

Examiners' Report

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCE
in History (6HI01) Paper A

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REPORT ON EXAMINATION 6HI01/A JUNE 2016

Q1. Most answers discussed the strengths of the Viking forces, and how their military power and their tactics changed over time. Candidates noted the early attacks on the English coastline, notably at Lindisfarne in 793, and pointed out that an effective response was difficult to develop thanks to the Vikings' mobility and speed, whether on horseback or in their speedy narrowboats. Over time the Viking threat changed as they developed fortified bases, which led to a new agenda of settlement by the early 860s. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxons suffered from weak organisation, and the peasant armies were not adept at war. Political disunity was considered, especially the permanent crisis in Northumbria. Some candidates strayed from the set timescale by addressing the impact of the Great Heathen Army and Viking successes after 865.

Q2. In considering Alfred's leadership some answers did not cover the whole chronology, focusing only on the loyalty shown to the king in 878, the battle of Edington and the Treaty of Wedmore. Better responses noted that leadership could be assumed through Alfred's military reforms, including the creation of the burhs, the development of a coastal fleet and the introduction of cavalry, all of which were seen as the key factor in subsequent Anglo-Saxon successes. Many noted that Viking military power was easier to challenge after 878. Haesten's leadership was never as effective as Guthrum's and, rather than attacking Wessex directly, many Viking forces changed their priorities as they began to settle, especially in East Anglia.

Q3. Some of the best answers noted William's military experience in Normandy which helped to shape his leadership skills. They also considered his invasion tactics, the papal support given to his enterprise, and his skill in provoking William by laying waste the land around Pevensey. The duke's leadership at Hastings, and his subsequent journey to London, were also well known. Set against these qualities were Godwinson's less impressive leadership, with candidates referring to the forced marches to and from Stamford Bridge, his impulsive refusal to wait for reinforcements, and his failure to provide clear and effective leadership at Hastings. The chronology established in the question was an important discriminating factor: many did not take their answer beyond Hastings, and thus limited their attainment accordingly.

Q4. There were too few answers to allow for a meaningful report.

Q5. The best candidates provided answers which displayed both range and depth. They noted the challenges faced by Henry in 1135, in England and the Angevin lands, before addressing legal and financial reforms. Many noted the importance of the king's early actions to improve his financial situation, including the appointment of Nigel of Ely, the Cartae Baronum and the Inquest of Sheriffs. Equally, many had a secure understanding of Henry's legal reforms, which promoted royal power over the legal system. Less secure responses failed to address the king's failed attempts to assert royal power over the church, or which failed to cover most of the chronology.

Q6. Almost all candidates agreed that Richard's reign was a disaster for England through the penal taxes imposed on the English people; and for the Angevin territories because of the loss of most of Normandy to Philip Augustus. Although the justiciars governed England reasonably well, they were unable to impose order very effectively, and had no answer to John's treachery. A few candidates mounted a challenge to the question, sustaining their argument with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Q7. Many candidates deployed a reasonable amount of information on economic conditions in mid- 14th century England, focusing on the growing urbanisation and its effects on living conditions in towns. Although most answers were reasonably effective on the stated factor, other comments were sometimes confused and of uncertain relevance. Some had little understanding of how the plague spread, were not well informed on the existing state of medical knowledge, or failed to note the significance of troops returning from the French wars.

Q8. Many were well informed on the changing status of labourers from 1350, and the ineffectiveness of the labour laws in attempting to check the rise in wages. Candidates also noted issues which led to the decline of the traditional manorial system, the erosion of the monarch's feudal rights, and the waning influence of the church. The question required coverage of events from 1350 to 1381. While most candidates considered the poll taxes demanded from 1377, a significant number did not examine the impact of the 1381 revolt on the landed classes and the monarchy.

Qs 9-10. There were too few answers for a meaningful report.

Q11. Most candidates discussed a range of relevant points before concluding that Henry VI was the main cause of the outbreak of civil conflict in 1455. Divisions among the nobility were usually exemplified by the Percy/Neville and Bonville/Courtney conflicts. Some, however, limited their discussion of noble divisions to the bitter rivalry of York and Somerset at the royal court. Other factors investigated included Henry's financial weakness and his mental instability, and the role of Margaret of Anjou was well known. However, the significance of foreign issues, notably the loss of France in 1453, was often omitted.

Q12. There were too few answers to Q12 for a meaningful report.

Q13. It was the range of material offered that often decided the mark awarded. Some weaker answers focused exclusively on the Simnel and Warbeck conspiracies, which often limited candidates to a L3 award. Others decided that Henry's position was secured only by seeing off the pretenders, including Suffolk, and overcoming the Yorkshire and Cornish rebellions. More secure answers linked a number of factors to the question, considering the importance of Henry's reforms in government and finance, his legal reforms, and his policies towards the nobility. Although several candidates had substantial material to deploy, they allowed narrative rather than explanation and analysis to shape their answers.

Q14. Most candidates agreed that Henry was able to improve the state of royal finances during his reign. The state of finances in 1485 was understood, and many were aware that it was only when the king transferred much financial activity from the Exchequer to the Chamber that finances began to improve, helped by experienced administrators such as Bray. The king's role in financial matters was well known, whether in overseeing administration, exploiting traditional feudal dues, or increasing the income from crown lands. Answers noted the threat to royal finances caused by the tax rebellions in Yorkshire and Cornwall. Some candidates addressed the king's policy towards the nobles: in a few cases this was the only material they could muster.

