

History B

Advanced GCE A2 H508

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H108

OCR Report to Centres

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

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F981, F982 Historical explanation

One of the aims of this specification when it was set up was to encourage the production of good historical writing by students across the four units. At AS in this Historical Explanations paper it is hoped that skills will be practised and refined and thereafter further developed in the A2 Controversies and Significance papers. It is expected that those skills will include, among others, the ability to select and deploy information relevant to the particular question set and to exclude or keep to a minimum what is less relevant; the building of an argument in response to a question, an argument based on supporting evidence which is accurate and pertinent; the use of appropriate historical terminology and, quite simply, good English throughout the essay. All these might be thought of as common characteristics of any good A Level History essay, and indeed they are.

However, by themselves these characteristics will not necessarily equip our students with all that is needed to write persuasive explanations of why events happened in the past. There are further moves which can be made, and which are made by some students. The benefits which this brings to their level of understanding of the French Revolution or the End of Consensus, and subsequently for the widening and deepening of their understanding about how historians look at witch hunting, or the Holocaust, are palpable and, by this mature stage in the life of Specification B, self-evident to examiners. Modes of explanation allow students to explore the qualities and shortcomings of different ways of looking at a problem. Whatever labels we give them, these modes are a 'way in' to an issue and help to arrive at an understanding of it which offers a persuasive historical explanation of a problem raised in a question. As one examiner colleague puts it, the benefits to centres and candidates can be very real: *'Some [candidates] also used the modes to analyse the explanation, looking for ways in which the different kinds of explanations interacted. This sometimes enabled candidates whose knowledge was relatively weak or unbalanced to reach higher levels because they were able to engage in discussion of links between factors and to suggest the best way of explaining an outcome.'*

To take one popular question, 'Why was Elizabeth under pressure to marry?' It would not be difficult with a class to draw up a list or diagram of relevant factors and to translate this list into an essay, ranking one (or more) elements as more (or less) important than others in bringing pressure to bear on the Queen. This approach might or might not produce some good historical explanation under examination conditions, but potentially far more productive for more students more of the time is a way of looking at the question which asks more questions, takes less for granted and is more in line with the stated aims of his specification. How did sixteenth-century people feel about queenship, marriage and love? How did they feel about Tsarism, or Anabaptism, or constitutional monarchy in revolutionary France? It is reasonable to assume in all cases that some people felt positively and supportively (not only critically) and, coming back to Elizabeth, that attitudes towards her marrying varied between different social groups and, intriguingly, within those groups, especially the political elites, and that such attitudes changed over time. In order to explain why these attitudes were diverse and mutable we need in turn to look at the circumstances of Elizabeth's long reign: which states of affairs helped to maintain such attitudes, and why did they change – as change they did? This in turn links to a need to explore the complex political and diplomatic world of Elizabeth, and to select and deploy from it actions and events which illuminate the pressures she was under to marry at particular moments and in particular circumstances. What was this 'pressure': moral? psychological? emotional? legal? Was it continuous, across 43 years? Students are not expected within the confines of a 45 minute examination essay to cover every aspect of such a question, but raising and discussing in a critical fashion the merits of various possible explanations of a problem will always gain credit as what Level I of the Mark Scheme calls a 'complex judgement' – which is a lot more than listing factors and choosing one, seemingly at random, as 'the most important'.

Little has been said in past Principal Examiner's Reports about the historicity of students' responses, that is to say the degree of accuracy and authenticity of their responses as an explanation of past events. It is understandable that there are sometimes confusions between Alexander II and Alexander III, or between Mary Queen of Scots and Mary Tudor; what is at issue here can be more serious and sustained. This is the case when, for example, a centre's candidates consistently write paragraphs asserting that Russia was in deep economic crisis from c1890 onwards and that the collapse of Tsarism was inevitable given the lack of jobs, terrible urban conditions and widespread peasant support for the Bolsheviks. The kindest word for such generalisations is 'wrong', and centres must ensure that they are offering to their students a picture of the past that is accurate, nuanced and evidence-based in terms of, for example, the pace of industrial development in early twentieth-century Russia, or the extent and nature of support for revolutionary groups. Students do not 'lose marks' for wrong History, but their chances of producing a 'sound' or 'complex' judgement about the past are hampered if responses are burdened with unsustainable generalisations and assertions – or History which is simply erroneous. We would take issue with students telling us in GCSE answers that all women supported the female franchise campaign in Britain, so it is surely reasonable to expect a more subtle and reflective approach after a further year's study of this very topic.

F981

The observations made above about the inaccuracy and unreliability of a minority of centres' responses can rarely be said to apply to those centres teaching Lancastrians and Yorkists, 1437–85. Indeed, the quality and complexity of students' responses to these answers are often favourably commented upon by examiners. Essays often showed a daunting command of some intricate events, and were thereby able to be as well rewarded as the mark scheme allows. Question 1 was more popular than Question 2, and there were several superb responses using Suffolk's rise to power as a 'way in' to the factional and dynastic issues confronting Henry VI.

Unsurprisingly, Question 3 on Elizabeth and marriage proved very popular. Examiners were struck by how well responses explored the connections between the need for a royal heir and England's precarious diplomatic situation at some points during Elizabeth's reign; likewise, the links between religious beliefs and pressure to marry in order to preserve and extend the Elizabethan Settlement were often impressively explored. As noted above, the nature and extent of the 'pressure' the queen faced was insufficiently questioned: the expectations of parliament and Privy Council were distinct, and changing circumstances across a reign of over 40 years needed to be more frequently acknowledged.

The remarks above about writing answers which are genuinely rooted in the sixteenth, as opposed to the twenty-first century, apply when discussing attitudes and values. Can we really follow the many who claimed that 'public opinion wanted Elizabeth to marry, or claim that this alone explains why she refused to do so? Some weaker candidates tried to suggest that as the 'Virgin Queen', Elizabeth had no desire to marry, which is surely to put consequence ahead of cause. It is unrealistic to expect AS students to have an intricate grasp of the mentalities of past generations, but it is realistic to hope that, as many responses did, the particular circumstances of the diplomatic, military and political contexts of relations with France and Spain, most notably, had a close bearing on the attitudes of Elizabeth and those around her to issues of marriage and succession. The precedent of Mary Tudor and the pressing contemporary issue of Mary Queen of Scots were well considered, and knowledge of the claims and shortcomings of individual suitors, especially Dudley, was good. One examiner writes: *'In particular, candidates dealt well with Elizabeth's use of marriage as a diplomatic tool – linking ideas, events and states of affairs to explain why something didn't happen.'*

Responses on Elizabethan poverty were often marred by contextual generalisation. Examiners were told about the Henrician coinage debasement, or problems of enclosure, but not how these issues related to increasing numbers of the poor or changing attitudes to them after 1558. There was a near universal assumption that poverty was in some respects the fault of the 'government'

and that solutions therefore needed to be centrally-led – although few candidates could talk with confidence about the sequence of poor law legislation and its effectiveness. A few responses more productively cited local examples of poor relief from Norwich or Ipswich, and took as a starting point the variations in attitudes and responses to poverty across the country and across a long reign. Addressing the possible links, or fear of links, between poverty and rebellion was fruitful, and more likely to be grounded in the period in question than an essay focussed primarily on long-term causal factors. Differences in the quality of explanation were marked. ‘There was enclosure therefore less food therefore more poor’ was much weaker than ‘there was enclosure because arable farming was less intensive therefore there were fewer jobs therefore there was migration away from a home parish’.

‘Liberal Sunset’ answers were more common on Women and the Vote than on Socialism, Trade Unionism and the Rise of Labour, but this is not to say that such questions were ‘easier’ or that responses were better. An examiner colleague reports that answers to Q5a were better than to the seemingly straightforward 5b. In the light of comments above about historicity, it is simply not appropriate to try to explain why some women secured the vote in 1918 while completely ignoring the political context. As the Mark Scheme makes clear, there is an expectation that the intentions of and actions of leading figures such as Bonar Law, Lloyd George and others are considered at least as germane to the issue and arguably pivotal to it; to write an essay on this topic with the ‘politics left out’ is unhistorical. Normally, examiners try to reward what is included rather than what is omitted, and here there were some mature and balanced considerations of the major issues – although one examiner tells me that the responses he saw did not fully grasp the issue of re-enfranchising men who had lost the right to vote because of war service overseas. For The End of Consensus, there were more responses to Q7 than Q8. Consensus essays showed some very deft touches. For example, it was perfectly valid for responses to reflect on the 1930s and to link a perceived social iniquity to the 1945 Family Allowances Act passed by the Coalition Government. Similarly, one terrific answer to Question 7b was able to link opposition to the NHS to a context of Cold War and Marshall Aid (meaning money would be available to support its introduction) and then to make further links to the role of Herbert Morrison within the Labour Party and on to the BMA and the role of Bevan himself.

F982

Centres are reminded that much was said about planning and its value in the June 2011 Principal Examiner’s Report, although several examiners have told me that plans of a page or more are appearing more frequently now, leaving less time to produce an answer of quality. This is clearly a matter of balance for centres to discuss with students. Plans which largely comprise factual material are rarely as helpful as those which select, deploy and categorise – whether this is done in diagram or linear form is entirely a matter of personal preference. Plans are needed for all topics, of course, but their absence or poor quality is particularly keenly felt in answers on Russia, by far the most common area of study within F982. Again, it is worth reiterating that examiners are delighted to reward, happy to praise and eager to acknowledge good historical explanation, and they are not looking to penalise and to nitpick. These laudable intentions are difficult to put into effect, however, when confronted by pages of descriptive writing about Ancien Regime France or late nineteenth-century Russia. Narrative writing is unusual in F981 and F982 responses, but descriptive paragraphs are unfortunately more common, and without a clear tie-in to the wording and substance of the particular question they rarely move a response forward. Planning which is based around modes, or categories, or issues, can help to remove or reduce the dangers of contextual overkill, quite apart from its other benefits.

For example, starting Question 5a with the aims of reformers and of the reforms themselves gave an immediate focus to the actual question set, and naturally lead on to a discussion of why those ideas were held; this in turn was linked to actions and events such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and the issue of voting rights, and responses to these actions and events. Such well-planned chains of connection often seemed natural and free-flowing in execution. By contrast, starting with the long-term contextual problems facing the delegates

arriving for the meeting of the Estates-General made relevance to the question harder to establish unless each issue of problem was then tied in directly to an attempt by the Constituent Assembly to tackle it, with greater or lesser success. Common to the wording of Questions 5b and 6b was the idea of ‘increasing hostility’. Was it increasing and, if so, why, and among which individuals and groups? Linking more critical attitudes towards the Church to increasing hostility towards the Crown was productive for a number of candidates, allowing them to explore ideas within a changing context of events rather than stock assertions about Divine Right divorced from a particular framework. Question 5 was more frequently and more successfully tackled than Question 6. One colleague tells me in relation to 6b: *‘The most interesting answers offered a more considered explanation that the king genuinely believed in the need for strong monarchy to ‘safeguard’ France against the rise of the mob/secularism/radicalism... beliefs reinforced by the rise of mob violence, his religious beliefs, influence of his wife and external monarchs.’*

Well-rewarded answers to Question 7 noted that the wording of the question referred to ‘Tsarism’ and not just Nicholas II, allowing candidates to think about the role and responsibilities of successive Russian rulers and attitudes to the institution, critical and reverential. Likewise the question referred carefully to ‘some groups’, and responses which took a group-by-group approach often worked well in identifying grievances and perceived remedies, thereby linking attitudes and beliefs to actions and events. One modal essay opened with a paragraph on 1861 and emancipation but carefully came back to the question at the end; then came a paragraph on ideas, tracing a growing sense of disillusionment with Tsarism; particular events were selected, in this case the 1905 pogroms, to tie events and actions into notions of unpopularity and desire for change. As set out above, the context of Witte’s economic and financial reforms and the ‘great spurt’ cannot be ignored by candidates determined to paint a uniformly black picture of Russia’s fortunes. Question 7b saw some intelligent and well-supported answers which went well beyond Bloody Sunday chronologically and thematically to explore the reasons why the ‘revolution’ of 1905, if indeed it merits the title, failed. A few candidates saw in 1905 a rehearsal for 1917, interestingly. There is no magic terminology for F981/2 essays which guarantees success, but a few responses to this question helpfully talked about the issuing of the October Manifesto as a ‘precondition’ to the failure of the revolution, and whether one agrees or not it is undeniably useful for students to be thinking that not all causes of events or responses are identical: some might be termed ‘triggers’ or ‘preconditions’ or, as discussed in the June 2011 Report, contingent or conditional factors. What matters is the use to which some terms are put in relation to a particular question.

Question 8 was less frequently, but no less successfully attempted. Question 8a was sometimes organised around the ideas of ‘Peace, Bread and Land’, allowing discussion of ‘importance’ to flow from these terms. One or two candidates managed not to mention the Provisional Government at all, minimising their chances of success however strong their grasp of ideas and beliefs. A sound grasp of the chronology of 1917 is absolutely vital for students who take this course, and too often examiners complain of confusion between March and October revolutions. This was clearly a prerequisite for Question 8b, where some responses made adept use of terms such as ‘turning point’ to advance ideas about the central role played by the Kornilov Revolt and responses to it, as only one example. One striking essay began with Trotsky, the MRC and the failings of the Provisional Government, only later looking at Kornilov, Kronstadt and medium or longer-term issues. Therefore, why not start an essay in the here and now, and then select and deploy material vital to explain how this train of events had come about? Students who practise planning and then carrying out such moves maximise their chances of producing intelligent, analytical historical explanations.

F983, F984 Using historical evidence

The entry in January was relatively small, reflecting the fact that most candidates enter for F981/2 before the Using Historical Evidence Paper. Nevertheless it is clear that the candidature consists both of those attempting the units for the first time and those who were re-sitting.

It was heartening to observe evidence in many the scripts that candidates, perhaps as a result of reading and following the advice offered in previous reports, organised their answers well. Most structured their responses to part (a) questions by examining the evidence for and then against the interpretation before reaching a conclusion. Where a new interpretation was introduced at an early stage, candidates were careful to test the given interpretation as well as justifying the new one. Equally in (b) very many attempted to use evidence from or about the given sources to illustrate claims about evaluative issues such as reliability, typicality and purpose. Besides this, there were more scripts than usual where candidates recognised that historians address second order questions concerning historical concepts such as causation and development over time rather than simply acting as information gatherers.

As might be expected in the fourth year that the specification has been offered, some Centres provide candidates with strategies for approaching both questions. This can help candidates, but care is needed to ensure that the strategy does not become a straitjacket. Examiners do not look for a 'right' approach, instead rewarding good history when it is in evidence. Candidates who enter the examination room with fixed ideas about the direction of change are at a particular disadvantage, since the question may contain a set of sources that goes against the grain of developments that are generally accepted or had been decided by the candidates before the examination. The task in part (a) of this examination is not to confirm an established view, but to explore the extent to which the sources with which the candidates are presented support a relatively straightforward interpretation, and then to amend it to reflect better the evidence inferred from the sources. Use of past questions is, of course, good practice, but candidates must beware the trap of trying to make the sources fit an interpretation for which they were not intended. This was seen, for example, where candidates tried to construct a new interpretation about the success of rebellions (F983 Q2) or methods (F984 Q4).

In part (b) candidates need to show an understanding of the discipline of history. The best answers demonstrate such understanding, going beyond mastery of examination technique to show how the reliability, typicality and purpose of sources can be used to evaluate sources in relation to a particular enquiry. These answers incorporate the skills and understanding needed for the highest levels within the consideration of individual or groups of sources, rather than working through the levels as though they are different and separate. Equally, weaker candidates betray their lack of understanding by making unreasoned assertions. There are often minor differences between the answers of candidates who show knowledge and understanding and those who do not. A few well-chosen explanatory terms or links between ideas can indicate that the candidate has understood an idea rather than that he or she is simply repeating a generic point.

In previous reports there has been reference to candidates' failure to develop their generic knowledge of the uses, problems and issues of using sources in relation to the sources provided. It was pleasing, therefore, that many candidates are trying to do exactly that, as the following extract from F983 Q2 illustrates.

"Sources 1 and 7 are chronicles. Chronicles are historical accounts that focus on narrative more than being factual. They are often very biased and used as propaganda. This can be seen in Source 1 by the way Holinshed seems to ignore Lord Audley's involvement in the Cornish rebellion. This may be a deliberate attempt to imply the upper classes are more virtuous and loyal. This can also be seen in Source 7 by the way Adam's tries to portray the Earl of Essex as a good man, despite his acts of treason."

A second issue has been candidates' failure to recognise the ways in which historians use evidence from sources to address second order questions. The same candidate showed a good understanding of the historian's task:

"Sources are often most useful when used together, as it is then that they can show change and continuity. Taking sources 4 and 6 as examples, both focus on religion. Source 4 was written in response to the beginning of the reformation. Source 6 is an account of action taken against continued enforcement of Protestantism. The sources were written 33 years apart but both display the same concerns about religious change with political undertones. The sources demonstrate the continued unrest religious change generated throughout the tudor period."

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that all candidates have now mastered the techniques needed to do well. Quite apart from the fact that each new session brings a new cohort of candidates to be initiated into the requirements of the examination, there are still instances of naivety that demonstrate a weak grasp of how historians engage with their sources and how they use their knowledge to do so. Many candidates assert that a source is useful because of its content – 'it tells us that ...'. It may well do so, but there are issues and problems that need to be addressed before a source can tell the historian anything, and the candidate needs to show that he or she knows what these are in relation to the extract provided.

One issue noted by examiners is that candidates do not recognise the difference between themselves, sitting in an examination room, with a limited amount of knowledge and no access to additional information beyond what they remember, and the research historian who will already have a sound knowledge of the topic and is seeking further evidence in relation to his or her enquiry. This leads to extensive listing of 'what we do not know about the source'. Given that this information is often available, this is not a useful line of reasoning. Rather, the 'issues and problems' to which the question refers concern the weight that should be given to the source and ways in which its evidence could contribute to a historical enquiry.

In the following example the candidate for F983 Q2 discusses the issue of purpose, linking it to his knowledge of the topic, then goes on to examine the reliability of another source. It is worth considering how this candidate might raise his mark by developing his ideas about these uses, problems and issues in relation to historical enquiries. Besides this, the discussion of the second source is weakened because the comments are speculative. It is far better to write about the reliability of a source where the candidate has some definite knowledge against which to test the extract.

"Source 4's purpose is to illustrate to the then monarch, Henry VIII and his commissioners, what the rebels would like. Typically the Pilgrimage of Grace's protesters were protesting against change, ie the dissolution of the monasteries. However here we can see the usefulness in the sense that we can see if the demands have a political, religious or economic agenda. We know that the Pilgrimage of Grace had all three. However, this is where the source raises problems for the historian as we can only see two. The source does not show religious demands such as not to tax only religious ceremonies such as baptisms. [The examiner then asks: Why is this a problem? In relation to what enquiry?]

In terms of reliability source 6 has its merits. From a first hand account of one of the two main leaders of the rebellion. ... However the historian does not know who the nobleman is explaining his actions to as typically one would imagine that this account would change in relation to its audience. For example if Northumberland was giving this account at his trial, then typically one would imagine that most of the blame would be put on his fellow leader Westmorland. However, from this source we are able to establish the dilemmas the leaders of rebellions faced." Some candidates write at enormous length. Generally these candidates are not making good use of their time. Long answers often contain descriptions of sources and their contents. As in the following example there may be hints of ideas that could be developed usefully but which are not because they are swamped by quotes and paraphrase that do not move the argument forward.

“Source 1 is an extract made by Sitting Bull, a chief of the Hunkpapa Sioux, and known for his inspirational leadership and encouragement for the equality of Native Americans and his fight against the constricted reservations. He describes how “the white man” came upon them and took away their liberty and their right for freedom. He also describes that when the soldiers “attacked our village and we killed them all”, this evidence can be used to disagree with the interpretation as this is definitely not a non-violent protest method instead it is an example violence that occurred between the difference races not just from the side that was deemed “superior but instead also from the racial minority of Native Americans.”

It is worth noting that while this extract is not wrong, the candidate could have made the salient points more briefly and clearly. This would have improved the level of argument and perhaps have meant that the candidate would have used the introductory remarks about Sitting Bull to evaluate the source.

Answers to (b) work best when the candidate frees himself or herself from the constraints of the interpretation used in (a), recognising that sources can be used by the historian in relation to different enquiries. This approach helps to divert candidates from relying purely on the content of the source when assessing its usefulness. Contrast these extracts from responses to F984 Q4 (b). In the first, the candidate relies on referencing the interpretation for (a), with the argument being that the content and authors of the sources match the enquiry, that is that it contains relevant information. In the second, the candidate recognises that the historian is asking questions of the sources rather than simply finding out information. However, the candidate does not exemplify the point with reference to specific sources, which would have improved the response.

“The sources are useful because as the interpretation talks of ‘racial minorities’ therefore the set of sources include a range of racial minorities are used, Native (Source 1), Hispanic (Source 7) and African (Source 3) Americans which can all offer different views and approaches of how the differing minorities achieved gaining Civil Rights and their approaches.”

“Another useful aspect of the sources given is that they span the period given, this is helpful for a historian because it would allow them to see how people and the way they protested changed over time and why. This is a positive issue because it shows if there are any clear patterns or trends that suggest why people acted and went about things the way they did.”

Many candidates are unsure about how much contextual knowledge they are expected to have and how to show it. It is accepted that candidates cannot make even simple inferences from sources without having some grasp of the period and topic about which they are writing and hence it is relatively common to reach Level 3 in AO1. The emphasis should be on knowledge being used, rather than simply added. The difference is often subtle. This candidate incorporates knowledge very effectively to cross-reference and interpret sources.

F984 Q3 “Sources 4 and 1 would be very useful when used together as they reflect the repressive rule being implemented in Naples and Sicily, and how radicals react to them. Source 4 is written by a member of the repressive governing scheme, and therefore is going to be ripe with self-justification. But this does not pose a huge problem as aims of ‘dissolving groups of fanatical young men’ are still apparent. Source 1 is an account of those so called ‘fanatical men’ before the time of source 4. Therefore a historian researching the repressive scheme would profit from the source as they would be able to see if those ‘men’ need repressing. This is especially useful as source 1 is an account of their aims.”

F983

Q1 The issue in the interpretation was familiar to candidates with many using the evidence to conclude that the population decline was the result of a number of factors. Where the factors were added together (It was the famine and other natural disasters as well as the Black Death) this was rewarded at Level 2 in AO2b. To achieve Level 1, candidates need to establish a more complex relationship or – and in this case the sources lent themselves more readily to this approach – establish a pattern of developments through time. The sources were accessible, and there were a fair number of attempts to cross-reference contemporary sources with the conclusions drawn by historians in sources 6 and 7. The issue of typicality arose in relation, for example, to source 3, but few candidates explained how this affected historians' conclusions.

Q2 Many candidates displayed good knowledge of individual rebellions and this was sometimes used to good effect in evaluating sources. However, there remains a tendency to use contextual knowledge rather than the sources to establish a new interpretation. While some sources could be used to address the issue of success of rebellions, this was not true in the majority of cases, so that a new interpretation concerned with this issue was unlikely to be convincing. Candidates are beginning to use chronicle sources more effectively, moving away from the Chinese whisper and increasingly faulty memory claims about those published considerably later than the events they describe, and instead focusing on what the content of the extracts can reveal about the stance of the writer.

Q3 There were many good answers to this question. Most candidates showed good contextual knowledge, often using it to support evaluation of sources. A sizeable minority had learned to group sources by period (the French Revolution period, the Chartist era and so on). This was intended to facilitate grouping and cross-referencing of sources, but sometimes led to contrived argument. Few candidates seemed aware of how strained the situation was c1830. Many candidates recognised that it was important to establish what would constitute 'revolution'. While there was violent activity and evidence of ideas that challenged the existing order, most found little to indicate that revolution was a realistic possibility. The range of activities and attitude of the authorities was taken to indicate a greater or lesser likelihood of revolution at different times in the period.

Q4 The wider range of sources and their relative familiarity in an everyday context makes 20th century topics potentially difficult. While most candidates understood the sources at face value, there were some issues of interpretation. However, the greatest challenge in this topic remains the need to apply contextual knowledge. Candidates were evidently aware of the role of women in the First World War and of when they were granted the vote, but did not use this knowledge very effectively in relation to sources 1 and 3. Many knew how the Boer War affected views of the Conservatives and applied this to Source 2. Far fewer used the 1945 election posters effectively, with face value comments such as stating that Churchill was most popular because his picture/poster was largest. There was often reference to the Beveridge Report, but only the Liberal posters referred directly to it, and candidates accepted this at face value. Too few candidates looked for overall patterning with regard to development over time.

F984

Q1 The issue of Vikings as raiders, traders and settlers was familiar to most candidates. This enabled them to enter into a debate about the Vikings' intentions in Ireland. A matter which should be addressed is the status of different kinds of sources concerning the Vikings. There are relatively few types of sources about them and candidates are expected to be able to go beyond generic comments about when events were recorded in writing or remarking that since Vikings did not leave their own written records we do not know what they thought or intended. A few candidates rejected all the sources in terms of reliability on the grounds that they were produced later. Thus they were effectively arguing that it is impossible to make any valid statement about the Vikings. Others had a simplistic understanding of the status of archaeological evidence, and

more particularly of archaeological reports. These candidates failed to distinguish between description and interpretation within Source 3.

Q2 There was a very wide range of answers to this question. Some candidates displayed impressive levels of knowledge of the period, using it to interpret and evaluate sources. There was confident cross-referencing of sources, for example contrasting the tight control exercised by patrons (S3) and the rigorous and rigid apprenticeship of artists (S5) with the creativity described in S1 and shown in S4. Many candidates recognised the importance of the combination of classical and modern figures in S4 and linked this with references to classical antiquity in S1 and S7. Several candidates established complex relationships between causal factors, scoring level 1 in AO2b, while most chose to add factors to that given in the interpretation on the paper.

In terms of evaluation of sources, approaches that worked well included considerations of the purpose of Source 2, given that it was from a Florentine to a Venetian; of the reliability of Source 5 given that it was an extract from a book about Michelangelo; and of the typicality of source 4, given the close control of artists suggested by source 3. The sources were most often discussed in relation to enquiries about the causes of the Renaissance, including the bias towards Florence in the set which meant factors more pertinent to other places were omitted.

Q3 This question seemed to be welcomed by candidates, who almost all had a good knowledge of the different political leanings of those involved in nationalist activity, so coped well with the term 'conservative' and were able to recognise liberal ideas in many of the earlier sources, allowing them to present a challenge to the interpretation. None of the sources presented particular problems, but where the context is familiar to candidates, as with the Wartburg Festival, they need to consider whether what they know (the small numbers attending – and hence the typicality of their views) is relevant to the issue in question, in this case the political leanings of nationalists.

Q4 This question had the largest entry and the candidates were, on average, weaker. Some candidates were able to make good use of their knowledge to develop ideas that generalised about the methods used by minority groups, but others demonstrated weak knowledge and understanding. Some candidates, for example, suggested that the interpretation should be about African Americans and minority groups on the grounds that African Americans did not constitute a minority. Candidates are not expected to know about all those who are quoted, and few were familiar with Mary McLeod Bethune. This became an issue when candidates speculated about what she meant by 'voicing protest forcefully'. Some took this to mean an incitement to violence, and a few picked up on her phrase 'smacks of discrimination' to suggest that she advocated violence.

This extract from (a) shows how an argument can be built by cross-referencing sources:

"Leaders such as Garvey and organisations such as NAACP are presented in these sources as encouraging non-violent protest as a tactic, opposed to the violence of Sitting Bull and Malcolm X. Marcus Garvey was around before Malcolm X. The time between the two leaders shows little improvement in equality, so maybe like with the Native Americans it is years of built up frustration and lack of change that encourages more drastic forms of protest."

The following extract from (b) shows some understanding of what historians do, using the given sources and knowledge of omissions to support the argument.

"Two very contrasting leaders are used, which is good for a historian who wishes to compare the differing opinions and teachings of leaders over time. Although maybe a source from another leader such as MLK, for the African Americans would help a historian discover the majority opinion/tactics over time."

More typical is this list of missing information, which gives no sense of the historian as anything other than an information finder. Consequently this could only be rewarded at Level 5 in AO1 (Some knowledge of the period but not used to support the sources).

“The sources as a whole cover the relevant time period and come from a range of sources. However there are obvious omissions to the collection of sources as there are no sources from a white person, a government official or body, a newspaper or magazine, the President or even the most prolific leader Martin Luther King Jr.”

F985, F986 Historical controversies

General Comments

The entry for the January session was comparatively small – just a couple of hundred candidates. Nearly all the candidates were entered for the Non-British topics with Witch-hunting being by far the most popular option. The only British option to have candidates was Imperialism.

Part (a)

The overall standard was very similar to that of January 2011. There were some excellent scripts from candidates who were able to write focus for much of their answer about the main interpretation(s) of the extract, and then finish off by explaining how the interpretation had been reached by the use of certain approaches and methods. In part (a) the best answers were those which tried to tease out the overall interpretation of the extract. It is clear that a minority of candidates were not clear about the meaning of the word 'interpretation'. It might help if candidates are introduced to this idea through the term 'argument' rather than 'interpretation'. If candidate go looking for the main argument of an extract they will not go far wrong. The other key characteristic of the best answers was a focus on the extract and only bringing in wider material and knowledge when it enhanced the analysis of the extract.

There were two main weaknesses in the scripts this January. Firstly, some candidates headed straight for approaches and methods and barely touched on the Interpretation of the extract. It should be made clear to all candidates that explaining the main interpretation of the extract should form the backbone of answers (just as it forms the backbone of the mark scheme). Secondly other candidates used a paragraph-by-paragraph approach. This did keep them focused on the extract but too often led them to produce a series of statements with each one focused on just one paragraph at a time. This took them away from any chance of reading the extract as a whole and teasing out the overall interpretation. The paragraph-by-paragraph approach has a place in early study of the extract and in preliminary planning of one's answer. It should be used as a means to an end – to work out what the main interpretation is. Ideally, there should be no evidence of a paragraph-by-paragraph approach in the final answer.

The paragraph-by-paragraph approach also led some candidates to identify an interpretation and an approach for each paragraph (sometimes each couple of lines) of the extract. By the end of their answers, some candidates had identified nine or ten interpretations and as many approaches. The message is simple – a good answer comes from careful reading and planning. Candidates should not begin to write their answers until they know what their answer is going to be, in other words until they have worked out what the main interpretation, and the main approaches and methods, of the extract.

Candidates should be aware of the danger of long quotations, either from the extracts or from other materials. There was a tendency for some candidates to leave such quotations to do the work, when answers really need to be driven by the candidates' own explanation, analysis and argument.

Part (b)

The overall standard was similar that of January 2012. The best answers were analyses of the named approach. They considered what such an approach has contributed to our understanding of the historical topic. These candidates avoided surveying dozens of historians who it is claimed have used such an approach. Instead, they wrote about the nature and contribution of the approach and brought in the occasional reference to an historian when such a reference

enhanced their analysis. The best answers also avoided the tendency of weaker candidates to write about the approach as an interpretation. For example, when asked to write about the Marxist approach, they wrote, instead, about the interpretations of Marxist historians. There is a subtle, but important difference.

Comments on specific questions

British topics

Different Interpretations of British Imperialism c.1850–c.1950

The extract focused on the crucial and central role that sex had in the continuing existence and successful functioning of the British Empire. It also stressed the way in which sex was used to make clear the inferiority of colonial societies. In the small entry there were a few outstanding scripts which contained holistic and sophisticated readings of the extract. There were no weak scripts, with all candidates at least able to interpret and explain important parts of the extract. Part (b) about the use by some historians of a focus on the impact of the Empire on Britain was not handled quite so confidently. Most candidates obtained a higher mark on part (a) and were not quite as familiar with the approach named in part (b) as they may have been. Answers tended to cover a narrow range of impacts and some aspects of British society that were influenced by Empire were not mentioned.

Non-British topics

Different approaches to the Crusades 1095–1272

There were only a few candidates for this topic making it difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions. In part (a) the candidates dealt with the interpretation about the colonial nature of the Crusades very well. They were familiar with the interpretation and the approach and wrote about both in an informed manner. Answers to (b) were also very good with the candidates focusing on the approach rather than on an interpretation.

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

Most of the candidates were entered for this topic. In part (a) there was a wide range of responses. Some candidates adopted a strict paragraph-by-paragraph approach which while it kept them focused on the extract, made a holistic reading of the extract very unlikely. Some candidates claimed the main interpretation was about social control and missed the religious aspect of the interpretation. Weaker candidates appeared to come to the extract with an interpretation in already prepared and then attempted to force the extract into that interpretation. Another weakness was to focus almost exclusively on approaches with the interpretation (or argument) in the extract barely given a mention. However, there were also many good answers where the candidates had taken time to tease out a big interpretation that made accounted for the whole extract. Approaches and methods were then discussed.

In part (b) some candidates wrote about Marxist history at great length but only occasionally connected it to the study of witch-hunting. There was also a tendency to focus on the claims of just one Marxist historian rather than consider the approach in a broader sense. However, there were also some excellent answers making very good points about how this approach had added to our understanding, as well as explaining drawbacks inherent in the approach.

Different American Wests

There were only a handful of candidates making any meaningful conclusions difficult to make. On the whole the candidates struggled with the overall big interpretation of the extract and tended to analyse it section by section. Answers to part (b) were more satisfactory and some interesting points were made about how such an approach has contributed to our understanding of the West.

Debates about the Holocaust

There were just a few candidates entered for this topic. On the whole, candidates were able to explain the argument in the extract about Jewish collaboration. However many failed to see the point being made by the author about the use of the trial by the Israeli authorities to focus on Jewish resistance and hide Jewish collaboration. In (b) candidates knew about the arguments surrounding minority groups but some tended to describe interpretations rather than evaluate the approach.

F987 Historical significance

There was only a small entry for this unit in January, and it was pleasing that centre judgements were generally found to be accurate.

As in previous examinations, the coursework component discriminated well, showing a good spread of marks. Despite the limited entry, several general observations can be usefully made:

- Candidates need to address the issue of significance earlier and more directly. Failure to do so can lead to excessive narrative with judgements about significance being bolted on at the end of each section or at the end of the whole study.
- Candidates are generally less successful in demonstrating significance ‘over time’ than significance ‘at the time’. In particular, there are examples of candidates neglecting to consider prior as well as subsequent events – so finding it difficult to characterise events either as part of a trend, or as a turning point. The use of terms such as ‘trend’, ‘turning point’ or ‘false dawn’ indicates that measures of significance over time have to be expressed using the terminology of change and development.
- There is a continuing tendency to confuse historical explanations with accounts of historical significance. Hence, ‘How significant was the battle of Trafalgar in bringing about the defeat of Napoleon?’ is causal, calling for assessment of the relative importance of Trafalgar as a factor bringing about Napoleon’s downfall. However, ‘How significant was the Battle of Trafalgar in the development of British sea power between 1760 and 1914?’ or, more flexibly, ‘What was the historical significance of the Battle of Trafalgar?’ are both about significance over time, with the battle located inside a much longer line of development (to be set alongside an assessment of significance ‘at the time’ – ie the immediate impact and consequences of the battle).
- Some candidates offer assessments of significance over time that are based on resonance but often settle for a simplistic ‘then/now’ approach, drawing attention to this or that statue, memorial day etc. This is fine as a start but candidates need to explore the nature of this resonance further, asking, for example, why it tends to attach to Martin Luther King and not to Malcolm X; to Florence Nightingale but not (until recently) to Mary Seacole. And further still to ask whether this or that historical reputation/resonance is deserved. Is it a matter of historiographical fashion, or are there some deeper prejudices at play?
- Some candidates who do all of this, fail to realise that significance (both ‘at the time’ and ‘over time’) is also a matter of negotiation, and that negotiation needs to be based on critical use of both evidence and interpretations. It was very pleasing to see that both centres were realistic and accurate in their marking of candidates’ responses to the requirements of AO2 (which accounts for half of the coursework marks). In the past, excessive leniency in this area has been the single biggest cause of the work of centres being moderated downwards.
- The sign of a good diary is that it reveals how the candidate *engages* with the process of the study – and this was evident in both centres (even amongst weaker candidates). The real value of the diary is that it provides a sort of forum for discussing the strengths and weaknesses of evidence gathered by each candidate – to be resolved, further debated or generally used critically, in the text of the study itself.
- On the other hand, it was disappointing to see a number of GCSE texts and/or authorless websites being both cited and used as sources of evidence.

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