



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1B

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

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Unit HIS1B

Unit 1B: Britain, 1483–1529

Comments from the Chief Examiner: Unit 1

In this examination session some issues generic to all the Unit 1 papers were noted:

- Candidates are required to answer two questions from a choice of three, each consisting of a part (a) and a part (b), i.e. 4 sub-questions in total. Whether due to timing issues or to a misunderstanding of the rubric, a few candidates either answered all six sub-questions or answered only one question. The format of Unit 1 papers is significantly different from AQA's legacy units, so it is vital that all candidates are aware in advance of what they will be required to do.
- Timing issues caused other problems too. This is a one hour 15 minute paper, thus allowing roughly 12 minutes in which to complete the (a) questions and 25 minutes for the (b) questions. A number of candidates failed to complete the paper and in addition to those who attempted only one question, there were others who missed out a part-question or lapsed into notes. Selecting relevant material and maintaining a strong focus on the question is part of the skill being tested in this examination and candidates need to realise that they will penalise themselves heavily if they fail to tackle the two questions required, in full. Furthermore, since they are asked to write in continuous prose – which is the only way any sense of argument can be conveyed – notes will never score highly.
- It was clear from some scripts that candidates had not studied, or revised, the full specification content for their chosen alternative. It must be emphasised that the three questions may be drawn from any part of that content. Without a secure understanding of the complete content, candidates will find it extremely difficult to perform well.

Report from the Principal Examiner

General Comments

The response to this paper was generally of a sound standard. Most candidates showed a good sense of relevance. Most managed the time available well and produced answers of a length and depth appropriate to the marks allocated. A minority of candidates, however, produced scripts that were unbalanced and incomplete, with essay answers to Question 2(b) being either fragmentary or omitted altogether. The work of most candidates was well-organised and presented with care. Almost all candidates chose to answer the first two questions – the very few answers to Question 3 showed little knowledge of the period to 1529. A minority of candidates performed poorly, with unacceptably low standards of written communication, careless errors and sometimes a lack of basic coherence. The majority, however, produced work that was controlled and purposeful.

Question 1

- (a) Answers to Question 1(a), on Henry VII's first Parliament, were often clear and competent, dealing skilfully with the situation faced by Henry at the start of his reign and his desire to establish himself. A number of candidates provided cogent explanations of Henry's attitude and actions towards the nobility. A smaller number showed depth of understanding of the timing of Henry's Parliament, before the marriage to Elizabeth of York. Weaker answers tended to provide a list of points rather than a targeted explanation – or to make use of irrelevant evidence relating to events after 1485.
- (b) The response to Question 1(b), on Henry VII's control of the nobility in the years 1485 to 1509 was generally good. There were many answers showing a good overall understanding of Henry's position in relation to the nobility, for example his good fortune in having relatively few great magnates to worry about, his use of 'carrot-and-stick' financial measures and his handling of the issue of retaining. Less successful answers tended to be unbalanced, with an excessive focus on 1485–1487. The widespread inability to produce even an approximate spelling of the key term 'recognisances' was disappointing.

Question 2

The quality of answers to this question, on trade and foreign policy, was mixed. The best answers were confident and well informed but too many responses lacked direction, with much reliance on very rushed and indirect description.

- (a) In Question 2(a), on the cloth trade, most candidates were able to explain in general terms the context of Henry VII's concerns about trade and his desire to exploit the income possibilities from customs duties. Several answers also wrote effectively about Henry's relations with Burgundy – though some candidates struggled to link their material on the trade embargo to an explanation of *why* the cloth trade was important. There was some uncertainty about the cloth trade itself and its pre-eminent place in England's export market.
- (b) Answers to Question 2(b), on Henry VII's success in gaining international recognition by 1509, were of variable quality. Many candidates relied excessively on literal description of the pretenders, Simnel and Warbeck, without due attention to the central focus of the question; others showed some knowledge of Henry's treaties with France and Spain but had little to offer after 1492. Several answers revealed very insecure understanding of Henry's policy towards Brittany. The best responses focused on the precise issue of 'recognition' and were able to trace the course of Henry's policies towards a range of foreign powers over the whole reign.

Question 3

There were too few answers to this question for any meaningful trends to be discerned.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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