

**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

**J410/10 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 10 series overview

This paper examines the theme of war and its impact on society. It requires candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding to explain the results of war across a broad sweep of British history, addressing the effects and consequences of wars on Britain, including the analysis of a significant event. This includes a piece of extended writing that requires the use of examples from across two of the three periods that candidates will have studied. Candidates' learning is assessed through four questions asking for recall, study of impact, significance, and the analysis of an issue over a prolonged period of time. These skills focus on Assessment Objectives 1 and 2, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the past, as well as explaining and analysing historical events.

Many candidates responded well to the challenges of the paper and had, for the most part, a secure grasp of the chronology of conflict, often demonstrating an excellent grasp of details of many wars and conflicts. Question 1 had a significant number of 'no response' answers. Question 2 conversely was often done very well with good knowledge and explanation. Question 3 generally showed good explanation of impact, but candidates often struggled to reach the top level by clearly addressing significance. Question 4 was often done very well, allowing candidates to construct a wide range of arguments with most candidates able to adopt a balanced approach to the question, sometimes very impressively.

| Candidates who did well on this paper generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>used examples, issues and events relevant to the time periods examined by the question</li> <li>responded to the demands of the specific questions set, showing a clear understanding of the command words</li> <li>had a secure grasp of chronology of different conflicts</li> <li>established clear explanatory links back to the issues in the question, especially for Question 4</li> <li>displayed a clear understanding of how historians assess significance</li> <li>had a clear grasp of the key concepts required from the study of the specification such as the different reasons for, and impacts of, different wars over time.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>showed a limited understanding of chronology and did not draw examples from the period stated in the question</li> <li>displayed insecure historical knowledge, for example by confusing information about different wars, or including wars that were less relevant to the question</li> <li>described the impact of issues without developing this into an analysis of significance</li> <li>offered responses to Question 4 that lacked balance, by only looking at one side of the argument – usually agreement – rather than both.</li> </ul> |

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## Question 1

1 Describe **two** features of IRA campaigns during the period 1969 to 1994.

[4]

This question focuses on AO1 knowledge and understanding of the past, and requires candidates to identify two examples, and support them with accompanying detail or development.

Many candidates were able to offer one supported example but not two, and therefore scored only 2 marks. Some candidates believed that the IRA sought to establish an independent Northern Ireland, or that their target was the Irish government.

Where candidates did score well, they usually referenced bombing campaigns, often mentioning the Birmingham pub bombings, or the Warrington bombings of 1993, or attempted assassinations of prominent British political figures, such as the Brighton bombing of 1984 aimed at Margaret Thatcher, or the mortar attack on Downing Street in 1991. Some candidates referred to Sinn Fein as the political wing of the IRA.

### Misconception



Many candidates referenced events in Northern Ireland 1969-94 which were not examples of IRA campaigns, particularly Bloody Sunday, or 'riots' in general. These were not credited as they were not examples of IRA campaigns.

## Question 2

2 Explain the impact that the Viking raids and invasions had on England.

[8]

This question focuses on knowledge and understanding of the past (AO1) and explanation and analysis of historical events using second order concepts, in this case an explanation of impact.

Many candidates achieved 5 marks or more. Typical areas that candidates explored were economic impacts/physical destruction (often evidenced by the discovery of hoards, or by tin coins in Northumbria as the Vikings had looted all the precious metals), religious impacts (the Vikings being pagan, Alcuin of York emphasising Anglo-Saxon Christian identity) or unity (Alfred the Great and his successors uniting the Anglo-Saxons against the Vikings, the growth of a united Anglo-Saxon identity in relation to the Vikings where previously the Anglo-Saxons had been divided among several kingdoms, e.g. Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, etc).

Most candidates addressed the question clearly and well, and where a few drifted into descriptions most kept the focus on impact. A few candidates confused the Vikings with the Normans and the Norman Conquest, but this was not common.

## Exemplar 1

On one hand, the Viking raids caused great physical <sup>and economic</sup> destruction in England. In 793 AD the Vikings raided the Lindisfarne monastery, and later in 795 AD they pillaged and destroyed Iona. Furthermore, the Vikings pillaged numerous Anglo-Saxon towns, evidenced by people <sup>burying</sup> ~~hiding~~ their treasures underground as they ~~the~~ fled from the Vikings' violence and destruction - most notably, the Staffordshire Hoard was found containing jewellery, silver, etc. ~~Historians~~ Moreover, great economic damage was caused, as historians discovered Anglo-Saxon coins made of tin rather than ~~typical~~ the typical silver - evidencing the great economic decline the Vikings caused them. Furthermore, in order to plead with the Vikings, many Anglo-Saxons were forced to pay 'Danegeld' to the Vikings as a bribe.

On the other hand, however, the ~~things~~ viking raids had a largely positive religious impact on the anglo-saxons. Alcuin of York preached that the viking raids and invasions were as much a religious threat as any. ~~as an~~ or defensive ~~one~~ the and imperialist threat. Thus a national anglo-saxon identity formed against the 'northmen', and religious ideologies emerged surrounding the vikings 'emerging from both hell'. This newly-emerged identity strengthened anglo-saxon defence against the vikings and arguably empowered King Alfred and Athelstan's determination against the 'northmen'.

Exemplar 1 shows the candidate has addressed the question clearly and with good supporting evidence. The two paragraphs explain different, valid impacts, one negative (physical and economic destruction) and one positive (religious). Both paragraphs are supported by relevant and specific detail, such as the Staffordshire Hoard and coins made from tin in the first paragraph, and the work of Alcuin of York and fears of the 'Northmen' leading to Anglo-Saxon unity under Alfred and Athelstan for the second. This was a focused, relevant and well developed explanation of impact.

## Question 3

3 How significant was war for medieval society in the period 1066 to 1450?

[14]

This question asks candidates to structure a response around significance: this year the focus was on the significance of war to medieval society. Candidates were able to give explained examples of the impact of war on society in the Middle Ages. They also understood that assessing significance involved consideration of scale, breadth or long-term importance of changes produced by war. Candidates tended to be less successful in explaining why such a change or impact could be considered significant, and this resulted in many candidates not reaching the highest level.

Candidates generally demonstrated good knowledge of war and its impact on Britain in the Middle Ages, and relatively few candidates went outside the boundaries of the dates set in the question. Where this did happen, it tended to be candidates rewording what they had written in Question 2 and discussing the Vikings. Where candidates were successful, they most commonly discussed the Norman Conquest (particularly the Feudal System), and King John, the Barons' War and Magna Carta. The campaigns of Edward I and the 100 Years' War were also often discussed well. The impact of the Norman Conquest was often argued to be significant as a whole, as it largely destroyed the culture of Anglo-Saxon England (here candidates pointed to the replacement of Anglo-Saxon thegns by Norman barons, and the literal rebuilding of the Anglo-Saxon church). The Feudal System, Motte and Bailey castles and the Domesday Book were often put forward as evidence of the significance of the Norman Conquest. These could be argued legitimately, but candidates often considerably overstated the allegedly egalitarian nature of Anglo-Saxon society and claimed that the Feudal System was significant because it imposed a hierarchical society on England for the first time, which is not the case.

King John and Magna Carta was often discussed well. Many candidates referred to the Charter as the beginning of equality before the law, with the principle of trial by jury, or referred to the Charter's long-term significance by pointing out how later monarchs re-issued it, such as Edward I in 1297, or how it influenced the American Revolution. In this way, candidates were able to argue for the significance of Magna Carta due to its long-term effects. A minority of candidates however seemed to believe that Magna Carta was issued by Parliament and was therefore significant in the development of Parliamentary democracy.

Other candidates successfully argued that the campaigns of Edward I were significant because the costs involved required support from the political nation, which led to the calling of the Model Parliament, which was a turning point in the development of Parliament and its influence over taxation. The 100 Years' War was successfully argued by some candidates similarly to be significant as a turning point in the history of warfare, marking the decline of the Feudal System and the growth of professional warfare, sometimes linked to the role of the archer in replacing the armoured knight as the most important figure on the battlefield.

Many candidates were able to explain examples of the impact of war but were less successful in explaining why these examples were significant, and therefore were unable to reach Level 4. Many candidates asserted that an episode or event is significant, without explaining this. It is not enough to say that something took place 'for the first time' to be an explanation of significance. Similarly, candidates are aware that if something is of long-term importance, it may be said to be of significance but then make claims that do not have historical validity (such as the claim that the Domesday Book led directly to the modern Census).

## Assessment for learning



Candidates should be encouraged to explain why each example they discuss can be considered to be significant.

Some responses showed awareness of what might support an argument for significance, such as an event or episode being a turning point, or being of long-term importance, or being of an unprecedented scale, but didn't explain why that made it significant.

## Exemplar 2

War was very significant for society since it led to a long term shift in the way society was governed and how hierarchy changed. The Norman Conquest from 1066 completely changed society as now society was controlled by feudalism where the monarch bestowed land to barons (nobles) in exchange for them swearing loyalty, raising taxes and an army and keeping law and order. <sup>mediocre</sup> This meant that society no longer 4000 thegns were replaced by 200 barons and by 1086 only 4 major lords survived as by 1070 only 3/15 Anglo-Saxon ~~bare~~ bishops remained. This completely changed how society functioned as now French became the official language as England was dominated by the feudalism for hundreds of years.

Furthermore, the way of attacking changed from fighting head-on, to sieging and securing castles in strategic positions, and so in this way, war was extremely significant for medieval society as it reshaped how social order existed. By introducing feudalism, William subverted society, and this was a very long term impact as for hundreds of years, till the 15th century, feudalism was the way of controlling society by establishing loyalty between the King and their barons. Overall, the shift in medieval society's method of hierarchy changed due to war for a long time so it was war was very significant for medieval society as it affected almost everyone in England at the time, and for a very very long time too.

Exemplar 2 is an example of a response that explains the impact of war on medieval society by looking at the Norman Conquest and successfully goes further in order to explain significance by explaining the long-term impact of this. Impact is explained in detail by reference to 200 Norman barons replacing 4000 Anglo-Saxon thegns, the impact on the Church, and the impact on language. These are valid impacts, explained with detailed support. The response then develops further into significance by explaining the long-term impact of feudalism. This goes beyond assertion of significance by using the argument that the Feudal System was the way of ordering society until the fifteenth century, explicitly arguing that this deserves to be considered significant because of its longevity and scale.

## Question 4\*

4\* 'Between 1500 and 2010, wars had a major impact on government and politics in Britain.'

How far do you agree?

[24]

This question requires candidates to consider a statement across two of the three study periods and explain examples of how the statement could be supported or challenged. Three explained examples covering both periods and across both time periods gave access to Level 5, although even some strong candidates limited themselves to Level 4 by only explaining examples that agreed with the statement.

Many candidates showed impressive knowledge and were able to use their knowledge in a relevant manner to address the question. Most candidates had little difficulty in explaining examples from across both time periods, with the Civil Wars and the Iraq War commonly used. Relatively few candidates struggled with the concept of government and politics, although some candidates were confused between 'government' and 'Parliament', this rarely materially affected their performance. Candidates typically used the Civil Wars, the Iraq War, and the two World Wars for agreement, identifying all of these as having had a major impact on government and politics in Britain. For balance, candidates sometimes simply argued that other wars (such as the wars of Elizabeth) did not have such an impact, and this was perfectly valid if explained. However, more candidates achieved balance by arguing that other wars and conflicts had more impact on other areas, beyond that of government and politics. Often, the Elizabethan Wars were argued to have had more impact on religion than on government, the Seven Years' War to have had more impact on Empire and global power than government, and sometimes that the twentieth century World Wars had more impact on the general population and society than on government.

Arguments for a major impact of war on government and society often began with the Civil Wars, arguing that the execution of the King and the establishment of a Republic were evidence of a major impact. This was certainly the case, and candidates clearly knew the events of the Civil Wars well (a minority of candidates argued that the Civil Wars did not support the statement because they had a greater effect on people than government, and used casualty figures as evidence, which was a valid line of reasoning). Typically, responses then jumped to the Iraq War as evidence of agreement from across the time period, using the lack of WMDs and anti-war demonstrations to argue that this led to a growth of distrust in British government/foreign intervention, this last point often supported by the failure of David Cameron to secure support for intervention in Syria. Discussion of Iraq was also usually well informed and well argued, although a significant minority of candidates seemed to believe that Tony Blair and the Labour Party lost the subsequent (2005) General Election, which is not the case.

The two World Wars were often then used as evidence of impact on government, with the 1918 Representation of the People Act and the extension of the vote to women seen as a governmental impact of WW1, and the Beveridge Report, 1945 Labour landslide, and establishment of the post-war Welfare State and NHS as evidence of the political impact of WW2 (although some candidates used the same point to argue that these wars had a greater effect on the population as a whole than on government and politics, which was valid if explained).

For balance, as noted, the religious impact of the Elizabethan Wars and the global impact of the Seven Years' War were often explained for disagreement. Other wars of Empire were also sometimes used for disagreement, although candidates sometimes confused the Crimean and Boer wars, or seemed unclear as to whether they should or should not be considered to have had an impact on government and politics.

Few candidates showed a lack of knowledge of chronology – only a small minority wrote about examples from the medieval period and so did not answer the question. Similarly, only a small number of candidates described various conflicts without addressing the question of impact on government and politics and were held at Level 2. Only a few candidates ended up discussing the causes of various wars without addressing impact and likewise made it difficult for themselves to rise above Level 2 (where this did happen, it was most likely to be on the causes of the Civil Wars, or appeasement and the causes of WW2 – examples perhaps of less successful responses remembering what they had covered for other papers). The relative lack of such issues points to the success of centres in preparing candidates for this paper.

Many candidates were able to access Level 5, but relatively few candidates successfully managed the extra mark for a 'clinching argument' – conclusions tended to be summaries of what the candidate had already said. Where candidates did offer a clinching argument, it was often to argue that the wars that had an impact on government and politics were those that were on a bigger scale than other wars, and therefore had the greatest impact, including on government, such as the Civil Wars or World Wars.

## Exemplar 3

In my opinion, wars from 1500 to 2010 have had a major impact on government and politics in Britain, resulting in many changes and improvements which are still present today.

One ~~way~~ reason you could agree with this statement is the effects of the English Civil Wars. These were brutal battles lasting from 1642 to 1651, resulting in the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and Oliver Cromwell becoming Lord Protector. This massively altered government and politics as it put Parliament in a much larger position of power, and ~~resulting~~ resulted in a British Republic for the very first time. Although, a monarch was then put back in power after Cromwell's death, this still showed Britain a new potential shift in power to Parliament and the government, which may have helped to create this power ~~and also~~ shift to Parliament that we see today. In conclusion, one reason you could agree with this statement is the effects of the English Civil War.

Another reason you could agree with this statement is the effects of the First World War. Although, the British population largely sided

with Blair's decision to invade Iraq, & it was then discovered after the invasion that one of the <sup>main</sup> reasons the British sided with this war, Iraq's ~~to~~ weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), was actually not true and Iraq did not have any WMDs. Then in the Chilcott report, in 2016, it was discovered that Blair actually knew that Iraq had no WMDs, and had decided to invade Iraq ~~anyway~~ anyway. This created a large amount of tension and distrust between the government and British, showing the government that they would have to work much ~~for~~ harder in order to gain support for any future wars, causing a ~~greater~~ further change in government in order to try and regain the ~~British~~ British trust back. In conclusion, another reason you could agree with this statement is the effects of the Iraq War.

Exemplar 3 achieved Level 5 overall, demonstrating balance and an answer that covered both time periods. These first two sections show a clear explanation of how both the English Civil Wars and the Iraq War affected government and politics. There is good supporting detail for the impact of the Civil Wars (the execution of the King, and Cromwell as Lord Protector, a British Republic for the first time), and also for Iraq (no WMDs, the Chilcott Report). Other candidates developed Iraq further in terms of its impact on British politics by pointing to the failure of David Cameron to secure support for intervention in Syria in 2013, and arguing that this was an impact of the distrust created by the Iraq War. This response is focused on the question and each paragraph links back to the question. At this point, the response had reached Level 4. It has explained the impact of war on government and politics with examples drawn from two periods. At this point it is not a balanced argument, but the response did then access Level 5 by explaining how Elizabeth's wars did not impact government and politics in the same way. This is a good example of a successful response to Question 4.

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