



General Certificate of Education

History 2041

Specification

Unit HIS3M

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

Unit HIS3M

Unit 3M: The Making of Modern Britain, 1951–2007

General Comments

Candidates' performance in the first examination of Unit HIS3M was most encouraging. The new format, answering two out of three essays in one and a half hours, clearly allowed the well-prepared candidate to attain the highest levels of the mark scheme by demonstrating their understanding and knowledge of the broad range of the specification. There was some evidence, however, that the removal of source based questions impacted negatively on some candidates as in those cases the subject knowledge of these candidates was less developed.

Despite the minimal choice of questions, the majority of candidates were able to provide in-depth, analytical responses. Also candidates often produced two well balanced answers within the time constraints. They were balanced in terms of depth, focus and showing historical interpretation and debate. As a result many candidates were able to demonstrate their conceptual and synoptic understanding of the years 1951 to 2007. It was very pleasing to see that in the majority of cases students had a good understanding of the four specification themes, although it was evident that the more successful candidates were those who had the ability to adapt and apply their knowledge and understanding in a more focused manner to the question. Candidates with an appreciation of what the question was seeking and who were able to respond more precisely were significantly more successful. In this context, the HIS3M paper appears to have provided a wide spread of marks ranging from the excellent to, in a small minority of cases, the Level 1 responses. Encouragingly, it appears that the majority of candidates were able to access at least the Level 3 marks with a significant number producing responses which merited Level 4 and 5 marks. In contrast, the rewarding of Level 2, and to greater degree Level 1, was relatively limited.

Although Question 3 was marginally the most popular question, all three questions were readily undertaken and it was very pleasing to see the 'synoptic' question, Question 2, attempted, often producing non-chronological, evaluative answers.

Whilst it was appropriate to see historians mentioned in essays, there was often a narrow range used. Rowe and Marr are appropriate to quote but a greater range would be helpful, simply to offer more balance. Thankfully few candidates went down the 'schools of interpretation' approach and as such their essays were much the stronger for it.

Question 1

01 Although this question required very specific evidence over a relatively short time period, an encouraging number of candidates selected the question and were able to develop cogent answers. The best answers were able to develop responses which focused on the reasons for 'British governments' efforts to join the EEC' within the time period, although precisely used evidence from outside the specified time period was rewarded accordingly. Many candidates also were able to highlight the efforts of Macmillan, Wilson and Heath to apply to join the EEC. Candidates often produced a range of reasons for the desire to enter the EEC; usually these revolved around Britain's changing priorities, her economic predicament in the late 1950s and 1960s, America as an unreliable ally and most answers noted that the Commonwealth's support was not guaranteed in the future and so a more pragmatic approach was required. Very good answers demonstrated the different

government approaches to joining but usually candidates stuck to 'British governments' and showed little discrimination between them.

Weaker responses focussed in too much detail on 'Britain's decline as a world power' *per se* and only belatedly related their responses to the EEC. Their responses were usually based on Britain's loss of power since Suez and some very vague generalisations about the state of the British economy. Rarely did weaker answers focus on the efforts of British governments—they simply tried to explain decline and then tried to say why Britain was not allowed to join until 1973. A minority of candidates produced narrative accounts of how the Suez Crisis was an example of 'Britain's decline' or described Britain's three attempts to join up to 1973 with an account of De Gaulle's reasons for vetoing the applications. Far too many candidates wasted time describing why Britain did not get into the EEC. This was not the focus of the question and clearly damaged their chances of a higher mark.

The question was seeking reasons for entry, not reasons why they were not allowed in. It was also noticeable that a considerable amount of candidates interchange 'we' for 'Britain' when describing attitudes and this should be discouraged. It introduces a personal, subjective tone and often leads to unsupported opinion and in the worst cases prejudice, particularly in terms of De Gaulle's rejection of Britain's attempts to join the EEC.

There were some inaccuracies such as EFTA being started before the EEC and the actual dates of application to join. Likewise there was some confusion over which party Macmillan and Wilson led.

However, there was a lot of very good knowledge displayed and where the argument was focused and full of evaluation and judgement, Levels 4 and 5 were in abundance. It was also notable that many answers avoided a chronological narrative and did attempt to produce a range of factors.

Question 2

- 02** The so called synoptic question on the paper was a popular choice for many candidates, with a number of candidates demonstrating an excellent conceptual understanding of 'economic decline'. With this question candidates tended to adopt two routes. One, a clear overview of reasons why, or why not, certain governments were able to stem decline and also an ability to discriminate between governments. Two, a chronological run through from the 'Golden Age' to the policies of Thatcher in the 1980s, usually with less emphasis or knowledge on the 1970s. Some candidates went further than the end date and occasionally this did not help their answer as the point they made was not contextual and relevant to the actual period of 1951 to 1990.

The candidates rewarded the highest Levels of 4 and 5 were able to produce answers with a high level of synopticity often employing the interpretations of historians including Corelli Barnett, Letwin and Johnson. These candidates were also able to achieve balanced responses involving a wide range of precisely selected evidence from the time period. A minority of candidates wrote almost exclusively on economic developments in the 1950s or, conversely, on the economic policies of the Thatcher governments which mitigated against providing balance for the time period.

Sophisticated answers did challenge the premise of the question but equally good answers confirmed the premise and then wrote several pages of controlled analysis, confirmed the viewpoint. Balanced answers were able to get away from simplistic 'targets' such as trade unions and offer a range of factors. These included a lack of investment, industrial relations, poor management over a long period of time, the cost of defence spending and the welfare state and the inability of politicians during the post-war consensus to 'rock the boat'. They also countered these factors by considering the 'Age

of Affluence' argument, the impact of 'Stop-go', the external problems of the 1970s such as the 1973 Oil Price crisis and the attempts of Thatcher to revive Britain.

The very best answers were aware of the two main lines of thought, post-war consensus versus 'Thatcher the saviour', and usually concluded that there was relative decline overall. They were able to highlight periods of relative progress but even then it was uneven and candidates often compared Britain's performance unfavourably to other countries, particularly growth rates in some European countries. They often concluded by suggesting that Britain's decline was either self-inflicted or due to outside events and pressures or a mixture of the two.

The key to this question was overview. It was not essential to cover every period in equal depth. If candidates were able to evaluate overall performance and then use selective evidence to support their argument, they could get into Level 5 and quite a lot did. Hopefully this means that candidates will now not view the synoptic question as being 'harder'; in fact the evidence would tend to suggest otherwise.

Question 3

- 03** This was the most popular question on the paper with the majority of candidates successfully identifying the factors which led to the successive election victories of the Labour Party between 1997 and 2005 from the question set. The majority of responses were able to achieve some balance between 'the weaknesses of Conservatives' and 'the strengths of Tony Blair', as well as the 'popularity' of New Labour. There were some very sophisticated answers and each of these was rewarded the maximum mark. There were some weaker answers where candidates simply pointed out what happened in the years under consideration but overall most candidates did attempt to balance the two factors offered in the premise of the question.

A significant number of candidates were able to successfully employ relevant knowledge outside the time limits of the question by analysing the legacy of Thatcher and the modernisation and rebranding of the Labour Party from the 1980s to add to their contextual understanding. Many answers quite validly linked the Thatcher legacy to its impact on Major's room for manoeuvre; likewise the work of Kinnock and Smith, albeit briefly, to jettison the image of 'the longest suicide note in history' and start the long road to revival and re-brand. Virtually all candidates mentioned the dropping of Clause 1V and the roles of Campbell and Mandelson in Labour's renewal.

In addition, the best responses analysed the changes in the popularity of the Labour Party as a result of their post 1997 policies and the developments within the Conservative Party since 1997. Good answers tended to highlight several factors for Labour's popularity. These included the Blair factor, the role or spin and the need to control the media, the business friendly approach adopted by Labour, the emphasis on education and the NHS and successes such as the Good Friday Agreement and devolution. Conservative weaknesses were seen to be poor leadership post Thatcher, internal divisions over Europe, perceived 'economic incompetence over the ERM, sleaze and corruption and a general desire for change.

However, whilst a significant number of candidates were able to analyse the reasons for Labour's victory in the 1997 election, they used very limited evidence to support their answers beyond 1997. Often their answers were very focused and accurate but they lacked some depth of evidence. Many candidates concluded by suggesting that 1997 was simply 'time for a change' and others claimed that New Labour's influence has been greatly exaggerated. Some challenged the positive assertion of 'popularity itself.

Finally, it is important that candidates always cover the course fully as questions will be set regularly across the full expanse of the years 1951 to 2007.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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