

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY A
(EXPLAINING THE
MODERN WORLD)

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/13 Summer 2018 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Subject information update

We have amended the Study of the Historic Environment component of OCR GCSE History A (J410) to fix the site studied from June 2019 (Castles) and June 2020 (Urban Environments).

Following consultation with and feedback from teachers, we are changing the way the Study of the Historic Environment will be assessed on GCSE History A. At the moment, the site to be studied changes each year of the qualification. From now on, candidates will study either Kenilworth Castle or an urban environment (South Shields in 2019 and Spitalfields from 2020 onwards).

What this means is that teachers of the Castles option, who are already preparing candidates to be examined on Kenilworth Castle in 2019, will continue to prepare each cohort of candidates for an examination on Kenilworth Castle in all future examination series.

For teachers of the Urban Environments option, they should continue preparing candidates to be examined on South Shields in 2019. For the June 2020 examination, and in future series, teachers should prepare candidates for an examination on Spitalfields.

We hope these changes will make the Historic Environment component of the qualification more straightforward for teachers to plan and teach. The teachers' site packs for Kenilworth and South Shields are already available on the website here: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/gcse-history-a-explaining-the-modern-world-j410-from-2016/planning-and-teaching/> and a site pack for Spitalfields will be available in Spring 2019.

The OCR set site will be reviewed after three years and may be subject to change. Each OCR set site will remain on the specification for a minimum of three years, unless the review process identifies a necessary change. If an OCR set site is to be changed and replaced with a new set site, centres will be notified in September two years prior to the examination being sat.

If you have queries about any aspect of these changes, please contact the History Subject Advisors at history@ocr.org.uk

Paper J410/13 series overview

This was the first examination of the new 9-1 Specification A Paper 3. The new paper was very different from what has gone before, both in terms of content studied and question styles. All British depth studies were taken from the pre-1750 period, whereas legacy British studies were all 20th century. Thus candidates faced the new challenge of working with a new period and, further still, sources from a new period. There was also a reduced focus on contemporary sources, with just two questions dedicated to this historical skill. There was also a new Study of the Historic Environment, with candidates in this unit being assessed on Framlingham Castle.

Given such changes, centres should be congratulated for their work in supporting candidates. It was clear from the majority of answers that candidates had been well prepared and they were able to deploy their knowledge accurately, especially on the explain-type questions.

Section A overview

It was clear that candidates had been well prepared for their depth study on Personal Rule to Restoration and knew what was expected. The overwhelming majority attempted to answer both of the questions. The range and quality of responses varied a huge amount.

Question 1

- 1 Explain why Parliament and the King were not able to reach a settlement between 1646 and 1648. [10]

This was the least well answered question on the paper, with many candidates either misinterpreting the question or being unable to answer the question set, so instead answering a different one. The question asked why Parliament and the King were not able to reach a settlement **between 1646 and 1648**, and candidates needed to remain tightly focused on the specifics of this time period in order to achieve the higher levels. However, many candidates simply reverted to discussing the general tensions of the 1630s and 40s about religion and money, and/or the causes of the civil war in 1642. Invariably these responses were rewarded no higher than Level 2. Stronger responses were able to discuss more precisely one or more reasons for lack of settlement in these years. The two most common reasons identified or explained were the divisions in Parliament; and Charles' actions (either secret negotiations with the Scots or using delaying tactics/playing the factions off against one another). These answers were rewarded at Level 3 and above.

Advice for Question 1

This may well be an area of the specification that centres wish to return to in order to ensure that candidates are secure in their understanding of the chronology of the period, which might help them to see that the causes of the conflict in 1642 are not the same as the period targeted in this question. To tackle this period candidates needed to be secure in their knowledge of developments such as: factions within Parliament and their aims, the Newcastle Propositions, the Head of Proposals and the Second Civil War. It is also vital that candidates remained tightly focused on the precise question being asked.

Question 2

2 Study Sources A–C.

'Cromwell was an unpopular ruler in the period 1653–1658.' How far do Sources A–C convince you that this statement is correct? Use the sources and your knowledge to explain your answer.

[20]

(✎) Spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology [5]

This was a source-based question and it was clear that candidates were well prepared for it. There were very few who ignored the sources and just wrote a knowledge-based essay. The vast majority of candidates engaged with all three sources and attempted to relate them to the question being asked, which was very pleasing to see. Most candidates ended up being placed in Level 2 or Level 3 for using the content of one, two or three of the sources in a valid way to address the question of whether or not Cromwell was a popular ruler.

Source A was the source most commonly not used in a valid way. Whilst many candidates were able to use the source to show that there were individuals or groups of people printing anti-Cromwell pamphlets, suggesting that he was not a popular ruler, many candidates ignored this and simply asserted that he 'must have been' unpopular because he was acting in an authoritarian way because of his instructions to seize printing presses and break down people's doors. However, candidates fared very well on the whole with Sources B and C, using the content of B to show Cromwell's popularity because Parliament was thanking him for saving the country from the tyranny of Charles I, and Source C to show that Royalists were portraying him as being in league with the devil.

The question also required candidates to consider how 'convincing' they found the sources in relation to the statement. Unfortunately, this was not successfully done by the majority of candidates, with many not even attempting to evaluate the evidence they were presented with. The bulk of attempts that were made fell back on simplistic comments about provenance, such as (with Source C), 'it's biased/unconvincing because it was produced by Royalists who were against Cromwell.' There were also some candidates who used the sources as a 'springboard' for their knowledge and proceeded to recite general information about (for example) the rule of the Major Generals, sometimes where it was not relevant, and without using their knowledge to evaluate the source(s) in question.

The most successful candidates examined the precise purpose or context of one or more of the sources in order to address the question of how convincing they were. Typically, these candidates argued that: Source B was less convincing because of Parliament's purpose of flattering Cromwell in order to get him to accept their offer of the crown; that Source B was less convincing because of the composition of Parliament by that point (MPs sympathetic to Cromwell); that Source B was convincing because Cromwell's military victories had won him great respect from Parliament; and that Source C was convincing because of its context (i.e. post-Restoration), because anti-Cromwell censorship (see in A) had now been lifted (although some argued that C's context in fact made it less convincing because its author was trying to ingratiate himself with the new monarch). These responses were rewarded at Levels 4 and 5.

Advice for Question 2

Centres need to ensure that their candidates are familiar with handling sources from this time period and that they can use them as evidence in addressing a particular statement/question. Candidates would also benefit from more practice at evaluating how convincing evidence is, but a tailored approach is required here. Responses which evaluate sources in a generic way are unlikely to achieve the higher levels in this question. Getting candidates to consider things such as the context of each source, the purpose of its author(s), and the other sources in the collection (and critically what impact these factors may have in relation to the statement/question being asked), would be a good starting point.

Section B overview

Again, it was clear that candidates were well prepared for the questions on Framlingham Castle and knew the history of the site well. Almost all candidates attempted both questions.

Question 3

3 Explain how Framlingham Castle changed between 1100 and c.1250.

[10]

Most candidates seemed to find this question quite straightforward. There was some impressive knowledge on display about the history of the site. It was pleasing to see that very few strayed out from the date range identified in the question. Some candidates limited themselves by not focusing closely enough on the changes to the castle (i.e. the fabric of the building) but instead spent too long discussing the history of the Bigod family generally, changes in ownership and description of events from the period. Such responses were usually rewarded at Level 2. More candidates were able to list changes to the building (e.g. features that were added during this period), or identify the nature of the changes that took place (e.g. the changes that took place were made to improve Framlingham's defence). However, most candidates were able to reach Levels 4 and 5 because they organised their answer coherently, identifying the nature of or reason for a change, and then supporting this with valid examples. Most frequently credited were: the changes to the castle to improve it as a home/status symbol under Hugh Bigod (supported by examples such as the addition of the chapel, chamber block and Great Park); and the changes under Roger Bigod II which improved its defences (supported by examples such as the curtain walls, ditches, gatehouse and towers).

Advice for Question 3

A clear understanding of the chronology of the site really benefitted candidates here. Whilst it was clear that certain events and personalities (e.g. Hugh Bigod's rebellion against Henry II in 1173 and John's siege of the castle in 1216) had really gripped and engaged candidates, it is important that they are able to link such narratives to the site itself and the question being asked. The best answers were those that had clearly thought about how to structure their response and organised their answer coherently.

Question 4

4 Study Sources D and E.

Which of these sources is more useful to a historian studying the history of Framlingham Castle from c.1300 to 1750? [10]

This question proved challenging for many candidates. This was a question about source utility and it was expected that candidates would make inferences from the sources about the period in question. Most valid inferences (credited at Level 3 and above) came from Source D, the most common ones being that we can learn about the castle being taken into ownership of the crown; and we can learn about the importance of the castle, given that the king had ordered its repair. Weaker responses lifted detail from the source and asserted its utility, e.g. 'it's useful because it shows us that Framlingham underwent repairs in 1310' (Level 2), or made simplistic comments about the provenance of the source, e.g. it's useful because 'it's an official document so we can trust it' (Level 1). Some candidates incorrectly assumed that the source revealed that the castle had fallen into dereliction by the point.

Fewer candidates were able to make a valid inference from Source E, but those that did typically commented on its utility for studying the changes that took place during this period which turned the castle into a prestige home under the Howard family. Most candidates pointed most often to the ornate brick chimneys. Other candidates pointed to how the Red House in the image points to the changing use of the castle by 1750. However, many candidates seemed to ignore the dates in the question and simply describe the castle's location on a hill, arguing that the image was useful because it can tell us why the castle was built there, or why it was good for defence. This was not creditable as an inference about the period in the question. Happily, a minority of candidates limited themselves to undeveloped comments on provenance, e.g. 'it's a photo so it's not from the right time period.'

Advice for Question 4

Again, candidates need to make sure that they read the question carefully, particularly the specifics of the time period(s) involved, and ensure that the comments they make address the question being asked. Inference from sources is a difficult skill, and candidates might also benefit from practising with contemporary sources and being given prompts, e.g. asking candidates to consider whether particular sources could be used as evidence that the castle was important, valued or under threat. Or perhaps the sources might be useful as evidence about the running of the castle or the lives of the people in it. The sources might also provide evidence about the purpose or function of the castle and how that was carried out. Or the sources might provide evidence about changes in the castle. The guidance in the specification provides a helpful set of prompts to help candidates consider the ways in which sources might be useful as evidence.

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