



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1L

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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Unit HIS1L

Unit 1L: Britain, 1906–1951

General Comments

In this third sitting of examination for Unit HIS1L of the current History Specification the paper proved to be accessible for the majority of candidates. Questions 1 and 2 received the highest number of responses but candidates from a number of centres did choose to answer Question 3. This was pleasing to see as the topic came from the chronological end of the Specification. However, Question 3 proved to be more difficult for candidates than Questions 1 and 2. Overall the (a) questions allowed candidates with relatively limited knowledge to make valid generalised points, for example about the costs of the Second World War in answering 3(a).

The vast majority of candidates found the time allowed of one and a quarter hours manageable in terms of answering two full questions. A few spent rather too much time on answering the (a) questions which carried 12 marks each to the relative neglect of the higher tariff (b) questions carrying 24 marks each.

Another small minority chose to answer each (b) question before its accompanying (a) question, or in a few cases to answer both (b) questions before the (a) questions. These approaches are not recommended as there was a tendency for material included in the response to the (b) question to be repeated in part (a). Answering the part questions in the 'wrong order' led to loss of continuity (in terms of knowledge and understanding) between the two parts of each single full question.

Marks awarded to individual candidates ranged from the maximum of 72 to those in single figures. Scripts which achieved high marks, addressed the assessment objectives within the context and content of writing about particular historical issues with deployment of knowledge relevantly, communicated their understanding effectively, analysed and had conceptual awareness. Answers which received the lowest marks almost always displayed very limited secure knowledge, or were confused, or generalised. Most candidates performed fairly evenly across their responses, although for a significant minority performance lacked balance in that one question was decidedly better answered than the other.

Quality of Written Communication was generally satisfactory. Very few scripts were illegible to the point of the examiner not being able to follow the argument or point being made. The main spelling mistakes of proper nouns were of 'Ramsay MacDonald', 'Snowden', 'Keynesianism', 'Mosley' and 'Attlee'. In Question 3 responses there was some confusion between Bevin and Bevan. A significant minority used the word 'where' when they meant 'were', and others 'of' instead of 'have'. There was an increasing tendency to use phrases such as 'this might have been a reason', or 'this could have' giving the impression that the candidate was far from confident in putting forward an argument.

Question 1

- (a) Question 1 was the most popular on the paper. Marks awarded ranged from the maximum to the minimum. The main weakness in many responses was to write very little, or even ignore, the role of the TUC, about which the question asked. A minority did consider in some depth the reasons for the TUC calling the Strike and made the key point that the miners formed the vanguard of the trade union movement and that if they were defeated in their demands there was little chance that other unions and workers would be able to resist demands for lowering of wages and poorer conditions emanating from employers and/or the government. Those who did make this connection gained at least marks at the top of Level 3 with most awarded Level 4 marks.

The majority of candidates concentrated on the position of the miners and their union. Most looked at long term causes of the economic situation for owners and miners by the spring of 1926 by identifying lack of modernisation, loss of markets, conditions in the mines and the consequences of the 1925 return to the Gold Standard.

Not as many responses were as detailed, or had a range of reasons on the short term causes of the miners' strike, or lockout. However, a good proportion of answers did refer to factors such as the Samuel Commission, the (ending) of the subsidy, the 'Triple Alliance', the determination of Cook and Smith, action of the *Daily Mail* printers and Baldwin's failure to 'talk'.

Weaker answers did see the miners' strike as a consequence of argument between the miners' union and the government with hardly a mention of the owners. A few believed that miners worked in factories. Overall those answers, which received marks at the lower end of Level 2 or indeed in Level 1, gave only generalised reasons and/or largely ignored the link between the Miners Federation and the wider trade union movement as represented by the TUC.

- (b) Most candidates were able to consider the actions of the government and then other factors accounting for the failure of the Strike, mostly connected with the issues for the TUC. Again the weakest responses with marks in the low end of Level 2, or in Level 1, were generalised and lacked exemplar illustrative evidence of the points being made. In a few cases there was very little knowledge of any kind or gross inaccuracy.

A very small number of responses misinterpreted the question as 'why did the government not prevent the General Strike from happening' rather than on the failure of the Strike itself. Some confused the General and miners' strikes, either regarding them as one and the same, or believing that the miners returned to work after nine days.

Answers which gained marks in Level 3 and the higher Levels were able to illustrate the general points made, e.g. about government preparation by identifying measures taken during the nine months period of the subsidy such as stockpiling, use of the armed forces, police and emergency services. Only a small number of candidates were familiar with the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS), though most referred to the use of volunteers and implementation of the Emergency Powers Act. Fewer considered the role of propaganda such as Baldwin's use of the radio and Churchill's *British Gazette*, though most considered the constitutional issue.

Most responses, though with differing levels of depth or development, also looked at the weaknesses of the TUC, such as division among its members (with Bevin and Thomas seen as moderates) about the aim of the General Strike, its growing concern about

constitutional legality and what could be seen as a revolutionary weapon, and eventual split with the miners' leaders. There was reference to the intransigence of Cook and Smith.

Throughout the range of responses from the best to the weakest there was a tendency to underestimate how much support there was for the General Strike and take a rather dogmatic view about public opinion overall not backing the TUC or the miners. On the other hand stronger answers did indicate a class divide of working class support for the strikers and middle and upper class opposition. Only the best responses really indicated explicitly that there were different historical interpretations for the failure of the General Strike. Some indicated the lack of support from the Labour Party. Overall this question was an excellent discriminator in terms of the standards in the range of responses.

Question 2

- (a) This question was answered overall quite successfully. There were, however, a few candidates who were confused and wrote about the fall of the first Labour government in 1924 and could not receive marks for this irrelevant material. Strangely, rather more included the Zinoviev Letter as a reason for the fall of the government in 1931 but otherwise considered relevant reasons pertaining to 1931.

As in both parts of Question 1, most responses ranged from the generalised to the well-informed. The former, with marks no higher than in Level 2, identified economic problems and were mostly stronger on the Wall Street Crash, the 'Depression' generally and rising unemployment, but weaker on the key issues of consequent financial problems for the government arising from the amount of unemployment benefit being paid out and the problems of securing foreign loans. At the lower Levels not many referred to the minority status of the government.

Stronger responses in Levels 3 and 4 did identify the minority position in the Commons as a problem for Labour, rejection of Keynesian solutions promoted by Mosley, the orthodox financial policies especially for a balanced budget pursued by MacDonald and Snowden, the difficulties raised by the May Report, division in the cabinet and the unacceptability of MacDonald's final proposals to the Labour Party. Most saw his 'attempted resignation as Premier and formation of the National government as the final reason for the end of the Labour government. Responses which achieved marks in Level 4 including the maximum mark linked these reasons together and in particular showed the relationship between the government's financial crisis and the overall political situation.

- (b) This question proved to be a good discriminator. Many found it quite difficult to keep within the parameters of 1931–1935. The two main flaws occurring in many answers were to look at the whole decade of the 1930s rather than just the years 1931 to 1935 and actions of the MacDonald National government, and to fail to distinguish between governmental policies and wider factors in terms of economic change or recovery. Such answers, for the most part, received marks in Level 2 unless there was more focus on the first half of the decade (and a competent attempt at assessment) when they achieved Level 3 marks.

There was a small minority of candidates who chose to write about the economic issues for the Labour government in 1931, often repeating material used in answering part (a). At best they received marks in Level 1. Most candidates mentioned leaving the Gold Standard, though not all were certain whether this helped British exports.

Responses which were awarded marks in Levels 4 and 5 contained a range of relevant material on government actions, for example, the adoption of protection, cuts in unemployment benefit and public sector pay, the Special Areas Act, 'and cheap money' linked to the building of houses. Such answers took a critical approach, for example to the limitations of the Special Areas Act or the lack of money in the economy especially at the beginning of the period to boost consumer spending. Many noted that, though assisting economic recovery, abandonment of the Gold Standard and the advent of low interest rates were ironically 'forced' upon the government rather than being positive policies. Though some candidates achieved marks in the highest Levels by focusing on assessing the degree of success achieved by the MacDonald National government in dealing with the economic crisis on the basis of government actions alone, most at these Levels also considered the importance of wider factors, such as the development of new industries and the beginnings of world trade recovery around 1934 based on American economic recovery.

Question 3

- (a) This question was the least popular (with about one quarter of the candidature attempting it) and also the least well-answered question on the paper. Many of the responses to part (a) were generalised with a high proportion of such answers confined to attributing causation of the economic problems to the damage from wartime and the debts accumulated by Britain, with a few making reference to 'the harsh winter'.

Some candidates spent time explaining why the Marshall Plan was so important but were essentially writing about post-1947 developments. Such answers did not gain credit beyond the lowest two Levels. Those candidates who were awarded marks in Level 3 and the rather small number gaining Level 4 marks did enumerate a number of reasons with some illustrative evidence and also had development. They included recognition that physical problems necessitated the building of houses, infrastructure and industry, the last of which required the massive change from a wartime to a peacetime economy. They illustrated the debt problems by reference to the ending of Lend-Lease arrangements and Keynes' efforts to obtain (the quickly used up) loan from the USA. Some considered the convertibility crisis.

The harsh winter of 1946–1947 was identified as producing economic problems, not least for the newly nationalised coal industry. Some also recognised the economic and financial burden of the empire and other overseas commitments, a few mentioning the withdrawal of British troops from Greece and Turkey for financial reasons. The massive spending connected to Labour's welfare and health reforms was also referred to in some responses. When the Marshall Plan was mentioned it was in the context of being necessary rather than giving detail of its implementation which took place essentially after the terminal date of 1947 in the question.

Responses in Levels 4 and 5 did not of course include all of the above factors, but those which did achieve the highest Level recognised the inter-relationship of reasons they had identified in producing the difficult economic situation for Labour in the years 1945 to 1947.

- (b) This part question proved to be challenging with only one quarter of the responses receiving marks in Level 3 and above. The main difficulties were again lack of clear knowledge and limited understanding. Answers in Level 1 were generalised and, in terms of assessing success, assertive. Answers in Level 2 were somewhat more detailed but the main feature was again generalisation about, for example Marshall Aid, rationing, the building of houses or establishment of the welfare state. Many concluded just with 'it was a difficult time' and there was little justification in terms of evidence for conclusions which tended to state either that the government was successful, or that it was not.

Those responses in Level 3 and particularly those which did achieve marks in Levels 4 and 5 gave a more balanced conclusion based on evidence. For example, though most candidates saw Marshall Aid as the crucial factor in leading to sustainable economic policies, cited as evidence that Attlee's governments were mostly successful in overcoming Britain's economic problems were the physical rebuilding of Britain especially with housing and the new towns, the introduction of the welfare state and particularly the National Health Service, nationalisation of key industries, and austerity policies under Cripps with most stressing the importance of increased exports. Most answers in Level 3 and above noted that whilst Cripps' policies may have been good for economic recovery they (and particularly continued rationing) were politically unpopular.

However, what took answers clearly into Levels 4 and 5 was balance, so that Attlee's governments' successes were considered critically. For example, they recognised that Britain's financial problems were only really solved by American help especially through Marshall Aid, that the number of new houses did not match post-war needs, the costs of the welfare reforms and the Health Service in particular had been underestimated and that prescription charges had to be introduced to offset some costs, and together with the costs associated with the process of nationalisation, some industries, notably coal as seen in the 1947 winter, hardly seemed more efficient than before.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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