



History

GCSE History A (Schools History Project)

Unit Overview (A953)

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RATIONALE FOR THE CHANGES

In 2012 all awarding bodies were asked by Ofqual to “strengthen” their existing GCSE history qualifications. This was to coincide with first teaching in September 2013. This process is separate from future GCSE development linked to new criteria.

The Controlled Assessment available from this academic year to be submitted to the Board in 2015 has seen significant adjustment to its previous version. The changes have been introduced as part of Ofqual’s plans to strengthen History GCSE. In broad outline, the changes should not have too much impact on the candidates, but they do represent an administrative challenge to centres and the teachers who have to provide the teaching programme and run the assignment itself. OCR followed the demands from Ofqual with the distinct determination to maintain the benefits of the existing controlled assessment. The overall changes were also kept to a minimum to preserve as much of the original spirit and skills involved in the SHP assessments as was possible.

Firstly we wished to maintain the options, which meant that the yearly generic task for each has been retained.

With the History Around Us encouraging individuals to see the value of local history to understand a broader historical subject. This has often come down to castles or the Industrial Revolution, but other studies have been more imaginative. Candidates have often shown a great understanding of how a local piece of history can provide an insight into a major event from the past, or even a string of nationwide developments.

The Modern World Study normally takes an international approach and shows candidates that history has a major part to play in explaining current situations. Here, Northern Ireland, terrorism and the Arab Israeli conflict have been the most popular subject areas, but there has been successful work on China, South Africa and racial issues in the USA. All the Modern World Studies have a focus of around 50 years, although some centres provide brief overviews before this period of study. The studies have provided understanding of some complex periods of history, with many candidates recognising the complexity of finding solutions to on-going issues that impact on the world in current times.

As well as content, the SHP controlled assessment also encouraged the candidates to produce strong holistic answers and this has been retained in the new specification, despite initial suggestions to the contrary.

The issue of word limits owes less to the demands of Ofqual and more to a growing trend for some centres to go beyond the word limits despite the timed aspect. As we are seeking to encourage effective and purposeful writing, it was decided to stress the word limit and enforce a more robust approach.

The initial element of the guide therefore highlights the changes that need to be considered to continue successfully delivering the controlled assessment.

The first of these changes is very much at the beginning of the process: Ofqual requested to be more aware and involved in ensuring that the demands and challenge of an individual centres assessment was equal to that of others. In order to achieve this, teachers who are putting the teaching programmes and assignments together must submit a Controlled Assessment form with the relevant details to the Controlled Assessment Coursework Consultancy Service (CACW). Due to external demands, this information must include the resources and other evidence being provided. The forms are all available on OCR’s website and have been made as user friendly as possible: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/ocr-for/teachers/coursework-controlled-assessment-consultancy/>. These forms may appear to suggest that only five sources are required in order to provide a task, but this is really only to suggest the range of types of source needed. At least three different types must be presented and one also needs to be Contemporary for the time period. It is not an exhaustive list and all sources available to candidates do not need to be approved. As the breadth of the course and the demand that candidates face a genuine task of selection and deployment are being maintained, a bigger number of sources is still really needed. In addition to the type of sources being offered, the forms also require the assignment title, plus a Programme of Study form detailing the title, site/issue/individual studied, time period studied, programme of study.

The second major change for candidates taking the controlled assessment from 2015 onwards involves the degree of control around the 2000 word limit. When marking candidates work, you must not read past 2000 words.

Whilst this sounds draconian, providing students are informed before the assignment begins, there should be few problems, with most candidates benefitting from having to plan and structure their work with care rather than simply throwing lots of content in.



Providing the teachers ensure that the 2000 word limits are clearly stressed during the teaching programme and re-emphasised when the task is provided, there should be few instances where you need to stop abruptly.

By drawing a line across the work the marker will signify to the moderator why the marking ceased.

The final change to the controlled assessment to begin with the marking of candidates for May 2015 is with the application of the mark scheme. The three assessment objectives being measured by the controlled assessment are now to be marked separately. Hopefully teachers who have marked controlled assessment before will see that although the assessment objectives are now separated, the language and levels being applied are exactly the same as before.

For candidates, it is strongly recommended that they continue to see the assignment in a holistic way. Bolting on elements to their answer to satisfy parts of the mark scheme will be likely to destroy the overall flow of the answer.

We have examples to illustrate the dangers of this approach already from a small number of centres who over emphasise the need to evaluate evidence as they develop their answer. Very often this evaluation does nothing to add to the quality or meaning of the answer, indeed, it simply provides a distraction. This shows that for the candidates, the simple message to answer the question directly, using their historical skills to do so represents far more helpful advice than suggesting they target specific assessment objectives.

Guidance is available from OCR. The new specification is available on the OCR website and there is a specimen paper. It is important that centres familiarise themselves with these as the guidance to teachers and candidates attached to each year's generic questions will no longer be available. OCR's guidance also includes administrative details such as how to obtain the controlled assessment questions from Interchange.

MARK SCHEMES

As before, all controlled assessment is marked by the centre using the OCR marking criteria and guidance before being moderated by OCR moderators. The work can be submitted either in digital format (Repository) or via postal moderation. OCR will send centres details of the sample that needs to be sent to the moderator soon after submission particularly after the annual deadline date of mid-May.

The new marking bands can be found on the OCR Interchange website and correspond to the following assessment objective mark values, on the task forms:

Knowledge and understanding of history	10 marks
Explanation and analysis of: Key concepts: causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance within an historical context Key features and characteristics of the periods studied and the relationships between them.	15 marks
Analysis and evaluation of: a range of source material as part of an historical enquiry How aspects of the past have been interpreted and represented in different ways as part of an historical enquiry.	25 marks

The marking process needs to be used in the same way as the old system, with the same emphasis across all three elements of the assessment objectives. Whilst marks are given for the three assessment objectives, it is important to remember that there is some inevitable overlap. For example, being targeted and relevant is part of all three. Good marks cannot be assigned for any of the three objectives without the answers being relevant to the question.

To be effective, an individual answer must have achieved a focus on answering the question throughout. The more often a candidate strays into narrative or simply copying parts of sources without direction, the further down the band it sits. Within this central theme of maintaining a focus on the specific task, there are other skills that a candidate is likely to apply in writing a good historical answer. These skills will be a confidence in applying the context behind the title and any evidence that can support the task. Top Band candidates will use the context and evidence to strengthen their answers, whilst solid candidates will assume that by using them in the appropriate places they support the answer. The final element of the answer will be the complexity of the argument, with the stronger candidates seeing broad patterns and synthesis in their answers.

With broad mark bands, the marker must concentrate on the overall quality of the answer and apply a holistic view, even when the assessment objectives are split. Also remember that producing the correct rank order is the prime task in marking the controlled assessment, therefore it is best to begin with this as the prime objective. Rather than trying to apply the mark scheme with the first candidate you look at, read at least eight that you feel likely to reflect the likely spread of ability within your whole marking. Decide which of these is best by the separate assessment objectives. Once this is done, place the others in order. These eight should then provide a scale against which to judge the others. This process should also develop some confidence and "feel" for the likely marks that should be given.

In bigger centres, this is only really part of the process, as it is critical that the overall order of merit is produced using the experience of the whole history teaching group within a centre. This should involve an internal moderation where a discussion between people is likely to bring about a rational coming together of individual set marks. This is often best done after an exchange of a sample between the teachers involved. The sample needs to reflect the range of abilities within the centre. The internal moderation should highlight that the key factors from the mark scheme are being appropriately applied by everybody and if differences are noted, changes can be applied. Everyone should be very clear that in the application of the mark scheme after the internal moderation so that when the samples for external moderation are decided, each teacher feels confident to amplify the reasons for rewarding a candidate with the mark given.

There are samples of candidates work which can be used with this guide, these can be found on the OCR CPD Hub: <https://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk> and a study of them can also help in preparing for marking of your own candidates. A word of warning, based on experiences from face to face inset events on this skill, we teachers are inclined to be over critical of other centres work, especially of candidates in the middling ground. At the same time, we may be then overly generous with the work we have ourselves been involved in! This is easily noted in face to face inset events, but you will have to take my word for it, although you must admit how this fits with human nature. Encouragingly, there is rarely the same problem with the top samples, where most will readily accept their virtues and suggest marks within a close range. The same cannot be said about the weaker candidates who have tended to be under marked.



One final aspect of the marking process involves the moderation process. Centres that have their marks adjusted, especially the huge majority where the adjustments are minimal, should not feel that they have done the whole marking process incorrectly. The broad mark bands can and must be applied with a degree of human subjectivity and assignments themselves still have some scope to be more or less complex. These facts can be considered when moderating, but few teachers in schools can have such a broad view. Hopefully marking will be kept in perspective; it is only the awarding of marks as accurately as possible. Clearly encouraging candidates to work to the best of their abilities and providing them with the where withal to achieve their best should be a more important aspect of the controlled assessment for most teachers of SHP History.

MARKING AND ANNOTATION

There are several reasons why annotation is an important element of marking. With candidates producing 2000 words for their answer, simply leaving yourself with a few key signs of quality to guide your decision and justify it is a must. However for candidates who are being used in internal or external moderation, a more thorough approach will benefit those who are reviewing the additional decision. Let people see why you feel a specific answer is worth the band/marks awarded. Look at the sample provided to see the range of annotation and summaries used by different teachers to explain their decisions, they provide a reasonable range of good methodology. The script commentary on the front sheet is my own, but gives some further examples of highlights.

Use Source E for grade A*. Source A for marginal A/B. Candidate B provides a marginal C grade and finally Candidate C for a grade E.

Finally, the experience of marking is one that evolves, and is not necessarily found from the off. Get the rank order correct and do your best to apply the mark scheme fairly. Feedback will then guide you in further attempts.

THE TEACHING PROGRAMME AND NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR SOURCE COVERAGE

Centres need to consider the new Controlled Assessment forms that must be completed and note the minimum requirements for source coverage. But initially, some more general points:

Many centres from the beginning of the controlled assessments foundations were troubled with the notion of a broad teaching programme, but there are two ways to check this aspect. The first one being to follow the seven elements outlined for the History Around Us task. These are spelt out in the specification and if covered, or very nearly all covered the course will be broad enough. The Modern World Study has a similar, but shorter list to lay a foundation to work with. The second way to check breadth is to consider three or four previous titles. If they could all be done with your current teaching programme without substantial additions, you have a broad teaching programme. You also have the advantage of not having to make substantial changes to your teaching programme with each new task. So hopefully we can now move on to the content of the teaching programme.

The content of the teaching programme needs to follow a Hippocratic process. The balance between the contextual content and the evidence is critical. Too little support for the course through a range of evidence often means candidates are uncomfortable about using sources to support their own answers. But alternatively, if the candidates are given lots of evidence and very little context, the candidates' understanding of the situation is often lacking and their use of the evidence is superficial, or potentially misleading. Providing a wide range of sources benefits more candidates, as everybody seems to cope better with different single and groups of sources. This is now checked by the forms sent to the Controlled Assessment Coursework Consultancy Service of OCR. It is important that centres do not work down to the minimum number of evidence as five sources are going to be too few.

The teaching programme really is under your control and should be effective, with due consideration of the type of candidates you know you are dealing with. A carefully constructed scheme that balances context and sources, as well as providing opportunities to use historical skills around the teaching can set candidates up fully for the task. This can come down to small details; framing evidence through careful selection that you want to use, from larger pieces. You might also consider possibly changing the wording of some sources to make them more useable. This combination of action and materials is likely to take the eight week period recommended by OCR. It is also very worthwhile building in a mock task to cover a shortened period time. Experience suggests 40 minutes for planning and

an hour 20 minutes for writing up will provide a meaningful amount of work to make feedback worthwhile. A mock can be based on the same task with a different focus point (for example, if your MWS task involves Bloody Sunday, use the same title dropping in another event that your candidates recognise, such as The Good Friday Agreement) or an older title set in your own context. Much of the feedback may well apply generally to your whole group, but there may also be specifics that need to be given to individuals. All this is going to provide a huge insurance net for your assessment and should add to the confidence with which your candidates tackle the controlled assessment.

There are two more elements of control that you should employ in constructing the whole assignment. Candidates need to be given the title and this should really mark a change of emphasis for your classes. This can be achieved with a "launch" event that is completed by the provision of the title the groups need to produce. There is a fairly generic launch included with this presentation. In addition to the task, you can re-emphasise key points that arose from the mock, remind the candidates the skills needed, as shown in the example, do some simple source based work or modelling of some small aspects of the historical skills likely to be needed. The key is to make it an event, so there is a clear sense that the students are entering a different phase of the assessment.

Once the launch is held, you move smoothly, hopefully, into the planning element of the eight hours of the task itself. The initial recommendation for splitting the eight hours between planning and writing was 4 hours and 4 hours, but it has been recognised that providing two hours of planning is often as much as is feasible for many individuals. The important thing however, is that the teacher still keeps a control over the planning element of the work. This does not involve any suggestion of intervention into what the candidates choose to use in their answers, or in suggesting a structure for the answer. What you should do is influence the nature of the planning. One simple format that has been suggested in previous inset events seems to work well. Have forty minutes in which your students are told to select evidence and context from the teaching programme that they think will help answer the question. This might be done with a highlighter and encourages a simple, quick review of what the student has got available against the specific title. Once this is done, you can add the sting, a little more complex work. For each highlighted point, suggest that the candidates say two things; firstly how the piece chosen fits into the question and where they might put it into their structure.



Some teachers may need further assistance with regard to where sources might be gleaned from. The two options really make very different demands upon selecting materials. Starting with the History Around Us, it should be remembered that as the course will feature both specific site material and a more general background with the opportunity to provide source evidence from both. Textbooks exist for Castle development and the Industrial Revolution, often aimed initially at Key Stage 3 candidates, providing general examples from a range of specific places. Libraries and Local History societies can often help to provide more local materials. There is often help out there. Do not feel obliged to find evidence that will require evaluation, as this is often in short supply with regard to local history. Some contemporary sources will allow for interpretations and impressions to be made.

The Modern World Study offers more scope for some evaluation with Northern Ireland and the Arab-Israeli Conflict offering sources which could raise points of bias or reliability. If websites from one side or the other are used, a balance should be attempted to encourage analysis through comparison. Newspapers, especially now digital back copy is available can be used for articles alongside maps and cartoons. Video clips can also provide contemporary speeches and opinion. The broader the range of sources, the more likely different candidates will find combinations of evidence that they are comfortable to select and apply historical skills with.

MODERATOR'S ADVICE

When considering a good source to use in the controlled assessment, there are a number of points that are worth considering. The relevance of the source to the study is obviously crucial, as is the standard of the reading level and potential problems in terms of language used. Adjustments can always be considered, if the general meaning of the source remains the same. Often primary evidence is more promising as it offers greater depth for the candidates to see attitudes alongside other historical value such as message and purpose. Consider whether a source is providing one central point or is capable of offering a range of uses. The former may be trimmed down quite closely, but the latter might benefit being left as a larger exercise with candidates being encouraged to investigate the whole and discuss as part of the teaching programme. Although a broad teaching programme is an essential feature of the controlled assessment, there is little value in employing red herrings amongst the evidence. There is a huge range of quality when it comes to candidates analysing valid materials. Evaluate the use of sources at the end of an examination session and consider why some valid sources are heavily utilised and others ignored. This can help develop a more effective pool of evidence.

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