

Examiners' Report

January 2011

GCSE

GCSE History 5HB02 2A

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Examiners report: 5HBO2/2A: Summer 2010
The transformation of British society, c1815-51

It is worth reiterating the need for teachers to be familiar with the content of the new specification. There were certain areas of the examination (such as Questions 2, 5 and 6) where a significant number of candidates appeared to have very little knowledge despite both areas being specifically mentioned in the specification for this examination. There were also a few students who answered 5a and then 6b or vice versa. In such cases they were awarded the mark for the question where they had scored highest and 0 for the other question. This is because in some examination series the content between optional questions may overlap and candidates obviously cannot be rewarded for using the same content more than once.

As the January 2010 report commented, candidates should be reminded on the role of stimulus material for questions 3,4,5b and 6b. In this examination paper bullet points were used although centres are reminded that in some examination series the stimulus material may take the form of a visual stimulus, a graph or a short piece of continuous prose. There are examples of questions with stimulus other than bullet points in the second set of Specimen Assessment Materials which are on the main EdExcel website for GCSE History B. It is offered as a prompt to students of some of the main issues and the chronological time span for the particular question being attempted. The stimulus material does not have to be used at all and this is often the case with the highest scoring responses. Conversely students should not rely on the stimulus material alone or simply rewrite the provided material in their own words – both of which will invariably give a low scoring response.

Question 1:

Candidates should be reminded that no marks can be awarded for own knowledge and that answers must refer to the source as this question will always assesses Assessment Objective.

Unfortunately there were some very articulate and extensive responses on conditions in coal mines which could not be credited as they made no reference at all to the source.

The best responses used phrases such as ‘it is clear from the source...’, ‘the source suggests that...’ or ‘we can infer from the source that...’ These kinds of statements often resulted in very clear focussed responses and consequently achieved full marks. These responses often made valid inferences from the source such as the harsh and claustrophobic conditions, the lack of protection and the dangerous conditions. Level one responses generally made simpler statements such as “the truck looks heavy” or “the child looks young.”

Question 2:

The focus here needed to be on importance of the individual/group chosen to reach the highest level. Level one responses offered generic detail on the conditions of working people, unrelated to either Oastler or Owen or asserted their importance but failed to offer any specific details to back this up.

Of the two responses Oastler was often the best although specific details were often lacking. Level three responses were able to refer to Oastler's specific attempts to improve working conditions such as the Yorkshire Slavery letters, his association with Sadler and/or Shaftesbury or with the Parliamentary Select Committee that investigated. Level 2 responses were general accounts of Oastler and the Ten Hour Movement with no focus on the actual question of the attempts to improving conditions for working people. Level one responses tended to offer common sense comment on the Ten Hour Movement such as it aimed to reduce working hours for example.

There were some level 3 responses on Owen and the GNCTU where candidates were often able to offer comments on his attempts to improve the conditions for his workers within his 'model' villages but many offered little or no comment on the GNCTU. Level 2 responses were biographical or narrative accounts of Owen which did not recognise the thrust of the question and level 1 responses were typically simple statements such as "he provided better things for his workers" or "he treated his workers well" with no specific details.

Question 3:

Most responses here could offer at least basic reasons why the Great Exhibition was important with very few offering a simple description or narrative of the exhibition itself. This focus on importance across many scripts was encouraging and there were some high level 3 responses.

These responses tended to show how the lower entrance fee was enabled wider social classes to participate and how it helped to dispel some irrational fears about the working class. These responses had a clear historical context of Britain in 1851 and commented on the Great Exhibition's symbolism, Britain's relations with its' colonies and its' role in celebrating Britain's industrial and economic strength. Level 2 responses were more general descriptions of the Great Exhibition itself. There were very few level 1 responses which were mainly unsupported statements such as "it showed how rich Britain was."

Question 4:

Again, there were a number of good responses here with many candidates able to offer responses with specific reference to railway growth. There were impressive responses with specific details on Brunel and Stephenson, on the development of towns, links to industrial development and comments on an investment 'boom'. When these factors were clearly offered as causes of railway growth these responses clearly achieved a good level three mark.

Level 2 answers were often detailed and lengthy accounts which failed to recognise the thrust of the question. These responses often dealt more with "other" areas such as how the railways were actually constructed, opposition to the railways or the social and economic effects of the railways.

Level 1 answers generally offered unsupported simple statements such as "so people could travel more" or "because they were fast."

Some candidates showed some confusion such as comments about terrorists using the railways or railways being used by illegal immigrants to travel around Britain.

Terrorists/effects of railways

Question 5a:

Many candidates seemed to struggle with this question with very few able to offer specific detail on the nature and/or purpose of the Swing Riots when assessing how they demonstrated the issue of poverty. The stronger Level 3 responses offered specific details which left the examiner in no doubt that the Swing Riots were actually being discussed and included references to "Captain Swing", the attacking of property and machines, the impact of unemployment and links to the Poor Rate.

Weaker responses which only offered more generic statements on riots in general and that they were riots and that they were a result of poverty remained in Level 1. Several candidates claimed that the Swing Rioters received ASBOs.

Question 5b:

Level four responses were able to reach a clear and well argued judgement on the changes brought about to the electoral system by the 1832 Parliamentary Reform Act. These responses acknowledged the weaknesses of the Act (such as working men were still largely disenfranchised/women not included/that it was disappointing given the preceding agitation) and some linked this to the development of Chartism. At the same time it was acknowledged that it was at least a move in the right direction and achieved much in providing better representation for urban centres and extending the franchise further. This kind of balanced response often gained the highest marks.

Overall however, most responses were weak. A significant number of candidates offered a range of inaccurate points such as that the Parliamentary Reform Act introduced a secret ballot, that it gave all working class men the vote, that it began the payment of MPs and even that it gave women the vote on equal terms as men. In some cases this naturally led to the false conclusion that the Reform Act did indeed bring major changes. A common error was to attribute the 1832 Reform Act to the demands of the Chartists.

Question 6a:

There were some very strong level 3 responses here with many candidates able to offer a range of reasons for the growth of urban areas.

Many were able to relate urban growth to industrial development, development of railways and as a result of both the 'push' out of rural areas and the 'pull' of the cities. There were also some detailed accounts of emigration for Ireland and Scotland to England. There were also frequent references to specific cities that underwent growth during the period.

However it must also be noted that a limited number of candidates did not seem to understand the term urban or confused the term with rural. This led them to speculate why people were moving out of towns and to the countryside.

Question 6b:

There were some impressive detailed responses, especially when discussing the inadequacy of earlier methods of poor relief and in describing Chadwick's ideas. There were some impressive level 4 responses which reached a clear judgement on Chadwick's role weighed up against other factors such as the wider context of utilitarianism and Malthus. Level 3 responses often argued the importance of Chadwick in reforming the Poor Law. Responses in Level 2 mainly described systems of poor relief before and after 1834. Unfortunately some candidates confused the Poor Law with Parliamentary Reform and therefore failed to score marks for this question.

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