



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1L

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

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Unit HIS1L

Unit 1L: Britain, 1906–1951

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

161 candidates sat this first examination of Unit HIS1L of the new History Specification. All had just one term of preparation before sitting. The vast majority found the time of one and a quarter hours adequate and manageable for answering two full questions. A small minority did run out of time usually by not finishing the final (b) part answer, or by clearly rushing into a brief response to the final (a) part answer. Also a few candidates did answer a question, or both, in 'reverse', that is part (b) then part (a). An even smaller minority answered both of their (b) questions first followed by their responses to the (a) parts. In these cases they did themselves no favours by losing continuity (in terms of knowledge and understanding) between the two parts of each single full question.

Some good candidates achieved marks throughout their scripts in the higher Levels. They understood well causation in responding to the (a) questions and made substantiated and balanced judgements in assessing importance or success in their responses to the (b) questions. At the other extreme were those who had too much time but not sufficient knowledge to fill it with appropriate answers. Though many candidates answered one of their questions rather better than the other, there were a few who answered one question

successfully but could not find a second question to do nearly as well because of inadequate knowledge.

Overall the paper proved accessible. All scripts were marked in accordance with the Mark Scheme, and no unexpected (or highly original) responses were seen. There was a fairly even spread of the number of responses to each question, although candidates from some centres clearly favoured the same choice of their two questions. Overall performance in Question 3 was marginally better than in Questions 1 and 2. It was pleasing to see that so many had reached the chronological end of the Unit Specification by answering that final question. Certainly the (a) part of Question 3 was answered considerably more successfully than responses to the (a) parts of Questions 1 and 2 where the level and detail of knowledge were either less familiar, or reasons to provide explanation were otherwise more limited. There was no such distinction between the (b) questions which produced in every case responses ranging from evaluations achieving marks in the higher Levels to those reaching only Level 1. The main general weakness in responses to the (b) questions was the lack of reference to different historical interpretations (though historiography is not expected at AS Level). Overall a major strength in responses to all parts of questions was a clear attempt to focus on the questions asked with few presenting extensive irrelevant information or argument.

Quality of Written Communication was generally satisfactory. Only one script was almost unreadable. A few candidates wrote without using full stops (or other punctuation). The spelling of 'suffragettes', 'suffragists' 'Ramsay MacDonald' – and even 'Attlee' which was included in Question 3 – taxed many. A significant number of candidates used the word 'where' when they meant 'were', a mistake which often made nonsense of sentences. 'Alot' and 'infact' appeared as incorrect words. Some candidates appeared tentative or cautious in argument by using phrases such as 'a reason could have been', or 'it may have been because...', giving the impression of both uncertainty and lack of understanding.

Question 1

- (a) This was not answered particularly successfully. Most responses were in Level 2, albeit at the upper end of that level. The main characteristic of such answers was some basic explanation for the introduction of conscription, in that the requirement for more fighting men was recognised as a general point, but evidence was limited in both range and depth. Most pointed out the early success in gaining volunteers for the British army with many also mentioning Kitchener. However, after that only the better answers, which reached the higher levels, considered such factors as growing pressures for the introduction of conscription in 1915 and 1916 emanating from the 'shell shortage' and from the generals, or the issues for Liberals, the 'Derby' scheme and that conscription was introduced in stages. Most responses contented themselves with general statements about the number of volunteers drying up, given the scale of casualties on the western front. The main error (made in about half of the responses to this question) was to state that it was the battle of the Somme which caused the introduction of conscription, an event which did not begin until July 1916, two months after the introduction of 'full' conscription. More discerning candidates rightly identified that it was rather the pressure from the generals for more troops, to prepare for what later was called the battle of the Somme, which was an important reason for the introduction of conscription. Another significant error was to assert that Lloyd George introduced conscription when he became Prime Minister, with some believing that the final Liberal split, actually at the end of 1916, came from Liberal concerns just over conscription. There was also a significant number of answers which diverted onto a question of their own invention about the consequences of the introduction of conscription for employment and the home front especially the role of women, anticipating the subject matter for part (b) of Question 1.

- (b) In contrast with part (a) this question was answered quite successfully, at least in part. The subject matter of work done by women during the War was well-known. Examples of such work and its importance for the war effort (or total war) were generally clear, even if a few rather overstated the case for women gaining complete equality in all spheres except in pay rates by the end of the War. Most answers linked changed status with acquisition of the vote for parliament in 1918, albeit only at the age of 30. Most answers referred to the suffrage movements before 1914 and the suspension of their campaigns for the duration as a significant factor for improvement in the position of women when linked with their contribution to victory. Weaker answers did divert to descriptive accounts of suffragette activity before the War, often featuring Emmeline Pankhurst and Emily Davison (with some confusion of the spelling of their names and their specific activities). Many pointed out that the age requirement in 1918 did not enfranchise most of the munitions' workers who had done so much to help win the War. However, although most responses identified the economic and political gains made by women during the War, there was less recognition of advances in terms of social freedom and independence. The main weakness in responses, however, was failure to cover the whole question by not looking at the position of women in the period following the War up to 1928. Most commented on the loss of jobs when men were demobilised, but few referred to the 1919 Sex Disqualification Act or the 'flappers' during the 1920s, although rather more did mention the 1928 Act giving women the vote for parliament at age 21. This was a question which demanded debate about historical interpretations. Weaker answers provided none, or asserted either that with men returning after the War nothing had changed, or the opposite that women kept all the gains made during wartime. Better answers, gaining marks in the higher Levels, debated the relative importance of war work against factors such as the suffrage movements, the continuation of social and political advances during the 1920s and how far the changing position of women was a longer term development, begun well before 1914, with wartime experience accelerating the process, rather than wartime work (and consequent experience) being the catalyst for change. Strangely none mentioned the importance of educational advance. However, there were some sound responses reaching the higher Levels which did provide balanced argument about the part played by different factors, but with war work as a central issue, and which demonstrated good understanding of historical interpretations.

Question 2

- (a) Like Question 1(a) this question was not answered in general too successfully. Most candidates gave descriptive background about the onset of economic depression following the Wall Street Crash and many also wrote about the decline of staple industries, but it was only the better answers reaching the higher Levels which really got to grips with the financial crisis itself facing the Labour government in 1931. A fair number of answers did note the political division in Labour over making cuts in unemployment benefit and balancing the budget, but only a minority mentioned the other main political problem for Labour, that it was a minority government dependent on some support from another party and thereby hamstrung in terms of action. Though some mentioned MacDonald, few considered Snowden. The proposals of Mosley and Keynes were mentioned by some, but there was a clear division between those who really understood them and those whose knowledge was insecure. Some weak answers strayed into the early period of the National government by considering the issue of the gold standard (not always accurately) and expenditure cuts which that government made. Again only those responses gaining marks in Levels 3 and 4 were really familiar with the May Committee proposals and the dilemma presented to the government by them. Nevertheless there were some well-informed answers, demonstrating good understanding, which provided context on the financial problems (rather than focusing on the economic), such as the

need for foreign loans, as well as linking together clear reasons on the key issue of how to finance government expenditure and particularly the rising cost of unemployment benefit, which was such a sensitive issue for the Labour Party with its working class and trade union support.

- (b) Answers to this question varied from those which were well-focused, had sound understanding and made supported judgements, to those which were generalised, assertive and either contained considerable inaccuracy or little relevant evidence. Responses which reached the higher Levels and indeed those in Level 3 were able to distinguish between actions and policies of the National governments and other factors accounting for economic recovery. Some very good answers justifiably questioned how far there had been a recovery by 1939, given the million still unemployed until the beginning of the Second World War. Sound answers did consider measures such as coming off the gold standard, protectionism, reductions in public sector wages, unemployment benefit cuts (and the means test), low interest rates, the Special Areas Act, encouragement of construction especially of houses, and rearmament which helped revival of staple industries. Some argued that the governments failed to see that much of the unemployment was structural rather than just cyclical. These good responses also argued that other factors such as American (and world and 'natural') economic recovery and the development of new industries were as important as any government measures. Indeed there was argument that some government policies such as the abandonment of the gold standard and free trade, and rearmament, were essentially not things the governments wished to do but which were forced upon them. Most of the substantiated judgement in responses was that economic recovery was due to factors other than government direct action. Weaker answers tended to be thin with a few providing almost no information about government measures or being confused about what governments did and wider factors such as the rise of new industries. Some tried to answer a different question along the lines of why there were regional differences during the depression. They contained attempts at awareness of historical interpretations but were implicit only, unlike sounder responses which had better understanding of different interpretations of the reasons for recovery.

Question 3

- (a) This part question was answered better than any other on the paper. There was a handful of candidates achieving marks just in Level 1 because they wrote entirely in brief generalisations about 'Labour's proposals' or 'Conservative mistakes/downfalls' (*sic*). A few believed that the Conservatives alone had formed the wartime government and 'won the war'. However, most candidates achieved marks in Levels 3 or 4 demonstrating good understanding with a range of reasons and balanced argument. Those in Level 4 had a range of specific explanations, although not necessarily totally comprehensive in coverage, but they did make sound connections between the positive aspects working in favour of the Labour Party and the negative aspects affecting the Conservatives. A clear feature of Level 4 responses was that they considered why the Labour victory was a landslide, whereas those answers in Levels 2 and 3 explained victory but not a landslide. The best responses linked Labour's programme, often with some specific detail such as support for the Beveridge proposals, with the public mood and that of the forces. They emphasised the wartime work of Attlee, Bevin and Morrison as ministers on the home front in Churchill's coalition government and support which had grown for socialist or collective action. There was explanation in some depth of the Conservative campaign, public views about Churchill as a good wartime leader but suspicions about his possible performance in peacetime, and his mistakes. Most candidates mentioned the 'Gestapo' speech. The Conservative record in relation to the depression and unemployment, and

on appeasement, during the 1930s was not as prominent in answers overall, but was usually alluded to in the best responses.

- (b) This question was answered quite well, at least in part. Overall far more was known about the Labour record and ‘achievement’ in relation to health than to housing. On health all knew about the establishment of the National Health Service and many made the comment that it was successful because it still remains today. There was less certainty about the name of the minister who created it, with some naming Bevin, and there was more extensive confusion over Bevan’s first name and how to spell ‘Aneurin’. Most applauded his efforts to overcome the opposition of doctors and his ‘stuffing their mouths with gold’, though fewer acknowledged opposition of the Conservatives. However, it was only the better responses, with marks in Level 3 and above, which normally tried to assess success in health provision and standards by 1951. The former was usually tackled implicitly by descriptions of access to free health care and medicines and of the problems of escalating costs, many mentioning the ‘dandruff syndrome’, but political success was sometimes questioned over the introduction of prescription charges and Bevan’s ‘principled’ resignation. Only the best answers attempted to judge success by the standard of improvement in the nation’s health in terms of tackling disease, or for children by providing free vitamins. Many answers were heavily weighted towards dealing with health and there was far less knowledge about housing. However, most did identify in general terms the need for new housing following the damage in the War, though estimates varied wildly about how many houses had been destroyed. Most also knew that Labour initiated a massive building programme. Far fewer indicated that demand was not satisfied, even through the council house programmes, that many homes were ‘prefabs’, or indeed made mention of the new towns. More knowledgeable answers did identify Stevenage or Harlow, but almost as many incorrectly named Milton Keynes. Attempts to estimate how many houses were built under Labour varied enormously, though again the better responses did rightly give the figure at around one million. Overall there was little evident explicit understanding of historical interpretations though there was some implicit recognition, for example by acknowledging the extent of improvements made in health provision, or questioning the achievement in housing, for example good responses pointing out Tory criticism and that Conservative governments after 1951 exceeded Labour performance. Overall what did distinguish the best responses was the ability to make judgements about the degree of success achieved in both areas of health and housing, and justify these by the evidence presented.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.