



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS2Q

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

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Unit HIS2Q

Unit 2Q: The USA and Vietnam, 1961–1975

Comments from the Chief Examiner: Unit 2

In this examination session some issues generic to all the Unit 2 papers were noted:

- In the compulsory source question, 1(b), some candidates failed to use both the sources and their own knowledge in responding to the question. Candidates must be reminded that unless they refer to the sources, by explicit comment on detail or views, paraphrasing or direct quotation (or if they use the sources only and show no additional knowledge), their mark will be limited to a maximum of the top of Level 2.
- Although there were fewer problems of timing than in Unit 1, some candidates clearly spent considerably longer than 15 minutes on the (a) questions and 30 minutes on the (b) questions, and consequently failed to complete their final answer. They should be reminded that even a couple of focused paragraphs could enable them to reach a Level 2 mark, whereas a string of notes would be unlikely to show skills above Level 1.
- It was clear from some scripts that candidates were not familiar with the complete content requirements for their alternative. Candidates must be reminded that they need to revise all of the content of these 'depth' units, particularly since this paper features one compulsory question which can be drawn from any part of the specification content, as can the remaining two questions, from which they have to choose one.

Report from the Principal Examiner

General Comments

The entry for this session was very small and therefore it may well not be representative of the Summer 2009 entry. Despite this, some overall comments may be made. All the candidates obeyed the rubric. The standard of English was sound. There was a clear attempt by most candidates to address the questions and there was little evidence of extensive irrelevancy. The majority of candidates were familiar with the material and it appeared as if centres had covered the specification effectively. There were some issues of examination technique which need to be considered by centres. It is essential that centres focus on the generic mark scheme in order to ensure that candidates make the most of their knowledge and understanding. There was a balanced uptake on the optional Questions 2 and 3.

Question 1

- (a) The quality of the responses to this question were very varied. There were some Level 1 answers, although these were very much in the minority. A larger number of candidates did not progress beyond Level 2. These candidates tended to identify relevant detail in the sources and make some comparisons, but these were predominantly linked to differences and the reference to similarities was meagre or simply not there. The best answers addressed the question directly and not only succeeded in identifying differences and similarities but also focused on the key instruction in the question, 'Explain how far...'. It is worth noting that those answers that did not explicitly state a similarity but clearly implicitly suggested one were rewarded.

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- (b) Many answers showed a reasonable working knowledge relevant to this question although there were a number who simply developed a narrative or descriptive approach and did not adequately consider the key instruction in the question, 'How important...'. Despite a handful of inadequate responses due to the lack of focus on the question, there were some sound responses. Such answers used both the sources and clear and relevant own knowledge. Candidates who were able to do this, even though their responses were often one-sided, were able to enter Level 3. There were a number of answers that showed understanding but lacked some depth in their comments. The best answers clearly displayed a balanced and well-argued response based on the sources and own knowledge.

Question 2

- (a) There were some rather narrow responses to this question. Many answers developed a limited range of reasons and then often did not develop an explanation of the reasons. Few candidates considered the wider contextual issues that influenced Kennedy's thinking. Although containment was understood by the majority of candidates there were few developed explanations of its significance. Few candidates considered the emergence of China as a communist state close to Vietnam. The specification does urge centres to develop a contextual understanding that may take candidates outside of the specified time frame. Some candidates showed that it was possible to reach Level 3 by defining a list of factors which were developed in detail. Centres need to understand that evaluation of the relative importance of the reasons is not required to achieve Level 4 but there must be an indication of the candidate's awareness of links between the factors. This latter point was not evident in many of the responses seen in this examination.
- (b) The key to producing a good answer to the (b) questions is to develop a balanced response. In terms of this question the issue is: did Kennedy favour increased US involvement in Vietnam or did he not? There is evidence to support both positions and identifying this, and making an evaluation of the relative importance of the detail, if done effectively, is the way to achieve a high mark. A number of candidates produced Level 2 responses because they wrote descriptive answers which merely outlined Kennedy's policies and did not address the key words in the question. It is important to develop both balance and range in answers to these questions, particularly for those candidates who seek high marks and the grades that go with them.

Question 3

- (a) As with Question 2(a) there were some narrow responses to this question. Vietnamisation was a fundamental element of Nixon's withdrawal strategy. Some candidates were only able to focus on that idea. The place of Vietnamisation in the wider menu of strategies was often not developed or understood by a number of candidates. In responding to part (a) questions it is important to place the reasons in a wider context, in order to enable candidates to develop a full explanation. Despite this, there were examples of sound understanding which was founded on an ability to identify a range of factors and develop links between them. This focus on links between the factors is an essential route to achieving a Level 4 outcome.

- (b) Candidates had the opportunity to consider the record of the US military in Vietnam over a period of time. This question enabled candidates to deploy their knowledge and understanding of America's presence in Vietnam across the whole period of the specification. Overall, the quality of the answers to this question was limited. Few candidates went beyond descriptive accounts of US military action and there was little evidence of developed understanding. Essentially examiners were looking for a balanced analysis which displayed evidence to back the proposition in the question and to challenge it effectively. Supporting detail is also crucial in the process of developing an effective commentary.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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