

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY B (SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

J411

For first teaching in 2016

J411/21 Autumn 2020 series

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.



Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate answers.

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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 21 series overview

As in previous years, it has been rewarding to see the degree with which candidates identify with their chosen site, often displaying a high degree of specific knowledge about the remains of the site and a sound understanding of the role of their site within the wider context of historical development.

Candidates generally show understanding of the requirement to make use of specific features of their chosen site as part of their answers, and better candidates will select a variety of features to exemplify their arguments.

The advantage of choosing which questions to answer based on the nature of their site remains a crucial element to the success of each candidate. The paper is designed so that it is possible for candidates (and centres) to study the widest possible variety of sites, and this will inevitably mean that certain questions will apply more easily to certain types of sites. For example, sites with a long history allow for greater choice when the question requires identification of a turning point, whereas sites which have been created for a single specific purpose may lend themselves more to discussion of the purpose of the first creation.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to attempt the required two questions – only attempting one question is self-penalising. Each year, and this is no exception, we find that some candidates have only written one answer, when it is clear, from the material which they use, that they have the knowledge that would help them to gain marks on other questions available.

Although this advice may apply to every examination, the advice to 'read the question' is particularly applicable this year. Questions may, on the surface, appear to have similarities with previous years, but, on closer inspection, have a different focus.

For example, a question which asks about the 'first use of the site', has a different set of criteria to use than one which simply asks for 'reasons for first creation of the site'. Both questions will expect a response using information about the early days of the site. However, in the first example, we might expect reference to wider historical events, trends and even comparison with other similar sites to a much greater extent than in the second example where the focus will have much more emphasis (though not exclusively) on the physical surroundings of the area and the actual construction of the site.

A good range of sites were used for the paper; each of the three questions could be accessed by students and there appeared to be appropriate use of the time available.

The paper is assessed for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Consideration is given in this assessment to the correct and appropriate use of specialist historical terminology at every level of the assessment. What this means in real terms, is that we expect candidates to use the correct language for their site – for example referring to a Barbican or Gatehouse of a castle rather than an 'entrance' or 'door'. Responses are not expected to be error free; the level achieved will reflect the standard employed throughout the majority of the response.

Candidates with lower SPaG skills, should try to make sure that any errors (particularly of sentence structure) do not impede meaning, as this may have an effect on their mark.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
- selected relevant aspects of their site to illustrate their argument for each specific question - referred in detail to specific remains to be found at the site to support their answers - selected questions which suited the nature of their site - referred to the wider historical context of the site as support for their answers - avoided 'telling the story' of the site in a narrative manner and adopted a more analytical approach.	- wrote about the site in general rather than selecting specific aspects - included long introductions to their answers which did little to address the specific question and gain marks - lost focus on the demands of the individual question, so although their initial response may have been valid, they drifted into a more general narrative - made valid comments but did not support them with reference to specific features of the site.

Option overview

All three questions were attempted by candidates and all are marked to the same framework to ensure fairness and consistency of marking irrespective of which of the questions the candidate chooses to answer.

Comments on responses by question type

Level of response questions

Each question is marked to five levels.

Candidates who simply describe the site without reference to the question, or those who identify a date of creation/turning period/use of the site/ tell the whole story, with no further support or reference to the physical remains, will not achieve above the lowest two levels.

To progress through the levels, candidates are expected to give a valid explanation in response to the focus of the question and support their answer with specific reference to features of the site. The degree of support and quality of contextual knowledge demonstrated will determine the position of the answer within each level. For example, a valid basic explanation, with minimal support, will gain the lowest mark in the level. A substantial explanation, making use of physical features, supported by sound contextual knowledge, and possibly (though not essentially) a judgement about the validity of the argument, will gain the higher marks in the level.

To achieve the top level, it is expected that candidates will provide a minimum of three separate explanations in response to the question.

Questions are often asked as to whether a judgement is required for the highest marks – perhaps balancing the relative importance of the features/aspects discussed in the essay. While this is commonly a feature of stronger answers and may well result in a higher mark within each level, this is not an essential feature of this mark scheme. Candidates may achieve full marks, either overall or within a level, without offering a judgement, but instead by providing top quality, detailed specific contextual support for their arguments.

Common misconceptions

	Misconception	One question asked for candidates to identify a turning point in the history of their site and explain the changes or features which continued associated with this specific event. Many candidates who selected this question appeared to have misunderstood the requirement and chose to write about multiple turning points in the history of their site. The question required a single turning point to be chosen. This meant that candidates often wrote at length about aspects of the site and its history which were not relevant to the original turning point they had identified and therefore could not be credited. It also frequently meant that they only made a brief comment on the original turning point and concentrated their answer on later events. According to the mark scheme, the original turning point they wrote about was taken as their chosen date/event, so candidates who answered in this way may have had considerable knowledge but were not able to gain credit because they had misunderstood the question.
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Key teaching and learning points – comments on improving performance

Better answers will always contain reference to specific aspects/features of the site studied, so candidates should be able to write in depth about aspects of their site in order to support their answers to the questions set. However, it is unrealistic to expect candidates to know every detail about their site, in the context of their wider studies, and they may well produce higher quality answers if they feel confident in selected key areas.

Consequently, although the full specification must be covered, candidates may benefit from focussing on key areas of their site's history which show a range of the features identified in each part of the site proposal forms, rather than attempting to reference the whole length of the history of the site.

Even when a question refers to 'tell the story of the site', it is expected that candidates will select key events (a top level answer only requires three explanations), rather than attempting a full history.

Guidance on using this paper as a mock

The paper and mark scheme follow the standard pattern of previous examination sessions for this component. As such, it would be an acceptable choice of paper to be used as a mock examination.

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