



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

History 2041

Unit HIS3E

Report on the Examination

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Unit HIS3E

Unit 3E: France and the Enlightenment: Absolutism Under Threat, 1743–1789

General Comments

Candidates generally answered in an impressive, sophisticated manner. Indeed, the standard of essay writing was high with some good, balanced and reasoned argument. These were a real pleasure to read. Perhaps slightly less convincing was the depth of subject knowledge offered and especially the ability to marshal specific dates, names and events in a focused manner.

There seemed to be very few issues with time management, and all offered lengthy responses that culminated in a conclusion. It is clear that candidates are being well prepared for the stylistic demands of essay papers, especially in conveying balanced points.

There was no overwhelmingly popular choice of question although Question 2 possibly proved to be marginally more favoured. This perhaps is no surprise considering how central financial affairs are in the course.

Question 1

01 This was answered well in general, with some good, balanced argument seen at the higher level. However, some candidates seem to have rushed into a response without really considering the precise demands. At the lower levels there seemed to be less focus on the issue of motivation, but more commonly there was much less of a convincing appreciation of self-interest. Indeed, there was a sizable minority that described events involving the magistrates and then simply asserted at the end of the section ‘and this shows self-interest’. This type of response struggled to advance out of the narrative levels. Of the candidates that did focus on motivation, there were some at the middle levels that struggled to find factors other than self interest. Whilst there was a sound identification of magistrates challenging the will of the king, there was much less awareness that this might have been done for reasons other than a desire to avoid taxation. The contemporary concern with ministerial despotism was simply dismissed in many responses as a ruse for naked material ambition from the parlements. Indeed, it was at times quite depressing to read accounts of how all magistrates selfishly sought to block reform with little appreciation that some of the demands for reform actually sprang from this group. At the higher levels, candidates identified that some magistrates may have advanced causes for reasons of conscience – such as enlightened thinkers or indeed Jansenists. Indeed, some were able to discuss events such as the Maupeou years and suggest that the parlements were the victims of arbitrary and centralising government – their motivations and fears having been proven correct. Moreover, there were some very impressive responses that argued the Parlements as a group were beginning to band together in the Union des Classes simply in response to aggression from without, and commented upon their defence by enlightened writers and pamphleteers. Unfortunately, those candidates that had not really considered that the magistrates as a group, or indeed even as individuals, might have been principled in their actions, tried to locate balance by suggesting that the Parlementaires were not the only self interested group and then embarked on a rather pessimistic survey of all groups in France that were also in it for the

money. The response that considered a range of possible motives for the actions of the Parlements did very well indeed.

Question 2

- 02** This question was answered very well and it was clear that candidates had prepared for this topic.

There was some very good subject knowledge on display and almost all candidates observed the dates given in the question. The very best answers were clearly balanced, although this proved troublesome for some candidates who, whilst strong on financial failure, struggled to even identify policies that worked if only in the short term. This was surprising considering the centrality of the Maupeou years to discussions of many aspects of this period. At the mid-level range, candidates were able to discuss some of the more generic aspects of financial policy, mentioning most commonly topics such as corruption and the inequitable taxation system, but they did struggle to go deeper than this to discuss policies specific to the period. At the higher levels there was a clear understanding of the reforms attempted with knowledge of dates and the names of the Controller-Generals. There was some very good analysis of the attempts to introduce free trade, and also of the tensions produced by the Physiocrats. Necker, and especially the *Compte Rendu* was known by many at this level, although it was the clear minority that saw the *Compte Rendu* as an honest attempt by Necker to establish confidence in the finances of the Crown. Generally this question was answered well and was a very good discriminator of those who had revised the period well.

Question 3

- 03** This question elicited a full range of quality in response. There were some truly outstanding responses that had looked at this particular period in some depth; however there were, at the other extreme, candidates who were unable to marshal much information specific to the period at all. In addition, it became obvious that some Centres were teaching quite some way beyond the dates set in the specification. Whilst this is admirable in providing a good breadth of education and perhaps even developing a good degree of independent learning, it is worth emphasising to candidates that they cannot be awarded for material outside of the dates given in the specification. Hence commentary on the Terror as evidence for the collapse of royal authority, whilst interesting as a passing comment, cannot be credited. On a similar theme, some candidates embarked on lengthy descriptions of the execution of Louis XVI; whilst not only limiting precisely because it is narrative, it is clearly outside the specification and therefore not worthy of reward. The content of the specification ends with the first meeting of the Estates General symbolic of the end of the Old Regime. The period 1787 to 1789 is a separate section listed in the specification and should therefore be given just as much weight in teaching and learning as the other 3 sections.

Most commonly, candidates at the higher levels were able to offer some very convincing balance, suggesting that, whilst the calling of the Estates General may have appeared to be a failure of royal authority, it may also be seen as an attempt to circumvent the parlements and their by now very vocal demands for a role in the constitution. Another argument given due credit was one that identified the parlements as a major opposition to financial reform and saw the Estates General as evidence that the King was unable to assert his will against them. In all, there were some very interesting arguments from candidates that had revised the period well.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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