



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1E

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

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Unit HIS1E

Unit 1E: Absolutist States: The Reign of Louis XIV, 1661–1715

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

There were many very good responses to this paper, and it is clear that a large number of candidates are already being very well prepared for the demands of this paper. Especially impressive was the depth of subject knowledge displayed and the ability shown by many to craft a focused and substantiated response to essay style questions. It was exceptionally pleasing to see such strength from a large proportion of candidates.

Only a small minority of candidates infringed the rubrics in some way – largely by only answering one question. It is perhaps worth emphasising to candidates that two of the three set questions must be answered, rather than simply sections (a) and (b) from one. In addition there were a few candidates that ran out of time. An easy rule of thumb for this paper would be to treat the mark allocation as a rough indication of the number of minutes that should be allocated to each question. In addition, some candidates offered some very detailed responses but unfortunately failed to consider the period set by the question. In order to allow candidates sufficient time in which to construct their answers, it will often be the case that a question will ask for consideration of only part of the chronological spread of the specification. Unfortunately, candidates that write substantially outside of this period will rarely be given any credit at all unless such material is offered in the form of a very brief context clearly linked to the

chronological focus. Candidates might therefore be well-advised to take time to consider the precise demands of each question and to occasionally re-read the question as they progress through their response.

By far the most popular choice was Question 1, closely followed by Question 2. Question 3 was answered by a smaller proportion of candidates and, generally it was well answered.

Responses to **Section (a)** type questions were strong, however there was a far greater range of achievement on this section than on the (b) questions. It might be worthwhile reminding candidates about the demands of this question. The clear focus is on offering an explanation for an event, and certainly not simply describing what happened. Stronger answers tended to offer more than one reason, and in the vast majority of cases more than three – indeed this should be the aim of all candidates. In addition, the ideal response tended to try to link these factors in a manner that went beyond a list. Most commonly, the links between factors were established by arguing a clear priority, established from the very outset in the form of an introduction. Slightly weaker responses tended to assert some form of priority either in the introduction and/or conclusion, but failed to give evidence throughout to why this might be the case. The weakest responses to this type of question focused on only one or two factors and did little more than identify the motives rather than developing points from own knowledge. In 12 minutes writing time, candidates should be able to not only develop the motives beyond identification and to make comparisons between them, but to also arrive at a conclusion that clearly states the most significant reason for an event, or indeed linking the factors in some other way.

Responses to **Section (b)** type questions were very good as candidates had clearly practised this type of question in preparation for the exam. The somewhat predictable comments about exactly what makes a good essay response might be made, although it was very pleasing to note that very few answers offered an exclusively narrative response. The objective is, of course, for candidates to offer some sort of assessment of the focus issue set in the question. If asked ‘How successful’ then in order to offer balance, and thereby access the higher levels, candidates should consider reasons for and also reasons against. Again, the better type of response tended to do this throughout the answer rather than limiting evaluation simply to the introduction and/or conclusion. It is also worth emphasising that historiography is not expected. In a question that asks candidates to consider ‘How important’ then the best answers will consider a range of factors clearly placing the focus factor within some sort of priority.

Question 1

- (a) There were some very strong responses to this question by candidates able to offer a good range of factors. The vast majority were able to offer more than two or three factors and quite a large number did this in a developed manner. Most candidates who linked responses in an impressive manner argued that the prime motive for Versailles was Louis XIV’s desire to assert his authority at home by means of bureaucratic centralisation, and also a desire to impress foreign visitors. Many candidates were able to mention good specific evidence in support of this including the ceremonies at court, the Hall of Mirrors and the Ambassadors’ Staircase. A minority of responses launched upon lengthy, but largely irrelevant, descriptions of Versailles itself, whilst some struggled to move beyond vague assertions that Louis XIV wanted a more impressive residence. Even the better responses tended to struggle with the spelling of Versailles.

- (b) This question was answered very well by the majority of candidates able to offer specific evidence to support their points. It was clear that well prepared candidates had already considered authority as an issue and were therefore able to construct a confident and well structured analysis. However, a significant number of candidates resorted to assertion suggesting that Louis XIV was indeed successful but failed to offer much in the way of support. The specific events that might have been mentioned, including the dismissal of Fouquet, the ending of pre-registration remonstrance in 1673, and Louis XIV's attempts to establish religious uniformity were largely the preserve of the more successful candidate. A number of responses spent an inordinate amount of time attempting to argue that success in foreign policy meant that Louis was successful as a monarch but failed to explain how this might have helped him to maintain absolute authority. Interestingly, most of the lower level responses focused exclusively on the one factor of finance – these responses rarely moved beyond a description of the Estates. The better use of finance as a factor argued that Louis XIV's failure to permanently and directly tax the first and second Estates proved that he failed as an absolute monarch. This of course assumes rather tentatively that Louis XIV ever intended to establish such an equitable system of taxation. Unfortunately, a number of candidates failed to focus on the dates set in the question and many did not mention Versailles as a factor in the extension of Louis XIV's authority. This was rather surprising given the focus of the (a) question. The very best answers considered both sides of the debate but did so throughout their response, rather than confining their argument to the conclusion.

Question 2

- (a) This question was answered very well indeed. It was clear that the vast majority of candidates at least had some idea of the immediate causes of the war – especially the will of Carlos II. Indeed, there were some very detailed and, unfortunately, narrative accounts of the crisis surrounding the ailing King of Spain. It was the ability to go beyond this central factor that determined which candidates would advance to the higher levels. This type of question demands a good range of factors that are well developed and, ideally, compared. The better answers argued a case for priority rather than simply giving a narrative of the years prior to the war. There were some exceptionally good answers that placed factors into long-term and short-term, arguing that the motive for war came primarily from Louis XIV and was merely a component of a consistent desire for territorial and dynastic security. In this sense the will of Carlos II was merely a fortunate excuse for Louis to achieve his long standing objectives. Alternatively, there were equally highly credited responses that argued Louis XIV had no intention of fighting the War of Spanish Succession – using the Partition Treaties as evidence – and that the war was a consequence of Louis XIV's overly ambitious foreign policy that had alienated many other powers. Crucially, if a candidate remained focused on argument rather than description; argued a case from the outset of their response and offered a good range of factors, they tended to do very well.
- (b) There was a full range in the quality of response to this question. Unfortunately, at the lower end, responses were marred by a lack of substantial subject knowledge, relying on somewhat vague assertions about glory. This type of candidate was rarely able to offer many specifics, even to the extent of the terms or names of treaties. Some of the higher levels tended to be awarded to responses that established what Louis XIV's objectives were, and argued a case to why one area of foreign policy was the most successful. However, this depth of knowledge is not a pre-requisite for high award – all candidates are required to display is a good evaluation of reasons for and against the notion of success; however this should be supported by specific evidence. A number of candidates failed to notice the dates set in the question and launched upon a general critique of Louis' entire foreign policy which could not be credited. Conversely, quite a number of responses only considered the War of Spanish Succession and said nothing of other conflicts in the

period. Higher quality responses went far beyond a description of foreign policy and offered good reasons throughout their response, arguing a consistent case for or against success.

Question 3

- (a) This question was answered reasonably well with the majority of candidates able to name the actual taxes. The very best responses gave a range of factors and assessed their relative importance within a consistent argument. Some very good responses argued that the two emergency taxes of the period were in fact a reflection of longer term attempts to establish a more equitable taxation system. However, most responded correctly balanced this by arguing that the Capitation and Dixieme were little more than emergency taxes that had often been levied in the past in moments of apparent crisis. The identification of long term and short term factors worked very well in response to this question with many responses identifying Louis XIV's expensive foreign policy and the construction of Versailles as at least contributing factors to the financial crisis. All candidates, even those at the lower level, were able to identify the War of Spanish Succession as an immediate short term factor for one of the taxes, but it was only the best answers that could offer specific evidence in support of the depth of the problem.
- (b) This type of question is a popular one for candidates that prepare well. This is especially true considering the centrality of Colbert to a study of this period. However, it is worth noting that whilst questions that demand coverage of the entire period certainly do not expect a comprehensive or indeed balanced view of the whole chronological spread, there should have been, in this case at least, some effort to consider factors after 1683. In addition, candidates would be well advised to be clear on the differences between economic and financial factors. Unfortunately a number of responses devoted lengthy sections to reforms of trade and industry which, without explicit explanation of links, cannot be credited on a question about finances. However, there were a good number of high quality responses from candidates that were able to give lengthy analysis of the success of taxation policies and also gave a good explanation of how improved trade brought in more money for the treasury. A number of candidates advanced the reasonable argument that finances must have been successful as Louis XIV remained able to fight his wars throughout the whole length of his reign although some advanced this further by illustrating the degree of debt by 1715. Whilst such arguments are not strictly focused on the issue of reform to the financial system, many at least managed an implicit focus. Pleasingly very few responses to this question were overly narrative and again many had clearly been well-prepared by centres.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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