

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY A ***(EXPLAINING THE*** ***MODERN WORLD)***

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/10 Summer 2018 series

Version 1

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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. 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.

Subject information update

We have amended the Study of the Historic Environment component of OCR GCSE History A (J410) to fix the site studied from June 2019 (Castles) and June 2020 (Urban Environments).

Following consultation with and feedback from teachers, we are changing the way the Study of the Historic Environment will be assessed on GCSE History A. At the moment, the site to be studied changes each year of the qualification. From now on, candidates will study either Kenilworth Castle or an urban environment (South Shields in 2019 and Spitalfields from 2020 onwards).

What this means is that teachers of the Castles option, who are already preparing candidates to be examined on Kenilworth Castle in 2019, will continue to prepare each cohort of candidates for an examination on Kenilworth Castle in all future examination series.

For teachers of the Urban Environments option, they should continue preparing candidates to be examined on South Shields in 2019. For the June 2020 examination, and in future series, teachers should prepare candidates for an examination on Spitalfields.

We hope these changes will make the Historic Environment component of the qualification more straightforward for teachers to plan and teach. The teachers' site packs for Kenilworth and South Shields are already available on the website here: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/gcse-history-a-explaining-the-modern-world-j410-from-2016/planning-and-teaching/> and a site pack for Spitalfields will be available in Spring 2019.

The OCR set site will be reviewed after three years and may be subject to change. Each OCR set site will remain on the specification for a minimum of three years, unless the review process identifies a necessary change. If an OCR set site is to be changed and replaced with a new set site, centres will be notified in September two years prior to the examination being sat.

If you have queries about any aspect of these changes, please contact the History Subject Advisors at history@ocr.org.uk

Paper J410/10 series overview

This was the first examination of the new Specification A Paper 2. The new paper was different from timed examination papers on the old specification, focusing exclusively on AO 1 and 2. It presented the challenge of a totally new focus of study: War's impact on British people and their governance, as well as some unfamiliar types of questions. Question 3 focused on a new area, that of significance, which had previously been more the domain of controlled assessment questions; Question 4 required a more developed essay style and structure than candidates are used to in their June papers.

Candidates responded well to the challenges the paper presented and had a secure grasp of the chronology of conflict. Their grasp of the detail of many of these was excellent: large numbers of candidates were able to construct well developed responses including examples from across all periods of study. It was especially pleasing that the essay style of Question 4 was not daunting, and many candidates were able to sustain an argument across multiple pages of writing. Equally pleasing was that most paced themselves well through the course of the paper, and did not linger on low mark questions, leaving a rushed essay at the end.

Overall candidates seemed very well prepared for the examination and able to demonstrate the skills and understanding gained on the course. This is not to be underestimated in the first year of a specification, and with such a different focus from previous examinations. Centres should be pleased that their hard work has paid dividends.

Question 1

1 Describe **two** examples of the impact of Viking raids on Anglo-Saxon England.

[4]

The majority of candidates found this question very accessible and were able to achieve 2 marks or more. Many different impacts were acceptable, and an extra mark could be given for an accompanying example. So, for example, many focused on the impact of the raids on monasteries, causing destruction of artefacts, spreading fear and leading to the monks writing about the evils of the 'Northmen'. Others chose to focus on the separate parts of the country uniting under King Alfred which gave a national identity for the first time. Also acceptable were answers focusing on Alfred's defensive strategies, or the ways the Anglo-Saxons coped with raiding, for example burying treasure.

It was very pleasing to see many candidates with good knowledge and understanding of this area of study.

Advice on answering Question 1

Encourage candidates to answer this question with specifics. A sizeable minority of candidates limited themselves by including too many generic points which could be true of any warfare or conflict, for example, deaths, looting and burning. These only achieved one mark without a solid example from the Viking raids to substantiate them. Equally, economic, psychological, positive and negative impacts arise from most conflicts: they need to be exemplified to gain credit, and it is the examples not the label that gain the credit. As such they are best avoided in this type of question as they distract candidates from the specifics.

Question 2

2 Explain the reasons for Elizabeth I's wars with Spain.

[8]

This question was generally tackled well and most candidates achieved 4 marks or more. They did this by providing the reasons for Elizabeth's wars, for example religious rivalry, economic ambition and through proxy wars. Many had remarkably good knowledge of privateering and its effects on Philip II, the need for defence against a hostile invasion and some were able to construct sophisticated answers around Elizabeth needing to prove herself as a female ruler in a patriarchal world. Many were able to develop one of more of these reasons into explanations for higher marks. Others need to develop more reasoning into their answer, and in particular, a focus on the question, i.e. how was the reason cited a cause of war.

Advice on answering Question 2

Candidates should write a paragraph explaining each point. They are most successful when they identify the reason, explain how or why it led to the war (in this case), and ensure they have fully addressed the question. Although most avoided the problem, some candidates did not achieve the higher explanation marks as it was not clear in their answer how their reason led to war. Being a Protestant would not automatically make for a war with a Catholic monarch. Candidates need to be sure to get to the focus of the question, developing their answer enough to get to war, be it unofficial, indirect or a war of defence.

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 impact of the Norman conquest on English society?

[14]

This question required candidates to not only demonstrate an understanding of the impact of the Norman Conquest, but also to explain it in terms of significance. There are many successful approaches that candidates took, and many impacts that were acceptable. For example, the devastation brought by the harrying of the north, the introduction of new defensive structures like castles, the changes to society's structure brought by the introduction of the Feudal system etcetera.

Many candidates were able to achieve at least Level 3 by explaining the impact of the Conquest using multiple examples. Had there been room in the level, many would have achieved more than the maximum ten marks as they explained many examples. However, to achieve Level 4 candidates must address significance successfully. This was much more challenging for candidates and means convincing the examiner that they are addressing impact over time or scale in a meaningful way. This was usually demonstrated at the start and end of a paragraph where some sort of overarching theme or statement of significance illuminated the explanation given.

Sometimes candidates alluded to or implied significance with the statements 'these continued for hundreds of years', 'in the long term' or 'this is still felt today'. However, this was rarely enough to justify placing an answer in Level 4, even with a good explanation of a change. It is important that more specific criteria are provided and explained.

Advice on answering Question 3

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 were more comfortable talking about impact 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 an impact of the conquest and then before leaving the explanation, emphasise the significance at the end of the paragraph, to be sure it has been made clear. 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' about the Conquest, which is not a recommended approach, unless they are explaining a significant continuity with the past, for example continuation of Anglo-Saxon legal structures and laws. In that case, it would be better for candidates to talk about the Conquest being less significant as a result of continuity.

Equally, there is no need to draw lengthy comparisons with other events and periods in an attempt to explain why one event is more significant than another.

Question 4*

- 4* 'War had more of an impact on people than on governments between 1500 and 2010.' How far do you agree with this statement? [24]

The aim of this question was for candidates to assess whether war had a greater impact on the people or government in the Early Modern and Modern period. On the whole this question was answered very well and candidates showed excellent knowledge of wars and their impacts. Most concentrated on impact rather than being distracted by the causes of war. Most focused their paragraphs well on the question and so had a coherent essay style. Most were able to explain at least one way in which war had a strong impact on either group to achieve high Level 3 marks. Many were able to explain at least three points in this way and so achieve Level 5.

It was also very encouraging to see the development of a more sophisticated approach to question answering. Many chose to compare the impact on both groups throughout their answer, and were rewarded for this. Some candidates preferred to focus on one group at a time, war by war, and structured their essay in this way which was also a very acceptable approach.

Another demand of this question is that candidates **MUST** focus on **BOTH PERIODS**. Most managed this well, but some answers were limited to the top of Level 3 if they did not explain adequately at least one example from each. The vast majority of candidates appeared aware of this, but a few focused their answers on one period alone, which depressed their marks.

Some candidates were held back from achieving the higher levels by confusing the details of wars, or attempting to transpose the impacts of wars they knew about with those they didn't. Some answers fell short of explaining the impact properly as they got caught up in the detail of 'the story of the war'. This happened more often with wars like the Crimean war where the details can cloud the point being made. That said most of these answers usually managed one explanation which resulted in candidates achieving Level 3.

Overall, this question was impressively answered. Candidates showed detailed contextual knowledge and the ability to structure, select and deploy appropriate knowledge carefully. In a one hour examination situation this was a real achievement. They had clearly been well prepared for this paper.

Advice on answering Question 4

Candidates should be encouraged to plan their answers to this question. They could focus on fewer wars (as many wrote about nearly every war they had learnt about) but ones which best allow them to exemplify the points they want to make.

They need to be specific about the impacts they identify, supporting with accurate factual support from particular wars which demonstrate that impact. Good revision is important.

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

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