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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE History
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Introduction

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in this, the third year of the reformed AS Level Paper 2C which covers the options Anglo-Saxon England and the Anglo-Norman Kingdom, c1053-1106 (2A.1), and England and the Angevin Empire in the reign of Henry II, 1154-1189 (2A.2). The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question for the option studied, each part based on one source. It assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting five second order concepts – cause, consequence, change/continuity, similarity/difference and significance.

Generally speaking, candidates found Section A more challenging mainly because some of them were still not clear on what was meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. The detailed knowledge base required in Section A to add contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources was also often absent. Having said this, although a few responses were quite brief, there was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions from Sections A and B. The ability range was diverse, but the design of the paper allowed all abilities to be catered for. Furthermore, in Section B, few candidates produced wholly descriptive essays which were devoid of analysis and, for the most part, responses were soundly structured. The most common weakness in Section B essays was a lack of knowledge. It is important to realise that Section A and Section B questions may be set from any part of any Key Topic, and, as a result, full coverage of the specification is enormously important.

The candidates' performance on individual questions is considered in the next section.

Question 1(a)

Candidates generally understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and use it to comment on the relationship between William I and the Papacy. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the perceived encroachment on the rights of the monarchy and contrasted with the wider support for the Church as demonstrated by William's readiness to pay Peter's pence. The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity. Candidates would do well to remember that contextual knowledge does need to be used to explain and develop the inferences drawn from the source and not just to provide free-standing knowledge. Some candidates were able to use the attributes of the source effectively to develop their ideas about its value to the historians. Those candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of part a responses.

Question 1 (b)

Candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to address the question. There were some effective answers that weighed up the strengths and limitations of the source and used this as a basis to reach a judgement about the weight that should be attached to the source for the enquiry. There are a substantial number of candidates who do not understand that 'weight' relates to reliability and use the term as a substitute for value. This does impact on the quality of their argument. It was also clear that some candidates did not have the contextual knowledge to explain inferences and assess the validity of the claims made by Orderic Vitalis and that undermined their answers.

Question 2 (a)

Candidates were able to understand the source and the focus of the question on the role of the chancellor in Henry II's government. The most effective responses developed inferences from the source material and integrated the source with their knowledge of the chancellor's role to argue for example that the chancellor was the most significant official in the government. Some candidates knew a great deal about the role of the chancellor but did not link it to source material and this meant the answer could not access the higher levels in the mark scheme. There are no AO1 marks available in Section A. Few candidates really engaged with the attributes of the source to allow them to develop a secure evaluation of the utility of the source. Very few picked up on the nature and purpose of the source as an essay specifically written to train clerks in the business of the Exchequer and used that to establish value.

Question 2 (b)

There were some good responses to this question in which candidates made effective use of the source and were able to develop valid reasons for attributing weight to it. However, quite a large number of candidates' responses wandered from the focus of the task and developed lengthy answers from their knowledge focused on the quarrel between Henry II and Becket. In discussing the reliability of the source many candidates argued that as the only version of the event it might need to be approached with caution since it could not be verified by other accounts but very few considered that the only account of an event would be highly valued by an historian and would supply what little knowledge we have of the settlement.

SECTION B

In option 2A.1 the most popular question was Question 3. In option 2A.2 the most popular question was Question 6. Many of candidates were able to produce analytical responses and therefore achieved at least Level 3. Most candidates demonstrated some accurate and relevant knowledge.

Most answers were clearly structured, with an introduction, a main body of several paragraphs and a conclusion. Most candidates also avoided mixing up major points in a single paragraph. This allowed them to develop clear arguments and develop a judgement. However, a noticeable minority of candidates avoided judgement by concluding that all factors were equally important or were rather non-committal in terms of success and failure.

Question 3

There were a small number of responses to this question which were awarded marks across the different levels. Whilst the weaker responses tended to have limited knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon economy and the silver penny in particular, the more effective answers examined the silver penny, the system of taxation and trading patterns. The best responses were not only well informed but also concentrated on the conceptual focus of the question – significance. These responses developed clear criteria for judging the significance of the silver penny within the Anglo-Saxon economy.

Question 4

There were only 2 responses to this question. The answers showed limited knowledge and tended to confuse Scotland with the north of England. There was a lack of focus on the concept.

Question 5

This was the most popular question in Option 2A.1. Most candidates developed a range of consequences of the Conquest including the impact on the aristocracy, the legal system, William's treatment of rebels and the consequences for trade and village life. The achievement of candidates varied according to their analytical focus, coherence in argument and precision in use of knowledge. Some responses offered little on the given factor and hence struggled to achieve in the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Question 6

This was the most popular question in Option 2A.2. There were some well-focused responses that debated the obstacles to Henry II in 1154 and supported ideas with relevant and sufficient knowledge. However, many candidates struggled to focus on the time period and extended well into Henry's reign discussing problems with Becket and measures introduced much later in Henry's reign such as the Assizes of Northampton. This had limited relevance to the question that was focused on Henry's immediate problems in 1154. Material about Henry's territory outside England was also not relevant. The best responses considered some of the following factors: the establishment of semi-autonomous 'kingdoms' by the barons, minting of coinage, Debasement, mercenaries, illegal castles, the role of the king of the Scots.

Question 7

The majority of responses to this question were well-focused on causation and supported with detailed knowledge resulting in many scoring highly in level 3 and level 4. Answers developed a good range of reasons for Henry's decision to conquer Ireland including John's need for land, the desire to appease the Church and the need to deal with Strongbow. The most effective responses developed very clear criteria for judgement, e.g. the fact that Henry had not shown any interest in Ireland before his problems with the Church or the immediate need to respond to Strongbow's challenge.

Question 8

This was the least popular essay on Henry II. There were some focused answers looking at Henry's extension of power over Scotland and Wales and his enforcement of the law through the Assizes of Northampton and the Assize of Arms. Some examined the importance of the re-coinage in 1180. There were also relevant arguments about Henry's continued failure to control his sons. However, some candidates looked more extensively at Henry's relationship with the king of France after 1174 and this had less relevance as the question focus was on the extension of 'royal power'.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(a)/2(a))

- Candidates must be more prepared to make valid inferences rather than to paraphrase the source
- Be prepared to back up inferences by adding additional contextual knowledge from beyond the source
- Move beyond stereotypical approaches to the nature/purpose and authorship of the source e.g. look at the specific stance and/or purpose of the writer
- Avoid writing about the deficiencies of the source when assessing its value to the enquiry.

Weight of Source Question (1(b)/2(b))

- Candidates should be prepared to assess the weight of the source for an enquiry by being aware that the author is writing for a specific audience. Be aware of the values and concerns of that audience.

In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to use contextual knowledge to support/challenge statements and claims made in the source

- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- In coming to a judgement about the nature/purpose of the source, take account of the weight you may be able to give to the author's evidence in the light of his or her stance and/or purpose
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to assess reliability by considering what has been perhaps deliberately omitted from the source. However, simply stating that a source is limited because it does not cover certain events or developments does not establish weight since no source can be comprehensive.

Section B

Essay questions

- Candidates must provide more factual details as evidence. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Take a few minutes to plan your answer before you begin to write your response
- Pick out three or four key themes and then provide an analysis of (for e.g.) the target significance mentioned in the question, setting its importance against other themes rather than providing a description of each

- Pay more careful attention to key phrases in the question when analysing and use them throughout the essay to prevent deviation from the central issues and concepts
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.