



General Certificate of Secondary Education June 2011

History B 4045

40453 Historical Enquiry

Report on the Examination

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40453 Historical Enquiry

Although the opportunity was presented in 2010 for centres to enter candidates for Unit 3 of the new Specification, 2011 marked the first substantial entry for this component. It therefore provides a more reliable and secure guide to the transition from the previous Specification to the new one in terms of the quality of work produced by candidates and of the standards of teacher assessment in centres.

The new specification has brought significant changes to this component of the examination. Centres and students are now required to select their own sources to provide answers to the tasks rather than use sources previously supplied by the AQA. There is a much stronger focus on testing historical skills (Assessment Objective 3) rather than knowledge (Assessment Objectives 1/2). Where the latter were the predominant Assessment Objectives in the old specification, historical skills now predominate. Perhaps the most significant change in terms of centre administration is the introduction of controlled assessment as the means of delivery of the written outcomes. It is pleasing to report that the large majority of centres has taken all these changes in their stride. In particular, the sources selected have been interesting and well considered; and, more importantly for the moderation process, the marking standards of centres have been accurate and within the tolerance applied by the AQA. Of those centres that fell out of tolerance, for most it is a matter of fine tuning in the application of the marking criteria rather than a serious misunderstanding of them.

The administration of the component was good and, in general, the problems anticipated by the late Easter did not materialise. On the whole, deadlines were met, and this was much appreciated by the moderating team who have their own deadlines to meet. The specification requires that the centre sends a bibliography of the sources used by candidates. Moderators asked centres to send, if possible, copies of the sources to provide an additional guide in judging candidate responses. The majority of centres responded to the request and the moderating team is grateful for this. The specification defines the Research Diary as an internal document, to be retained by the centre until the moderation process is complete. It is not, therefore, necessary to send the diaries of each candidate in the sample to the moderator. Whilst not a prevalent practice, enough centres did provide this additional material for comment to be made in this report.

Controlled Assessment required centres to make a decision as to how to present their students' work. The large majority of centres, for understandable reasons, presented hand written answers from their students. A small minority, perhaps with more favourable access to ICT facilities, produced word processed answers. Either mode is acceptable: the key principle is that centres are able to confirm the validity of the students' work. It was anticipated that the introduction of controlled conditions in the writing of answers, together with the removal of the essay type question targeting knowledge and understanding, would lead to a shorter length in candidates' responses, more in tune with the advisory word limit of 2000 words. This was generally the case although there were instances of centres appearing to ignore the suggested time frame for responding to the tasks and allowing their students an excessive wordage. The quality of the answers was only very occasionally improved by an excessive wordage. Features of such lengthy answers tended to be over-elaborate introductions, the use of knowledge beyond the weighting of this Assessment Objective and lengthy conclusions/final statements that repeated points already made in the main body of the answer. In short, these students had put in much extra effort for very little reward in terms of the final mark allocated. A final point on the writing stage: as an approach to writing the answer, it would be helpful if students could indicate which source is being considered. On occasions this lack of direction presented real problems to the moderator.

As always, the standard of annotation varied from centre to centre but, in general, it was good and helpful to the moderator in assessing the marking standards of the centre. A large number of centres used the marking grid issued in the Teachers' Resource Bank and this facilitated the making of clear judgements in terms not only of the final level attained by an answer but also the mark within the level. Where this was supplemented by comments in the margin to indicate where a level of analysis and evaluation had been attained, this was even more helpful. The least effective, and least helpful, annotation occurred where there was a mark or level at the end of an answer with a brief general comment unrelated to the mark scheme. In these circumstances it was difficult for the moderator to determine how the centre had reached its decision. Some annotative comments were erroneous and indicated a misunderstanding of the mark scheme: for example, the indication of Level 4 in the opening paragraph when the criteria for Level 4 could not possibly have been met at that point. Similarly, a comment of 'Level 4 knowledge' suggested a misunderstanding of the mark scheme and the weighting of its Assessment Objectives. Centres are required to standardise their marking internally. There was ample evidence that this was done in the large majority of centres.

Turning to the Tasks, these are provided by AQA and cover the four Areas of Study in the specification. Of the four Areas, the British People in War was by far the most popular, followed by Britain at War. Together they accounted for the very large majority of centre choices – hardly surprising as these Areas were taken from Section B of Paper 1 of the old specification. The Changing Role and Status of Women was the choice of a healthy minority of centres, reflecting the continuation of a popular coursework option of the old specification. Only a handful of centres were attracted to the fourth Area of Study – Britain and the Aftermath of War.

The tasks set in all the Areas of Study provided very few problems in terms of understanding. They were set as broad topics which would lend themselves to differing routes of approach and emphasis. Thus the sources selected were almost entirely relevant to the topic and approach. The only notable exception was in Question 1 of the British People in War on recruitment into the armed forces in the First World War, where sources relating to the Women's Land Army appeared. The focus of both Tasks is the demonstration of the historical skills of analysis and evaluation, together with a comparison of a range of sources. The choice of sources to be used thus becomes critical. Not all centres gave their students the range and balance required to reach the higher levels. For example, in Question 1 of the British People in War on recruitment into the armed forces, an over-emphasis or complete reliance on recruitment posters meant that candidates could make no meaningful comments on the utility of the sources beyond a comparison on content. It was not possible to make any comparison based on source type. Visual sources, such as a map of the D-Day beaches in Question 1 of Britain at War or data of children evacuated in Question 2 of the British People in War, could lack a statement on provenance or purpose. Such sources could be analysed to Level 3 standard but a Level 3 evaluation statement was much more problematic. In effect, the candidates had nothing to go at. The use of secondary sources often presented a similar problem. Good analysis, based on content, could be achieved but a good (Level 3) statement on evaluation was much more difficult unless the provenance of the source was clear – for example, from Duff Cooper's biography of Haig, written at the wish of Haig's family. This tended to be an exception and too often candidates could write little more than a statement along the lines of 'It's a secondary source written in 1998 by a historian so it will be well researched and accurate'. Centres are reminded that the specification requires only one secondary source to be used – in the interpretation question – and it may well be advisable to steer clear of them beyond this requirement. A 'good' set of sources that will enable students to demonstrate the skills of analysis and evaluation thus has a balance not only of content/context but also of source type with clear provenance and purpose provided. Many centres provided these, coming up with unusual sources including from the locality and local oral sources.

The above comments on the sources selected lead on to a consideration of candidates' responses in answering the two questions set and to the standard of assessment of those responses. A large proportion of centres seemed to have used the 'Summary of the Mark Schemes' as a more detailed guidance in applying the generic mark schemes. In particular, by breaking a level into 'bands', essentially covering how well or to what degree a student had demonstrated the skills of analysis and evaluation across the range of sources, it enabled teachers to place a candidate's answer within a level with accuracy. This was important as in some areas the mark range within a level is so large (for example, Question 2 Level 3) that it would be possible for a centre's marking to identify the correct level but still for the marking to be out of tolerance.

As stated above, the large majority of centres were judged to have assessed their candidates' work accurately and within the AQA's tolerance limits. Of those that fell out of tolerance, some were because of a severity in the centre's marking. However, more centres fell out of tolerance through leniency in assessment. There were a number of reasons for this and they are addressed below. As the same Assessment Objectives are being tested in the same weightings over the two questions and there is a similarity in the level descriptors of both questions, issues in the application of the mark schemes tended to relate to both questions. There was a tendency to over reward simple statements of analysis and evaluation by placing them in Level 3 rather than Level 2. A statement that merely indicates bias without saying why in the context of the source can only be rewarded in Level 2. The use of a source from a website requires more than recognition of the possible advantages/disadvantages of the use of the web for it to be rewarded beyond Level 2. In general, the over rewarding from Level 2 to Level 3 tended to be more in the evaluation rather than the analysis of a source.

It was also found, sometimes in whole centres, that the evaluation of sources was ignored completely or source analysis was misinterpreted as source evaluation. This had a serious impact on the assessment of the centre's marking as, in effect, one of the historical skills had not been demonstrated. Such answers would be limited to the mid Level 3 range of marks.

Knowledge (Assessment Objectives 1/2) is very much the minor ingredient in the new Unit 3, accounting for only 20% (8 marks) of the total. An over rewarding of knowledge when the historical skills of source analysis and evaluation have not been strongly demonstrated also tended to place a centre assessment out of tolerance. Centres are reminded that knowledge should be used to support the source analysis. Lengthy, knowledge based introductory statements on how evacuation was organised or the background to the suffragette movement can add little to an answer testing historical skills – their place in the mark scheme would be Level 1 'description'. Similarly, an answer that is essentially knowledge-based using the source content to support that knowledge is not recognising the purpose of the question as indicated in the weighting of the Assessment Objectives.

A further issue that led to leniency in centre assessment was a tendency to over reward Level 3 answers into Level 4, and it may be of use to remind centres of the criteria for Level 4. One set of criteria is a sustained demonstration of the skills of evaluation and analysis with supporting knowledge across the sources – that is, the criteria for the top of Level 3 have been met. Level 4 then requires evidence of a judgement based on the sources. Looking at the sources as a whole, do they support the proposition that evacuation was a success or that the generals were to blame for the horrors of trench warfare in the First World War? Why has that judgement been reached? An answer that ends with a summary conclusion of 5/6 lines cannot have reached the depth of judgement to meet the Level 4 criteria – it is a tentative conclusion (Level 3). Similarly, a response that summarises the information in the main body of the answer in a repetitive way has not met the Level 4 criteria.

The above section of this report may appear to be unduly critical of teacher assessment of Unit 3 tasks. It should be emphasised at the end of this Report that the large majority of centres have adapted to the new criteria of controlled assessment in all its stages with a degree of professionalism that does them credit. In doing so, they have enabled their students to demonstrate the core skills of the historian to a sound level of competence and to produce a range of interesting, informed responses to the Tasks.

The Board offers support to teachers on Unit 3 in a number of ways:

- a Controlled Assessment Adviser to support the centre on an on-going basis and to consult with on individual centre issues
- Feedback Reports offer detailed comments by the moderator on all aspects of the centre assessment of Unit 3 for 2011
- Meetings in the Autumn Term 2011 focussing on marking and marking standards
- the Teachers' Resource Bank on the AQA website has a number of support documents. Two entries are of particular relevance to issues raised in this Report:
 - (i) 'Annotating the Controlled Assessment Tasks' provides advice on annotation and includes the grid approach referred to in the Report
 - (ii) 'What students should know about Unit 3' provides practical advice on the selection of sources and in understanding the mark schemes.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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