

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

GCE History (6HI01/C)
Unit 1: Historical Themes in Breadth
Option C: The British Empire:
Colonisation and Decolonisation

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Option C – The British Empire: Colonisation and Decolonisation

General comments on Unit 6HI01

Examiners once again reported that the majority of candidates understood the essential requirements of the Unit 1 examination. Many were able to structure their work effectively, provide a range of relevant and accurate material to support the points they were making, and maintain a sustained focus on the question set. At the highest levels of attainment were those who displayed the ability to analyse a range of factors in detail and present a convincing answer overall.

However, examiners also noted that there were a significant number of responses which were limited by specific areas of weakness. Although more candidates are attempting analysis (Level 3) and, indeed, producing analytical responses with some good understanding (Level 4) many are limited to the lower bands due to a lack of accurate and relevant exemplification. In this session, in particular, examiners commented on a lack of secure supporting knowledge and chronological awareness. It is important that arguments be supported with sufficient secure and accurate evidence to make the points stand up. In addition, higher level responses explain how these points relate to the question, whether supporting or challenging the premise of the question.

Also once again many candidates failed to read the questions carefully leading to responses which did not focus directly or, even well, on the key issues. In general, this led to marks being awarded at low band Level 4 or Level 3. For example, in Option E/F many candidates confused the Weimar Constitution with the Weimar Republic itself leading to a limited discussion of the problems caused by constitutional issues. In other cases the complete misreading of questions led to Level 1/Level 2 marks and in a few unfortunate cases there was no rewardable material despite a developed response having been written.

Quality of written communication is integral to the awarding of marks within the Level descriptors. Although areas of weakness have been highlighted in previous reports it has been felt that the general quality of organisation, expression and spelling, punctuation and grammar has been good.

Therefore, it is a little concerning to note that many examiners observed that in this session they had seen a slight decline in the quality of written expression, punctuation, particularly the use of capital letters, and spelling. Some candidates were also clearly disadvantaged by a lack of choice of questions within their topic area studied. It is vital that centres cover all the content specified in the bullet points in the specification if candidates are to have a choice. Questions may be asked on specific bullet points or across the bullet points and so failure to cover the specified content adequately may lead to a lack of choice and/or imbalanced answers. Examples of topics where content is clearly not always covered include A2, B5, D4, D5, E/F2 and F7. In particular, centres should note that topic D5 refers to Equality in the USA, 1945-68 and is not focused wholly on the civil rights of African Americans. Topics which have clearly benefited from increased coverage in past sessions include D3, E/F2, E/F3 & E/F6.

Despite the weaknesses noted above it is important to note that, in general, candidates produce well organised and knowledgeable answers and that the

best responses engage the examiner to create a very pleasant reading experience.

General Comment – Option C

Option C has a small candidature of just over 250 entries. Candidates are generally well prepared with a good understanding of concepts and key issues; responses are often thoughtful and interesting. However, there is evidence of some insecurity in the ability to select and deploy relevant and accurate knowledge. The topics are often broad in both content and time period in relation to other Options within the Unit. Examiners this session have noted that this seems to have led to an increase in what could be described as formulaic answers which discuss relevant factors but are not securely focused on either the given factor or the specific wording of the question. This often allows candidates to achieve Level 4 but is preventing them from producing the directly focused answers with explicit understanding of the key issues which is required for Level 5. In particular, there is often a cursory discussion of the given factor followed by the development of a 'more significant' factor or other factors leading to an asserted conclusion that there is a 'symbiotic' relationship between all of the factors involved. To achieve high Level 4 and Level 5, particularly with questions which ask for a judgement of significance rather than stating that one factor is more significant than another, it is necessary to show relative significance; relative significance which is then explained and supported rather than just asserted. It is also important that candidates are given access to supporting material which relates directly to the time period under study. This is particularly the case with centres studying both topics C1 and C3 where the study of the slave trade is contiguous. Although there are general points which can be made concerning both time periods, candidates should be provided with or research supporting material which is specific to c1680-1760 and c1760-1800. Supporting material which refers to the period before 1680 is also frequently used to support responses on the slave trade in both these topics. Having said the above, examiners enjoy marking this Option and centres should be congratulated for creating obviously stimulating and interesting courses for their students. The most popular topics are C1, C2, C3 and C5 with a slightly smaller entry for C6.

C1 – The Origins of the British Empire, c1680-1763

There were over eighty entries for this topic. Both questions were popular but it is here that examiners observed perhaps the most examples of more generalised and formulaic answers. Although there are clearly several generic themes stretching across the topic there appears to be a growing tendency to make generalised assertions about the contributing factors with few specific examples except in relation to war. There is a clear understanding of the Empire growing in wealth and power but there is still little sense of its territorial growth. It is important that candidates for this topic are clear of the key words in the question and the time period being discussed.

Q1. The question asked candidates to determine the significance of the Navigation Acts in stimulating the growth of Empire. It did not suggest that it was the most significant and so candidates could explain significance with reference to both strengths and limitations of the Acts in stimulating growth or in relation to other factors. However, it was important that the focus was on the impact of the Acts themselves and if dismissing the Acts as not significant it was important to explain why they were of lesser significance. Many responses were able to achieve low-mid Level 4 but did not show significance or merely asserted a 'symbiotic' relationship without clearly showing where the Navigation Acts fitted in. Some candidates wrote long descriptions of the Navigation Acts themselves creating imbalanced and implicit responses at Level 3. The best responses tended to focus on the wording of the question with a discussion of the extent to which they stimulated expansion. Some explicitly explained an inter-relationship by suggesting that the Acts stimulated both trade and the expansion of the navy both of which led to increased territorial expansion.

Q2. For this question the dates were of utmost importance. Although reference to contextual factors such as the Navigation Acts and government intervention before 1713 were relevant, the question was focused on the period 1713-63. The starting date of 1713 allowed candidates to discuss elements of the slave trade such as the granting of the *asiento*, growing competition from independent slavers and the development of the plantation economies in North America in the period after 1713 in relation to other specific factors of expansion at this time. However, many responses seemed to ignore the starting date completely answering a more generalised question about the growth of empire in general. References to the slave trade and to the British East India Company often referred right back to the early 17th century. The best answers were completely aware of the time period under discussion and were able to refer to not just the elements of the slave trade mentioned above but to specific treaties and wars after 1713, the growth of settler colonies and the growing power of the British East India Company.

C2 – Relations with the American Colonies and the War of Independence, c1740-89.

There were over one hundred entries for this topic. In general the responses were a pleasure to read. This topic covers complex and often confusing content and centres are to be congratulated for the detailed knowledge and chronological security with which most candidates approached the answers.

Q3. Although a few candidates misread the dates of this question and/or confused the chronology, most responses were sound and secure. There were two approaches to this question which were each equally valid. Some responses concentrated on the dates mentioned in the question itself leading to detailed analysis of events leading to the outbreak of the conflict. Others suggested that the events of 1773-75 were merely symbolic of a disintegrating relationship that had been on-going over a much longer period. Responses tended to differentiate themselves based on the extent to which the outbreak of conflict was discussed as opposed to the general breakdown in relations. There were some very good answers that confidently dealt with matters such as Lexington and Concord, the Second Continental Congress, the Olive Branch petition and Bunker Hill. The most regular confusion was between the Boston Massacre (1770) and the Boston Tea Party (1773) and the Stamp Act (1765) and the Tea Act (1773).

Q4. Once again the majority of questions were a pleasure to read and even those at low Level 3 who were unable to produce supporting evidence made interesting observations. Candidates were asked to consider the extent to which colonists were united in their opposition to Britain from the end of the Seven Years' War to the end of the Revolutionary War. Most responses tended to focus on the earlier period by very few failed to address the period of the Revolutionary war. Some focused on opposition in general while others discussed groups and individuals. There was some failure to grasp the extent of Loyalist sympathies but apart from this responses were wide ranging and brought up some interesting points. It was good to see candidates selecting and deploying material which they may have revised to answer a question with a slightly different focus with such dexterity. There was only one candidate who completely misread/misunderstood the question.

C3 – The Slave Trade, Slavery and the Anti-slavery Campaigns, c1760-1833

This is the most popular topic on the paper with over one hundred and fifty responses. Responses to this topic are wide ranging. Level 5 answers tend to be conceptually strong with detailed specific knowledge and clear judgements. There are far fewer Level 2 answers than in the past but many responses are low-mid Level 3. These responses attempt analysis but have very weak and sometimes irrelevant supporting material. It is important that centres provide or encourage their students to research the specific elements of the slave trade during the period after 1760 rather than make generalisations about the growth of the slave trade from the 1600s.

Q5. The question was focused on the growth in the trade in slaves during the period c1760-1800. Many candidates were able to attempt analysis (Level 3) but wrote very generalised responses with reference to the Atlantic triangular trade system and/or failed directly to discuss the needs of the plantation system. Those who did focus on the plantation system tended to relate this specifically to consumer demand rather than also look at the treatment of slaves within the system. There was also an opportunity for candidates to look at the effect of American independence on the slave trade but this was rarely taken. Some candidates described the life of slaves on the plantations or gave simple descriptions of the triangular trade which could not achieve more than Level 2. Also although it is acknowledged that more slaves were brought to Britain than might have once been thought, there were a significant number of responses which suggested that African slaves were brought to Britain to work as labour in manufacturing. A suggestion for approaching the growth of the slave trade during this period would be to ask the question 'How many, and why were so many, slaves transported across the Atlantic Ocean during this period?'

Q6. There were many very good responses to this question with an increasing number of candidates understanding why it took so long to get slavery abolished and what the main obstacles were. These candidates referred to factors such as the West India lobby, the profit motive, pro-slavery parliamentary supporters, fear of the French Revolution and the divisions amongst abolitionists after 1807. Some of the answers were interesting and very thoughtful. However, unfortunately there were a significant minority of candidates who misread the question completely and attempted to explain how the West Indian planters helped to achieve abolition. Some of these responses did mention the opposition of the planters and any relevant reference was rewarded but many were only able to achieve Level 1 or Level 2. A few provided no rewardable material at all despite producing a response with developed paragraphs. There were also a limited number of responses which mistook West Indian planters for the slaves themselves.

C4 – Commerce and Conquest: India, c1760-1835

There were no responses to these questions.

C5 – Commerce and Imperial Expansion, c1815-70

There were a very limited number of answers to Q9 most of which used material from topic C6. Those which were focused on the time period were aware of the different factors influencing imperial expansion.

There were no responses to Q10.

C6 – Britain and the Scramble for Africa, c1875-1914

Please note: centres studying topic C6 should ensure that their candidates are aware that they should be answering questions 11 or 12. Every session some unfortunate candidates answer questions to topic C5 using supporting material from the wrong time period.

Over 100 candidates were entered for this topic. The majority of candidates are very well prepared and have very good general knowledge. At high Level 5 these are some of the more well-organised and interesting responses that examiners read. Having commented in past reports about the use of historiographical theories concerning the Scramble, it is clear that centres which use this approach have succeeded in encouraging their candidates to provide exemplification to support their discussions. This has led to more focused answers which now clearly access high Level 4 and Level 5 and lead to some of the most sophisticated answers seen at AS level; a pleasure to read.

Q11. This question produced interesting and sometimes thoughtful answers but many were little more than discussions of the effects of the Second Boer War. In general answers tended to be imbalanced with either discussion of the earlier or later period or relating specifically to Egypt. Those responses which focused on the policies of Disraeli and Gladstone were rarely able to extend their discussion to Salisbury or Chamberlain. The best answers showed a clear outline understanding of the key attitudes and were able to show change over time. There was some sophisticated discussion of Gladstonian imperial policy.

Q12. Even those candidates who were unable to provide detailed supporting evidence were able to attempt analysis of the extent to which strategic concerns were the primary motivating force behind British expansion in Africa. Most responses focused on the situation in Egypt and East Africa with supplementary reference to another geographical area such as West or southern Africa. Level 4 responses were well-focused but often imbalanced with a more narrow focus on the Nile Valley region or the importance of one particular factor. There were some excellent Level 5 answers which were able to show the interaction of different factors or different motivation in different geographic regions. Some suggested that strategic concerns underlay almost all of the decisions made in imperial expansion while others suggested that while strategic policy was responsible for expansion in Egypt expansion in other areas was motivated more by economic concern or imperial rivalry.

C6 – Retreat from Empire: Decolonisation in Africa, c1957-81

Over fifty candidates produced responses to this topic. The most popular by far was Q.13 with a very limited number responding to Q14. Most candidates were well prepared but still seem uncertain of the timeline of decolonisation writing in generalisations rather than with specific exemplification.

Q13. Most candidates were able to discuss the relative importance of economic considerations in Britain's decision to decolonise. Responses were differentiated by the ability to explain and develop the extent to which economic considerations impacted on the decisions made. Many candidates were content to assume that this referred to nothing more than Macmillan's cost-benefit analysis and so missed an opportunity to discuss the post-war economic situation, Britain's desire to join the European Community and the economic influence of the USA particularly post-Suez. Some of the best responses were able to show how economic considerations interacted directly with other influences at the time. There are still a few candidates apparently unaware that the decision to grant independence to Ghana had been made before the Suez Crisis and that Mau Mau began before this event as well.

Q14. Very few candidates attempted this question but those who did tended to use case studies in East, West and southern Africa to support their conclusions. This is a wholly appropriate approach. Candidates who could refer to the situation in Southern Rhodesia, in particular, often produced stronger responses. Most candidates produced interesting, if not wholly secure responses, and the best were a pleasure to read.

Summary

Centres might consider the following areas of weakness in many responses: Candidates must focus more clearly on the question set, noting its specific wording and the timescale to be covered.

Chronological awareness is sometimes weak. Candidates should know key dates, and should be able to explain and expand on points made with accurate reference to the order in which events happened.

The range and depth of supporting material is often the key to success. This support should be relevant, focused, accurate, and in sufficient depth to allow the points made to stand up.

Candidates sometimes struggle to answer questions using sufficient supporting material and/or have a limited choice of questions if centres do not cover all of the content indicated by the bullet points in the Specification.

Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with historical concepts and vocabulary relevant to the course of study. In January many confused the Weimar Republic with the Weimar Constitution, economic and political policies, and social and political policies. Several could not frame a secure definition of a totalitarian state.

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