

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY A (EXPLAINING THE MODERN WORLD)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History A
(Explaining the Modern World)**

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/12 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction

Paper 12 series overview

Section A overview

Question 1

Question 2

Section B overview

Question 3

Question 4

3

4

5

5

7

9

9

11

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](#).

Would you prefer a Word version?

Did you know that you can save this PDF as a Word file using Acrobat Professional?

Simply click on **File > Export to** and select **Microsoft Word**

(If you have opened this PDF in your browser you will need to save it first. Simply right click anywhere on the page and select **Save as . . .** to save the PDF. Then open the PDF in Acrobat Professional.)

If you do not have access to Acrobat Professional there are a number of **free** applications available that will also convert PDF to Word (search for PDF to Word converter).

Paper 12 series overview

Candidates were well-prepared for this depth study on The English Reformation with Castles: Form and Function. The majority of candidates demonstrated a good level of knowledge which they used to address the questions clearly. The quality of responses varied, as would be expected, but very few missed out questions and very few seemed to have run out of time, which was encouraging to note.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• demonstrated good knowledge of key uprisings, especially the Pilgrimage of Grace and Prayer Book Rebellion, with some able to explain clear links between causes and events • showed the ability to evaluate sources with contextual knowledge • understood Robert Dudley's redesign of Kenilworth Castle and its symbolic purpose to impress Elizabeth I • explained why changes at Kenilworth Castle were made and successfully linked these to shifts in its function • made supported inferences from Source D about the castle's defensive strength, using contextual knowledge to add depth • produced detailed, well-structured responses that incorporated their own knowledge with source material • used details from Source E, supported by contextual knowledge, to infer the castle's changing role as a residence and status symbol.	• did not focus on why specific events, such as the dissolution of the monasteries, led to rebellion • made stock evaluations (e.g. 'the source is unreliable') rather than precise, contextualised analysis incorporating their own knowledge • did not pay attention to the date parameters of questions • did not develop valid inferences, particularly from Source E, to draw stronger conclusions about the castle's changing role.

OCR support



You can find information on exam review webinars and other support events in **Training** on the horizontal menu within GCSE (9-1): History A on [Teach Cambridge](#).

Section A overview

Candidates were well-prepared for the English Reformation section, demonstrating secure knowledge of the key events and issues of the period. Most applied their understanding effectively to the demands of the questions, with many able to draw on contextual knowledge to strengthen their responses. While the quality of responses naturally varied, it was encouraging that nearly all candidates attempted each question and managed their time well.

Question 1

The English Reformation c.1520–c.1550

- 1 Explain why there were uprisings against Henry VIII and Edward VI's religious policies between 1534 and 1550. **[10]**

This question focused on the causes of uprisings in the Tudor period. To answer effectively, candidates were required to explain two different reasons for rebellion, with many selecting the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Prayer Book Rebellion. More successful responses, typically those at Levels 4 and 5, demonstrated secure understanding by explaining the specific causes of each uprising, particularly linking the Pilgrimage of Grace to the dissolution of the monasteries. A minority of candidates produced highly effective answers that drew on detailed knowledge of the causes of the uprisings against Edward VI in Cornwall.

A significant number of candidates reached Level 3 by identifying relevant uprisings, most commonly citing the dissolution of the monasteries as a reason but were unable to fully explain why these events provoked rebellion. Less successful responses tended to link the religious reforms of Henry VIII and Edward VI or offered generalised statements such as 'changed religion'. Some responses focused heavily on Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon and the break from Rome, without establishing a clear link to the specific causes of uprisings. In some cases, candidates could name one or more uprising but did not demonstrate a clear understanding of why they occurred.

Exemplar 1

		Henry disah got rid of all the monasteries as
		he said the monks were pregnant, the
		for his own profit, which angered the
		so commoners who would get free healthcare
		from the monasteries.
		Edward VI was protestant and made
		the whole country protestant. This angered
		nobles who went against him.

The response in Exemplar 1 is placed in Level 3 for identifying the dissolution of monasteries as a cause of uprisings to Henry VIII's religious policies but does not move beyond this due to a lack of analysis.

Question 2

2 Study **Sources A, B and C**.

'The Catholic Church was seriously threatened by opposition between c.1520 and 1534.'

How far do **Sources A, B and C** convince you that this statement is correct?

Use the sources and your knowledge to explain your answer.

[20]

() Spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology

[5]

This question required candidates to evaluate three sources in order to assess the validity of the statement. While many candidates were able to quote accurately from the extracts, a number struggled to make effective use of the material to develop their responses. As a result, many responses were placed into Level 3, although the quality within this band varied considerably. More successful answers demonstrated the ability to use contextual knowledge to evaluate the sources, but a lack of precise evaluative phrasing (for example, 'However, I am not completely convinced by this because I know...') often prevented candidates from moving beyond Level 3. Stock comments such as 'the source is unreliable' were common and did not constitute effective evaluation.

The first source was generally the best understood. A number of candidates reached Level 4 by using specific details from the source alongside contextual knowledge. However, Sources B and C proved more problematic. Errors of comprehension included taking Source B's statement that the author 'would be converted to Protestantism' literally, and assuming, in Source C, that the murdered priest was Catholic and had died defending Catholic beliefs. Confusion between Thomas More and Thomas Hitton was also common.

The most successful responses reached Level 5 by integrating their own knowledge effectively to evaluate the sources.

Exemplar 2

2	This source^{source A} would appear to suggest the church wasn't threatened by opposition. This can be seen in the source where he describes Luther's beliefs as "wicked and desperate words ... of a snake". This shows the Catholic church wasn't under threat as while people like Luther may have opposed them powerful individuals like the king of England still supported the Catholic Church. This meant they weren't under any real serious threat as people such as the king who had the power to make religious changes in a country still supported the church. However the information in this source is contradicted by the fact that after writing this Henry VIII would later reform religion in England through the act of supremacy, declaring himself head of the Church and removing influence of the Catholic church. This shows^{source is not convincing that} they were threatened by opposition as the ideas of Luther had led to a protestant reform under the same king who actively disputed them showing they were a serious threat.
---	---

While the full response of Exemplar 2 went on to reach the top of Level 3, the extract meets the criteria for Level 2. This section uses specific details from the source, supported by a quote, and links it back to the given statement.

Assessment for learning



Most candidates showed good practice in handling contemporary sources for Question 2. To improve further, they should be encouraged to read sources fully, to accurately identify the author's stance. For higher marks, focusing on the writer's purpose and audience would strengthen their evaluations.

Section B overview

Candidates showed secure knowledge of castle design and function, with many producing thoughtful explanations and well-supported inferences. A stronger focus on precise time periods and further development of source analysis would have helped more candidates reach higher levels.

Question 3

Castles: Form and Function c.1000–1750

3 Explain how Kenilworth Castle changed between c.1500 and c.1750.

[10]

Effective responses to this question described the changes made to Kenilworth Castle within the correct date range and explained either why these changes occurred or how they demonstrated a change in the castle's function. Many candidates demonstrated good knowledge of Robert Dudley's building works and his redesign of the gardens to please Elizabeth I. These responses often went on to explain how these alterations reflected the castle's role as a status symbol, allowing candidates to access Levels 3 or 4. Knowledge of the castle's slighting after the Royalist defeat in the Civil War was also frequently mentioned, although less successful responses tended merely to state that the castle was 'slighted', while more successful responses provided details of the extent of the damage and its later use as farmland.

The highest level responses were those that drew an effective contrast between the function of the castle before and after these changes, linking their descriptions directly to the shift in purpose. However, some candidates did not note the date parameters of the question, either writing about the castle's entire history or summarising all known changes before eventually reaching Dudley's alterations and the later slighting.

Exemplar 3

3)	One way Kenilworth changed was its function. at the start of 1500 Kenilworth's function was a palace and was used to impress. Kenilworth was under the ruling of the Dudley, more specifically Robert Dudley. At the time Robert Dudley was trying to impress Elizabeth as he really liked her and wanted to marry her. Inside the castle he added a grand fire place and lots of new windows to represent his power. and wealth . The windows were to show that Robert was wealthy and elegant.
	However later on the function shifted from palace and royalty to a formidable fortress. The castle shifted and became a lot more to harder to get into. The reason this was done was to protect those who so lived inside the castle. For example instead of the large windows that showed power and wealth was was removed as glass was easy to shatter meaning that it would be easy to enter. the Instead the walls were made thicker and windows were made smaller so the castle was similar to a fortress ^{fort} . This provided a lot more security.

The response in Exemplar 3 meets the criteria for Level 4 for the reference to the new windows representing wealth, power and elegance, in addition to referencing the palatial nature of Kenilworth under Dudley.

Question 4

4 Study Sources D and E.

Which of these sources is more useful to a historian studying the history of Kenilworth Castle between c.1250 and c.1500?

[10]

This question required candidates to consider the utility of Sources D and E in the context of the Middle Ages. Many candidates were able to make supported inferences from Source D, often noting the castle's strength in withstanding a siege despite the impressive siege engines used against it. However, a number misinterpreted the source, assuming the siege towers were part of the castle's defences. Likewise, some responses relied on simplistic comments on the provenance.

Source E was generally less successfully used. The most effective responses used details of the large windows, supported by contextual knowledge such as their likely decorative glass, to infer that the castle's defensive role had diminished and that it now served as a residence and status symbol. Some candidates fell back on stock evaluation or claimed the source was 'just a photograph' without drawing valid inferences. A few stronger responses drew relevant points about John of Gaunt, but overall understanding of what the source showed was limited.

A recurring issue was not observing the date parameters of the question, with many responses including events outside the specified period, preventing access to the higher levels.

Misconception



Some candidates mistakenly linked Source E's castle image to the siege described in Source D, which is inaccurate.

Supporting you

Teach Cambridge

Make sure you visit our secure website [Teach Cambridge](#) to find the full range of resources and support for the subjects you teach. This includes secure materials such as set assignments and exemplars, online and on-demand training.

Don't have access? If your school or college teaches any OCR qualifications, please contact your exams officer. You can [forward them this link](#) to help get you started.

Reviews of marking

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our post-results services. For full information about the options available visit the [OCR website](#).

Access to Scripts

We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

Our free, on-demand service, Access to Scripts is available via our single sign-on service, My Cambridge. Step-by-step instructions are on our [website](#).

Keep up-to-date

We send a monthly bulletin to tell you about important updates. You can also sign up for your subject specific updates. If you haven't already, [sign up here](#).

OCR Professional Development

Attend one of our popular professional development courses to hear directly from a senior assessor or drop in to a Q&A session. Most of our courses are delivered live via an online platform, so you can attend from any location.

Please find details for all our courses for your subject on **Teach Cambridge**. You'll also find links to our online courses on NEA marking and support.

Signed up for ExamBuilder?

ExamBuilder is the exam paper builder platform for a range of our qualifications. [Find out more](#).

Free for all OCR centres with an Interchange account, it allows unlimited users per centre. We require an [Interchange](#) username to verify your centre's users for ExamBuilder.

If you do not have an Interchange account, please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username.

Once you have an Interchange username, use the form on [this page](#) to sign up for ExamBuilder, or ask an existing user at your centre to create an ExamBuilder account for you.

Active Results

Review students' exam performance with our free online results analysis tool. It is available for all GCSEs, AS and A Levels and Cambridge Nationals (examined units only).

[Find out more](#).

Tell us what you think

Your feedback plays an important role in how we develop, market, support and resource qualifications now and into the future. We want you and your students to enjoy and get the best out of our qualifications and resources, but to do that we need your honest opinions to tell us whether we're on the right track or not.

You can email your thoughts to resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk or visit our [feedback page](#) to learn more about how you can help us improve our resources.



Designing and testing in [collaboration with you](#) and your students



Helping young people develop an [ethical view of the world](#)



Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) are [part of everything we do](#)

Contact the team at:

☎ 01223 553998

🖥 ocr.org.uk

To stay up to date with all the relevant news about our qualifications, register for email updates at ocr.org.uk/updates

Visit our Online Support Centre at support.ocr.org.uk



OCR is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

OCR is a Company Limited by Guarantee and an exempt charity. Registered in England. Registered office: The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA. Registered company number: 3484466.

We operate academic and vocational qualifications regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA as listed in their qualifications registers.

We are committed to providing a fully accessible experience across all our products, platforms, and websites. Find out more about our [accessibility standards](#).

© OCR 2025. All rights reserved. We retain the copyright on all our publications. However, our registered centres are permitted to copy and distribute our material for their own internal use, in line with any specific restrictions detailed in the publication. Find out more about our [copyright policies](#).

We update our publications regularly so please check you have the most up-to-date version.

We cannot be held responsible for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and do not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

When we update our specifications, you'll see a new version number and a summary of the changes. While we do our best to reflect these changes in all associated resources on [Teach Cambridge](#), if you notice any discrepancies, please refer to the latest specification on our website and [let us know](#).

Our resources do not represent any teaching method we expect you to use. We cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions in our resources.