
A-level History

7042/2B The Wars of the Roses, 1450–1499
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Students were largely able to engage effectively with the new A-level examination. Most students were able to use their time to the full to produce answers using all three of the sources on the compulsory question (Q01) as well as answer two essay questions (Q02, Q03, Q04). This was very encouraging. Q02 was clearly the most popular essay question and Q03 was the least. However, all questions produced a range of very good and weaker responses. The poor use of spelling, punctuation and grammar is an area of concern. Obviously students are writing under exam conditions, but centres should note that well-organised and effective communication is a part of the mark scheme. The volume of references to things such as the 'English throne' and 'nobels' was disheartening. Both centres and students need to work on the quality of written communication. Centres should also note that all sections of the specification are regarded as equally important with regard to examination coverage. They should make sure that teaching reflects this.

Section A

Question 1

There were two major elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance and tone, and an evaluation of content and argument. It is essential to understand that both requiring some application of own knowledge in order to establish value. The lack of the application of contextual own knowledge was a major feature of many responses this year and significantly limited the marks awarded. It is also worth noting again that this is not a comparative exercise and there is nothing to be gained from doing so. An overall conclusion attempting to establish which source is of most value is largely a wasted effort.

With regard to provenance and tone it is worth noting that students who integrated discussion of this into larger arguments as to the value of the individual source usually produced more satisfactory responses than those who established a separate section to address this. This was largely because separate sections (for provenance, tone and then content) tended to make generic comments about provenance of the source that did not tie them clearly into the value of it for the specific question asked about why Clarence was executed in 1478. It is not helpful, for example, to comment that a source was likely to be pro-Tudor unless an argument is made about how this might influence its view on Clarence's execution. There was too much generic comment on provenance and its general value. Responses that considered the main emphasis of the source using quotes, contextual knowledge and provenance together to support this, and then considered the limitations with a clear overall judgement, tended to perform better.

Regarding the evaluation of content and argument, the major issue was the lack of own knowledge to support or challenge the major emphasis and argument of the source. This seems to be in part because many students addressed content through a sentence-by-sentence (or even phrase-by-phrase) approach. Therefore they missed the overall emphasis and could not produce knowledge that was different to that in the source but would support it. Students also quoted without adding contextual own knowledge to elaborate upon the meaning of the information selected. Picking a section to quote and repeating it back uncritically is not a high level skill. This is a depth study paper and students are expected to contribute more than is written on the source. Too many answers failed to evaluate the content and argument of the source with own knowledge. When used effectively own knowledge can both support quotes and the general emphasis as well as challenge it.

Omission was widely deployed by students but too rarely used effectively. Simply listing the things that a source does not mention has very little intrinsic value. It is a given that each source cannot possibly mention everything related to the topic. Omission may be relevant, if, for example, it is felt that something has been deliberately ignored and the student elaborates as to why this might be and how it limits the overall value of the source. Generally, however, students would profit more from considering the limitations of the source using knowledge that challenges its main emphasis. This is facilitated by taking a more holistic view of the source rather than the sentence-by-sentence approach which too many students seem to have adopted. It should also be noted that the students are being asked to discuss 'value' and not reliability, usefulness, validity or any other concept. The term 'bias' was frequently deployed but all too often in a highly simplistic and dismissive manner and, whilst it certainly can be effectively deployed, centres may find that other terminology is less problematic. Without own knowledge that supports and challenges the emphasis of each source, as well as its provenance, it is hard to make meaningful comments as to the overall value of a source.

Section B

Although most students were able to write two full essays within the time period there were some issues common to all essay questions. It is important to note that the paper is a depth study that the students have been investigating for two years. It is therefore expected that they will be able to deploy far more precise evidence than was seen in many responses. General points need to be substantiated with some specific examples, names or dates. Another common issue is the lack of links between essay content and the question asked. Descriptive or narrative essays that merely relate what happened are not analytical and do not directly answer the question asked.

Question 2

This was largely well handled. Most students were able to explore a wide range of reasons as to why the Lancastrian government collapsed in 1461. The question largely covered the period between the First Battle of St. Albans (1455) and 1461. Although reference to earlier in the period was clearly relevant, there were some answers that focused almost entirely on the period before 1455 and therefore, in light of the question asked, tended to be rather unbalanced. One key discriminator was how the First Battle of St. Albans itself was handled. The question asks about the significance of this battle in particular. The most effective answers considered both the arguments supporting its significance and, crucially, those that challenged it before moving on to consider other issues. They did not merely implicitly challenge it by only considering alternative issues.

Question 3

Although there was a wide range of responses, this was the least well handled of the three essay questions. The major reason for this appeared to be students attempting to rewrite the essay question. Some attempted to talk heavily about Edward IV's actions before 1461 and then do the same with consideration of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. Although some consideration of long-term issues could be warranted, the question was fundamentally asking about the years 1461 to 1464. A failure to acknowledge this led to very unbalanced responses. Similarly attempts were made by some to turn the question into a study of the dispute between Edward IV and Warwick. Others confused the events of this period with those of the later readeption and subsequent battles. It is vital that students answer the question that is asked. Students who did apply knowledge of the period and issue in question could, and did, access the highest marks.

Question 4

This question from the end of the specification was handled reasonably well by many students. The weaker responses, as in all essay questions, were those that narrated large sections of the events in the years 1486 and 1499 rather than tying what was discussed specifically to the concept of threat or comparing it to the threat posed by Margaret of Burgundy. There were, however, many excellent answers that considered the threat from her, in the context of the situation and the other threats, to come to a reasoned judgement.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.