

Examiners' Report January 2013

GCSE History 5HB01 1C

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Introduction

This was the last of the January modular examinations and therefore the cohort was limited to those candidates who would finish the course this June. Nevertheless 193 candidates were entered for this paper.

There were a number of impressive answers and also a great deal of evidence that candidates had been well prepared for certain styles of question. Many responses demonstrated an understanding of how to structure an analytical answer, even if they did not always have the specific knowledge that would allow them to reach Level 3. However, for Level 4 it is not enough to identify several factors or to look at both change and continuity; at Level 4 there needs to be a sense of evaluation discussing the extent of change.

Candidates also recognised that, as a Study in Development, change and continuity was a key theme in this paper and made comments about progression and regression, although strong claims about 'huge changes' or 'great progress' again need to be supported by specific details.

However, several general points that may help future candidates can be made that apply to all questions and are relevant in every session. This paper covers approximately 600 years and therefore candidates must have an understanding of the sequence of various periods and the names used for them. Vagueness has a significant effect on marks when candidates discuss the use of longbows and pikes during the nineteenth century or appear to think the English Civil War was during the Middle Ages. Although not applicable to this paper, it can also lead to a failure to score any marks if candidates confuse terms such as 'since 1900' and 'the nineteenth century'.

Examiners noted that certain questions revealed very limited knowledge on the care of the wounded during the First World War, and the strategy and tactics used during the Battle of the Somme. Apart from the extension studies where a choice is possible, the entire specification should be studied. Any individual who is named in the specification should be well known by candidates but candidates should also be confident on the themes of the nature of warfare, combatants and the various factors involved in change and continuity. The theme of combatants is explicitly stated to cover recruitment, movement, provisioning and care, yet candidates often seem rather vague when discussing these aspects of the specification.

Candidates should also be aware of the fact that the stimulus material can take various forms in Q3 and Q4 but will always be bullet points in Q5b and Q6b. This stimulus material is intended to alert the candidate to the need to cover the whole period in question, to look at a range of causes or effects or to consider both change and continuity. However, there are no marks for paraphrasing the bullet points and it is not compulsory to use this material – indeed, it is possible to gain full marks without doing so. Therefore candidates should be ready to bring in additional ideas and details from their own knowledge and to ignore any bullet point they do not understand.

Finally, candidates should make sure they analyse the question. It is highly unlikely that they will be able to use the same material in two separate questions or that they can repeat a question they have practised in school. Some knowledgeable answers failed to score highly because candidates produced a prepared answer on the topic rather than a focused answer on the specific question. In particular, candidates need to understand that questions about role and impact require an analysis focused on effects and not just a description of what was done.

The allocation of marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar will be discussed later in this report but it is worth noting here that there has been a clear decline in handwriting over the last few years. In some ways this is understandable given the increasing use of computers to present work but there have been a sizeable number of answers where handwriting was difficult to read from the very first question and not simply at the end of the examination. When marks are being awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar, it is important that examiners can identify capital letters, commas, full stops and apostrophes, and correct spelling.

Question 1

Most candidates were clear about what was expected in answers to this question. They were usually able to identify a change that had taken place from the first source to the later one and they realised that they needed to show which part of the sources helped them to identify that change. Most candidates also realised that descriptions of source content or use of own knowledge would not be rewarded in this question and that a lengthy answer here might impact on their performance in the more high-scoring answers later in the paper.

Answers should explain what inference is being made about change, for example identifying the nature or scale of change. Simply juxtaposing comments about the sources, with the occasional 'whereas' or 'however' inserted is not an analysis of change. Valid answers based on these sources discussed changes in how the authorities simply appropriated horses during the Civil War, while they used propaganda to persuade women to volunteer during the Second World War.

Although the context for the sources should be known, this question is based solely on inferences to be made from using the sources in combination; some candidates wanted to discuss changing attitudes towards women which could not be inferred from Source A.

There are no marks here for discussing continuity.

Question 2

Q2 is always set on key people, events or themes within the specification. The most popular option was on the Crimean War and the overall importance of the work of Florence Nightingale during the war was generally well known, but few candidates could provide many specific details to support their comments beyond the reduction in the death rate. There were also few comments made about any other aspect of care for the wounded during the Crimea beyond an occasional reference to Mary Seacole. The army hospitals and surgeons were merely condemned as inadequate until the arrival of Nightingale.

The care available during the First World War was not well known. Answers generally asserted that care was poor and there was a high risk of infection but many of the answers described the conditions on the Western Front and discussed disease rather than the care of the wounded.

The system of dressing stations, field hospitals, the RAMC and the transport of the severely wounded back to Britain was rarely discussed.

Answers were mainly descriptive and very few answers on either option actually focused on assessing how effective the care was.

Question 3

Candidates were knowledgeable about the Battle of Waterloo and also had a good understanding of the reasons for Wellington's victory. Most could offer some development of the stimulus material, explaining why infantry squares were a strong formation and how Napoleon's decision to attack the building held by the Coldstream Guards was an error, but it was also pleasing to see that many candidates could add details from their own knowledge. Many could name Blücher and Grouchy and compare the number of troops and types of weapon. Practically all candidates explained that Napoleon's haemorrhoids made riding difficult and prevented him from surveying the battle as normal.

Most candidates also offered a conclusion that attempted to show the interaction of factors or to evaluate their relative importance, with many deciding that Wellington earned the victory through his good leadership and tactics.

Question 4

Candidates were surprisingly lacking in detail on Q4 and answers often remained vague generalisations based around the stimulus material. The bullet point about faulty shells was often assumed to mean that they resulted in a high level of British casualties rather than being used to explain why the bombardment before the battle was so ineffective. The order to walk across no-man's land was seen as an obvious reason for high casualties, but it was rarely placed in the context of the German concrete dugouts and the failure to flatten the barbed wire, which meant that the Germans were manning their trenches as the British advance began. The policy of attrition was usually condemned with little understanding that it meant that Haig saw high casualties as an acceptable part of battle or that it was believed that the British could sustain such losses longer than the Germans could. However, it was clear that some candidates did not understand this policy and candidates should be reminded that it is not necessary to use the scaffolding in the question to achieve high marks and they should be discouraged from trying to use material that is unfamiliar to them.

It was also surprising how few candidates could offer additional details, such as the build-up of ammunition in advance of the battle being reported in newspapers, the weather hampering the reconnaissance planes which would have reported the barbed wire was still intact, or the reluctance of Haig to adopt new tactics.

Most candidates could expand on the stimulus material to show how tactics led to a high loss of life but some candidates strayed from the focus on the Battle of the Somme and described conditions on the Western Front generally, often talking about disease rather than casualties in battle. In general, there seemed to be a good understanding of trench warfare but limited knowledge of conditions specific to this battle, which is a named case study in the specification.

Question 5 (a)

Celtic methods of fighting, as exemplified in Boudicca's revolt, were generally well known. However, many candidates turned this into an answer on Boudicca's revolt and made comparisons with Roman tactics and methods of fighting. The most commonly identified link to Celtic society was an explanation that tribes rarely co-operated and that they prized individual displays of bravery. These points, together with difficulties in communication, were often used to explain that complex tactics or indeed any sort of co-ordination was therefore difficult. Other points made were that they were expected to provide their own weapons and claims were made both that the Celts were a rich society, experienced in metal work and therefore well-armed, and also that they were an agricultural society with many individuals too poor to provide weapons and their reliance on farming implements.

Question 5 (b)

Answers to this question were slightly disappointing, with many candidates relying on the stimulus material. These answers tended to be descriptive, describing each point separately to show that it made capturing a castle difficult, but not developing the implications to show why the combination of points made it so difficult to capture a castle. Such answers tended to stay in Level 2 if they simply described the situation or they reached Level 3 if they focused on explaining why these points caused problems for the attackers. For example, many answers took the bullet point about feudal service only lasting 45 days and said this made it difficult to capture a castle because a siege normally took longer than that. Few candidates went on to explain that this situation then required additional payments or the employment of mercenaries. Many candidates said that thick castle walls made it difficult for the attackers to break through, but answers often went on to describe the siege engines that were used, missing the emphasis on the difficulties faced by the attackers. Some candidates misunderstood the bullet point about the collapse of the siege tower at Lincoln and wrote about King Stephen's cowardice in running away or callousness in abandoning his men; however, the point being suggested here was the difficulty of constructing, transporting and using various siege engines. Few answers developed the problems raised by castle architecture. Features such as the splayed base of walls, the system of inner and outer walls, the use of towers at the corners, the use of crenellations, round towers etc were rarely discussed.

Where candidates recognised the focus on the difficulties in attacking a castle, they were more likely to form their own argument and use the stimulus material as support, usually reaching Levels 3 and 4. However, a number of answers were based on the siege of Acre, which was not an example of the capture of a castle.

Question 6 (a)

Religion as a cause of the Civil War is generally well known. Candidates wrote confidently about Charles' belief in Divine Right, his marriage to Henrietta Maria, his friendship with Laud, his desire to beautify churches and his attempt to impose the Prayer Book on Scotland. They were also aware of the fact that many of his opponents in parliament were 'hardcore Protestants'.

However, some candidates produced their prepared answer on the causes of the Civil War and discussed other causes such as money or power, which could not be rewarded.

Question 6 (b)

The causes of the First World War were also well known but not all candidates could shape their knowledge to produce a response to this question. Many supplied various details about the rivalry between Britain and Germany and a sizeable number also looked at political tensions within Europe and the assassination in Sarajevo. Where they showed how these events contributed to the outbreak of war the candidates reached Level 3; if they merely told the story of what happened, they remained at Level 2. However, only a small number of pupils were able to weigh the relative importance of these causes and reach Level 4.

SPAG

Spelling was often reasonably accurate, although, 'definitely' was often misspelled as 'defiantly'.

Basic punctuation was usually accurate, but apostrophes were frequently placed incorrectly and there were some very long sentences that lacked punctuation. However, a surprising number of candidates did not use capital letters for names.

The most common grammar mistakes were 'must of' and 'he done' but there were also a lot of casual and vernacular expressions, such as 'majorly'.

Although handwriting is not assessed, candidates do need to make the letters in words and their use of punctuation clear.

Summary

As always, there was a wide range of answers. The best were truly impressive, demonstrating good understanding of the concepts involved and supported by precise and wide-ranging knowledge. At the other extreme, candidates had frequently grasped certain key ideas and details but could not fit them into an overall framework of change and continuity over 600 years, so that details were often anachronistic or vague.

In addition to candidates' knowledge and understanding, two aspects of examination technique have a significant impact on marks. The ability to analyse the question and understand its overall focus and timescale often makes the difference between Level 2 and Level 3. At Level 2 many answers respond to the topic and consist simply of information, often based around any stimulus material that is provided. At Level 3, answers respond to the specific question and then select and deploy information in order to construct a focused answer. Examiners comment that they often see a plan included with the best answers.

The second point is about the use of the stimulus material and especially the bullet points in questions 5b and 6b. These are always factual pieces of information and candidates who take them at face value tend to produce additional detail but the answers remain essentially descriptive and Level 2. Candidates who think about what sort of cause/what aspect of continuity/what nature of change/what extent of impact is being illustrated by these factual examples are more likely to produce a Level 3 analytical response and also more likely to draw on appropriate own knowledge to develop their argument.

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