



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1F

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2009 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334). Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX
Dr Michael Cresswell Director General.

Unit HIS1F

Unit 1F: France in Revolution, 1774–1815

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

The candidates who presented themselves for the examination in this session showed a reasonable general awareness of the factors leading to the French Revolution as demanded in Question 1 but knowledge of the Republic and the Terror, examined in Question 2, was far less secure and there was scarcely any attempt to respond to Question 3 on Napoleonic Rule in France. The lack of command of appropriate information, particularly for Question 2, led to some excessive generalisation in answers and whilst most candidates showed some understanding of appropriate technique, they were not always able to back their comments and ideas with suitably selected or precise evidence.

Question 1

- (a) The reasons for French financial problems were broadly understood and there were plentiful references to the costs of war, the vagaries of the taxation system and sometimes also to the incompetence or incapacity of Louis XVI and his Ministers. Occasionally answers became sidetracked into discussions of down-trodden peasants suffering bad harvests and lost the focus on 'financial crisis'. However, the most frequent problem was

the failure of students to explain why the financial crisis was so acute in 1786 to 1788. Those who paid insufficient attention to the dates given in the question and provided only generalised and unspecific explanations were unable to access the higher marks. Furthermore, there were few candidates who made any explicit attempt to show how the various factors linked together, making connections, for example, between war, loans, interest and debt.

- (b) Many candidates were able to make general links between the attempts to reform the French financial system and the coming of the revolution. However, two issues arose. In some cases those links were more implicit than explicit and such candidates easily diverged into a discussion of why the financial problems of the Ancien Regime provoked revolution, rather than the 'attempts to reform'. The other issue concerns what candidates understood by the 'outbreak of the French Revolution'. Scarcely any attempted to define this, which would have given the essay a clearer focus. Some assumed it was the storming of the Bastille, some the creation of National Assembly, some the events to the end of 1789. It was quite possible for candidates to argue a case for any of these being caused or not caused by attempts to reform the royal finances, but some finished up with a rather woolly response which, in some cases, degenerated into a description of events after May 1789.

Question 2

- (a) The knowledge displayed in response to this question was variable. Far too many candidates thought that the execution of Louis XVI was necessary in order to launch a Republic, there were minimal references to the National Convention, and indeed some referred to the decisions of the National Assembly, and most tried to explain why Louis was found guilty, rather than why he was executed. As in 1(a) answers were frequently very generalised, with descriptions of Louis's mistakes and failings rather than demonstrating a clear awareness of the reasons for his execution. A stronger short-term focus would have benefited many candidates here.
- (b) Many candidates struggled with the demands of this question. Whilst there was some broad awareness of the Terror and Robespierre's part in it, only a few better candidates were able to address his unpopularity and evaluate whether this was the most important reason for the collapse of the Terror. Some sensibly referred to Robespierre's excesses and a few knew about the impact of the Cult of the Supreme Being, although there was a lot of confusion over the dechristianisation campaigns. The execution of Danton and Hébert were rarely mentioned and the crucial importance of Robespierre's loss of support from the sans-culottes was often passed over. Furthermore, candidates struggled to balance Robespierre's unpopularity against other reasons for the collapse of the Terror, which was essential for a high-scoring answer.

Question 3

There were no meaningful answers seen.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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