

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY B (SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

J411

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Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 12 series overview	4
Section A overview	5
Question 1 (a)	5
Question 1 (b)	5
Question 1 (c)	5
Question 2	6
Question 3	6
Question 4 and 5	7
Question 4	8
Question 5	9
Section B	10
Question 6 (a)	10
Question 6 (b)	11
Question 7	12
Question 8	13
Question 9	14



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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 12 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 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 this 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). Exemplar 1 is an example of poor conditions (food supply) leading to illness.

Exemplar 1

Another reason is because food was not regulated or kept in good conditions. For example, meat sellers would often get their meat from the countryside and bring it to the towns. The meat would be kept outside all day causing it to go rancid. People of course still bought the meat, resulting in food poisoning.

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 was given 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.

Question 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 credited 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.

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]

Most 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.

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

Candidates do seem to enjoy their study of this period with many very strong answers seen on both Questions 8 and 9 which reflected some really good practice. Question 8 was the more popular question but those who answered Question 9 often really knew about different explorers in the Elizabethan period which was very good to read. As with the other depth units, centres are advised to look at purpose on Question 7: saying 'It is a Catholic website so it is bound to be biased in favour of Mary' is not really sufficient to reach the top levels in the mark scheme – nor is 'he is a historian so he will be more accurate'. Answers which referred to the title of the book – and therefore suggest that the motive was to show how the spy-master had saved England – were much more lucid and likely to reach Level 4.

Question 6 (a)

6 (a) In Interpretation A, the illustrator portrays how an Elizabethan noblewoman tried to impress guests. Identify and explain **one** way in which he does this. [3]

In general, this question was answered well. Candidates understood the interpretation that was being offered was putting forward and were able to use detail in the picture 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 the nature of Elizabethan society. [5]

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 the actions of the noblewoman were typical. 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.

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 food ... 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 and men in Elizabethan society. 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 the nature of Elizabethan society'. Most frequently these were questions about the lives of the poor which is not what was being asked for in the question –*which needed to focus on an aspect of Interpretation A*. 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.

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

If I were to do further research into interpretation A, I would investigate how typical it would of been for an Elizabethan noble woman to want to impress guest in this way. I believe it would help us understand Elizabethan society as we would find out about Elizabethan nobility, ~~and~~ in general, and see how they chose to entertain and possibly impress their guests.

As a summary to help centres going forward: Candidates need to make sure their enquiry is linked to Interpretation A and 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. 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 threat which Mary Queen of Scots posed to Elizabeth. How far do they differ and what might explain any differences? [12]

As mentioned at the start of this report, this is the other question where candidates struggle to reach the highest level. 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 Catholic website so it will be positive about Mary as she was a Catholic'. This is not sophisticated enough to warrant the higher marks for explaining the purpose of the interpretation. A stronger example of developed purpose is below. This clearly explains the intentions of the author of the website:

Exemplar 3

Interpretation B describes Mary as a "Martyr" and talks about her innocence in the assassination attempt against Elizabeth. The purpose of this article is to prove Mary's innocence. Also because it is from a Catholic website it also may want to prove the protestants wrong and make people see that Elizabeth was wrong to sign Mary's death warrant.

For Interpretation C, too often candidates made superficial points around 'He is trying to promote is book' which, again, is only really rewardable at Level 1. What was rewarded at Level 4 was more sophisticated such as '*His book is called 'Elizabeth's Spy-Master' so he is going to want to produce a case that Walsingham saved Elizabeth through his work*'.

That said, most candidates did reach the middle levels on this question. For Level 2, candidates identified individual points of similarity and/or difference between the interpretations: B says Mary was innocent and C suggests she was guilty of treason. At Level 3 we need to see direct use of one, or both, of the interpretations such as 'B says Mary protested she never plotted to hurt Elizabeth and C says Mary's letter clearly encouraged the conspirators'.

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* According to the book *Travel: London*, Elizabethan theatres 'had the support of everyone from the Queen to the peasants.' How far do you agree with this view of people's attitudes towards theatres between 1580 and 1603? [20]

This question was attempted by all but a handful of candidates and we saw a full range of responses. It was clear that this had been a topic that centres had prepared many candidates well for with few poor quality answers. Most candidates came down on the side the theatres did have the support of most of the population. Reasons for this ranged from the fact there were numerous new theatres built during this period which is a reflection of their popularity – e.g., The Theatre, The Curtain, The Rose, The Swan and that plays on Bankside attracted thousands of Londoners and visitors. Further that the plays were popular with all social groups who loved the comedies, tragedies and histories and that they were popular with the poorer classes because 'groundlings' only paid a penny. Finally, that the audiences were often noisy and engaged with the actors which shows they were popular.

Nearly all candidates were also able to make the case against - the Puritan disapproval of plays and 'having fun' was the most common example cited alongside concerns by the authorities that crowds lead to a rise in crime such as pickpocketing. We did credit that Elizabeth enjoyed watching plays at court and some of her courtiers sponsored a theatre company to win her favour. Overall, this question saw many answers rewarded at the highest level for quality writing.

This seems a very good question for centres to use with candidates to show the benefits of combining knowledge with structure to create a well-argued piece of historical writing.

Question 9

9* According to the website www.elizabethan-era.org.uk, Elizabethan adventurers were motivated by the belief that 'new discoveries could bring untold riches.' How far do you agree with this view of the motives of adventurers between 1580 and 1603? [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 motivations of Elizabethan adventurers. Many agreed that wealth motivated many, e.g. Francis Drake plundered many Spanish and Portuguese ships in the Caribbean and West Africa, bringing back vast quantities of treasure.

Stronger answers also considered that Walter Raleigh knew that gold and silver mines in Central and South America had brought the Spanish great wealth and he hoped that the discovery of gold in North America would do the same for England (and himself). The case against was often based around trade – for example that Ralph Fitch sailed to Syria in 1583 to establish trade links between England and the Mughal Empire and that James Lancaster sailed to the East Indies seeking opportunities for trade with spices, cotton, silk, jewels and perfumes from East Asia. Overall, as said, this question either produced very good or very weak responses which depended on the amount of contextual knowledge deployed by each candidate.

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