

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY B (SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

J411

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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.

Paper 11 series overview

For the second year of the new 9-11 GCSE History (SHP) specification we were very pleased to see how the feedback offered last year has been acted on. The overall standard has definitely risen with candidates tackling Questions 2 and 3 in particular with more clarity and better use of the Second Order Concepts needed to reach the higher levels. There are still areas where candidates, as a whole, can improve: in particular on Questions 6b and 7. With Question 6b, more thought is needed as to how they can frame an historical enquiry question from the interpretation given as opposed to asking a more generalised question about the period without referencing the material given. On Question 7, candidates do need to think and explain more about the intended impact of the interpretations given as opposed to statements that 'it is biased' which is not sufficient. Overall, however, the quality of the extended written responses and the knowledge deployed as support is a credit to how centres have engaged with the specification.

Section A overview

The People's Health remains the most popular topic across the 11-19 units and it is pleasing to report that there were fewer answers that focused on topics that were on the old 'Medicine through Time' specification such as penicillin and surgery. It was also clear that candidates were stronger on the essay questions with many accessing the higher two levels because they had written balanced answers that considered both sides of the argument with well-chosen deployment of support.

Question 1 (a)

The People's Health, c.1250 to present

- 1 (a) Name **one** way people in towns obtained their water in the period 1250–1500.

[1]

Valid responses included conduit; well; water seller and rivers or streams.

Question 1 (b)

- (b) Give **one** example of what people in the first half of the nineteenth century believed caused cholera.

[1]

Valid responses included miasma, God and touch.

Question 1 (c)

- (c) Give **one** example of how people tried to prevent Spanish Flu in 1918–1919.

[1]

Valid responses included the use of air filter/face mask; isolation flu advice leaflets; films shown in cinemas; closure of some public institutions and health visitors sent door to door.

Question 2

- 2 Write a clear and organised summary that analyses people's lives in Britain in the period 1750–1900. Support your summary with examples.

[9]

This question demands more than a basic description of people's lives in the period 1750 - 1900. To move beyond Level 1, it's important that candidates are clear about how to organise an analytical response in these types of questions. The organisation of the answer around a historical concept (such as change, continuity, causation, consequence, significance and diversity) is the driving force behind this question, as opposed to contextual knowledge alone. Where candidates answered with descriptions of people's lives generally then it was a Level 1 response.

Candidates who attained Levels 2 and 3 did so by organising their responses around a second order concept; causation/consequence and change over time were the two most frequent concepts rewarded. Many candidates provided two or more examples of analysis of people's health in the period which was rewarded at Level 3.

Question 3

- 3 Why did living conditions in medieval towns have such an important impact on people's health?
Explain your answer. [10]

The better responses to this question did two things well. Firstly, they provided specific examples of conditions in medieval towns and secondly they make a direct link to how these conditions impacted on people's health. These answers provided a clear answer to the question and were rewarded at Level 4 (one well explained impact) or Level 5 (two well explained impacts).

The most common example of poor conditions impacting on people's lives in the medieval period that were seen was the fact that health was dependent on living conditions in houses and said that 'people often worked in homes so spent a lot of time there which would impact on health'. Other common examples were the condition of streets and markets, the fact that it was very difficult to access clean water and remove waste safely. It was also pleasing to read examples of diversity in answers such as the differences in housing between the rich and the poor.

Level 3 answers were awarded for candidates who wrote in general terms, or where the knowledge used was not specific enough to the medieval period itself. It is worth stressing to candidates that they do need to develop strong knowledge and understanding of the conditions specific to each period – it was clear on this question that a minority had confused medieval conditions with the industrial period because answers mentioned 'back-to-back housing' and/or cholera which clearly was not relevant to the medieval period.

Finally, it was important that candidates were writing about conditions 'in towns' as specified in the question and not the countryside which was the case with a few candidates.

Questions 4 and 5

These were generally well-answered questions and most candidates did try to produce a balanced argument. For clarity for centres, it is important that candidates understand the need to consider both periods where required: the consideration of only one period, such as the government response to the outbreaks of plague in the period 1500-1750 means that the answer cannot be awarded above Level 4 no matter how many accurate responses are accessed. For Levels 5 and 6 we need to see a degree of balance with both periods considered although it does not have to be equal. Level 6, for example, can be either two explained points on each side or three on one and one on the other. The key to reaching the top two levels is making sure there is a consideration of both sides of the argument in the answer.

Finally, candidates should always be encouraged to carefully check the wording of the question to make sure that everything they write is directly relevant to the question being asked.

Question 4

- 4* How far do you agree that government responses to plague were more effective in the period 1500–1750 than the period 1250–1500? Give reasons for your answer. [18]

Surprisingly this proved to be the least popular of the two option questions. However, in general it was answered well.

It is important when answering questions that are asking for a comparison between periods that both periods are considered. Those answers that gave examples of the government response in the period 1500–1750 only could not score higher than Level 4. It was also the case that candidates needed to focus on specific government responses as opposed to the actions of the people generally. Those answers that talked, often at length, about the flagellants or use of toads on swellings, could not score higher than Level 1.

Higher level responses gave specific examples of the actions taken in both periods by the government. For the medieval period, the most common example was the ineffectiveness of the letter sent by Edward III asking for the streets to be cleaned up. This was then contrasted with the Plague Orders of the Queen in the early modern period:

Certainly examiners saw some very good deployment of knowledge, in particular about the latter period in these answers which led to many high marks on this question. The very best responses had a 'clinching argument' and provided a level of analysis beyond a summary in their conclusion (e.g. the Early Modern responses were more effective because they dealt with preventing the spread rather than trying to deal with the causes, which were unknown in both periods). However, these were few and far between.

Question 5

- 5* 'National government has done more to improve people's health since 1900 than it did during the Industrial Age of 1750–1900.' How far do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. [18]

The vast majority of candidates were able to reach at least Level 2 by identifying or describing government action in one or both periods. Some candidates at this level knew the names of acts (e.g. the 1875 Public Health Act) but were unable to develop their response by explaining why these led to improvements in health (e.g. attempts such as 'it was compulsory' and 'people were made to clean the streets' were far too vague and generalised).

Many were able to move beyond this by explaining how government action had led to improvements in people's health. Candidates seemed much more confident with action since 1900, with the Liberal Reforms and Housing Acts being well deployed – see Exemplar 1.

Exemplar 1

Clearly, in the 1900's the national government took huge strides to improve the public health, for example in 1906 children were now entitled to free school meals at school. This therefore meant that children weren't as malnourished because poor families could not provide the correct nutrients ^{in food} whereas now children became much healthier. Furthermore, in 1919 the housing act was introduced which gave people nicer houses with the correct facilities, reducing the spread of disease and also fixing the toilet and water issues.

Likewise, in the twentieth century, the introduction of the NHS, the Clean Air Act and the Smoking Ban / AIDS awareness campaigns by the government were all deployed to good effect.

There were a minority of candidates who wrote irrelevant answers about people's lifestyles generally. However, a pleasing number of candidates were able to give one or more example of 1750–1900 government action, usually the development of sewers, the Public Health Acts and the Pure Food Act. Some candidates tried to use the work of Snow or Pasteur but these were not creditable beyond Level 2 as the question was about *government* action. Finally, as said in the introduction to these questions above, both periods needed to have been covered to access Levels 5 and 6.

The very best responses had a 'clinching argument' and provided a level of analysis beyond a summary in their conclusion (e.g. *Although it might appear that governments since 1900 have done more, they were dealing with different problems which could only really dealt with after the fundamental challenges of water supply and waste had been tackled in the 19th Century*).

Section B overview

The Norman Conquest section was generally answered well, in particular Question 8 on the motives for castles. That said, Question 9 was answered much less well mainly as some candidates appear to have seen the words 'cavalry' and 'Normans' and so wrote about the Battle of Hastings which was not what the question was about. It is important that the date in the questions are strictly adhered to. Also, some attention needs to be paid by centres to the reasons why interpretations are different: too often examiners read on Question 7 that 'Horrible Histories' was 'dumbed down for children' while the historian 'would have done more research so was likely to be accurate'.

Question 6 (a)

The Norman Conquest, 1065–1087

- 6 (a) In Interpretation A, historian David Howarth argues that life in England just before the Norman Conquest was pleasant. Identify and explain **one** way in which he does this. [3]

In general this question was answered well. Candidates understood the interpretation that Howarth was putting forward and were able to use his words to develop their answer. It should be noted by centres that we are only looking for **one** feature of how/why it has helped the author create the impression. Three separate points will only score 1 mark.

Question 6 (b)

- (b) If you were asked to do further research on one aspect of Interpretation A, what would you choose to investigate? Explain how this would help us to analyse and understand life in England immediately before the Norman Conquest. [5]

This is the question the majority of candidates find difficult. Too many candidates ended up in the lower levels for a mixture of reasons. Firstly, where candidates did not advance beyond Level 1 it was typically because they did not frame an enquiry around a historical concept, but merely wanted to find out more 'information' from the interpretation, e.g. 'I'd like to know more about the hard labour ... I'd find out what they had to eat and drink'. Secondly, some candidates came up with an enquiry question, but one which was not linked to the interpretation in question at all. This seemed very 'rehearsed' and there was no attempt to link it to Interpretation A. Most frequently, this was things about the lives of women. The question asks for research on 'one aspect of Interpretation A', so these responses often did not even attain Level 1. Finally, some candidates did come up with a valid enquiry question, but not one which would 'help us to analyse and understand life in England on the eve of the conquest'. Most frequently these were questions about the impact of the Norman Conquest which is not what was being asked for in the question – *'life immediately before the Norman Conquest'*. Finally, too many candidates used phrases such as 'I know from my own knowledge that....' Which rather invalidated their enquiry question as they were providing the answer to the question.

Higher level responses were able to think historically, framing wider enquiry questions which were usually around diversity or causation. The most common one was centred on whether life was pleasant in this way, with 'plenty' of everything, for all different types of people/in different areas of England. If candidates were able to indicate how it would help further historians' understanding, they moved into Level 2. At the top level, candidates were able to use Interpretation A as part of their enquiry, explicitly comparing the impression given by A (i.e. life was peaceful and idyllic for everyone in England), to finding out whether this was the case for all kinds of people on England or whether it varied with region, wealth, etc. Exemplar 2 below does reach the top of Level 2 but it needed to have a more explicit reference to Interpretation A for Level 3:

Exemplar 2

I would choose to research whether this was typical across the entirety of England, in the north and south. This would be interesting to research because it would tell us more about whether life was better but only depending on where you lived, and perhaps who controlled the area you lived in. This would be useful because it would tell us more about the ~~wealth~~ distribution of wealth in Britain at the time but also about the different styles of leadership within each sector of the ~~country~~ ~~country~~

As a summary to help centres going forward: candidates need to make sure their enquiry is linked to Interpretation A and is centred around a historical concept such as change, consequence, causation, consequence, significance or diversity. They also need to make sure that they take into account the second part of the question, i.e. to pick a question that will *help further understanding* of what has been cited in the question.

Question 7

- 7 Interpretations B and C both focus on the impact of the Norman Conquest on English society by 1087. How far do they differ and what might explain any differences? [12]

Level 4 is reserved for answers that make a valid comparison of portrayals in B and C, with support from both sources and the difference are explained with specific reference to the purpose/audience of B and/or C. Too often attempts were made when looking at Interpretation B and its audience that were only creditable at a low level such as 'It is from a programme aimed at children so it has been written in simple language/tries to be funny/looks to engage them through making it seem gory'. In the case of the 'Horrible Histories' extract, more depth was required to reach the top level such as 'I think the reason that B is more negative is that B is aimed at children so is trying to make the content quite dramatic yet with a clear and simple narrative – hence the title 'Wicked William the Conqueror'.

For the Morris interpretation, too often candidates made superficial points around 'He is trying to promote his book with the film' which, again, is only really rewardable at Level 1. What we did reward at Level 4 was more sophisticated such as 'He is trying to put forward a different view of History that William actually was a positive influence'.

That said, the majority of candidates did reach the middle levels on this question. For Level 2, candidates identified individual points of similarity and/or difference between the interpretations (e.g. B says William burned stuff down but C says he freed slaves), or identified how the interpretations portrayed William/the conquest differently, but without support. If support was provided then candidates reached Level 3. Here they were able to compare the overall portrayal of William or the conquest as presented in the two interpretations (e.g. B suggests that the conquest was entirely negative. It presents the Anglo Saxons as being oppressed by a 'wicked' foreign invader who 'slaughtered peasants'. But C argues that the conquest also had some long-term positive impact such as introducing 'chivalry' and getting rid of slavery) but did not deal with the purpose or audience well enough to reach Level 4 as Exemplar 3 shows.

Exemplar 3

In interpretation B is all about normans. On the other side interpretation C is all about how good the normans are that ~~way~~ the Normans treat Anglo Saxons better than they treat themselves. Plus not ~~many~~ many people realised that 30% of the population is slaves, that the Anglo Saxons branded, beaten, mutilated and killed by their owners or masters.

Question 7 is an area where centres should look to work with candidates to develop their skills to really think and explain why an interpretation has been offered about events of the past and (as a general rule) try to avoid use of the word 'bias'.

Question 8

- 8* In his 1979 article *Medieval Castle Architecture*, historian Charles Coulson argues that the construction of a castle 'was intended as a symbol of lordly status, rather than a response to military insecurity.' How far do you agree with this view of Norman castles in England between 1066 and 1087? [20]

This question was attempted by all but a handful of candidates and elicited a full range of responses. It was clear that all candidates had clearly studied the use of Norman castles in England and many were able to direct their knowledge at the question, which was pleasing to see. At Level 2 and above, much was made of the military features of early Norman castles, their use in response to rebellions and the suppression of London, and archaeological findings suggesting their role in housing soldiers. On the other side of the debate, candidates were able to point out that Anglo Saxons were often forced to build the castles, and that they were often built over the top of Anglo Saxon sites, which showed them have a function of showing status and power. They also argued that the evidence of particular castles like Castle Acre, which had few defensive features, revealed castles to be more about showing off. Many candidates also used the pattern of castle building (i.e. far more built after rebellions had died down in 1070, and being built out in the countryside) to argue that the vast majority of castles did not serve a military function.

There was a huge range of Norman castles and specific knowledge used being used as evidence in this question which was very impressive.

Answers at the lower levels did not cite specific evidence which rooted their descriptions in the 1066 – 1087 period. For example, there were many responses which claimed, inaccurately, that England was full of stone castles, with barbicans, gatehouses and concentric circles by 1087. Others did not give any precise evidence to support the points made, e.g. Castles were built after rebellions so they had a military purpose. There were some but not many clinching arguments in this question, most suggesting that the interpretation was too simplistic because in fact the purpose of castles had changed during the period in question. As a way of supporting candidates going forward, centres should work with candidates to make sure their points are not just listed but supported by specific examples as evidence.

Question 9

- 9* In his 2004 book *The Penguin History of Britain: The Struggle for Mastery, 1066–1284*, historian David Carpenter argues that the main reason why the Normans were successful before 1066 was because of 'their use of cavalry and fast-moving warfare.' How far do you agree with this view of Norman society, culture and warfare before 1066? [20]

This question was answered by very few candidates. Where it was done well, it was done very well with candidates able to focus on details about the importance of fighting skills to the Normans. Answers used evidence such as the fact the Normans had as full-time soldiers - these soldiers had chainmail, swords and shields, and had mastered the art of fighting on horseback i.e. they were knights. Furthermore, the invention and spread of the stirrup allowed knights to charge their enemies on horseback and to remain on the horse leaning out and swinging their swords while still fixed firmly in the saddle. Candidates were able to explain that to fight this way needed years of training and that William of Normandy had grown up among men who had mastered the technique.

However, too many answers saw the question as being about the Battle of Hastings and wrote about events in October 1066 providing an analysis of which factor helped William win the battle the most. These were often barely rewardable. It is therefore vitally important that centres make sure that questions are trained to read (and answer) the question on the paper, not the one they would like to be on the paper. Referring back to the question regularly through the answer can be one way of helping candidates make sure they are answering the question and keeping a focus on the question throughout.

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