



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2012**

**History 1041**

**Unit HIS2Q**

***Report on the Examination***

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## *Unit HIS2Q*

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

#### **General Comments**

This examination revealed an impressive degree of knowledge amongst many students. It was also very clear that examination technique had been a focal point for students' preparation. Students seemed to have a better awareness of how to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme and the characteristics that answers needed to display in order to do so. One issue that does remain is that of them producing answers which simply read as an extended list of factors. The approach adopted in answering Questions 03 and 05 was often replicated in the responses to Questions 04 and 06, which need to be approached differently. Answers to the latter were often presented as a list of factors agreeing with the proposition in the question and then a further list disagreeing with it. The focus seemed to be more on developing the range rather than developing a more integrated and balanced analysis.

#### **Question 1**

- 01** Many students demonstrated a sound understanding of the basic approach that should be adopted when addressing this type of question. There were very few examples of answers which simply described the content of each source and then left it to the reader to identify the extent to which the views in the sources differed, or which simply focused on either differences or similarities. This positive approach of defining both differences and similarities of views ensured that many answers were able to enter at least Level 3. Having suggested that most students seemed to have a good examination technique in terms of this question, there were some exceptions. A significant number concentrated solely on the sources and made few, if any, references to their own knowledge. This instruction is clearly defined in the opening sentence of the question. Thankfully, relatively few students suggested a difference between the sources because a point was made in one source but was not referred to in the other.
- 02** There were very few examples of answers which failed to consider both the sources and relevant own knowledge. Once again, this suggests a growing awareness of the basic requirements of this type of question. Many answers were able to establish a clear balance and did so by developing a good range of detail drawn both from the sources and from any own knowledge. The best of these focused on careful assessments of both the military and the political impact of the events for both sides. Relatively few answers simply took the view that Tet was clearly a victory for the USA. There was a genuine attempt by many students to establish a balanced and argued assessment of the outcomes of Tet, both in the immediate aftermath and in the medium term. This often led to the production of some well-crafted conclusions which defined a judgement on this question. Weaker answers tended to rely heavily on the sources and then include some detail almost as an afterthought. Such often took the view that Tet was both a victory and a defeat for both sides. In this way every possibility was covered and no precise judgement arrived at.

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**Question 2**

- 03** There were many responses to this question. Many students displayed an impressive range of knowledge and understanding. The majority of answers referred to both the strengths of the Vietcong and the failures of the Americans and the South Vietnamese government. References to the My Lai massacre were fairly frequent although these were viewed more favourably if they were developed as being illustrative of some aspects of US treatment of the South Vietnamese people, rather than simply free-standing descriptions of a particularly awful incident. There were some very effective efforts to establish linkage between the factors by adopting a thematic approach and considering the political, social and economic reasons. Many other students were able to exhibit linkage through the depth of explanation that often existed in the answers. There was a good understanding of the political appeal of the Vietcong and the varied methods it used to win the hearts and minds of many South Vietnamese peasants. The detail present helped a number of answers to enter Level 3 even if the range of reasons was not fully developed. The weaker answers tended to merely recycle a point and thereby became narrow in the coverage.
- 04** This question produced answers that displayed a wide range of quality. Some answers were rather narrow in scope, although these were fairly few in number. Many students clearly had sound knowledge on the reasons for the escalation under Johnson. The issue was not so much that students lacked knowledge but rather that a number were unable to deploy that knowledge in order to show a balanced argument and explicit understanding leading to a judgement. Weaker answers often simply developed what was an extended list of factors and made little attempt to address the requirement for explanation and the analysis implied in that process. Better answers attempted to not only identify the factors but also to assess their relative importance and support this with well selected supporting detail. There were some sophisticated assessments of Johnson's personal commitment compared to the importance of the USA's long-standing commitment to containment and the global role the USA had established by 1965. The use of relevant contextual material was a very effective means available for students to display their understanding. Many answers widened the debate to include sound references to the role of Congress and the impact of the popular support that Johnson initially enjoyed, as well as the political and military challenges Johnson faced.

**Question 3**

- 05** Responses to this question varied in quality but the majority provided a good range of factors linking the Watergate affair to Nixon's approach to Vietnam and US withdrawal. Particular focus was given to the loss of Congressional confidence and the collapse of public support for Nixon himself. Many students argued that Watergate influenced Nixon's decisions well before the affair became public and, for example, referred to Nixon's determination to develop policy towards Vietnam which would cushion the negative impact of Watergate on him personally and on his administration. While weaker answers tended to be confined to a domestic political perspective or to offer simple narratives, most students were able to assess the contribution of the Watergate affair to US policy (as demanded by the Specification) in the context of an established withdrawal from Vietnam. Some went on to explore other factors that contributed to the withdrawal and where such material was made relevant to the question and appropriate links were established, it was rewarded.

- 06** Many students were able to develop well-structured and balanced responses to this question. Impressive detail was deployed as supporting evidence for some well-founded judgements and conclusions. There were some perceptive analyses of Nixon's policies and the agenda that underpinned them. Some answers were able to take the same event and analyse it from both the perspective of commitment to protecting South Vietnam and then show the opposite view. Vietnamisation is an example of such an event. There was some effective use of contextual knowledge and understanding. Some answers attempted to develop comparisons between Nixon's actions and those of Johnson and often suggested that Nixon was clearly less committed to protecting Vietnam and more focused on protecting himself and the USA. A range of good answers considered Nixon's policies in terms of the emergence of détente. Weaker responses tended to resort to purely narrative detail or to make comments that lacked any explanatory depth.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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