

## **A LEVEL**

*Examiners' report*

# **HISTORY A**

**H505**

For first teaching in 2015

## **Y303/01 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.

## Paper Y303/01 series overview

Y303 is one of twenty one units for the revised A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of at least one hundred years through an interpretation option on a named in-depth topic and two essays. The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates are required to use contextual knowledge to test the views of two historians about one of the three named in-depth topics or an aspect of one. The question does not require them to comment on the style of writing or the provenance of the interpretation. In Section B candidates are required to answer two essay questions from a choice of three.

To do well on Section A, candidates need to explain the view of each interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

To do well on Section B, candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period, explaining similarities and differences between the events they are discussing in order to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons made may be either between periods within the topic or between regions. The strongest answers will test a hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

### *Overview of candidate performance*

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:

- showed a clear understanding of the views of the two interpretations in relation to the question
- were able to use contextual knowledge to test the interpretations, linking that knowledge directly to the interpretation through evaluative words
- were able to consider both the strengths and limitations of both Interpretations using contextual knowledge
- in answering the essay questions, covered the whole period in a balanced way
- adopted a thematic approach
- made links and comparisons between aspects of the topic
- explained the links and comparisons
- supported their arguments with precise and relevant examples
- reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question.

Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:

- showed a limited understanding of one or both of the interpretations
- did not go beyond a basic explanation of part of the interpretation
- did not link any contextual knowledge directly to the interpretation and therefore did not evaluate the interpretation
- in answering the essay adopted a chronological rather than thematic approach
- did not make links or comparisons even if events from different parts of the period were discussed in the same paragraph
- failed to cover the whole period
- did not focus on the precise wording of the question
- made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

## Section A

### Question 1

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing about Henry I's personality. **[30]**

The interpretations focused on the debate about Henry I's personality, with Passage A predominantly suggesting that Henry was a cruel and paranoid ruler and Passage B predominantly suggesting that Henry should not be considered cruel by the standards of the time, and was in fact a very fair and just king. Most candidates were able to correctly identify and explain this difference between the passages.

Stronger answers recognised the nuances in the passages. For example in Passage B, not only does Hollister state that death and mutilation were common punishments for the time, but also states that Henry's use of both punishments was rare. Candidates are advised to read the passages carefully to try and make the most of the information given.

Most candidates were able to use some own knowledge to evaluate the passages. Strong answers used examples of punishments given by Henry that were not mentioned within the passages (either to confirm or refute Henry's cruel reputation), or gave details of the work that Henry did to develop the justice system in England in order to challenge Passage A/support Passage B. Weaker answers used speculation to evaluate, with phrases such as 'this would not have been likely at the time', or 'Henry was well known for...' without providing examples or support from knowledge.

Weaker answers used very few evaluative words ('convincing', 'valid') etc. Stronger answers used evaluative words clearly and consistently. In some responses, candidates confused the labelling of Passages A and B. Whilst in the majority of cases it is possible to see the intended meaning of the candidate and a candidate would not be impinged in any way for such a mistake, it is worth noting that candidates should be careful that errors such as these do not detract from the clarity of their argument.

On the whole, it was pleasing to see candidates using their knowledge of Henry I in this question and engaging well with the debate.

## Section B

### Question 2\*

- 2\* 'The most important change in English central government in the period from 1066 to 1216 was the development of the office of chief justiciar.' How far do you agree? [25]

Some responses to Question 2 did not focus on the question, explaining various reasons for changes to central government at this time rather than considering the importance of the office of chief justiciar in comparison to other developments.

Many responses did focus on the question and compared the development of the office of chief justiciar with one other relevant factor (usually the development of the exchequer). Some candidates only considered the judicial aspect of the role of justiciar and not the wider responsibilities of the role. The strongest answers were able to analyse the full responsibilities of the justiciar and compare multiple developments across the period. There should also be a focus on the importance of the role – the best responses considered the short and long term impact of developments.

### Question 3\*

- 3\* Assess the importance of feudalism in the development of English Common Law in the period from 1066 to 1216. [25]

As with all thematic essays, to do well candidates should show knowledge across the period. A number of candidates focused only on the developments during the reigns of Henry I and/or Henry II and neglected to comment on change and continuity under other rulers. Similarly, many candidates took a chronological approach to this question.

Better responses were able to identify that feudalism laid the groundwork for the development of Common Law in a number of areas, including in land law and the ways in which feudal tenure laid the groundwork for developments made by Henry I and Henry II. The very best answers were able to identify and explain ways in which feudalism actually hindered the development of Common Law, through the establishment of honorial courts.

## Question 4\*

- 4\* 'Becket did more to strengthen the English Church than any other Archbishop of Canterbury in the period from 1066 to 1216.' How far do you agree? [25]

A large number of candidates took a chronological or 'archbishop-by-archbishop' approach to this question. This was achieved either by writing a full paragraph about one archbishop before moving onto the next, or by taking a chronological approach within each paragraph, with limited comparison. Unfortunately whilst this often showed very good knowledge from candidates, these approaches do not allow for the synthesis that is required to reach the top levels.

Where a thematic approach was used, candidates generally chose appropriate themes for consideration. These included, though were not limited to: the archbishops' relationships with the monarchy, relationships with Rome, and the success of their respective reforms. Weaker answers focused on Becket and perhaps one other archbishop, or showed limited knowledge of Becket and focused only on others (often Lanfranc or Anselm). The best answers used knowledge of a number of the archbishops on the specification, from across the full range of the period (including, for example, Langton), and compared their successes in relevant areas. This approach allows for synthesis, and those candidates that showed specific knowledge could reach the top levels of the mark scheme.

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