



General Certificate of Education

History 2041

Specification

Unit HIS4X

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Unit HIS4X

Unit 4X: Historical Enquiry

General Comments

In this first year of the new specification, it was very pleasing to note that a considerable number of the enquiries were of a very good standard and centres on the whole applied the mark scheme accurately and with some discrimination. This was self-evident as virtually all centres were able to place their candidates in rank order of ability. It has been an encouraging start and there were clear signs of much enthusiasm, hard work and independent learning. One moderator aptly summed up how good the best work was; 'intelligent, well-written and well-structured, where often high-scoring candidates had taken on more demanding tasks and were risk-takers to good effect'. However, there was a small but significant number of centres that had not grasped the importance of designing a title and getting it approved and this resulted in some candidates being unable to access some of the assessment objectives. Overall, a good understanding and knowledge of the past was interpreted without too much description and/or an over-emphasis of 'historical schools of thought'. At the top end of ability, the enquiries were superb and received full marks.

Below are some of the key perceptions from the 2010 series of HIS4X:

- as stated above, a tiny minority were clearly hamstrung by an unworkable title and struggled to deal with AO1b. Hence, the 100-year context was covered very patchily
- many of the candidates were centre-taught but there was clearly still room for many personal, innovative enquiries and local histories
- most candidates were within the word count boundaries for the main body of the enquiry and the source evaluation exercise (A02a)
- virtually all candidates produced a discrete A02a source evaluation and these were excellent at the top end. However, too many candidates carried over from the legacy specification Personal Study a desire to make personal comments about why they had chosen the topic
- most candidates used an appropriate range of sources and many understood the difference between an A Level text and a specialised university text
- the standard of English was quite good
- virtually all candidates produced a bibliography but some candidates simply listed every book or website they could find on the topic whether they had used it or not
- 90% of centres produced very helpful annotations and comments on the enquiries
- internal standardisation seemed to work well
- the assessment of a candidate's work seemed very fair and realistic. A few centres were a little severe but the main criticism was the over-rewarding of description or narrative. This indicated that some centres were unsure of how to apply the mark scheme
- where all candidates in a centre were attempting the same topic, there was some evidence of over-coaching and guided planning. This is against the spirit of the enquiry and can result in a lowering of marks at A01a
- there were too many centres which had not sought approval of their intended title. The correlation between non-approval and a weak final mark was very evident
- most centres did send the requisite forms but there was a considerable minority that had to be reminded to forward the relevant outline forms, centre mark forms and proof that

internal standardisation had taken place, plus a signature to confirm that it was the candidate's own work.

Choice of titles

All the moderators commented on the fact that this was the most serious problem in the moderation process. Clearly the key to a good enquiry is a good question and unfortunately there were too many titles which had not been sent to their adviser for approval or, if so, had elected to ignore the advice given. Where centres had not included an outline form, it was impossible to say with any confidence whether they had received advice when selecting titles. Furthermore, some centres included outline forms without adviser comments. It is **strongly advised** that all centres use their adviser to obtain a relevant and workable title that takes into account the 100-year context. This year some titles 'got through' which were dubious and required great skill to produce a good answer. Whilst many centres did work hard, and with some success, to incorporate a meaningful 100-year context, others simply tacked it on to questions that may well have been tackled on the legacy specification Personal Study. Whilst the 100-year context may appear to be artificial in some respects, it is incumbent on centres to re-examine how synopticity is to be undertaken and how a 100 years of history might be reviewed in terms of change and continuity.

Examples of where a title did not, and clearly could not, work included:

- 'Within the context of 1890–1990, to what extent was Gorbachev responsible for the end of the Cold War?' Clearly until 2017, all Cold War questions will lack a proper 100-year context
- 'Within the context of the years 1845–1945, how responsible was Hitler for the holocaust?' As Hitler was not born during part of this period, the question is not feasible. If the centre had chosen to place the emphasis on 'anti-Semitism' or 'German nationalism', the question would have proved much more satisfactory
- furthermore, some candidates were attempting titles which simply were impossible; for example, in a causation question when the focus point was not near the end of the chronological span, such as Russia in 1917 but when the 100 years were from 1860 to 1960. The candidate would have been much wiser to have focused the period from the early 19th century
- in a question such as 'Within the context of the period 1603 to 1714, to what extent was the English Civil War caused by the personal failings of Charles 1?', the years after the 1640s are irrelevant. Hence, the candidate is only going to achieve a weak level at A01b
- likewise, questions which clearly had been attempted as a personal study now simply had a 100 years tacked on to them and therefore any question on the French Wars of Religion now would need coverage from 1494
- also, some centres chose titles which were too vague. Therefore questions such as 'To what extent did violence support the achievements of black civil rights?' reads more like an undergraduate task as opposed to A2.

On the other hand, where the adviser had refined a centre's submission, the prospects were much better. Titles that spread across a century, such as a comparison between Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, or on Tudor poverty or where a candidate took a depth topic and placed it in a 100-year context rather than taking the broad brush approach, can work well. Studying something in depth and adding the broader context around it seemed to work well for many centres.

Compared to the legacy specification Personal Study, there were fewer esoteric titles and it was pleasing to see a diminution in questions with a Third Reich focus and many more attempting Civil Rights in the USA, for example.

What is blatantly clear is that with the right title, candidates are able to cover the A01b assessment with some confidence and also avoid long narrative chronologies. Weaker candidates clearly thought a 'cut and paste' narrative of the 100-year period would get them into Levels 3 and 4. Although at the initial teacher support sessions, several exemplars were used to indicate varying levels of achievement, centres should avoid picking titles which lend themselves to simple descriptions. Candidates should also avoid using sub-sections to break up their enquiry. Subsections tend to produce periods of time as opposed to analysis, evaluation or assessment.

Whilst it may appear 'mechanistic on the surface, titles which start with 'Within the context of the period' or 'To what extent' prove to be a tried and tested format in steering candidates away from uncritical narrative and it encourages candidates to compare, contrast and evaluate.

Addressing the Assessment Objectives

Most candidates appeared to have made very creditable attempts to address the Assessment Objectives. Having four assessment components to the new specification is a challenge, particularly the need to produce a discrete source evaluation (A02a) but many candidates did offer substantial pieces of work. The nature of the specification makes it possible for a candidate to achieve highly in one or two areas, less well in another, yet still score a good mark.

It is clearly difficult for moderators, in absentia, to assess the accuracy of centre marks for A01a, yet there were obvious inconsistencies displayed in some centres where candidates were given very high A01a marks when the essays were poorly structured, had weak spelling, punctuation and grammar and used a minimal amount of sources. **Centres are reminded that candidates should be researching and producing work of their own and the writing of the Historical Enquiry should be the work of the candidate alone.** The amount of advice and guidance given must be taken into account when centres award marks from the generic mark scheme for A01a. For enquiries to achieve a Level 4 or 5, candidates must be able to demonstrate an ability to examine complex subject matter and, using a very good range of relevant, specialised and challenging sources, produce a coherent, fluent response.

Candidates from some centres included no source references or footnotes at all but in most cases candidates had made some attempt to support their line of argument in the text with references. This however can have a downside when the references all come from the same one or two sources and highlight the paucity of sources used in the enquiry. Virtually all candidates produced a bibliography but in too many cases gave no indication in the essay that they had used more than one or two of them. Often this was critical when trying to highlight historical interpretation and debate (A02b). Once the two authors' views had been expressed, there was little else available to display an appreciation of how a range of other historians have interpreted the past.

The new 100-year context, A01b, led to a variety of responses and proved to be the key discriminator of a candidate's ability. The best candidates produced enquiries which were full of analysis and judgement from the first paragraph. Others wrote a simple 100-year chronology. There were two basic criticisms of how A01b was dealt with. Firstly, there was a tendency in some centres to over-reward simple narrative. A few centres seem to have interpreted the 100-year requirement as a need to construct a century-long chronological narrative and appeared to have instructed their candidates accordingly. The result was that candidates

should have been placed in either Level 2 or 3 and no higher. Further to this, the inclusion of the 100-year element appeared to be very much a contrived add-on, which detracted from the overall flow and quality of the essay. Of course, the choice of title, as noted previously, played a major part in the success or failure of A01b. Secondly, whilst a tiny handful of candidates effectively ignored the 100-year context altogether, quite a few did not cover the 100-year period or simply did not afford it 20% of the essay. Too many candidates simply focused in on a short span of time and rather cursorily commented on the 100-year context. Candidates, who do not overtly indicate that 20% of the essay has dealt with the 100-year period, will not be rewarded.

Whilst there are several ways of approaching the 100-year context, candidates must make sure that they focus on the interplay between causation and consequence, continuity and change and try to highlight the relationships between these key features and characteristics within the 100 years. It is not sufficient to simply cover the 100 years and demonstrate very little contextual understanding. Again, the selection of a title which is relevant and appropriate, makes for a successful enquiry. At the highest levels, candidates must show conceptual awareness and have selected a wide range of precise evidence. This means that students should avoid quoting from Wikipedia and a random scan through the internet. (Wikipedia is at best a useful portal to useful information, but at its worst can be unrepresentative). There were quite a lot of very impressive essays which had sustained judgement throughout. The quality of synopticity was indeed highly encouraging and there was a good amount of very subtle appreciation of ideas and arguments observed at the highest levels.

Like other aspects of the new specification, centres will undoubtedly become more comfortable with this aspect in future years. However, centres must wean candidates off unsuitable topics and titles which do not lend themselves to an examination of a specific issue within a 100-year period.

In terms of A02a, the responses were somewhat mixed but most candidates did make a decent attempt at some relevant comments on the sources. Some answers were a little simplistic and the worst suggested that 'Wikipedia was the best source because it was easy to understand'. The weaker answers appeared to struggle with the concept of reliability and utility and in some cases these aspects were missed out altogether and a personal justification of why the candidate had chosen the topic was given. This version tends to suggest that some centres have still not moved away from the old personal study criteria. Candidates are not required to 'tell a story' of why they have chosen the topic. Likewise, it does appear strange and somewhat self-castigating that a tiny minority of candidates always start by explaining how hard it was to find sources for the topic! A simple response might be that perhaps a different topic might have proven a wiser course of action. Linked to A01a, it suggests that a 'valid study' might prove beyond the candidate if the title being adopted was pursued.

Also, some candidates did not take the advice of their adviser and try and find a more balanced range of sources. Narrative answers often simply followed the line of one historian. A02a demands that candidates should evaluate sources with an appreciation of their reliability and utility and, as the levels increase, candidates must discriminate between the sources and show some considered judgement. The word 'useful' appears to be a ubiquitous response which seems to cover all things without any real attempt to explain 'How useful etc'. Many were list-like and standard textbooks seemed to masquerade as academic research. Whilst some of these texts offer a convenient packaging and synthesis of many other more specialised texts, the result is often rather bland. Centres need to steer candidates towards serious historical research much more for, although it is possible to achieve good results using a relatively small number of sources, few enquiries using only one or two sources produced adequate enquiries.

Thankfully many candidates did use a good range of resources and their analysis was full of effective evaluation of the sources for their relative worth. They balanced the relative merits of several sources and discriminated with sound judgement.

Where candidates did not produce a source evaluation they were awarded zero for A02a and if a candidate went over the upper word limit of 600 they were penalised. In future years the source evaluations may well become somewhat formulaic as centres become familiar with the requirements but it would be helpful if candidates could select 3 or 4 sources to compare for their relative worth and not simply suggest that 'all the sources used were useful'.

The final assessment criteria, A02b needs to be seen in conjunction with the demands of A01a. For the enquiry to be valid, it obviously needs to have an appropriate historical base which will, by definition, reflect a variety of specialised and challenging sources. Hence, the best answers at A02b often had designed a title which had in-built debate or conflict, and the historians they then used gave them ample lines of argument to pursue. Furthermore, many answers at Level 3, and more so at Levels 4 and 5, very subtly appraised the relative value of how others have interpreted the past throughout their essay. They were also able to show the differences, and similarities, of debate within the context of the 100-year period and their answers were usually very analytical and full of judgement. As in the legacy Personal Study, the most effective enquiries were able to outline succinctly the general viewpoints of historians. Thankfully many candidates were also able to recognise historians as individuals rather than blind followers of a 'school of thought'. Weaker candidates clearly find some difficulty with viewpoints and interpretations. Evaluation can be very simplistic and historians are often dismissed as a complete representative of a particular school, such as Marxist or Intentionalist. The main criticism here was that candidates merely tended to summarise and/or describe the views as opposed to using the historian's actual words to support the candidate's own conclusions. Also, too many candidates offer quotations in their enquiries but this does not necessarily mean that a 'historical debate' has been understood. Quotations must link to the point being discussed or analysed.

It is not essential for candidates to feel the need to try and artificially introduce a debate or interpretation throughout the enquiry but good quality essays clearly had been planned with this aspect in mind. Often the introduction would flag up debate inherent in the chosen title and usually some contrasting views were offered right at the start of the essay.

Centre Marking

Most teachers understood what they were assessing and this was clearly demonstrated by the quality of the annotations seen throughout the enquiry and by very helpful summative commentaries. At times these were exemplary and made the moderator's task much easier. The standard in centres is generally high and centre organisation and management appears very sound. On occasions some centres simply put 'A01a' or 'A02b' against a paragraph. It would be more meaningful if there was a comment indicating the quality of the criteria as opposed to the simple fact that the paragraph was mainly about one assessment criteria. Most centres appeared to interpret the mark scheme with some confidence, although one or two centres seemed to mix up A02a and A02b. In most cases this did not appear to make a significant impact on the marks awarded and the problem has been pointed out to the centres involved, via the feedback forms. There was some but, overall, little erratic marking or wholesale misunderstanding of what the mark scheme was attempting to do. Adjustments were made invariably where a centre had been consistently lenient in its interpretation of the criteria. Often centres had over-rewarded simple narrative on A01b or simplistic comments on the sources in A02a. In only a very tiny minority of centres had there been really significant over-marking and clearly these centres had not grasped the standard required for particular levels.

Seven sides of narrative, usually chronological, simply cannot receive a mark of over 30. A few centres were unsure of what was needed at A02a and tended to over-reward fairly basic, often throwaway, remarks on source utility, and in some ways there was less differentiation here than on the other assessment objectives.

However, the overall impression was that centres had made a very fair attempt at assessing their candidates' work and once the AQA publishes in the autumn examples of marked work, even more precise marking and moderation should be possible.

Administration

Centre administration on the whole was done very efficiently and in line with AQA procedures. This was pleasing considering it was a new specification and there were a considerable number of centres submitting enquiries who had 'migrated' from other boards or simply had not undertaken coursework before. The major criticism was the failure of a number of centres to send the relevant forms. Some centres had to be reminded to forward the Centre Declaration Sheets but there was a failure by a significant number of centres to enclose Outline Forms. All the forms are important, particularly the Outline one which indicates which units were studied at AS Level and Unit 3 and whether the title was approved or not. This is critical so that a check for any overlap can be undertaken.

In the 2011 series, it would be very helpful if all centres could make sure that the enquiries are page numbered, stapled if necessary, and that all deadlines are adhered to rigidly. Some centres have sent the enquiries in bulky folders and this is not required. Also a few centres need to check their arithmetic as in a small number of cases the addition was incorrect and the wrong mark entered on the Centre Mark Form.

Summary

It is pleasing to record that many good enquiries were produced in 2010. Centres on the whole applied the mark scheme accurately and with some discrimination. Candidates were fairly well prepared, whether centre-taught or personal. Very few enquiries appeared rushed so the conclusion must be that sufficient time was allocated for their production. Almost no instances of plagiarism were seen and this reflects great credit on the candidates. The presentation of the actual enquiries was very good. Some candidates clearly were well coached in this respect. There is no need to double space work but more care could be taken when using footnotes and bibliographies. Some centres will need to re-visit their 2010 titles with a view to producing a more manageable title as this year some centres were asking the impossible.

Clearly there are many candidates who can demonstrate quite sophisticated skills of enquiry and have displayed mature skills when examining a wide range of topics. It is not easy when dealing with a mass of complex material and being asked to communicate high quality judgements at the same time. Commitment to the Historical Enquiry has been self-evidently a success and it bodes well for the future of history as a motivational subject.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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