
AS HISTORY

Component 1B Spain in the Age of Discovery, 1469-1598
Report on the Examination

June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General Comments

Most of the responses reflect the hard work and dedication of both students and schools. Students were able to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do in engaging fully with the demands of the question paper. Most wrote with knowledge and understanding in producing articulate and thoughtful answers which demonstrated willingness and enthusiasm to engage with the subject and its inherent issues. There were some students whose ineffective time management defined their overall performance, running out of time or hastily truncating higher-level opportunities in weak evaluations and limited judgements. There were a small number of extended responses which reflected a propensity for narrative responses, lacking definition or the requisite interpretive skills to take fuller advantage of the higher levels in Question 01.

Overall students coped well with the demands of the examination which required comparison between extracts, and an understanding of historical context and interpretations within AO3. These helped to differentiate between students who were more confident in the reading of the extracts, placing less able students in the lower levels. Many may well need to move away from simplistic references to “omission” as an effective comparison and interpretive tool, similarly many wrote extensively showcasing their own knowledge whilst not fully developing the interpretation of the extracts to more effectively articulate and support the convincing views expressed. The essay questions reflect AO1. The essays were focused and balanced, the most successful demonstrating clear supported and sustained judgements linking effectively to the focus of the question.

Section A

Question 01

It was clear that students were able to consider the two extracts by James Reston Jr and Thomas F Madden in turn, making effective comparative comment in their responses whilst developing this further in the conclusions. Many displayed a demonstrable understanding of the respective interpretations in the two extracts and showed an understanding of their respective historical content within a secure and supported context. Knowledge of the work of the Inquisition in the reign of King Charles of Spain was extensive, reflecting the confidence of the vast majority of the students with this popular topic. There however remained a small minority of students whose responses remained largely content driven, lacking a fuller understanding of ‘the more convincing view’ and were consequently quite reliant on ‘omission’ as a determining factor in interpretation.

Examiners were looking for the following key elements in candidate answers:

1) An understanding of the interpretations in the two extracts.

The most successful students, achieving levels 4 and 5 explicitly identified the overall interpretation of each extract and explained it using effective and relevant contextual own knowledge. They were equally able to acknowledge other views and arguments to evaluate, demonstrating high-level skills of interpretive reading with understanding. Whilst there was some evidence of a more mechanistic approach with the potential to offer less effective interpretations, this has been addressed significantly from previous years. The complexity of the interpretation of comparative views was not appreciated by less able students who usually addressed only one or two statements in each extract, relying on omission: ‘Extract A is less convincing because it does not mention....’.

2) An understanding of the historical context

The more confident students offered a cogent argument by both supporting and challenging the argument. The work of the Inquisition, both from a traditional perspective and from a more challenging contemporary standpoint provided both a wealth and depth of own knowledge from well prepared students able to successfully manipulate it in response to the skills required and the demands of the question. Demonstrable precision was provided by many students to provide balanced and detailed argument within a clearly defined historical context. Less able students characteristically demonstrated little precision or wider understanding of the need to offer a convincing interpretive and balanced approach. A small number of students produced answers which were largely descriptive rather than evaluative. The majority understood the direction of the question to define the work of the Inquisition in the reign of King Charles of Spain.

Comparison between the two extracts

This had the potential to be problematic for less able students whose approach to comparison extended to assertive phrases and reliance upon the content of the extract with little supporting contextual own knowledge. The most able recognised the need to judge the validity of the interpretations, drawing on effective and relevant analysis to provide a meaningful and substantiated judgement. Many argued that Reston's view was the more convincing because of its recognisable traditional interpretation. Madden's arguments which offered challenge to the traditional views were seen as convincing because allowance is made for exceptions and change over time. This reflected a more realistic view of the contextual and contemporaneous views which many Spaniards exhibited for the work of the Inquisition as a means of defending orthodoxy from heresy. "They loved their Inquisition."

Section B

Question 02

The focus of the question was the extent to which political unity was not achieved in Spain in the years 1492-1516. The question invited students to present a range of evidence and arguments to identify and evaluate the reasons why political unity was not achieved in Spain. The most students were able to reach considered conclusions as to the extent to which Spain was politically unified between 1492-1516. There remained a small minority who sought essentially narrative responses, with little developed understanding of the extent of wider issues, or, who relied on largely unsupported and assertive conclusions. The reign of Ferdinand and Isabella remains a very accessible and popular question.

Most responses used chronology and detailed own knowledge to develop and sustain convincing arguments leading to equally convincing judgements.

Conciliar government and its relationship with the Royal Council and the towns remained tenuous and control of the nobility, elusive. There remained regional differences and tensions which compounded the lack of unity sought by Ferdinand and Isabella. Much of this was variously acknowledged and students were awarded appropriately. Political unity was defined by the union of the respective Crowns, resulting in a stronger power base centred around effective Conciliar administration, the Cortes and the Royal Council. The Reconquest was instrumental in defining political unity, creating a sense of "unity of purpose". Lastly, the Inquisition was used as an effective political tool, ensuring stronger royal control.

Political unity served as an effective discriminator which allowed students to explore a wide range of factors and reach supported and sustained judgments within a clear balanced structure. Those achieving the higher levels demonstrated the ability to analyse and evaluate key features such as the significance of the Dual Monarchy, their partnership and Isabella's death. Most students were able to a greater or lesser extent offer a challenge to the view by citing evidence supporting the view that political unity was achieved in Spain.

Question 03

The focus of the question was the extent to which Spain was governed effectively in the years 1529-1556 despite the absences of Charles and his commitments as Holy Roman Emperor. The focus of the question was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of Spanish government by the time Charles abdicated in 1556. Not as popular as Question 02 nevertheless, was well attempted by many students who were able to respond successfully to the demands of the question arguing the premise that Spain was effectively governed during Charles' absences. A victim of his imperial responsibilities, to which he was bound Charles was constrained by the inability to disengage from the wider, and for Spain, disastrous conflicts. The more sophisticated responses demonstrated clear and detailed knowledge tempered with contextual, and in the case of higher level responses, conceptual understanding, clearly making links across a range of relevant factors revealing understanding of breadth and change over time.

The better responses acknowledged that Spain, despite Charles' absences, emerged stronger not weaker. Charles's absences were mitigated by effective regents, especially Philip after 1543 and the structure of the royal government and administration of the Conciliar system. Spain, despite the parlous condition of its domestic economy and equally poor social conditions emerged as the pre-eminent Catholic power globally. Students who showed knowledge and understanding of the key argument were rewarded appropriately within AO1.

Good answers were able to demonstrate effective balanced and well supported responses leading to informed and well- articulated judgements at level 4 and above, Weaker responses offered little accurate and precise supporting detail with analysis confined to largely unsubstantiated assertion. There was a small proportion of students who exercised considerable descriptive knowledge of events within the Holy Roman Empire without closer links to the arguments and the focus of the question. The most able students were able to discriminate appropriately and made links between the various factors involved, political, economic, military and religious, analysing and evaluating the extent to which Spain was effectively governed in the years 1529-1556.

Effective government was established by Charles in the period of reform between 1522-1527, laying foundations upon which successive regents could rely. The appointment of key individuals: Gattinara and Los Cobos. The compliance of the nobility after 1522 strengthened developing security for the regents. The Conciliar system effectively administered Spain.

Conversely, Charles' rule and subsequent absences created a latent disaffection especially in Aragon where dangerous levels of resentment, faction-fighting and violence built up. The government relied on the rule of one man at the centre, inter-council rivalry, the relationship between the towns and regional nobility remained tenuous within a context of wider international war. Lastly, the Conciliar system remained fundamentally inefficient and cumbersome.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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