



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS2F

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Unit HIS2F

Unit 2F: Challenging British Dominance: The Loss of the American Colonies, 1754–1783

General Comments

There was a clear difference this year between the quality of responses to Question 1 and to the optional questions. Candidates were clearly happier with essay questions than with source analysis, though whether this is a generic problem or one exacerbated by the specific sources is difficult to ascertain. As in the January 2010 examination, there was evidence that candidates had limited knowledge of the 1770–1775 period, a period of significant importance in this unit. As for the optional questions, it was pleasing to note that the French and Indian Wars continues to be a popular topic, with a majority opting for this topic in a not insignificant number of centres.

Question 1

- 01** Many candidates found this a relatively demanding exercise, possibly because they attempted to answer the question without fully digesting the sources. Although both sources were conceptually demanding, they were not inaccessible and did have the merit of being relatively concise. Source A stated that ‘it has been argued that Britain should have made concessions to the American colonists rather than using force against them’, but in the rest of the source Langford proceeds to argue that the use of force was the correct policy; too many candidates presumably spotted the reference to ‘concessions’ and interpreted this to mean that Britain ought to have made concessions to the colonists, the exact opposite of the actual meaning. Source B also caused some problems, and relatively few were able to appreciate the subtlety of the argument that Britain had followed a policy of discussion, ought to have followed a firmer policy, but now any attempt to apply force would be counter-productive. Usually some attempt was made to identify both differences and similarities, but too often these attempts were restricted by limited comprehension of the sources.
- 02** Most candidates made some attempt to answer this question based on both own knowledge and the sources. On the whole responses were only moderate quality, and the main reason for this was limited knowledge of the key period, 1770–1775. Too many candidates clearly preferred to write about events of the 1760s, such as the Sugar Act, Stamp Act and Townsend’s Duties, with relatively sketchy and unsystematic treatment of post-1770 events. There is certainly no shortage of such events: the Boston Massacre, the Gaspee incident, the Boston Tea Party, the ‘Intolerable’ Acts, the Quebec Act. The first and second Continental Congresses and the Olive Branch Petition all merited consideration. This was certainly not a period of inactivity, as stated by several candidates. Centres should be aware that the existence of a compulsory source analysis question means that all parts of the specification should be covered if candidates are to be adequately prepared, and it was noticeable that many candidates who performed well on their chosen optional question were far less comfortable on 1770–1775.

Question 2

- 03** There were some good responses here. Most candidates were aware of the background to conflict between Britain and France in North America, referring both to the strategic importance of the Ohio Valley and to the lingering resentment on both sides concerning the inadequacy of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Knowledge of the actual events of 1754 was not always secure, and there were some imaginative spellings of 'Fort Duquesne', but there was certainly awareness of increasing Anglo-French hostility. Some candidates were unable to confine themselves to 1754, and went on to refer to the death of Braddock near Fort Duquesne in 1755. There was some tendency for responses to be descriptive of the events of 1754, rather than explicitly explaining why the conflict escalated.
- 04** Most candidates disagreed with the quotation, placing greater emphasis on the wide-ranging impact of Pitt after 1757 than on the single battle of Quebec; stronger candidates linked the two, pointing out that the capture of Quebec might not have occurred had Pitt not appointed Wolfe to the British forces in Canada. Usually, after dealing with Quebec and Pitt, candidates went on to examine other contributory factors, such as the impact of the British navy (both in open battle, such as Quiberon Bay, and in the enforcement of an effective naval blockade) and the serious weaknesses in the French campaign. Most candidates were able to supply a reasoned conclusion, regarding Quebec as a very significant victory, with important consequences for the whole balance of power in Canada, but less significant than the overall impact of Pitt.

Question 3

- 05** There were some good responses to this question, with candidates often able to offer a good range of reasons for British defeat at Yorktown. Sometimes responses were relatively narrative, describing the immediate background events without clearly identifying the actual reasons for defeat. A more serious failing was the tendency of some candidates to dwell on the broad long-term reasons for British defeat in North America, referring to British commanders such as Burgoyne and Howe, who had disappeared from the scene before Yorktown, rather than the immediate factors directly concerning Yorktown.
- 06** Another good response, causing few problems to those candidates with adequate knowledge. As with Question 04, candidates often speedily dismissed the reason identified in the quotation, and went on to identify a preferred factor, in this case either the failings of the British military campaign in North America or the intervention of foreign powers. The best responses came from those candidates who, regardless of whether or not they regarded Washington as the major reason for American victory, gave extensive comment on the positive contribution made by Washington, in terms of raising morale, developing sensible guerrilla tactics, and on occasions (e.g. Yorktown) taking decisive action. Often candidates qualified their praise of Washington with reference to his limitations as a military commander and the fact his adventures could well have been speedily terminated had he faced more capable British commanders. Whilst candidates often supplied a reasonable range of factors for British defeat, relatively few made specific reference to the weak direction supplied by London politicians such as North and Germain.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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