

Examiners' report

A LEVEL

HISTORY A

OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in History A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y101/01 Summer 2025 series

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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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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.

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Paper Y101 series overview

Y101 is one of thirteen units in Paper 1 for the A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of about fifty years through an Enquiries or source-based question and a traditional essay question. The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A, candidates have to answer a compulsory source question based on four written primary sources. The question requires them to use all four sources to assess the validity of a view. In Section B, candidates are required to answer one essay question from a choice of two.

To do well on Section A, candidates need to be able to consider both provenance of the sources and apply contextual knowledge to them in order to reach a judgement about the sources in relation to the issue in the question. The judgement should be based on an evaluation of the reliability of the evidence given, not on the topic or contextual knowledge. To reach Level 6, a judgement should be made at the end of the analysis of each source, with an overall judgement in the conclusion.

To do well on Section B, candidates need to address the issue in the question, using detailed supporting knowledge. In order to reach the higher levels, candidates will need to assess the issues they discuss and reach a supported judgement at least in the conclusion. To reach Level 6 candidates should also make an overall judgement as well as interim judgements when assessing each factor.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- considered the provenance of the source(s) and used relevant contextual knowledge - clearly linked the contextual knowledge to the source being discussed to show whether the view of the source was valid or not - reached an overall judgement as to the extent to which the sources supported the view in the question - in answering the essay question candidates discussed at least two issues in depth - the supporting detail was both accurate and relevant to the question set, not just the topic - reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question - made a series of interim judgements about the issues discussed in relation to the question.	- did not consider both the provenance and use contextual knowledge to evaluate the sources - wrote an unbalanced answer in their treatment of the sources, with very little consideration of one of the sources - reached a judgement based on their knowledge rather than the sources - showed a limited understanding of the major issues relevant to the essay - were unable to support their answer with relevant material - did not focus on the precise wording of the question - made unsupported comments about issues which were assertions.

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Section A overview

There is one compulsory question in this section. This question requires candidates to critically assess evidence and reach judgements. The critical evaluation of sources is the central theme in this section with all marks given against AO2.

The Enquiry section in Paper Y101 is focused on the extent to which Alfred aimed to protect the poor in legal issues.

Question 1

Alfred the Great

1 'In dealing with legal issues, Alfred's main aim was to protect the poor'.

Use the **four** sources in their historical context to assess how far they support this view. [30]

Candidates demonstrated an ability to link each source to the issue in the question. Some candidates, however, found it more difficult to engage with Source D, since it doesn't explicitly refer to 'the poor'. Yet others recognised that it highlighted Alfred's commitment to justice and the rule of law, as reflected in the king's insistence that the will of King Aethelwulf be read aloud, so that 'none of them would hesitate either for love or fear of me to state what the law said'. Having noted this feature of the source, candidates contextualised it with knowledge of the circumstances surrounding Alfred's succession. In general, little was said about the provenance of this source beyond occasional comments about the importance of wills as evidence of Anglo-Saxon society. Candidates handled Source C, from Asser's life of the king, with more confidence. The provenance was known in much more detail, with Asser's links to the king usually explained, and his motivation for writing positively about him, linked to building the king's appeal to the Welsh. The source was interpreted as evidence in support of the view in the question, since Asser explicitly states that the king was 'wonderfully solicitous' on behalf of the poor. Criticism of the magnates was usually contextualised with comments about Alfred's cultural aspirations, including the emphasis placed on education, and his desire to ensure their constructive participation in governance and justice. Source B was usually seen as evidence to suggest that Alfred was less concerned with the poor, as such, and more concerned with the population as a whole. Reference to 'the barbarians' and the violence that overtook society as a result was often contextualised with knowledge of the Viking attacks. This, together with the reference to 'surety' in the source, also prompted some candidates to discuss some of the principles of Alfred's law code, including the imposition of compensatory payments for injuries and other types of crimes. In terms of provenance, it was often noted that William of Malmesbury was writing centuries later; consequently, he had a skewed view of Alfred's reign, in part coloured by his post-Conquest nostalgia for the Anglo-Saxon past. Some candidates simply noted his reputation as one of the most learned writers of his time, but this only led to superficial recommendations of the source's reliability. Source A, in providing a very clear statement of the king's expectations when it came to justice, was more easily linked to the issue in the question. Contextual comments were similar to some of those provided in relation to Source C, concerning Alfred's cultural aspirations, while more specific knowledge on the sources for the law code were also mentioned. Candidates generally saw the source as reflective of Alfred's own views, since the king himself was identified as the author of the law code. Other candidates pointed to the influences that underpinned it, arguing that Alfred was simply putting into practice principles he had found in earlier law codes, as well as in Mosaic law. In order to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme, candidates needed to provide a judgement in the key issue in the question, based on consideration of the provenance of each source. Many candidates provided analyses of the sources, linked to the key issue, using knowledge and provenance, but did not provide any judgement.

Exemplar 1

1	Source A supports the view. It states that, when dealing with legal issues, a judge should "judge very fairly" and "not give one judgement for the rich and another for the poor". The veracity of the source is high; it is taken from the introduction to Alfred's law code drawn up by 895 which was written by Alfred himself. It therefore only makes sense that Alfred's true intention to be written here, since the law codes were a piece of promulgated legislation that Alfred wanted to be implemented in his desired way; to protect the poor within a legal setting. When considered within context, this source also stands strong; within the burih system that he had implemented in the burihial hidage, everyday duties like that of judging petty crime were delegated to the Ealdorman of the relevant shire. This often led to unjust rulings, with connections to the relevant Ealdorman playing a significant role in the outcome of a case. Therefore, for Alfred to be addressing this and expressing his desire to protect the poor within a legal setting makes complete sense.
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Source B, however, does not support the view. It states that, in dealing with legal issues, Alfred's main aim was to quell the English "lust after violence", thus suggesting that he was aiming to reduce violence within his kingdom. The credibility of this source is low. Firstly, it is taken from William of Malmesbury's chronicle written in ~~1143~~ 1143; this was, of course, well after Alfred's death in 899 and although William's method of gathering historical evidence was sound, there are parts to this source where he anachronistically attributes 12th century standards under Henry I onto Alfred. For example, his suggestion that "there was no safe way of travelling without a military guard" is simply untrue as, though there had been issues with violence amongst his own people, it was at no point as severe as this suggests. Also, when considered in context, the implication that the English seemingly inherited a lust after violence "from the example of the barbarians" is also an exaggeration. Alfred's burghal system was effective at repelling the Vikings, as evidenced by his success at the

battle of buttington in 893, and much of this relied on the English people wanting to resist viking and pagan culture. Thus, though there may have been some isolated incidences, overall the English people were against the viking lust for blood and crime.

Source C does support the view. It suggests that Alfred was "a painstaking judge in establishing the truth" particularly when it came to "cases concerning the poor". The validity of this source, however, does not stand up to interrogation. Asser was employed by Alfred to ~~write~~ write the 'Life of King Alfred' which, considering it was written 6 years before Alfred's death, was largely a panegyric piece of political propaganda. These stock phrases like "painstaking" and "wonderfully" can be ignored as the platitudes of a royal encomiast who had been handsomely rewarded by his patron with a bishopric in Sherbourne and two monasteries at Congressbury and Banwell. When considered in context, the source also doesn't stand up; the suggestion that Alfred thought about helping the poor "day and night" seems unlikely considering that, by this point, the viking army had returned and

were causing havoc for Alfred just as they had been prior to his narrow victory at the battle of Edington in 878. Alfred's priorities were quite clearly focused on repelling the vikings as opposed to helping to protect the poor when dealing with legal issues.

Source D does not support the view. It states that his primary concern was that "nobody would hesitate either for love or fear of [him] to state what the law said" which indicates that his main aim when dealing with legal issues was simply that everyone abide by it and exceptions he made for no one, not directly suggesting that he is aiming to protect the poor. The credibility of this source is strong. It is taken from Alfred's will and so was intended to read after his death, thus removing the potential that the source was a piece of political propaganda. ~~Whilst~~ Whilst he may have been attempting to solidify his legacy as a law-abiding ruler, there is nothing within this source that rings untrue when considered within its context. There was indeed an inheritance crisis following Etlfred's death and it is certainly the

		case that, along with the crown, a large
		portion of possessions fell into the hands
		of Alfred. Thus, it is certainly the
		case that when Alfred stated that abiding
		by the law was his main concern, he
		may well have been telling the truth.
		Overall, whilst both source A and source
		C agree with the view, neither of
		them can be taken at face value.
		Source B and D suggest that his main
		aim in dealing with legal issues was
		not to protect the poor and both of
		them appear highly credible when
		examined.

This is an example of a Level 4 response which is mostly focused on the question, with some provenance and generally relevant knowledge of the sources' historical context, but with little judgement.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should focus on how far the sources support the view in the question rather than simply explaining each source in light of the issue.

Assessment for learning



Judgements need to reference the provenance of each source if they are to be developed fully rather than simply noting whether each source supports the view or not.

Section B overview

Candidates are required to answer one essay from a choice of two. Each question is taken from a different Key Topic and requires candidates to weigh up the importance of a range of factors or issues.

Question 3 was more popular than Question 2.

Question 2*

The Making of England 899–1016

2* 'The aim of Aethelstan's legal codes was to exert his authority.'

How far do you agree?

[20]

Candidates who attempted this question tended to have less developed knowledge of the legal codes and so it was more difficult for these answers to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme. Where candidates did demonstrate relevant knowledge, the Grately Code, which focused on theft, trade, and 'secret' murder, amongst other things, was often explained, as was III Athelstan relating to Kent, and the London peace guild. Using this knowledge, candidates could argue that Aethelstan's main aim was to exert his authority. Alternatively, others highlighted a more general commitment to law and order – the focus on such crimes as theft pointed to a break down in law and order to some extent – or greater concern over his image as a ruler. In order to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme, a judgement was needed as to Aethelstan's aims with the legal codes. Knowledge also needed to be generally accurate and detailed.

Question 3*

3* How effectively did Edmund deal with challenges from his enemies?

[20]

The more popular of the two questions, candidates were able to identify Edmund's principal enemies as the Vikings of Northumbria, Olaf Guthfrithson and Olaf Sihtricson (though the two were sometimes confused), and the rulers of Strathclyde. Fewer answers referred to Idwal Foel ab Anarawd, king of Gwynedd, possibly because he died so soon into Edmund's reign. Some candidates demonstrated detailed knowledge of events relating to Northumbria, noting that Guthfrithson, despite causing havoc in Mercia at the very beginning of Edmund's reign, was met on his return to the north by the king at Leicester, where a peace treaty was arranged. Candidates considered this treaty a significant failure, since Edmund gave up control of the Five Boroughs. Edmund's swift recovery of them in the following year, after Guthfrithson's death, was seen as evidence of the effective way in which the king dealt with his enemies. Guthfrithson's successor, Olaf Sihtricson, had his own difficulties in York with competing claims to his position. Edmund's seizure of the city in 944, with the help of the Archbishop Wulfstan of York, whose slipperiness was acknowledged by some candidates, was seen as further evidence of the king's effectiveness in dealing with the Viking challenge in Northumbria. Knowledge of the threat from Strathclyde tended to be less detailed, but candidates were aware of Edmund's attack on the kingdom, which culminated in the cruel blinding of the king of Strathclyde's sons, and Edmund's granting of the kingdom to Malcolm I of Scotland. This, too, was seen as evidence of Edmund's effectiveness in dealing with the challenges of his enemies. Some candidates tried to broaden the scope of their answers by discussing Edmund's success in forging links with continental rulers, Louis IV, king of West Francia, and Otto I, ruler of East Francia, but these rulers cannot be considered as Edmund's 'enemies'. Similarly, candidates discussed the king's law codes and tried to identify criminals as 'enemies', but this, too, was less successful. Candidates needed to provide a judgement related to the issue in the question in order to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Exemplar 2

3	Edmund (939-946) faced challenges from his enemies from three key sources: the Vikings, especially Olaf Guthfrithson and Olaf Sihtricson; Scotland and Strathclyde; and from fugitives disrupting law and order for in his kingdom. It would seem that while he dealt with the existential threat concerning the first two effectively, the last threat — although seemingly less posing less of a threat to the West Saxon crown itself — ironically was the one Edmund personally could not overcome. While it is true that Edmund's reign was marked with failure in the first ^{early} years, as Olaf Guthfrithson seeking revenge for his defeat at Brunanburh in 937, immediately returned to the north, taking York in the process — Edmund was most certainly made up for this failure by the end of the reign. Indeed, not only did he exploit the divisions often confused transitory period in 942, after the death of Olaf Guthfrithson and the rise to power of Olaf Sihtricson by successfully reclaiming the five boroughs, Edmund even exploited divisions amongst the Vikings in York to capture the region in 944. Moreover, Edmund took
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Then again, it cannot be ignored that Edmund was blessed with good fortune. Edmund ~~did~~ was nearly lucky to be reigning during the death of Olaf Guthfrithson, and it was also by pure chance that Olaf Guthfrithson's power in York was diminished due to rival factions such as those headed by Regnall and Sinfrið, as evidenced by all three of them creating a Congress of their arm. While Edmund deserves credit for exploiting a favourable circumstances, it cannot be said that he contributed fully to — by his own efforts — to the success of ~~settling~~ subduing the ~~the~~ Viking threat in York.

Unlike the previous factor, Edmund was not assisted by luck when attempting to deal with the problem of Worpdoas

in the country. Edmund did promulgate ~~the~~ three law codes between ~~the~~ 939-946, and most of which dealt with issues such as runaway slaves and cattle rustling. Indeed, unlike his predecessor Athelstan who kept changing his rulings on theft (e.g. from the death penalty being from 12, then to 15 in Athelstan and 11 Athelstan), showing ~~both~~ inconsistency between amnesty and harshness due to neither of them working, as Athelstan admitted in 11 Athelstan himself; Edmund's rulings were consistent.

However, it would be too far to say that Edmund was successful in dealing with ~~the~~ enemies within his kingdom with his law codes. Indeed in 945 he led to the death of the ~~the~~ Thelred for mistreating an abbot and even with his authoritarian rule, Edmund was killed by his enemy - a runaway, slave outlawed slave by the name of Leofa of his royal estate in Puddochurch.

Lastly, when considering Law Edmund ~~was~~ managed to deal with Scotland

and Strathclyde — this factor was ~~not~~ definitely the most successful. Edmund took a ~~a~~ varying approach to Strathclyde and Scotland. He blinded the sons of Dunmail ~~and~~ after ravaging Strathclyde and handed control of ~~the~~ Strathclyde to Scotland (under King Malcolm). This was to avoid a ~~new~~ (Hiberno-Norse) alliance with the north in return for greater control for Malcolm. This successful approach was thus linked to subduing the Viking threat and also showed Edmund's flexibility in employing both diplomatic and military tactics.

So, in the final analysis, Edmund effectively dealt with the challenges from his enemies to varying degrees of success. While his challenge of preventing a Hiberno-Norse and north-England alliance was ~~some~~ the most successful, the internal challenge of ~~fighting~~ ~~dealing~~ with enemies and criminals within his own kingdom — albeit originally posing the least existential threat — was actually the one he failed to

address, mostly clearly shown by his ~~own~~ assassination in 946.

This is an example of a Level 4 response in which the question is generally addressed with largely accurate and sometimes detailed knowledge and understanding. However, there is little judgement and some of the knowledge is less effectively related to the question.

Assessment for learning

Candidates should provide a judgement in response to the question which is focused on the key issue and substantiated with a convincing explanation.

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