

Examiners' Report January 2013

GCSE History 5HB03 3D

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Introduction

This was the seventh series of this Schools History Project Source Enquiry The Work of the Historian. The focus of the enquiry was the impact of the Great Depression on life in Britain in the 1930s. Most candidates were able to demonstrate responses that were worthy of some credit and many produced answers that were well argued, developed and supported by additional recalled knowledge of the work of the historian and use of the sources provided.

There was continuing evidence that more candidates were able to access all five questions. Few candidates produced answers that were not worth at least some marks.

The sources appear to have worked well except for the graph in Source D. This source proved difficult for some candidates, particularly those who found aspects of graph work instantly intimidating or geographically challenging. In some cases, the data in the graph was misread. This apart, the majority of candidates appeared to have no problem understanding the sources. A twentieth-century focus presents fewer problems for candidates in pointing out problems with evidence and possible other sources to use to resolve them than, for instance, the medieval period.

As in all previous series, high Level 4 marks on Q5 were more difficult to achieve than top levels in Q1–Q4. In this series of the specification, there were 3 additional marks in Q5 for SPaG. Failure to answer Q5 therefore cost candidates a potential 19 marks. This alone should encourage candidates to ensure that they allocate their time in proportion to the mark tariff available for individual questions. Additional recalled knowledge (ARK) was often thin or non-existent in answers to Q5.

There was evidence that centres are responding to advice given in examination reports. Encouragingly, there were far fewer blank responses to questions. There were also fewer answers to Q4 written on the last page allocated for responses to Q3. Most candidates produced reasonable answers to Q1 and Q2 but many failed to cross-reference in Q3 and simply trawled through each source using simple matching. Fewer were able to deploy understanding of differences in content alongside comment on support provided by the nature and provenance of each source.

Q4 produced many answers that were good on content but made little or no reference to a source's nature, origin or purpose. Moreover, many comments on utility focused on simplistic learned responses of dubious historical value.

There were fewer, although still too many, responses that saw all primary sources as reliable and useful and all secondary sources as made up and therefore of little real value. A surprising number of candidates continue to have a negative view of historians and history books and put more faith in the veracity on all counts of people who were there at the time.

Timing was generally less of a problem for candidates than in earlier series. Some candidates, however, produced answers that were overlong in response to Q1 and Q2, which left them with difficulties completing developed answers to Q3–Q5.

There is clear improvement in skills, and evidence that teachers are teaching methods and strategies to help candidates deliver these skills. However, there is also some evidence that candidates are neglecting the basics, perhaps in their anxiety to deliver these methods and strategies. Most important of all was careful reading of **all** the source information, content and supporting information. Examples of these included overlooking, in Source B, that Alf Smith lived in South London and, in Source D, that the statistics were from two different parts of the country.

Question 1

Generally, this question was answered well, with most candidates able to reach a Level 3 by making at least one supported inference. Only a few merely provided details from the source (Level 1), some made inferences without using the source (Level 2), while most were able to infer something about England in the 1930s and provide support from the source (Level 3).

Most inferences concerned the variation in prosperity between the North and the South, citing the fact that unemployment in the North was the result of older declining industries and that more prosperity in the South was due to newer industries based on newer technologies.

Gratifyingly, only a very small number of candidates confused the background information with Source A, but there is still a tendency for some candidates to write more than is required for an answer that earns only 6 marks. Many of those who do this drift into a consideration of the nature of the source or a discussion of other sources on the paper, neither of which is ever required for Q1.

There is still a tendency among some candidates merely to copy from Source A in answers such as:

'From source A, I learn that 1930s England was a period of steady improvement in wages and living standards, this was true with areas with new industries like electrical equipment and motor engineering.'

This could be contrasted with an example where a candidate used their own words:

'This tells us that the 1930s was seen as a period of expansion and an era for improvement in society. This is shown through the increase in wages, which therefore leads to an increase in living standards.'

It still needs to be emphasised that candidates should try to produce succinct answers, making inferences in their own words backed by information from the source in order to gain the highest marks for this question, and therefore making the best use of their time. Clear and brief answers can earn the full 6 marks.

To support teaching and learning:

- Candidates should start by making an inference and then support it directly from the source. This should be followed by an explanation of the implications of this inference.
- Candidates need to remember that more than one inference is needed for full marks.

Question 2

This question was often answered well, with most candidates reaching a Level 2 and many a Level 3. The majority of candidates could identify an impression given by a reading of the source and could support it with evidence taken from the source, as illustrated in the following answer:

'The author has also tried to create the impression that unemployment can send you into depression and make you feel worthless. I get this impression because the author says "But he is beginning to feel that perhaps there is no longer a place for him anymore – that he must change or die." This implies that unemployment can even ruin your life.'

A large number of candidates identified more than one impression, while the very best answers were able to recognise the author's aim of demonstrating the impact on the health and mental well-being of the unemployed.

Candidates were often very good at identifying the kind of language used and how this created the impression:

'Also the author is trying to show that unemployment ruins peoples' physical features. "His face is lined and his cheeks are sunken because he has no teeth.'"

Weaknesses in the answers to this question tended to be cases of confusion of the authorship, some candidates thinking that the author was Alf Smith. Others thought that the aim of the article was to warn the unemployed about the perils of unemployment and urge them to find work. Some spent too much space exploring the biases of magazines while others identified an impression and simply supported it by copying chunks from the source.

To answer this question well, candidates need to read the information about the source carefully, to identify accurately the aims of the author, and to provide a number of examples from the source to support their explanation of the impression that the author is giving. It is good that candidates are increasingly able to interpret the language used, but they also need to recognise that other factors, such as the individual chosen and what is said about that individual, also contribute to the overall impression. It is clear that a number of candidates can do that.

To support teaching and learning:

- Candidates should be reminded to analyse the individual details within a source but link them to the overall impression created. In many ways, this is a more developed version of Q1.
- Candidates need to not only infer the overall impression and identify the parts of the source that create that impression, but also analyse the way that language and treatment of these details combine to produce that effect.
- Candidates need to have a clear idea of the difference between an impression and a message and make sure they address the correct aspect in answering the question set.

Question 3

Answers to this question continue to indicate that, although candidates can be very detailed and conscientious in their matching of sources, they still have difficulty with cross-referencing and reaching a judgement. It remains the case that large numbers of candidates just list the content of the sources. Some dismissed Source B as irrelevant to the question asked, and a number found it difficult to analyse the graphs, sometimes adding the percentages of unemployed in each region in each year together and assuming that was the overall percentage of unemployed for the country as a whole in that year. To their credit, a few candidates were able to identify that isolating two years in this way masked more detailed trends across the 1930s.

While there was an undoubted increase in the numbers of candidates prepared to address the nature of the sources, often this remained fairly simplistic. For example, for Source C one candidate wrote, 'Roberts wrote 50 years after the event and so a lot may have been forgotten.'

The majority of candidates stuck to a consideration of the content of the sources in order to answer this question. However, some candidates were able to identify that Source C was from a very general textbook covering a long period and that the space devoted to Britain in the 1930s in such a source was likely to be too limited to provide the detail needed for an answer to the question.

Too many articulate and perceptive candidates do not provide a complete answer, and fail to finish with a statement of what the three sources together imply. An example of a candidate reaching Level 3 by making a judgement can be found in this answer:

'Overall I think the sources slightly agree with the statement, that standards of living rose in the 1930s, as looking at the sources they suggest that this rise was only for some in England and a majority of people didn't have a rise, but there was a rise for some.'

It needs to be emphasised that to achieve the top level in this question, candidates have to provide an overall judgement of what the sources together imply, and this should include some judgement about the relative reliability of each source.

To support teaching and learning:

- Candidates should avoid treating sources individually as this rarely allows them to go beyond Level 2.
- Candidates are more successful when they look at the overall package of evidence from the sources within this question.
- Candidates also need to address the skill of cross-referencing so that more candidates can achieve Level 3.

Question 4

Most candidates were able to reach at least a Level 2 on this question. Interestingly, and in contrast to answers to Q3, there was an increase in the number of candidates who reached Level 2 by considering the nature of the sources, rather than the content. Too often candidates who were able to consider both nature and content were unbalanced in their treatment. For example, candidates considering the nature of the sources often only picked out and repeated content from Source E and described Source F, without considering the actual value of the content of either.

However, quite a number of candidates stated that the photograph was staged which, of course, it was and some could comment on the reasons for this:

'It's also quite likely that it was staged, because it could've been a tool to get the nation to sympathise with the plight of the miners.'

Although Frank Cousins was not usually known to candidates, there were often perceptive thoughts expressed about his use as a witness:

'...it says that this guy is "the leader of the transport and general workers' union". This is helpful because we can already [know] from his job status he is going to have some idea about how unemployment can affect people... It is useful in terms of content because he gives a first-hand view of what he saw unemployment could do to people's lives.'

Although it is no longer occurring a great deal, it is worth commenting that a small number of candidates are still completing their answers to Q4 on the final page of the answer book allocated to Q3. This should be discouraged as it creates problems during the examination marking process. It is better for candidates to use all the space allocated in the answer book for Q4.

To support teaching and learning:

- Candidates should go beyond describing the content of sources to examine the value of a source's nature.
- After they have dealt with the content of a particular source, candidates should probably stay with the same source and comment on its reliability and utility. Glib generalisations about primary sources being better than secondary sources or that 'photographs never lie' should be avoided.
- Candidates should ensure that the focus of their response is specific to the historical investigation specified in the question.

Question 5

The vast majority of candidates now at least attempt an answer to this question, although some responses are too short and rushed and handwriting can suffer. Candidates need to be reminded to use their time wisely, as answers to this question command the highest allocation of marks on the paper.

There has been an increase in the number of candidates who can reach Level 3, but Level 4 answers remain comparatively rare. Level 3 candidates are able to suggest ways in which the sources that they offer can be used to answer the question, as opposed to candidates who stay at Level 2 because they only suggest and list sources.

There is still a tendency for some candidates to go through all the sources on the paper and discuss the extent to which each might be used to aid research into the question posed. Others do little more than examine the problems posed by Source C. These kinds of answer earn Level 1 or, at best, Level 2 marks.

Candidates did show some genuine understanding of the kinds of source that might be available and relevant. References to the census, to employment statistics, to police statistics, to health records and to diaries were all quite common. Some candidates suggested looking at the accounts of various businesses and checking the stock records of shops to discover different patterns of consumption between the North and the South. Many candidates were aware that there were still people alive who could remember the 1930s but that many of these would have been children at the time and with a consequently limited perspective or, if they were adults, they would be very old.

Some candidates did show considerable subtlety of thinking:

'Other research that the historian could do to discover whether England was divided in this way could be to look at newspaper articles from the times – perhaps one newspaper from an industrial Northern town and the other from London or somewhere in the South-East and compare the attitudes in them to unemployment and also standards of living – if England was indeed divided then the South-East would perhaps document more trivial and high standard events like new shops opening, where to buy electrical goods, etc., whereas the Northern newspapers would make for grimmer reading, and contain lots of articles about unemployment.'

Finally, there was evidence of some learned formulaic answers such as:

'Overall a historian can never be one hundred percent correct with their conclusion or cannot always be sure what they find is correct, as people may be biased to portray and put their point across and make it more interesting. Or different sources may contradict others and therefore a historian cannot judge which is right or which is wrong.'

Or:

'Overall, you can never be sure that the conclusion you draw is correct, because you may have used biased or incorrect evidence, or new evidence can be found after you draw your conclusion disproving your evidence and theory.'

Obviously there is truth in these kinds of statement but it is difficult to give great credit for them. Generally, candidates need to be encouraged to think for themselves and to consider carefully all the information provided for them on the question paper, especially the nature of the sources, which are wide-ranging.

To support teaching and learning:

- Candidates need to leave themselves sufficient time to approach this question properly.
- Candidates **must** recognise that they need to use sources and their own knowledge of the work of the historian for Q5.
- Candidates need to make sure they understand the hypothesis before they make a judgement on its accuracy.

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