

History Pilot

General Certificate of Secondary Education **GCSE 1938**

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course) **GCSE 1038**

Reports on the Units

June 2010

1938/1038/R/10

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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History (1038)**

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4971 Medieval History

Candidates performed across the mark range in both Raiders and Invaders and Power and Control. However, there was a heavy concentration achieving bands 2 to 4 with relatively few in bands 1 and 5. There were a number of positive features this year including:

- the selection of material;
- overall knowledge and historical understanding;
- balance.

In comparison, the following represented some of the stumbling blocks to candidates achieving the very highest marks:

- deployment of material;
- ability to compare;
- use of sources.

Each of these is covered in more detail below, together with other issues that reveal inconsistency across centres such as length of response, candidate awareness of what is required, referencing and centre administration.

Candidates usually had at their disposal a range of information about Saxon and Viking life or about King John and Edward I. There were hardly any instances of mistaking the question and writing about a different society or a different monarch. On the whole candidates showed reasonable skill at selecting appropriate information and grouping this information in a fairly logical way. Most candidates also demonstrated a reasonable balance in their treatment of the two societies or monarchs. Saxons and Vikings were usually dealt with in equal measure as were John and Edward I although there was a tendency for a few to devote too much space to King John. There was also little evidence of answers that were unfinished, although a few obviously spent too long gathering sources.

Candidates' **knowledge** of the societies and monarchs was usually sufficient with some of the better ones recognising the complexity and range of issues. Many candidates though depicted issues as fairly simplistic and polarised. For example, many saw the Saxons and Vikings as completely similar or completely different. Similarly, John was reported to have major problems with the Church whereas Edward I had none. There were thankfully few howlers, although it was surprising to find that a few candidates thought that King Alfred was a Viking.

The single biggest reason for losing marks is a **failure to answer the question set**. Both Raiders and Invaders and Power and Control required a comparison and both had specific content areas. Whilst the majority of candidates focused on the everyday life of the Saxons and Vikings, there was a sizeable minority who concentrated more broadly on life or even writing all they knew about them. This meant that there were swathes of irrelevant or, at best, semi-relevant material on legal systems, where they settled, the structure of society and government organisation. Likewise, with the monarchs, the question was clearly focused on problems but large numbers wrote at length on their successes, comparing their achievements. Others failed to address sufficiently the extent of the difficulties and instead wrote exclusively about how they solved the problems.

The end result was that a number of candidates selected appropriate material but this was lost amidst chunks of tangential content. A particular issue was the long introductions which some insist on and which provide little but background context to the societies or monarchs – in the most extreme cases this can be up to a half of the whole answer.

Comparison is clearly a challenge for many candidates and it was noticeable that attempts fitted into a number of levels. At the lowest level were those candidates who made no attempt to compare. Information was chosen for the two societies or monarchs with no real attempt to select similar themes or issues for the two elements. Any relevant links were accidental and the response was likely to be heavily descriptive and sometimes scrapbookish.

The next level up still tended to keep the societies and monarchs separate but the ability to select was better and candidates ended up discussing similar issues such as children, women, clothing, houses for the Raiders and Invaders and religion, barons and foreign affairs for the Power and Control options. However, the responses still tended to be in the form of separate mini studies and so comparison was implicit – ie through selecting common issues.

A variation on this took candidates to the next level up. Here the two societies or monarchs were still largely treated separately but explicit comparisons were made usually at the end of sections and more thoroughly in a conclusion. On the whole, this still largely consisted of a similarity and differences exercise. Candidates adopting this approach could still earn good marks although better marks were usually reserved for those with quality explanation. In other words, the similarities and differences were both identified and explained.

Some of the best responses were reserved for those who organised their work by themes or aspects such as houses and leisure for the societies and religion or over-mighty subjects for the monarchs. Here the comparisons were clear and explained. Such responses were invariably more analytical and evaluative, probing issues such as the extent of the similarities and differences, the significance of the problems, how much things were of their own making and how much due to external factors.

Some whole centres were source-free zones whereas others contained scripts which were replete with **source extracts and interpretations**. In different ways, both could prove problematical. The use of evidence is built into the generic mark scheme and there is an expectation that candidates do consider the nature of some of the evidence – at least for the higher marks. This does not mean that the question is designed as a source evaluation exercise. Again the deployment of sources by candidates seemed to fit into a number of hierarchical levels.

At the lowest level were those who simply ignored any reference to the evidence. The end result was usually an uncritical reconstruction of an historical situation. The next level was often characterised paradoxically by a very extensive use of source material. Long quotes or whole extracts of minimal relevance were sometimes cited. Source extracts were introduced often at inappropriate points so that the flow of the argument was disrupted. The problem could be compounded when the candidate attempted evaluation of a source or an interpretation. The evaluation was often simplistic, eg 'this is a primary source so we can trust it', 'this is written in a textbook so it must be true', 'people do not lie when they write books'. It was noticeable that, in a sizeable number of answers, candidates were almost too condemnatory of written sources, seeing them as totally unreliable, whereas archaeological evidence and websites were regarded as much more objective. Few candidates questioned the reliability of websites.

The better responses were often characterised by a judicious use of source material. They used information in a number of ways to support or qualify their points. Sometimes a source extract (shorn of irrelevant parts) was used to help the narrative. Any evaluation was specific to that source and not generic, eg 'our knowledge of Saxon and Viking homes is limited because the materials with which they were constructed has not survived' or 'this source probably gives such a negative view of John because it was compiled by monks who were amongst the main groups that John upset'. The use of sources came over as an integral part of the response and not a bolt on. There were no disruptions for generic statements about source reliability but rather low key statements that a particular source has to be treated with caution for a particular reason

which makes any conclusion provisional – just enough to demonstrate to a reader that the judgement or conclusion needed to be treated with an element of caution.

The same situation pertained to the interpretations of historians and archaeologists. Many candidates ignored these completely but they were still able to achieve good marks without referring to them. Others used them in various ways – the least useful being name dropping or referring to them in a way that was tangential to the question. The most valid use of interpretations was adopted by a relatively small number of candidates who linked the societies and monarchs to a valid historical debate quoting the occasional view of an historian or even summarising a school of thinking; for example, interpretations connected to the degree of civilisation in the everyday life of the Vikings or changing viewpoints about how much John's problems were of his own making.

Although centres with large numbers tend to have a good spread of candidate responses, it is noticeable that there are some distinctive features of some centres. Some have been referred to above, such as the use of sources, but there are others.

One of these is the **length of responses**. Whilst this is likely to be determined largely by the time available for writing up, it is surprising how long some answers were. It was difficult to see how some candidates had managed to write all they did in the allocated time. Others were flimsy with some whole centres producing no response that extended much beyond 1-2 sides of A4.

Clearly, there is no ideal length – the basic criterion is whether it is an efficient and effective answer to the question. Brevity could be a virtue and some earned very good marks for well focused, fairly laconic answers. However, the very short ones tended to lack some or all of breadth, balance and substantiation. For example, they might cover one of the societies or monarchs more fleetingly; they might home in on just one or two aspects and, above all, provide too much assertion and not enough information to demonstrate their judgements. In contrast, long answers did not necessarily address these issues – sometimes being characterised by poor selection, too much contextual background, journeys into generic source evaluation and repetition. Repetition was, in fact, a problem with a sizeable number of candidates. Sometimes whole sections were covered more than once.

Centres are allowed to organise the sitting of this task in ways that suit their circumstances as long as they operate within the parameters of the requirements. Some try to do this over one day whereas others clearly use two or more days. There was no evidence that one method worked better than any other. In a few cases though there was some indication that candidates changed direction after the first session – not always leading to an improvement, as responses sometimes became less cogent and occasionally inconsistent.

The **guidance given to candidates** also seemed to vary across centres. Again there is a happy balance to strike. The most worrying were the extremes – either where the candidates were obviously unprepared as to what they really had to do or where the approach was too mechanistic and formulaic. In the worst cases, the candidates followed almost a template often making almost identical points in the same order – sometimes the same irrelevant points. The information provided by one candidate was largely the same as all the other candidates. Marking proved quite challenging as there was often little to distinguish responses. What was apparent though was that such approaches rarely achieved the highest marks.

The better centres had obviously prepared their candidates for the techniques and given summary guidance but had stopped short at templates. Work done throughout the teaching programme had prepared candidates to cope with comparative questions and how sources might be introduced. The sharing of the mark scheme and the use of past questions can sometimes backfire. There were examples where centres had disaggregated the mark scheme and encouraged their students to make sure they covered all the statements associated with the

bands. The result was often disjointed answers where the argument took second place to the statements. The mark scheme is a best-fit one which means that a cohesive, well supported response will always succeed over one that has been too heavily influenced by the separate statements

In terms of preparing candidates to answer the task, some use of past questions can be helpful. This year though there was evidence that this could be to the candidate's detriment especially with the Power and Control question. A number of responses actually answered completely or, in large measure, a past question. No doubt this had been done as a practice piece but ended up being reproduced as a response to this year's question. The better centres encourage their students to analyse the specific question very carefully. The evidence for this obviously comes in the final product but also sometimes in the plan. A number of centres encourage their students to spend time on a plan, highlighting what the key words are and how these might be addressed.

Some centres obviously provide advice on **introductions and conclusions**. At one end of the spectrum are those that avoid both whereas, at the other end, are those who devote more than half their answer to an introduction and conclusion. A very common annotation from markers was 'irrelevance' against much of the first page of answers where candidates thought they needed to show the examiners their knowledge of who the Saxons and Vikings were, where they came from and how they got to England or alternatively to the family dynasty or early upbringing of John or Edward I. The best answers often defined their parameters in a brief introduction outlining what criteria they were going to use to answer the question.

Conclusions proved a significant aspect of many responses as this was sometimes the only occasion when the comparisons were discussed in any detail. This at least had the advantage of leaving the reader with a positive reaction to the work. This was not the case, however, with a number of conclusions which tended to be divorced from what the rest of the answer was saying or where completely new elements were introduced which would have been better in the main part of the answer. The better answers often recognised the complexity of the issues being discussed and tended to be more provisional and tentative.

Most candidates provided a list of **resources** used. Some even provided regular footnotes where relevant in the main body of the answer. Most were fairly limited in their bibliographies – sometimes a single textbook or on a few occasions 'class notes'. Quite a few relied quite heavily on primary school resources especially for the Raiders and Invaders. Some though provided impressive and extensive lists often containing websites but occasionally some 'learned monographs'. In just a small handful of cases, there was a brief commentary with regard to the value of the sources used. Obviously many of the sources come from textbooks but it would be helpful if the candidates identified the original source in any analysis rather than just referring to the school textbook.

Centre administration was usually competent and often exemplary. The work was well organised with cover sheets and despatched promptly. A small number of centres confused the parallel operation of 4971 (legacy) and the new B871 and entered candidates for the wrong specification. In a small number of cases, the work enclosed did not match the attendance list but these happened very infrequently as was the instance of one centre marking its own candidates first before sending them on to the external examiner.

Despite the comments above, it is important to remember that many centres coped admirably with the organisation and administration of this paper. Candidates clearly had some understanding of the issues and many made valid attempts to compare their societies and monarchs. On the whole, new centres as well as old seem to have prepared their candidates to select and deploy their material and there is implicit evidence that many candidates and, hopefully their teachers, have enjoyed teaching children about this important period in the country's history.

4972, 4973, 4977, 4978, 4980, 4981, 4982 Coursework

The moderation of coursework proceeded smoothly this year with most centres now having settled on successful schemes of work and coursework assignments. Most of the work was marked carefully and accurately and moderators had to make few changes to centres' marks. Where marks were changed, the changes were usually relatively small. Moderators were grateful for the useful summative comments on work provided by most centres. This can be helpful when they sum up the main characteristics of the work in relation to the assessment criteria in the mark schemes. It is especially useful when similar phrases to those in the mark scheme are used.

The Local History and International History units were popular and much interesting work was submitted. However, some of the weaknesses reported in earlier reports still remain. In several of the Local History units there is still too little emphasis on the significance of the chosen site/issue to the local community today. Some centres need to devote one assignment to this aspect to make sure that candidates give it the attention it deserves. Sometimes it is tacked on the end almost as an afterthought. It is important that centres that have followed SHP courses in the past do not allow the work for this unit to turn into a site description. The weak area of some of the work submitted for the International unit is still 'international significance'. Most candidates address the issue of significance but fail to devote enough time to the international significance of the topic studied. It is common to find this appearing in the last page or two of the work (if at all). Some assignment titles need to be reworded to focus candidates on international significance.

The Whose History? unit works best when assignments are clearly focused on two key issues: comparing and contrasting the ways in which the past has been represented and interpreted; and explaining why the past has been represented and interpreted in different ways. Candidates find it easier to focus on these two issues when each is the focus of a separate assignment. Some assignments are still encouraging candidates to evaluate interpretations as if they were sources. Indeed, some assignments use a range of sources such as cartoons and the exercise turns into one more about source evaluation.

Few centres use the Change Over Time unit while the Society in Depth unit is rather more popular. In the latter the most interesting work is to be found in assignments on the role of the individual where candidates were asked to compare the importance of two individuals or are asked to judge the relative importance of impersonal and personal factors or to consider the contrast between the immediate and the long-term impact of an individual. It is still disappointing to see much simplistic source evaluation still alive and well in the other assignment about the main characteristics of the society studied. It would be better here if candidates were provided with a range of source material and asked to reach conclusions, supported by evidence from the sources, about the main characteristics. This might help move candidates on from knee-jerk low-level evaluation.

Centres are reminded that OCR coursework consultants are available to comment on centres' questions and programmes of study and to offer advice on all matters related to coursework and teacher assessment for the History Pilot.

4974, 4975, 4976, 4979 Teacher Assessment

The most popular teacher assessment unit by far was Heritage Management and Marketing with just a handful of centres entering candidates for the other units. The overall quality of the work was good with most centres now coming to terms with the requirements of teacher assessment. The marking of the work was usually carried out carefully and accurately with moderators having to make only occasional changes to centres' marks. Where adjustments were made, the main reason was descriptive or heavily structured work being rewarded too generously.

Some centres produced brief overall comments on candidates' work as a whole. These were very useful as they provided an holistic judgement of each candidate and matched the work as a whole to a band in the mark scheme using a 'best-fit' approach. This is exactly how the work should be assessed. It is not necessary to award a mark to each piece of work and these marks, if awarded, should never be added to reach a total mark. Teachers are being asked to use their professional expertise to judge the qualities of the work as a whole using the criteria in the mark scheme.

Topics for the Heritage Marketing unit ranged from subjects such as the framework knitters in Nottinghamshire, to sites such as workhouses, to people such as Robin Hood and King Arthur. Candidates in one centre produced some excellent and interesting ideas for a William the Conqueror trail, while others suggested ways of making their local museum more attractive and historically valid.

The best work often shared a number of characteristics:

- it often resulted from tasks that gave candidates some opportunities for extended writing so that they could produce developed and detailed explanations, analyses and evaluations. The weakest work was often produced by heavily structured exercises that gave candidates little opportunity to do other than respond a few lines at a time;
- it usually demonstrated that some study of the relevant history had been completed in depth. This was used to inform the marketing work. A number of candidates submitted work on both the history and the marketing but made few links between the two. The main objective of the Heritage Marketing unit is to make this connection. Knowledge and understanding of the history should be used to (a) evaluate presenting marketing, and (b) to enrich candidates' marketing plans and materials. They are being required to market, for example, a site or a person or an issue. This marketing should not be a history-free area with the candidates' main concerns focusing on the production of, for example, key rings. It should be using historical knowledge and understanding to explain why, for example, a site is historically important and worth visiting rather than just a fun day out. Some candidates had clearly been taught a lot about different marketing approaches but seemed to have forgotten that they were marketing an aspect of history. These candidate clearly wanted their visitors to go no further than the gift shop;
- another characteristic of most of the better candidates was an ability to be reflective and self-critical about work produced. Weaknesses and oversights were turned to their advantage by candidates who evaluated their own marketing plans and suggested how they could be improved and how they would now do things differently.

The small number of centres studying the Multimedia in History unit often produced some very interesting work. The best work was again a product of bringing together historical knowledge and understanding with multi-media products so that they could be evaluated as representations and interpretations of history.

Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

Overall, the teacher assessed unit has been a success and now produces a wide range of varied work where candidates have had to use much initiative. It is hoped, and expected, that this progress will be continued in the future in the revised version of this specification.

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