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Oxford Cambridge and RSA

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY A (EXPLAINING THE MODERN WORLD)

J410
For first teaching in 2016

J410/09 Summer 2018 series
Version 1

Contents

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. 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 can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper J410/09 series overview

This was the first examination of the new 9-1 Specification A. This new specification 'Paper 2' differs from timed examination papers on the old 'legacy' specification, focusing exclusively on AO1 and AO2. It presented the challenge of a totally new focus of study – the nature of government and politics in Britain across a period spanning a thousand years – as well as question types that centres were unfamiliar with. Question 3 focused on a new area; that of significance, previously the domain of controlled assessment questions. Question 4 required a more developed, thematic essay-style that previous candidates would have found unfamiliar.

Candidates' responses, for the most part, demonstrated a good level of preparation for this component. Their answers appeared to reflect a breadth and depth of learning that stood them in good stead for undertaking the examination. The balancing act of candidates having a broad base of knowledge as well as sufficient depth in order to be able to answer a variety of questions was largely managed with candidates showing they had a good understanding about a sufficient number of examples in order to be able to answer all questions with a good level of competence. For example, many knew enough about the Restoration to be able to explain why it represented a change but also why that change was significant in the long-term. Most candidates appeared to cope well with managing their time with the length of their answers reflecting the marks available for the question. It was not uncommon for candidates to answer the questions in 'reverse order' starting with Question 4 and finishing with Question 1.

Question 1

1   Describe **two** examples of the increased power of the state during World War One (1914–18).

[4]

The question required the candidates to show knowledge of measures that increased the power of the state and the way in which the state's power was increased. Candidates, almost without fail, attempted to advance a measure and what that entailed. For those that could not remember specific information many could give an example of how state power did increased and that knowledge was credited. Common areas of focus centred on censorship, rationing and conscription. Most stayed within the bounds of the First World War as specified in the question. Many candidates demonstrated excellent recall, for example of the Defence of the Realm Act.

Question 2

2   Explain how the Normans were able to take control of England in the period 1066–1087.   [8]

The vast majority of candidates were able to identify valid examples of the Norman establishment of control over England, often using the building of castles, the Domesday Book and the Harrying of the North. This allowed most candidates to reach Level 2, with a significant number of these being able to analyse this contribution in order to show the development of these examples to show how this allowed William to establish control (and so access Level 3, or Level 4 for two or more explanations).

Commonly candidates described the events leading to the Battle of Hastings and the impacts of the Viking invasion of the North on Harold Godwinson rather than the Norman Conquest itself. Often these answers only allowed candidates to reach Level 1. Some candidates were confused by the period and mentioned King Cnut, Aethelred the Unready and other monarchs out of context to the question.

Similarly, many of the candidates described the example rather than explaining the context of how it established Norman power. This meant that a large number of candidates were stuck at Level 2 despite a range of examples.

Advice on answering Question 2

Candidates should be encouraged to write a paragraph explaining each point. They are most successful when they identify the reason, demonstrate specific understanding of it and then explain the impact (in this case), and ensure they have fully addressed the question. Some candidates selected more obscure examples, such as the involvement of Edgar Aethling which candidates found it harder to develop into an example of Norman control.

This question is examined in the same way as Question 2 and Question 6 on Paper 1 and candidates should be encouraged to adopt the same approach.

Question 3

3 How significant was the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 for Britain? **[14]**

Many candidates were able to identify more than one way in which the Restoration affected England and these answers often went on to analyse 'before' and 'after' in order to reach Level 3. That said this question saw the largest number of less strong responses. This was partly as candidates often struggled to demonstrate longer-term significance and the answers were often descriptive in reference to the short-term impacts of the Restoration of Charles II. Candidates largely had a good understanding of the impacts of the English Civil War on society and the role of Oliver Cromwell on the interregnum, but many depended on this description rather than drawing it into the impacts of the Restoration.

Candidates who demonstrated understanding of the significance of changes brought by the Restoration were credited alongside candidates that could show how the Restoration itself was significant.

Some candidates misunderstood the question and outlined events that they felt superseded the Restoration in significance, such as the Glorious Revolution.

Candidates that chose to show that the Restoration had an impact on the increasing power of Parliament were credited alongside those who could accurately argue that the power of the Monarchy was retained. There was some excellent understanding of the concepts of monarchy, parliamentary government and democracy. Assessors worked with candidates who showed an understanding of the concept of significance as far as was possible.

Advice on answering Question 3

Centres are encouraged to explore the issue of significance fully with candidates, both in terms of long-term, short-term, reach, size and type of impact. This is important as some candidates restricted themselves to merely considering change rather than significance, which capped their marks at the top of Level 3 - 10 marks. Significance is different.

The most effective approach seen in candidates' responses was to successfully explain how the Restoration changed England and then before leaving the explanation, emphasise the significance at the end of the paragraph, to be sure it has been made clear. The best approaches considered significance in a long-term context against a political concept. Of course some candidates are capable of a more sophisticated approach from the start of the paragraph, laying out the criteria for significance clearly and then developing explanation on to it. But that approach requires candidates to sit back and plan their answer more carefully, which many are reluctant to do in an hour long examination.

Many candidates had a good focus on the question throughout their answer. Some spent quite a long time explaining what was 'insignificant', which is not a recommended approach, since given the nature of this topic candidates were unlikely to be able to explain a significant continuity with the past, since the subject matter is towards the start of the period of study.

Question 4*

4* 'Religion was the main cause of political problems between 1500 and 2014.' How far do you agree? Explain your answer. **[24]**

In general, candidates performed well on this question as its breadth allowed them to display their knowledge and understanding. Many candidates produced impressive responses and showed an understanding of how religion and other issues caused political problems across the period specified. It was pleasing to see relatively sophisticated concepts being used with confidence by many candidates.

The key to answering this question was an identification of a political problem and its cause (e.g. religion). Candidates often showed good breadth of detail, but less effective responses tended to discuss the factor but not explain the political problem that resulted from it. For example, many candidates wrote about the pressure for political reform in the nineteenth and early twentieth century but then digressed into the reforms this pressure produced rather than showing the political problems they caused.

Advice on answering Question 4

Candidates should be encouraged to plan their answers to this question. They could focus on fewer issues (as many wrote about a very wide range of issues and events but expressed these as a narrative) but ones which best allow them to exemplify the points they want to make. Two issues for each period specified in the question are ample for candidates to obtain a very secure mark in the top level.

They need to be specific about the issues they identify, supporting with accurate factual support from which progress into a clear explanation. A common reason candidates remained in Level 3 in this instances was that they were able to offer examples of why religion created political problems in the earlier period but offered no explanations – whether for religion or other factors – in the later period.

When making their points they then need to retain their focus on the question, rather than drift into a narrative of the events. This may seem obvious but when writing an essay over the course of thirty minutes it is easy for candidates to lose this focus. Planning is the answer, and a style of writing which keeps the question in mind.

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