
A-level

History

7042/2F The Sun King: Louis XIV, France and Europe, 1643–1715
Report on the Examination

7042/2F
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General

While the responses to the questions on this year's paper as ever showed a wide range of ability, the level of understanding was generally good. Students scored very equally across the paper. There were very few students who had little to say on the questions and some were of a very high standard.

Both Sections A and B were marked according to the respective generic levels mark schemes which offer a range of 5 levels of attainment, carefully graded to assess a combination of understanding and knowledge. Adjustments to the marks within these levels were made according to how well the student's work matched the level requirements. There was little difference seen in the quality of the responses to the different areas of the specification content, and, to this extent, the questions proved effective at differentiating between students, with a roughly equal number of strong and weak answers being found in response to every question.

Question 1

The source question is demanding and students generally fared best when they took time to consider both the provenance and the content of the sources carefully - in relation to the focus of the question - before beginning to write. Strong answers usually began with a direct reference to the key insights offered by the source and then related this and some consideration of the provenance to the detailed assessment of the source. Weaker students tended to be very mechanical in assessing provenance first, then tone and then elements of the content without integration and sometimes without much own knowledge or understanding.

Those who considered each source as a whole, were able to find each one's key insights into the issue of the French economy between 1661 and 1666. Source A established the monarchy's sole control of the finances and blamed all previous problems on fraud. Source B attacked Colbert and his policy of mercantilism and argued that his tariffs were punitive to France and his sale of offices would lead to the beggaring of the nobility; Source C reflects Colbert's private advice to Louis to maintain the navy but to reduce his wasteful domestic spending. Very few students saw all these key insights clearly and this limited their ability to assess the value of the sources.

The consideration of the provenance was far more successful when integrated into the assessment of the content and insights given by the sources. Most students commented on the official nature of Source A as a royal edict being sent for registration by all French parlements, but few understood the use of the royal "we" and recognised that this was Louis alone not Louis and Colbert. As such, many did not comment that the extract would naturally blame fraud for the financial problems faced by the monarchy and not its own long wars of aggression and the exclusion of the first and second estates from taxation which would be to invite criticism of the whole system of status upon which Louis's France depended. Some talked about the iniquitous taxation system in France and the frauds that were perpetrated, and some did talk about the real problem being the costs of warfare. Surprisingly few students made the association between Fouquet's fate and the Chamber of Justice – although some that did have him executed rather than imprisoned.

Source B's provenance was the key to unlocking the value of the source. As a noble courtier, the anonymous writer was almost inevitably hostile to an arriviste like Colbert who wanted to make the second estate more enterprising and attacked their embezzlement and use of offices. Those few

students who really appreciated this could then explain the clear prejudice against Colbert and to question the basis of this attack on his whole policy. Students with good contextual knowledge were able to talk about mercantilism and tariffs effectively although those students who made references to autarky, infrastructure and trading companies were less closely related to the source's content. The point on beggaring the nobility by a policy of ending office holding was clearly exaggerated - Colbert did try to reduce office holding but it was not really possible, even had he wished to do so, to end it completely.

Source C's provenance again was critical to understanding the value of the source. Colbert had not long been promoted to Minister of Finances in 1665 and yet, albeit tactfully, he was prepared in a private memorandum to criticise Louis's domestic spending on "unnecessary things" which many students saw as a green light to bring up Versailles – which was legitimate provided it was remembered that much of the really extravagant spending was yet to come at this point. Colbert's emphasis on the navy was well explained by many but fewer explained the economic basis of this in terms of promoting trade and commerce. Virtually no students picked up the different emphasis in Colbert's understanding of *gloire* compared to Louis's conception which is clearly shown here, as Colbert did not recognise some of Louis's more wasteful spending as contributing to his reputation. Better students integrated the provenance and the content well and commented on the fact that despite Colbert's subordinate position and recent appointment, he was still prepared to tackle the king on a key part of Louis's behaviour.

A few students did give a judgement at the end of all the sources, comparing their value to the historian. Better students tended to give their judgement at the end of each source, ensuring that the answer did not end with an AS comparative judgement. The sources must be judged for their value independently – they are free standing.

Question 2

This proved to be a popular choice among students as the Revocation of the Edict is the natural watershed of Louis's reign, and, apart from the building of Versailles, Louis's most famous action. Yet the question proved difficult for many students to access the highest grades. Nearly every student could cite one reason apart from religion for his decision; the achievement of absolutist rule and the influence of Madame de Maintenon being the most common alternatives. According to their ability and knowledge, students cited the coronation oath, his Jesuit confessors, the name "Dieu-donné" and the questioning of Louis's entitlement to be called the "most Christian king" as supporting the religious case for the revocation. However, few explained exactly who Huguenots were (indeed for some students Huguenots and Jansenists were bundled up together), or their beliefs or why on religious grounds Louis would hate them; most relied on his hatred being based on them being "heretics".

Most students found it hard to distinguish religious from other motives; for example, Madame de Maintenon's influence was based on religious grounds, the atonement of earlier sins and the need to protect the souls of his people. Those citing his desire for absolutism referred too to the Huguenots being heretics and so having no place in a Catholic kingdom. In this lay the challenge of the question; for Louis, the religious, the personal and the political overlapped. Better students in some shape or form recognised this issue and saw the inter-relation of all of these factors in Louis's decision. This meant that their decision as to which motive was the strongest was far more nuanced and produced by a persuasive argument rather than simply trying to set factors with clear overlap against each other which was not really persuasive.

Question 3

This question explored a key issue of Louis's reign – his absolutism – and whether this went into decline in the latter parts of his reign. The question proved popular again with students because most of them approached it through Louis's declining health and the changing influence of those around him. They tended to show how the loss of a loyal servant in Colbert and his replacement by the more aggressive Louvois led to a loss of control and students provided various versions of Louvois's decline and demise. Others – seemingly in a well-rehearsed answer, included Madame de Maintenon's influence and followed a “for and against” pattern on both Louvois and Madame de Maintenon with good detail and persuasion. Some of these did become a kind of argument as the issues in the “for” sections were picked up in the “against” sections.

Other students offered alternative approaches; some focussed on Louis XIV's international authority over the period and pointed to its decline through the Nine Years War with the loss of national prestige and resources in the war. Yet other students considered the failings of the French system of government; weaker students here tended to describe the general problems of authority in France by reference to its geography, provincial autonomy and the inefficient and unproductive system of taxation. Better students focused on how the system was in decline by this point, with the problem of appointing an intendant to Brittany being cited or the need to find new forms of taxation with the capitation and the dixième being cited – although the latter was only introduced during the War of Spanish Succession. Better students found balance here by saying that although Louis's authority was coming into question due to financial problems, he had sufficient authority to do the unthinkable – to tax the first and second estate.

The best answers went beyond the rather anecdotal and personal, included a range of issues and were constructed in the form of an argument which focussed on an issue and debated it.

Question 4

The challenge in the last question lay in the precise focus of the question, which asked the extent to which the Peace of Ryswick damaged French authority rather than the damage caused by the Nine Years War. Most students who opted for this question did know a good deal about the terms of the Treaty and the significance of the loss of territory and the demeaning terms such as recognising William III as the rightful King of England, ending his support for the claims of James II and the stationing of Dutch troops in the border fortresses in the Spanish Netherlands. Clearly the recognition of these losses damaged France's international position and shows that France was beatable by a Grand Alliance. Most found a way of challenging this by citing how Louis's acceptance of the treaty regained France's diplomatic position in Europe; this was most clearly shown by the Partition Treaty which followed soon after the Peace and the terms France accepted with regards to Spain which may have influenced Carlos II's will. Others tried to claim with difficulty that the retention of Strasbourg was a gain for France's international position.

Weaker students focussed on the damage done by the war rather than the treaty and so were missing the precise focus of the question; however, some better students proved able to focus such discussions on to the treaty – for example although France's military power had not proved able to defeat its opponents, the treaty represented that the allies had to come to terms with France without all their key objectives achieved because of the army's resilience. As ever, better students were able to choose themes to debate – loss of territory, France's diplomatic isolation, the situation with Spain for example – to form an argument to form a coherent argument in response to the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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