ask of them are fact based (What were the demands of Tudor rebels? What methods were employed in popular politics?). This reveals a fundamental misconception of what history is and what historians do, although most candidates had progressed beyond the idea that historians are seeking the truth.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 (a) A sound approach was to differentiate the extent to which the powers of different institutions changed during the period. The Church and the monarchy, or government in general, showed different patterns of change over time according to the source evidence and this was the route taken by those who successfully presented an alternative interpretation.

1 (b) This questions was relatively well done. Although there were the usual generic comments about chronicles, there were some thoughtful evaluations. For example, one candidate cross referenced the Statute of Labourers and the court case against abbot who broke the law, showing how the second could be used to evaluate the first to show the effectiveness of the law. In other cases contextual knowledge was used to evaluate sources.

2 (a) Many candidates in this Option organised their responses by considering the various factors that might affect the level of success of rebels. This was a valid approach that had the potential to allow an amendment to the interpretation where the likelihood of rebel success depended on these factors. This approach was less successful where the pattern depended not on source evidence but on prior consideration of the issue. This was sometimes compounded by mistakenly linking sources to the wrong rebellion. This was seen with Source 2, linked to the Yorkshire tax revolt and Source 4, assumed to refer to Kett's rebellion. This error occurred most frequently where candidates used the sources as a stimulus for telling the story of the rebellion to which the source related rather than using source evidence to test the interpretation. Where evaluation was attempted it was often generic, although some were able to recognise at least the purpose of those sources that would hopefully act as deterrents to future rebels.

2 (b) Many candidates continue to make generic comments about sources without applying their ideas to the specific sources. There were a few instances where candidate had clearly learned to go beyond this, for example selecting the repeated use of 'traitorously' in Source 2 or the 'great prudence' in Source 3 to show how the sources demonstrate the purpose of condemning rebels and praising the government's approach to preventing or quelling rebellion.

3 (a) Those who provided a valid definition of 'revolutionary' fared best as this provided a consistent framework for testing the interpretation. The sources were understood and candidates were able to use their knowledge to aid analysis and occasionally evaluation of the sources. For example, in Source 2 the reference to 'the French Emperor' suggested revolutionary connotations at face value. However, contextual knowledge of Luddite methods both in terms of threatening letters and machine-breaking, allowed candidates to downplay the source's implication of revolutionary popular politics.

A less clear concept of 'revolution' led to some contorted interpretation of sources. If the gradual reform advocated by Sources 4 and 6 were to be successfully identified as revolutionary, then a definition of 'revolutionary' might need to be extended beyond the electoral system.

Few candidates used Source 4 well, failing to recognise the tone and language which turned the argument on its head and suggested that it was the bourgeoisie who were the revolutionaries.

Evaluation of sources was rarely taken into consideration in reaching a conclusion.

Most candidates offered a new interpretation, the most common being an argument for change over time, with popular politics becoming less revolutionary by the end of the period.

3 (b) The best responses went beyond the content of the source to consider its authorship, purpose and typicality in gauging the extent of its usefulness. Some candidates provided textual analysis and this worked well in relation to Source 5 as references to the bourgeoisie's attempt to whitewash itself and the inconsistency of its behaviour gave a clear indication of Engels' standpoint and purpose. Contextual knowledge of Luddite activity as well as of the name Ned Ludd was well-known. However most candidates simply claimed the behaviour described in Source 2 as typical of Luddites. A better approach was to consider the likelihood of the machine breakers being in touch with Napoleon or the implications of the call for republican government, given the social origins and reactionary aims of the Luddites.

4 (a) Most candidates arrived at an amended interpretation that took into account the alleged successes of protest in mentioned in Sources 4, 6 and 7. However, they also commonly questioned the reliability of all these sources on the grounds that the Guardian was a left-wing newspaper, that CND was self-promoting and that a peace campaigner was likely to overstate the success of his actions. Hence the amendment remained unconvincing.

The first three sources proved difficult to interpret. Superficial reading led to claims that Sylvia Pankhurst and her fellow-campaigners were anti-war, while many thought that Source 2 referred to the Second World War or that Herbert Morrison was Deputy Prime Minister during one or other of the World Wars. In an effort to apply knowledge reference to women being granted the vote was used as an indicator of the success of the opposition shown in Source 1. Better candidates recognised that despite the reaction of female onlookers to the anti-conscription demonstration, conscription was used for the remainder of the First and the whole of the Second World Wars. Most ignored or misinterpreted the first part of Source 3, focusing instead on the overall lack of opposition to the Second World War.

A number of candidates divided the 20th century into a series of periods such as the Age of Innocence (up until c1916). They then explained the different levels of success of opposition to the character of the period without reading the sources sufficiently carefully to check whether or not they matched the claims made about them.

4 (b) There were many low level generic responses making claims about the kind of source, the benefits of hindsight or drawbacks of memory loss over time and the purpose of websites without using the specific sources provided. Better candidates used their knowledge, for example of Test Ban and Non-Proliferation Treaties to establish that although CND might have overstated its impact, the developments mentioned did occur. The most common approach was to recognise that newspapers published during the World Wars would have been subject to censorship, and to evaluate the evidence in Source 3 in the light of that knowledge.

F984 Using Historical Evidence - Non-British History

General Comments:

Most candidates were re-sitting the Unit. The numbers were therefore significantly reduced, with very few responses on some Options. As ever, Option 4 was the most popular.

Candidates generally understood the interpretations and were able to use the sources to the best of their ability. In the part (a) questions, most candidates adopted a structured approach in which they separated evidence supporting the interpretation from that challenging it before reaching a conclusion. Those who started with a conclusion (amended interpretation) were generally less successful. This was either because they used an interpretation from a past paper which was unlikely to be a sound reflection of the evidence, or because in their later analysis of the sources they found significant evidence that challenged the new interpretation. Most candidates found it difficult to construct a sophisticated conclusion that took all the evidence into account.

In part (b) it remains true that very few candidates are able to meet the conceptual demands of the question. While some worked systematically through sources that lent themselves to the evaluative strategies that candidates should aim to demonstrate, most made generic comments about the type of sources on the paper without engaging with the sources themselves. Weaker candidates revealed that they understood the merit of a source to depend on the amount of information it contained, and, conversely criticised sources individually or as a set for omitting what they regarded as important information.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 (a) Candidates were generally able to engage with the interpretation, having some understanding of what 'Viking identity' amounted to. This gave a clear route into the question. The most successful responses divided identity into several categories such as behaviour (raiding, trading, seafaring) and beliefs. This allowed a meaningful survey of the evidence. As is often the case, pre-formed ideas about when changes took place were used to construct a new interpretation. Using change over time as a measure was not usually successful since the final source showed Vikings invading in longboats, a trait found throughout the period. The more observant noted the Christian crosses on the mastheads and linked this with other evidence of conversion to Christianity.

1 (b) Most candidates approached this question systematically, suggesting ways in which the sources could be evaluated. This allowed them to demonstrate what they understood. Too many made generic comments based on what they expected to see, for example that monks and chroniclers were hostile to the Vikings. While this was true of Source 4 it did not apply to Source 5.

Comments on Source 1 and 7 were relatively weak, with few understanding that a modern archaeological report is an interpretation of the evidence or appreciating the significance of the Bayeux Tapestry having been made on the orders of Bishop Odo. Some candidates were able to suggest how the sources could be used to demonstrate patterns of assimilation.

2 (a) There were a couple of instances where candidates did not appear to understand the term 'civic pride' but in most cases, the term presented no difficulty and candidates realised that the question was offering them a cause of development in the Renaissance. This meant that they could set up alternatives such as self-promotion, the role of the church and classical influences. This led to many Level 2 responses in AO2b. It was rarer to find new interpretations that demonstrated interaction between factors or change over time. Sources were generally well-understood and contextual information used sparingly to develop points from them. There was, however, little effort to evaluate the sources using either provenance or contextual knowledge.

2 (b) Responses were generally disappointing in comparison with part (a) in this Option. Candidates still relied on unsupported assertions about reliability, typicality and purpose rather than using their contextual knowledge to explain their ideas. Some candidates also spent much too long explaining that there was a good range of sources and time periods or criticising the sources for omitting evidence about Naples (and sometimes Rome).

3 (a) There were very few responses to this Option. Candidates understood the topic well and could, therefore make effective use of the sources. Evaluation of sources was rarely attempted but new interpretations were relatively successful.

3 (b) There was some reliance on commentary about the balance of sources between Italy and Germany and on types of source, but generally there were sufficient evaluative comments to reward.

4 (a) The best candidates have understood that sources can be used in more than one way and could show how many of the sources could both support and challenge the interpretation. For example, Source 6 provided evidence of discrimination in the work camp, but the project still offering opportunities, while in Source 3 Native Americans were receiving education and training but at a cost to their traditions.

Some candidates saw the opportunity to use Source 5 to show that the view expressed in Source 4 was not an isolated opinion, but this was not comment and more contrasted earlier and later sources to show changes in behaviour or policy.

Good answers recognised the role of federal government (rather than wider society) in bringing about a change in the way minorities were regarded. Many candidates attempted to argue, necessarily with limited success, that equality improved over time. In doing so they by deliberately ignoring the difficulties in source 6 (or by claiming this was just NAACP exaggeration) and the warning in source 7 that work still needed to be done.

Weaker responses often contained very long introduction to answers which added nothing to the remainder of the answer. Source 2 was not always well understood – candidates couldn't decide if the author was offering a racist view or not, while some candidates misinterpreted Source 3 through lack of contextual knowledge.

4 (b) Many responses relied on assertion, for example claiming that 'Source 3 is a very typical view of Native Americans at this time', without using any contextual knowledge to explain this reasoning. The best candidates were, for example, able to explain that the process of Americanisation and other changes such as the Dawes Act had created the situation in Source 3 so it did represent a typical approach. There were still too many answers that fall back on 'it was written much later so he may have forgotten' or 'it's from an NAACP magazine so it may be biased' without any further explanation.

F985, Historical controversies - British

General Comments:

In the last examination of this specification it was rewarding to see many candidates responding so well to the challenges posed by historians' interpretations and by historical controversies. Some of the best work was very impressive, while nearly all the candidates were able to respond in positive and constructive ways. The extracts in part (a) made the same demands as those in past papers and the overall standard of the work remained similar to that in previous years. It was clear that the overwhelming majority of candidates had benefited enormously from following this course. Many will be well prepared for studying History at university level.

The entry for the British option was much smaller than that for non-British, but there were candidates for each of the four topics. British Imperialism and Britain's 17th Century Crises were more popular than Appeasement or the Norman Conquest. The latter had only a handful of candidates. Many centres had clearly responded to the guidance in previous reports and candidates' answers were more concise and more focused. Often, the shortest answers were the best, while very long answers tended to drift into irrelevance. The best candidates had wisely spent a significant part of their three hours thinking and planning. In response to part (a) most candidates were able to keep their answers focused on the extract and it was rare to find general surveys of historians. Likewise, in response to part (b) most candidates made a genuine attempt to assess the named approach rather than just describe it.

Part (a)

The best answers were tightly focused on the extract and managed to produce a holistic reading. The candidates responsible for these answers had clearly spent time going through the extract carefully, annotating it, and reaching a clear conclusion about the big argument or message of the extract. This was probably all done before beginning to write their final answers. Their answers often began with a clear summary of the 'big' argument which was supported with clear, brief and relevant references to the extract. They used their knowledge and understanding of other historians, and of the historical topic, to throw further light on the extract and its interpretation. However, these references were brief and to the point, with the candidates quickly returning to the extract and its interpretation. This 'holistic' approach was far more effective than that of analysing each paragraph in turn which tended to work against a coherent reading of the extract as a whole. The best answers were then developed through explanations of the approaches and methods used by the historian again supported by frequent references to the extract. These answers demonstrated an understanding that the extracts focused on one, or at the most, two main approaches that underpinned the extract as a whole.

Candidates that were awarded fewer marks often spent too little time explaining the interpretation. Some found it easier to write about the approaches demonstrated by the extract and quickly passed over the main argument that the historian was presenting (sometimes this was dealt with in a brief paragraph). A minority then proceeded to drift away from the extract and write lengthy accounts of the approaches and of historians associated with them. Others tried to focus on the extract but did this by using long quotations which were left to do the work in the place of the candidates' own explanations and analyses. A paragraph-by-paragraph approach often ended up with candidates finding four or five interpretations and approaches in extracts. Some of these were triggered by a single brief reference in the extract e.g. a reference to women triggered off claims about a gender approach, while a brief mention of peasants led some candidates to claim a 'from below' approach. Attempts to evaluate the extracts were misguided. The question does not require it and it often led to candidates claiming that it was remiss of the historians not to include in their interpretations long lists of every possible approach and method (ignoring the fact that the extracts are about a page long). Candidates

need to understand that none of the extracts claim to produce a comprehensive account. They represent the conclusions of historians attempting to throw further light on one aspect of a controversy by using particular approaches, questions and methods. Their work will always need to be complemented by the work of other historians using different approaches, questions and methods.

Part (b)

Answers to part (b) questions are gradually improving. More candidates focused their efforts on explaining the contributions made by the named approach and on its shortcomings. This resulted in many impressive evaluations of the approaches. Some candidates still tended to write about, and evaluate, interpretations of particular historians that have resulted from the named approach, rather than evaluate the approach as a whole. When done properly, this question produced some superb answers. Candidates explained how the named approach, because of what it was, naturally led to particular ways of seeing the topic, as well as to insights and understanding, that could not have resulted from other approaches. They also explained how the approach left other possible ways of investigating the topic untouched. The work of individual historians was used to illustrate these general points about the approaches, but the best answers remained focused on the named approach as a whole, and not on individual interpretations. The key to good marks is to focus on an assessment, rather than a description, of the named approach.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Topic 1: The Debate over the Impact of the Norman Conquest, 1066-1216

There were very few candidates entered for this topic. In part (a) the best answers showed some understanding of the argument about the Norman Conquest being a colonisation but few were able to go on and develop this by explaining that the historian argues for, and provides examples of, change and discontinuity. Most candidates tended to give individual examples of changes without constructing an overall reading of the extract from them. There were attempts at evaluating the extract for which no credit was given. Some candidates realised that the extract views events in England from above. In part (b) candidates tended to describe long-term developments rather than assess the approach.

Topic 2: The Debate over Britain's 17th Century Crises, 1629-1689

In part (a) it was encouraging to see candidates as familiar with the 1688 revolution as they usually are with events earlier in the century and there were some very good and interesting answers. The best answers explained how the extract represents a revisionist, or 'anti-Whig', as many candidates described it, interpretation of the 1688 revolution. The historian clearly sees it as conservative in nature, defending ancient rights, and this was explained well by some candidates who also realised that the focus is one from above with little interest being taken of those below the ruling classes. There were many different, but perfectly valid, approaches to part (b) with a good number of candidates able to explain what insights approaches focusing on religion have brought to our understanding of 17th century crises.

Topic 3: Different Interpretations of British Imperialism c. 1850-c.1950

In part (a) some candidates were more comfortable writing about the approaches e.g. counter-factual, economic and the balancing of gains and losses, than explaining the overall interpretation of the extract. Most were able to identify some groups that did, or did not, benefit, but few were able to identify all of them or use them to put together an overall reading of the extract. The historian sees the advantages of imperialism outweighing the disadvantages, although not necessarily for those living in Britain. There were many different approaches to part

(b), many of them valid. Answers tended to be stronger on advantages than disadvantages of the approach with a surprising number of candidates not realising that the idea of informal empire might be missed by a focus on physical domination.

Topic 4: The Debate over British Appeasement in the 1930s

An encouraging number of candidates understood at least parts of the overall argument of the historian - that Chamberlain and Halifax had no illusions about Hitler of Nazi Germany, were playing for time for rearmament rather than a permanent peace, and understood a war was inevitable. Fewer, were able to put all this together into one overall reading of the extract. Many were able to suggest that a 'from above' approach was being used. There were some good answers to part (b) but some candidates got distracted by the intentionalist/functionalist debate and rather lost sight of the debate over appeasement.

F986, Historical controversies – Non-British

General Comments:

In the last examination of this specification it was rewarding to see many candidates responding so well to the challenges posed by historians' interpretations and by historical controversies. Some of the best work was very impressive, while nearly all the candidates were able to respond in positive and constructive ways. The extracts in part (a) made the same demands as those in past papers and the overall standard of the work remained similar to that in previous years. It was clear that the overwhelming majority of candidates had benefited enormously from following this course. Many will be well prepared for studying History at university level.

The entry for the non-British options was considerably higher than that for the British. Witch-hunting and the Holocaust were the most popular choices by some distance. Many centres had clearly responded to the guidance in previous reports and candidates' answers were more concise and more focused. Often, the shortest answers were the best, while very long answers tended to drift into irrelevance. The best candidates had wisely spent a significant part of their three hours thinking and planning. In response to part (a) most candidates were able to keep their answers focused on the extract and it was rare to find general surveys of historians. Likewise, in response to part (b) most candidates made a genuine attempt to assess the named approach rather than just describe it.

Part (a)

The best answers were tightly focused on the extract and managed to produce a holistic reading. The candidates responsible for these answers had clearly spent time going through the extract carefully, annotating it, and reaching a clear conclusion about the big argument or message of the extract. This was probably all done before beginning to write their final answers. Their answers often began with a clear summary of the 'big' argument which was supported with clear, brief and relevant references to the extract. They used their knowledge and understanding of other historians, and of the historical topic, to throw further light on the extract and its interpretation. However, these references were brief and to the point, with the candidates quickly returning to the extract and its interpretation. This 'holistic' approach was far more effective than that of analysing each paragraph in turn which tended to work against a coherent reading of the extract as a whole. The best answers were then developed through explanations of the approaches and methods used by the historian again supported by frequent references to the extract. These answers demonstrated an understanding that the extracts focused on one, or at the most, two main approaches that underpinned the extract as a whole.

Answers that were awarded fewer marks often spent too little time explaining the interpretation. Some candidates found it easier to write about the approaches demonstrated by the extract and quickly passed over the main argument that the historian was presenting (sometimes this was dealt with in a brief paragraph). A minority then proceeded to drift away from the extract and write lengthy accounts of the approaches and of historians associated with them. Others, tried to focus on the extract but did this by using long quotations which were left to do the work in the place of the candidates' own explanations and analyses. A paragraph-by-paragraph approach often ended up with candidates finding four or five interpretations and approaches in extracts. Some of these were triggered by a single brief reference in the extract e.g. a reference to women triggered off claims about a gender approach, while a brief mention of peasants led some candidates to claim a 'from below' approach. Attempts to evaluate the extracts were misguided. The question does not require it and it often led to candidates claiming that it was remiss of the historians not to include in their interpretations long lists of every possible approach and method (ignoring the fact that the extracts are about a page long). Candidates need to understand that none of the extracts claim to produce a comprehensive account. They

represent the conclusions of historians attempting to throw further light on one aspect of a controversy by using particular approaches, questions and methods. Their work will always need to be complemented by the work of other historians using different approaches, questions and methods.

Part (b)

Answers to part (b) questions are gradually improving. More candidates focused their efforts on explaining the contributions made by the named approach and on its shortcomings. This resulted in many impressive evaluations of the approaches. Some candidates still tended to write about, and evaluate, interpretations of particular historians that have resulted from the named approach, rather than evaluate the approach as a whole. When done properly, this question produced some superb answers. Candidates explained how the named approach, because of what it was, naturally led to particular ways of seeing the topic, as well as to insights and understanding, that could not have resulted from other approaches. They also explained how the approach left other possible ways of investigating the topic untouched. The work of individual historians was used to illustrate these general points about the approaches, but the best answers remained focused on the named approach as a whole, and not on individual interpretations. The key to good marks is to focus on an assessment, rather than a description, of the named approach.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Topic 1: Different approaches to the Crusades 1095-1272

Most of the answers were of a high quality. In part (a) many candidates understood the historian's argument about the importance of the Eastern church and empire in bringing about the First Crusade. There were also some good explanations of why the historian thinks that too much focus has been placed in past studies on Pope Urban II. There were some fascinating answers in part (b) about the advantages and disadvantages of trying to understand the Crusaders on their own terms.

Topic 2: Different Interpretations of Witch-hunting in Early Modern Europe c. 1560-c.1660

Answers to part (a) divided between those that showed an understanding that the extract is about the crucial role of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and those that used the extract as simply being about ideas about witches. Thankfully, the first group was in the majority. Many candidates were clearly very familiar with the *Malleus Maleficarum* but their answers were disciplined and they did not let this knowledge lead their answers into irrelevant directions. Many of the points made in the extract about the new 'demonic agenda', and why the *Malleus Maleficarum* was so influential, were understood, but putting them together into a coherent and overall reading of the extract was very challenging for some candidates. The strongest candidates understood that the historian is viewing the witch-hunts from above, but other candidates were able to find five or six different approaches. It was clear that many candidates had studied the anthropological approach in detail for part (b). There were some excellent and fascinating answers. The main strength of these was the focus on assessment of the approach with examples from individual historians being used to illustrate and support general points being made. A few candidates struggled because they lost the focus on anthropology and its contribution to understanding witch-hunting in the period 1560-1660.

Topic 3: Different American Wests 1840-1900

The best candidates demonstrated a clear understanding that the extract argues that Turner's frontier thesis needs to be revised, but with such revisions is still very useful for understanding the American West. According to the historian, the Frontier had a profound impact on Americans

and the West but not always in the ways claimed by Turner. Most candidates were able to understand some of the criticisms made of Turner, but all could put them together into a coherent overall reading of the extract. A small number of candidates claimed either that the historian is completely dismissing Turner, or that he is accepting his thesis without reservation. The candidates had clearly studied the work of historians who focus on the role of the federal government and there were some good answers to part (b). The advantages of the approach were explained rather better than the disadvantages. Some candidates seemed to think that using this approach would make historians unaware of those parts of the West where the reach of the federal authorities had not stretched to.

Topic 4: Debates about the Holocaust

The best candidates were able to explain that the historian is arguing that the Nazi authorities thought it was important that German involved in the Holocaust retained their German professionalism and their normal human decency. Different methods were used to try and achieve this but they were often not successful. Many candidates understood parts of this, but fewer were successful in putting these ideas together into a coherent and overall reading of the extract. Some candidates were unfortunately distracted by the reference to anti-semitism not being a significant motive. This gave them the excuse, which they were looking for, to write at length about Goldhagen and his ideas. There were many good, solid answers to part (b). Candidates took very different approaches to this question which led to many interesting answers. The strengths of the approach were explained better than its disadvantages.

F987 Historical Significance

General Comments:

AO1:

Candidates offered the usual stimulating range of coursework titles – from the *Judenzahlung* to the Spanish Inquisition; from Gertrude Bell to Franco. Thankfully, there were fewer titles calling for a causal explanation, in which the relative importance of an event in causing something else is confused with its historical significance. In this respect, it was pleasing to see how one candidate, who had chosen to write about the significance of Stalingrad did not limit himself to the contribution of the battle to the outcome of the Second World War (typical of confusion with causal explanation), but ranged well beyond this to the Cold War and, eventually, the fall of the Soviet Union. In this way, assessment of developmental significance over time, in which prior as well as subsequent developments can be considered, and critical notions of trend, false dawn and turning point explored, becomes a really potent ally to historical judgement.

Weaker candidates in particular, when looking to assess significance over time, tend to limit themselves to uncritical assertions about resonance. It is one thing to identify a statue of Churchill outside the Houses of Parliament; it is quite another to ask how far the memorial is deserved. Candidates operating at Levels 2 and 3, where only one account of significance is successfully produced, target mainly the synchronic option (significance ‘at the time’). This is fine, but they lose sight of the fact that significance needs to be *negotiated*. This can only be done through critical use of evidence; otherwise we are left with generalised assertions. Meanwhile those who seem to be convinced of the subject’s significance before they embark on the study, tend invariably to confuse significance with either fame or success.

AO2:

Much has been said on this over the years, and it does seem that more candidates are getting the idea – which is, that the study is meant to be an *investigation*. The title, in the form of a question, contains a proposal about the significance of a person or event, and the task is to answer the question by means of a process of enquiry using historical evidence of various kinds. Viewed in this light, it is clear that all of the evidence used has to contribute to answering the question. Hence, cross- or counter-referencing of historians’ views has to drive the argument in some way; and evaluation of source material has to lead to some clearer vision of the end-point. In a nutshell, that is how the notion of an evidence-based investigation can be made to work. Moreover, it is not difficult to manage (given that the title question has been chosen with an eye to the availability of reputable sources of evidence. It is worth repeating one last time – it’s all in the planning and the research. It is a great pity that less able candidates in particular have been allowed to use the world-wide web as their first (in some cases, *only*) port of call for relevant material. This is not because of the internet *per se*, but because of the plethora of unattributed quotations and footnotes that subsequently find their way into candidates’ work and invariably deprive it of the intended experience of investigation.

Sad to relate, several centres persist with ‘models’ of significance borrowed from various ‘luminaries’. At best, these are useful pieces of guidance that can be safely left in the background; at worst, they are integrated into studies in such a way as to be seriously distracting (for both author and reader).

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2016

