

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

GCSE History
5HB02 2A The Transformation of
Surgery c1815-c1851

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5HB02A The transformation of British society c1815-c1851

General Comments

The January 2012 examination was the fifth sitting of this GCSE History specification. It is clear that the vast majority of teachers and candidates are now fully acquainted with the format. There were hardly any blank pages which demonstrates that candidates have often been well prepared by covering the entire specification. It was also noticeable that there were very few rubric offences at all. Centres should note that if a candidate attempts 5a and 6b or 5b and 6a then examiners mark both but award only the higher mark of the two responses. It was also noticeable on question 1 that far more students understand that they are required to make one valid and supported inference from the source provided. There were very few lengthy responses which were totally own knowledge without any explicit reference to the source. There were some very impressive scripts which showed specific and accurate knowledge which was used for detailed explanations on the lower and middle tariff questions and to give high-level sustained analysis and supported judgements for questions 5b and 6b. Centres might also wish to stress the value in candidates spending a little time to help them make an informed decision when choosing question 3 or 4 and 5 or 6.

It is noticeable that many of the highest scoring candidates clearly underline or highlight the key words in the question to help focus their responses. Middle range scripts generally lose the focus of the set question and often produce an answer which either "tells the story", is "everything I know about this topic" or is clearly a response aimed at a previous examination paper question. Level 1 comments are generally an additional piece of information added to one or more of the bullet points in the stimulus material or one or two simple points about the subject matter in the question which is often not specific to the actual period studied.

The following has been mentioned in previous reports but it is a worthwhile reminder to centres and also for centres new to this specification. Stimulus material is always provided for questions 3, 4, 5b and 6b. In this particular examination paper bullet points were used. Centres should note that in some examination series this material may take the form of stimulus such as a map, poster, picture, graph, or a short piece of continuous prose. There are examples of questions which do not use bullet points in the second set of Specimen Assessment Materials which are available on the main Edexcel website for GCSE History B. The stimulus material is always offered as a prompt to students of some of the main issues and the chronological time span for the particular question set. The 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 provided material alone or simply rewrite it in their own words – both of which will invariably give a lower scoring response.

Question 1. On the whole this question was very well answered. Most candidates avoided simply describing information in the source or using only their own knowledge and instead drew a valid inference which was supported such as the passengers looking wealthy, the impressive architecture and huge flags to all give a sense of grandeur and occasion at the opening of the Liverpool to Manchester railway. Some candidates used the words 'showcase,' 'a show of genius and strength,' and 'a masterpiece' to convey the significance and convey the sense of celebration.

Question 2. The quality of answers was very varied. Level 3 responses were very tightly focused throughout on the aims of the Act of Parliament chosen. But a significant number of responses were very weak. Some candidates confused the two Acts, or claimed that either the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act dealt with working conditions in coal mines and factories. Other candidates mistakenly described, often in great detail, the introduction of the Roundsman and Speenhamland systems in 1834. Some candidates were unable to attempt an answer about either of these key pieces of legislation and left the page entirely blank. A significant minority of candidates also claimed that the 1832 Reform Act brought in the secret ballot.

Q3. Level 3 responses were clear about the historical context of the period 1815-51 and developed their answers to explain the effects of industrialization on the employment of children. Most of these responses also explained how these working conditions became an issue for those who wanted reform and many scripts had an understanding of the challenges facing campaigners. Level 2 answers were often detailed description of working conditions. Surprisingly, candidates seemed much more familiar with coal mines rather than textile factories. There were few Level 1 responses. The question was also seen by some as an opportunity to express their own opinions on child labour.

Q4. Level 3 responses focused clearly on the set question and explained the appeal of Chartism to many working class people in the 1830s and 1840s. These responses often explained the dissatisfaction with the 1832 Parliamentary Reform Act and wider economic issues. There was no mention of the failure of the GNCTU. These candidates also had a very good knowledge of the points of the Charter. Level 2 responses tended to write "all I know about Chartism" and lost sight of the actual question by writing about problems of leadership, the methods used by the Chartists or the use of government force.

Q5(a). This question was well answered. Level 3 responses focused on the question to give an explanation of Brunel's role in the development of railways. These answers explained his contributions as an engineer and most explained the trial of the gauges. Level 2 answers described his work and often specific tunnels and bridges. There were some answers which confused Brunel with Stephenson or wrote about his work on steamships.

Q5(b). For Level 4 candidates needed to give an analysis of the economic effects of the railways in the years c1815-c1851 weighed up against the social effects and reach a sustained judgement. There were some Level 3 responses which explained the economic and social changes brought about by the coming of the railways. The majority of candidates scored Level 2 by offering a description of the changes brought about. These responses were more confident describing social changes such as the growth of seaside resorts. The answers in Level 1 were often vague and unsupported comments such as "there were more jobs" and "people could travel more."

Q6(a). Level 3 answers had a sound understanding of the significance of the Great Exhibition of 1851. These responses explained it as a symbol of Britain's economic progress, the use of railways and visits by people of all social classes. Level 2 answers generally described the building at Crystal Palace or the exhibits. Level 1 answers were generally vague comments which could often have been applied to any exhibition rather than anything specific about the 1851 Great Exhibition, such as "lots of people went there" or "there was lots to see."

Q6(b). For Level 4 candidates needed to reach a judgement with precise and accurate knowledge on the effects of migration from Scotland and Ireland on the growth of urban areas in England in the years c1815-c1851. Level 3 candidates showed good knowledge to explain the effects of the Irish potato famine but these answers were less clear about the effects of the Highland clearances or of increasing rural unemployment and poverty in agricultural areas of England. Level 2 answers were often descriptions of town conditions in early 19th century England. Level 1 responses were mainly vague and unsupported comments such as "they were poor" or "they moved to get jobs."

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