

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY B

(SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
History B (Schools History Project)**

J411

For first teaching in 2016

**The People's Health, c.1250 to present
J411/11, J411/12 and J411/13
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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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The People's Health, c.1250 to present overview

The People's Health, c.1250 to present is one of three thematic units in Component Group 1 British History GCSE paper. The focus of assessment for the thematic paper is knowledge and understanding, and explaining and analysing events and periods. The paper has three compulsory questions and a choice of one question from two optional questions.

The thematic study requires candidates to understand change and continuity from c.1250 to the present. The study requires them to consider historical development over a long period and to identify and explain why certain developments occurred. The questions test various historical skills from the ability to deploy second order concepts in their answers to writing explained arguments for or against certain views.

Specifically, candidates need to be able to present a historical summary of an area of content they have learned (Question 2), offer an explanation in response to a historical question (e.g. explaining the causes or consequences of something) in Question 3 and recall and apply their knowledge to support and challenge a statement in an essay-style question from either Question 4 or Question 5.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- Question 1 - recalled at least two valid answers - Question 2 - analysed responses to the plague 1348-c.1670 by organising their response around a historical concept most frequently causation (belief and linked response) - Question 3 - fully explained at least one reason why the gin craze became a significant public health issue in the period 1660-1751 - Questions 4 and 5 - effectively deployed a range of knowledge, using precise, period specific evidence to support their answers, explaining how it addressed the question being asked - all questions – were comfortable with the four different time periods on the specification, and able to differentiate between them - remained focused on answering the precise question in front of them – a very important point.	- Question 1 - did not produce a valid answer to any part of Question 1 - Question 2 - correctly identified responses or causes of responses to the plague 1348-c.1670 - Question 3 - identified valid reason(s) why the gin craze became a significant health issue but were unable to develop their response with precise evidence and/or use to address the question - Questions 4 and 5 - made accurate but generalised points which they were unable to support with specific evidence; or gave precise evidence but did not explain how it helped to address the question being asked.

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Question 1 (a)

1

- (a) Give **one** example of how early modern towns tried to improve public health in their local areas between 1500 and 1750. [1]

Successful candidates used precise detail specific to the 1500-1750 period. More general answers such as clearing waste off the streets were not specific enough and required more precision, e.g. not allowing people to put household waste out for scavengers until after 7pm.

Question 1 (b)

- (b) Name **one** way in which people in towns obtained their water between 1750 and 1900. [1]

This question was answered correctly by most candidates. The most frequently credited responses were conduits and water pumps. A minority of answers were not creditable because they were not precisely focused on towns, e.g. wells.

Question 1 (c)

- (c) Name **one** person whose work during the 1900s had a positive effect on public health. [1]

The most frequently credited responses were Dr Niven and Princess Diana. Often, where responses were not credited, it was because candidates had chosen someone from the previous time period.

Question 2

- 2 Write a clear and organised summary that analyses responses to outbreaks of plague during the period 1348 (the Black Death) to c.1670.

Support your summary with examples. [9]

Most candidates were able to include some relevant knowledge about responses to the plague in the period 1348 - c.1670.

While there were some responses which contained unorganised descriptions, most also did approach their summary in an analytical way.

Most frequently, candidates considered causation (notable religious responses and responses based on the miasma theory).

Some responses were organised around change over time – e.g. the more proactive responses from the National Government in the Early Modern period as compared to the medieval period.

However, there were still many responses which did not move past Level 1. To move into Levels 2 and 3, responses needed to contain precise examples relating to responses and to organise them around a second order concept.

The best responses were able to organise their answers around:

Causation (e.g. why people/ authorities had the responses they did, given beliefs at the time):

- Miasma
- Religion
- The Four Humours

Change/continuity:

- **continuity** of beliefs about the causes of plague
- **continuity** of responses from ordinary people
- development of centralised government responses during early modern period, which was a big **change** from the medieval period.

A minority of candidates misunderstood the question and wrote about descriptions of the plague rather than responses. These were likely to be marked at Level 1, 1 mark.

Exemplar 1

2		During the 1348 outbreak of the Black Death, many/ most of the population believed the plague was a punishment of god. As a result of this, flagellation occurred were a person would whip themselves and others to show god they repent their sins and for him to stop the black death.
		Also during the 1665 outbreak, people infected with the great plague had to quarantine for 40 days in their house, their door was marked with a large red cross to prevent entry of people.

This extract begins with a threshold Level 2 summary based on causation (religion) with one valid supporting example. The candidate identifies the belief that the plague was a punishment from God and that one response was flagellation; this was briefly developed by saying this was done to repent their sins so that God would stop the Black Death. To be awarded more than 4 marks, this could be supported with more precise detail such as the flagellants came to England from Northern Europe and/or that they would walk in line, whipping the back of the person in front of them.

Alternatively, this could have been developed by describing an additional religious response.

Next there is a Level 1 description of a response to the plague. This is not organised around a second order concept and so is credited at Level 1.

Question 3

3 Why did the gin craze become a significant public health issue during the period 1660 to 1751?

Explain your answer.

[10]

Most candidates were able to identify a valid reason why the gin craze became significant problem (Level 2), the most popular response being that it was cheap. Many candidates were then able to progress to Level 3 by using precise evidence about accessibility, e.g. dram shops in attics and back rooms, or the slogan 'drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pence.' Or they then addressed the question by noting that the cheapness and accessibility led to over-consumption and deaths.

There were a good number of responses which offered at least one full explanation, supported by precise evidence/examples; these were organised around a range of valid reasons (listed below) and rewarded at Levels 4 and 5.

Most popular reasons to develop responses from:

Reasons why the gin craze developed:

- Gin became a cheaper alternative

Reasons why the 'gin craze' was a significant public health issue:

- Babies were harmed
- The death rate increased
- Lots of small gin shops opened

Reasons why the government found it difficult to deal with:

- Legislation introduced to tackle the issue was not enforced

There were also a significant number of responses which simply described the gin craze without focusing on the causation focus of the question. These answers could not be credited above Level 2. Additionally, many candidates attempted to use gin tasting better than water as a reason. This was not credited because drinking alcohol instead of water was not a new development and so not a valid reason.

Question 4*

4* 'Government action was **not effective** in improving public health between 1750 and 1900.'

How far do you agree?

Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

This question was asking candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of government action on public health in the period 1750 - 1900. Most candidates were able to use their historical knowledge of related events in the correct period.

Frequently credited points in favour of the statement included:

- 1848 Public Health Act

Frequently credited points to disagree with the statement included:

- 1875 Public Health Act
- Bazalgette's sewers in London
- Food adulteration legislation

At Level 3 and above, candidates were credited for demonstrating specific historical evidence to support their points and using this evidence to address the question about how effective government action was.

Responses reaching Level 6 put forward four explained points, with at least one point on either side of the argument. This does not need to be equally balanced. The most successful responses on this question tended to have more disagree points and just one agree.

Although most candidates were able to identify valid points for Level 2, fewer were able to reach the higher levels by developing them. Candidates whose points were awarded at Level 2 usually had a lack of precise detail and/or did not use their knowledge to address the question. As the focus of question was the impact of government action, rather than why public health improved, answers which explained why **other factors** led to improvement could not be credited above Level 2 description of related public health issues.

Additionally, a significant number of candidates wrote about government **inaction**, which was not the focus of the question. For example, by describing Laissez Faire and/or the work of John Snow going on to argue that Snow's investigations into the causes of cholera had little impact on the government. This could not be credited above Level 2 description of related public health issues.

Exemplar 2

		However I also disagree as in 1875
		the food & Drugs Act stopped adulterated
		foods drugs (chalk mixed with flour) being
		sold to the public, this was a major
		improvement as people were not getting ill
		and food poisoning from their food / drugs
		making this governmental response extremely
		effective as before people were eating food
		that made them ill.

This paragraph uses a developed explanation of the Food and Drugs Act of 1875 to disagree with the statement that government action was not effective in the period 1750-1900.

The candidate uses some precision with the correct date and the example of chalk mixed with flour and then goes on to link it to a public health issue that it resolved.

Assessment for learning



Candidates must have a balanced argument to reach beyond Level 4 of the mark scheme (Questions 4 and 5). However, this does not have to be equally balanced. On Question 4, the candidates who reached the top of the mark scheme tended to have three disagree and one agree developed explanations. Candidates who opted for two agree and two disagree developed explanations were less successful because they often found it difficult to develop more than one agree point.

Question 5*

5* 'Since c.1900, changes in living conditions and lifestyles in Britain have improved people's health.'

How far do you agree?

Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

This was a slightly more popular question than Question 4. This question was asking candidates to evaluate the impact of living conditions and lifestyles. The majority of candidates understood what the question was asking and wrote about the correct time period. Some candidates demonstrated confusion in their understanding of the difference between the 1900s and the nineteenth century.

Frequently credited points to agree with the statement included:

- Housing – various housing acts
- Food – impact of rationing; Free School Meals
- Air – Clean Air Act; public smoking ban

Frequently credited points to disagree with the statement included:

- Food – changes in diets (convenience food, consumption of sugar/fats etc)
- Air – Great Smog and cars
- Increase in smoking
- Inactivity – impact of technology on work/leisure

At Level 3 and above, candidates were credited for demonstrating specific historical evidence to support their points and used this evidence to address the question about changes in living conditions and lifestyles and their impact.

Responses reaching Level 6 put forward four explained points, with at least one point on either side of the argument.

A vast majority of candidates were able to identify valid points for Level 2, although fewer were able to reach the higher levels by developing them. Candidates whose points were awarded at Level 2 usually had a lack of precise detail and/or did not use their knowledge to address the question. Candidates need to make sure they don't rely too much on 'general knowledge' to answer these post 1900 questions as this can often lead to imprecise examples.

Exemplar 3

Furthermore, I strongly agree that since 1900, changes in living conditions and lifestyles in Britain have improved people's health is through the view on smoking. During the 1900's, smoking was very common, however once linked to lung cancer it began to slowly be viewed as a toxic lifestyle. We can see this through the 2007 Health Act, in which aimed to ban smoking in public spaces, to prevent a rise in first hand and second hand lung cancer. This shows how people's health has improved, as we see how smoking, which was once seen as a common lifestyle is now proven as negative and strongly discouraged.

This paragraph uses a developed explanation on smoking to agree with the statement that since c.1900, changes in living conditions and lifestyles in Britain have improved people's health.

The candidate uses a change in attitudes to smoking over the period, using some precision with the 2007 legislation and a link to a health issue.

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