

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY A
(EXPLAINING THE
MODERN WORLD)

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/09 Summer 2019 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.

Paper 9 series overview

This was the second year in which the new GCSE History 'A' specification has been examined, and examiners were impressed with the quality of many candidates' responses, both in terms of quality and the level of care taken over the scripts. Paper 2 is the thematic study, and this option covers a thousand years of British history, during which Britain transitioned from rule by monarchs to a parliamentary democracy. Successful candidates need to demonstrate an understanding of changes and continuity across this broad sweep of time, considering aspects of who held power, their basis of that power and how it was maintained and challenged across three eras. There were many strong responses seen by the team of examiners that worked on this paper, and these typically displayed effective time management skills, a good understanding of different chronological periods, and the ability to analyse material in relation to the specific demands of the questions set. Questions 1 and 4 produced many strong responses, with candidates displaying good understanding of medieval issues in particular. In general, a wide range of candidates were able to identify or describe relevant issues for the higher tariff questions and so reach at least Level 2 for these. That said, many responses remained in Level 2 since they did not develop sufficient focus to move into explanation, and this was especially true of Questions 2 and 3 (as stated above). For these questions, some candidates demonstrated insufficient understanding of the issues demanded by the question and suggested that more thorough revision would have improved their ability to respond to them.

Question 1

1 Describe two claims to the English throne in 1066.

[4]

This question had very straightforward demands; candidates were required to give two examples of valid claimants to the English throne in 1066. For candidates to obtain full marks, valid details of each claim also needed to be provided. Many candidates were clearly engaged when studying the topic and produced strong responses that showed a sophisticated understanding of valid claims to the throne with William of Normandy, Harold Godwinson and Harald Hardrada almost always the examples candidates used. Some candidates confused the basis for the claims, and others supported with details that were too general to credit with an extra mark; for example, Edward the Confessor did not promise the throne to all the claimants. Another common misconception was for candidates to describe generic claims to the throne that did not identify a particular claimant in 1066.

Candidates should be encouraged to approach this question briefly. There is no reason why the examples and development cannot form the same sentence. Questions 3 and 4 present candidates with a more significant academic challenge. Centres have been effective in encouraging their students to write a short response to Question 1, and this has allowed a greater range of extended responses to Questions 3 and 4 than last year.

Question 2

2 Explain reasons for the growth of the Labour Party between the late 1880s and 1914.

[8]

Candidates were expected to identify valid reasons for the growth of the Labour Party during this period, and to credit the broadest possible range of valid material, 'growth' was interpreted by the examiners as any development, either in terms of the origin of the Labour Party or its expansion in the early twentieth century. Ideally, candidates cited a valid issue, developed this with some exemplification and then connected the issue clearly to the development of the Labour Party in order to construct a valid explanation. Two sound explanations were sufficient for candidates to reach the top of Level 4, and so full marks. Reference to the growing demands of the working classes, dissatisfaction with existing political parties, the development of trade unions and the voices of those recently enfranchised were all commonly cited as valid reasons for the growth of Labour in the period and these were frequently developed by candidates into explanation. There were also attempts to consider the Chartist movement as a reason for the growth of Labour; candidates did not often make the necessary links to associate this much earlier movement to the development of the Labour Party and this was a far less successful route taken by some candidates. Another misconception was the assumption of links between Labour and the militant women's suffrage movement. Although sound understanding of the material was seen in many scripts, some candidates offered material that was chronologically confused with reference, for example, to the 1980s.

As noted in last year's report, candidates should be following a structure to their response rather than writing a narrative. It is effective if each attempted explanation is its own self-contained paragraph. Question 2 will often be focused around a cause (as with this paper) or a consequence (as with last year's paper). This question is broadly like Questions 2 and 6 on Paper 1 and Question 1 on Paper 3 and centres are strongly advised to adopt a similar approach across these papers. Issues of 'linking back to the question' are always at the heart of historical explanation and are just as relevant in Question 4.

Question 3

3 Explain the significance of the 1832 Reform Act.

[14]

Central to success with this question was an understanding of how the 1832 Reform Act changed (or did not change) the nature of the British electoral system. Many candidates were able to offer information about the Reform Act, but without demonstrating an understanding of how it represented change (or continuity) it was not possible to reach Level 3 and higher. A good example of this was the way the act redistributed parliamentary seats; a larger number of candidates managed to demonstrate how this constituted change by removing 'rotten borough' constituencies and giving representation to industrial cities, opening access to Level 3. For Level 4, candidates were expected to show how an understanding of how the act represented a turning point or how it had long term consequences, and there were a good number of responses that did so successfully, often by arguing that the act set a precedent for further reform. Candidates could also reach Level 4 with convincing comment about how the act was not significant, and this was usually accompanied by material on the later parliamentary reforms which demonstrated their relative importance. While the great majority of candidates offered relevant comment on the 1832 Reform Act, some material was rather confused – for example by mixing up the act with the 1867 one - and in some instances candidates mistook the question as a reference to the Reformation.

Centres have clearly encouraged students to try and consider the issue of significance, but there is still room for improvement in students' responses. At the heart of a response should be a focus on change or continuity which should involve an understanding of 'before' and 'after'. Many candidates did not deal with the issue of 'before' and so claims of change were less convincing. This focus should aid candidates in reaching Level 3. Change that is explained as long-lasting or wide-ranging is likely to be moving towards significance, and so Level 4.

Exemplar 1

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| 3 | | <p>In the short term, the 1832 Great Reform Act was significant because it allowed more men to vote in the British electoral system. The act resulted in the cost of property (as a requirement of voting) to decrease, resulting in more an increase of voters (from 11% to 19%). This meant that more people were able to decide on the government that controls parliament, although most of the men voting were upper middle class, gentry and nobility.</p> |
|---|--|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>Moreover, in the long term, the 1832 great reform act set a precedent for future reform acts, which makes it very significant. Following the great reform act, the percentage of male voters increased following the second reform act (to 40%), the first representation of the people act (to 60%) and the second representation of the people act (to 100%). This meant that overtime, the british public became more engaged to join politics and therefore, vote for a successful and honest government.</p> |
| | <p>Overall, the great reform act was significant in the short term, since it increased the percentage of male suffrage. However, it acted more significantly in the long term because overtime, the top political nation grew to today's standards, due to the emergence of reform and political engagement with the british public. //</p> |

The second paragraph of this candidate's response is a helpful one, as the candidate constructs an explanation based around the significance of the Act as a precedent for further reform. It shows an awareness of longer-term change that occurred as a result of the 1832 Act, and so of its significance. This is reflective of a Level 4 response.

Question 4

- 4* 'The main limitation on the power of the monarchy between 1000 and 1715 was the nobility.' How far do you agree with this statement? [24]

The 2018 report on this examination gave advice regarding the need for candidates to draw on material from both the historical periods referenced in the time span of the question. It is clear that centres have acted on this feedback, and the majority of responses made it very clear that candidates were approaching the question with reference to both historical periods in addition to the 'sides' of the question (whether the nobility were the most important limitation to the power of the monarchy or not). Some candidates offered material to disagree with the statement that suggested the monarchy were able to successfully overcome challenges from the nobility rather than looking at other factors that limited the power of the monarchy. This was considered by examiners to be a valid approach and was credited. In order to construct a successful explanation, candidates were expected to specify how the issue they discussed limited the power of the monarchy; for instance, many candidates identified Magna Carta, but some lacked an example of how it limited John's (and future monarchs') power. The overall quality of candidates' responses to this question was impressive; many offered valid examples of the nobility and 'other factors' spanning both time periods with explanation of how the monarchy's power was limited as a result, opening up Level 5. The quality of much of the material for the medieval period was particularly strong with candidates grappling with relatively complex material, and with success. The scope of the question allowed candidates to consider a broad range of factors that limited the power of the monarchy and examiners saw many candidates rise to that challenge. There were some candidates who misunderstood the term 'nobility', and this limited the extent to which they could access the higher marks.

In order to obtain a secure mark in Level 5, candidates do need to make sure that they have constructed four explained points across two time periods and that these both agree and disagree with the statement. This is challenging – and the marks for Question 4 represent almost half the marks available on the entire paper – and candidates are strongly advised to set aside around half the time of the examination to answer it. That said, many candidates attempted to consider a very large number of issues and while these responses showed some breadth of understanding, they sometimes appeared rather narrative as the material was not developed sufficiently for each example and so lacked credible explanation. It would be advisable for candidates to focus on fewer issues, but to develop them more fully to make sure that they respond specifically to the question set. Without explanation, a long descriptive response charting a wide range of monarchies receives relatively little credit; the highest mark for such a response is Level 2, nine marks.

Examiners were impressed by the number of candidates who were able to construct a clinching argument, often around how Parliament increasingly became more of a threat to the power of the monarchy than the nobility.

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