

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

(EXPLAINING THE MODERN WORLD)

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/08 Summer 2019 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 exam paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Series Overview

This is the second year in which the new '9-1' GCSE History 'A' specification has been examined. This Paper 2 option covers migration to Britain across a period of a thousand years and new question types which until 2018 candidates were unfamiliar with. Successful candidates need to demonstrate a strong chronological understanding of issues connected to migration – why migrants came to Britain, their contributions and reaction to them – as well as be able to construct extended responses based around cause, impact, consequence and significance. There were many strong responses seen by the examiners, and these typically displayed effective time management skills, a good understanding of different chronological periods and the ability to analyse material in relation to the specific demands of the questions set.

Some candidates were not seen to apply their understanding as effectively to the questions, and there was some confusion in relation to chronology and specific migrants groups that prevented responses from reaching a high mark. Question 2 in particular saw candidates access the higher marks, since many were able to deploy their knowledge in an effective way to show why migrants from Asia and Africa arrived in Britain within the specified time frame. In general, most candidates were able to at least describe relevant issues for the questions, and so reach Level 2, but equally it was not uncommon for candidates to remain in Level 2 as they did not develop sufficient focus to move into explanation, and this was especially true of Questions 3 and 4. Some candidates did not perform well on Question 1, since its relatively narrow demands could not be met by candidates who had not revised the topic.

It was really positive for examiners to see the vast majority of candidate make genuine, considered attempts to answer all of the questions on the examination paper fully. Regardless of the overall mark, candidates clearly applied their best efforts.

Question 1

1 Describe **two** examples of English resistance to Norman control during the reign of King William I. [4]

This question has straightforward demands. Candidates were required to give two examples of activity that showed some form of resistance to Norman control of England. For candidates to achieve full marks each example needed to be supported with further detail. To make sure candidates were being credited fairly the 'development marks' were extended to include any relevant Norman response, and indeed this was the approach of most candidates. Candidates who could not cite specific examples but were able to provide a general understanding of Norman actions that the English would have opposed were able to obtain a general mark. Many candidates were able to cite clear examples of resistance – Hereward the Wake and the Silvatici were commonly seen – and responses obtaining four marks were not uncommon. Rarely, candidates were not able to provide knowledge of such resistance, and this was usually because they offered information that was irrelevant to the period in question.

Candidates should be encouraged to approach this question briefly. There is no reason why the examples and development cannot form the same sentence. Questions 3 and 4 present candidates with a more significant academic challenge. Centres have been effective in encouraging their students to write a short response to Question 1, and this has allowed a greater range of extended responses to Questions 3 and 4 than last year.

Question 2

2 Explain why there was African and Asian migration to England in the period 1500 to 1700. [8]

Candidates were expected to provide reasoning for why two groups of migrants from Africa and/or Asia arrived in England during this period. The question offered a broad opportunity for candidates but it was perfectly acceptable for candidates to give examples of either African or Asian migrants. Ideally, candidates approached this question by identifying a specific reason for migration (such as 'accidental' arrival in England) and then showing how this reason applied to a particular and relevant migrant group. In reality, many candidates chose to identify a group and then through accurate knowledge and full understanding demonstrate how the group then arrived in England. By showing an understanding of the patterns of migration at that time it was perfectly possible for candidates to offer valid explanations. This was the most common approach. Two sound explanations were enough for candidates to achieve Level 4, and this was not uncommon. Some migrant groups lent themselves to more effective explanation than others; ayahs and lascars were frequently developed through reasoning into explanation of why they came to arrive in England, but candidates sometimes invalidated their material through chronological confusion. The Royal African Company, for example, was sometimes used by candidates as reasoning for the arrival of well-known individuals such as John Blanke, when the latter very much preceded the former. There were also some misconceptions about the 'triangular' slave trade and its connection to African migration. Some candidates offered only generic reasons for migration – for example 'conditions were poor in Africa' – that were not rooted in the period.

As noted in last year's report, candidates should be following a structure to their response rather than writing a narrative. It is effective if each attempted explanation is its own self-contained paragraph. Question 2 will often be focused around a cause (as with this paper) or a consequence (as with last year's paper). This question is broadly similar to Questions 2 and 6 on Paper 1 and Question 1 on Paper 3 and centres are strongly advised to adopt a similar approach across these papers. Issues of 'linking back to the question' are always at the heart of historical explanation and are just as relevant in Question 4.

Question 3

3 How significant was migration in the Middle Ages for English society?

[14]

At the heart of this question is an understanding of how English society did (or did not) change as a result of migration in the Middle Ages. Many candidates were well-versed in an understanding of which migrant groups came to England in the Middle Ages and the contribution those groups made, but without an understanding of how this represented change it was difficult to reach Level 3 and higher. This was frequently the case with Flemish migrants, for example; candidates often referred to how they 'boosted the economy' but without demonstrating how Flemish skills represented a change that allowed this boost. Lombard bankers and Hanseatic merchants also fell into this category. Commonly, candidates were able to demonstrate the change that occurred as a result of Jewish migration, both in terms of how this led to the construction of castles and cathedrals, and how the subsequent of the Jews led to a change in attitudes. For Level 4, candidates were expected to show an understanding of how the change represented a turning point or how it had long term consequences, and this was not often seen. Candidates could also reach Level 4 with convincing comment about how migration did not have significance. While most candidates' responses were clearly rooted in the period, some lacked the chronological understanding necessary to do so; Huguenots and Palatines were sometimes used as invalid examples.

Centres have clearly encouraged students to try and consider the issue of significance, but there is still room for improvement in students' responses. At the heart of a response should be a focus on change or continuity which should involve an understanding of 'before' and 'after'. Many candidates did not deal with the issue of 'before' and so claims of change were less convincing. This focus should aid candidates in reaching Level 3. Change that is explained as long-lasting or wide-ranging is likely to be moving towards significance, and so Level 4.

Exemplar 1

English society was also significantly affected by the Normans' migration in 1066. After William became King, he reformed Britain in many ways that significantly changed it for British society. For example, Anglo Saxon lords lost all their power and land and had to hand over what was given to Normans, the language changed and a Domesday Survey conducted by the Normans abolished slavery. However, it could be argued that Anglo-Saxon lords losing power only affected a very small portion of the upper class in England and for many average workers and British people their lives did not change; they did the same work, for the most part they still spoke Old English as it was the only the high class Normans who spoke Old French and 70% of the population perhaps were no longer serfs. Therefore the Norman migration and invasion of the Normans was very significant for the higher class English men and women and for the majority of English society, their lives hardly changed.

This paragraph is helpful for centres and candidates to consider, since it deals with the issue of significance by qualifying the extent of the changes that are explained. After reaching Level 3 through explaining valid changes to upper society as a consequence of migration, the candidate then shows a clear awareness of the limited reach of those changes to the majority of the population, which demonstrates an understanding both of English society at the time and of the concept of significance.

Question 4

4* 'British society benefitted from immigration in the period 1500 to 2010.' How far do you agree with this statement? [24]

Advice was given in last year's report about the need for candidates to draw on material from both periods. It is clear from the majority of responses that centres have acted on this feedback and more candidates approached the question with reference to both historical periods, as well as to the different perspectives of the question (benefit and did not benefit). Many candidates had wide-ranging knowledge of migrant groups across this period and numerous examples were given across a typical response. In order to advance towards explanation, candidates were required to demonstrate an understanding of the contributions or (or reactions to) a group, with some explicit link to the issue of benefit or detriment. A range of candidates were able to do so, with some being able to offer balanced responses covering benefit and detriment across both time periods, and so reach Level 5. It was not uncommon, however, for candidates to offer comment on the actions of the group without reaching some form of judgement about relative benefit. Often, the candidates' selection of examples made it difficult for them to do so; for example Italian migrants were often cited as having brought benefit through introducing ice cream to Britain, but a specific comment about why this was a benefit was absent. On the other hand, candidates who selected groups such as the 'Windrush generation' or the Huguenots were frequently able to offer an explained benefit or contribution they made.

In order to reach the higher marks within Level 5 candidates do need to make sure they have constructed four explained points across two time periods and in order to both agree and disagree with the statement. This is challenging – and the marks for Question 4 represent almost half those available on the entire paper – and candidates are strongly advised to set aside around half the time of the examination to answer it. That said, many candidates this year offered far more than four migrant groups across very long responses which, while showing breadth, lacked the depth of material for specific migrant groups that limited the candidates' prospects of constructing explanations. Candidates would be well advised to focus on fewer migrant groups, but to develop their responses more fully to make sure they respond specifically to the question set. In this way, long descriptive responses that can be given relatively little credit (the highest mark for such responses is Level 2, 9 marks) would be less frequent.

It might be somewhat clichéd to say, but candidates should make sure they have read the question carefully and their response addresses its specific demands.

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