



**General Certificate of Education  
January 2011**

**History 1041**

**Unit HIS1F**

***Report on the Examination***

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# Unit HIS1F

## Unit 1F: France in Revolution, 1774–1815

### General Comments

Most candidates showed an understanding of the requirements of this paper, providing reasons in response to the 01/03 and 05 questions and attempting to provide well-structured and balanced answers in their 02/04/06 mini-essays. There were few examples of candidates offering pure narrative, although elements of description sometimes crept into otherwise well-organised responses. Perhaps the biggest single fault seen in this session, was a failure to take note of the dates given in the questions, or, if observed, to recognise the significance of these dates. Consequently, answers to 01 often referred to 1789 while answers to 04 sometimes failed to go beyond that year, and instead wasted time explaining the impact of the changes of May-July 1789, rather than beginning in August, as directed. Most problematic of all was the misunderstanding surrounding the dates in 06, where a number of candidates failed to appreciate that the question was asking about the period of the Directory and Consulate.

Most candidates completed the paper and seemed to allocate their time sensibly. A few lapsed into bullet-pointed lists in their final answer and consequently deprived themselves of higher level marks for argument, while a very small percentage omitted an answer altogether. When the factual material was adequately known, candidates generally wrote well, showing good understanding of causation and consequence. However, some clearly had major gaps in their knowledge, or a muddled sense of chronology, without which they struggled to provide effective or convincing answers.

### Question 1

- 01** Candidates were expected to offer a variety of linked reasons and many duly obliged, linking war debts and high interest loans to inability to reform the outmoded taxation system and so tap the nation's wealth. A few were unduly harsh on Louis XVI who was accused of not being willing to bring about any change, and on the Finance Ministers who were falsely said to 'lack ideas'. Indeed, some candidates would have benefited from greater reflection on their alleged reasons, which could at times be contradictory. The best distinguished the longer-term from the more immediate reasons, with an emphasis on the latter. The less successful tended to write in rather general terms about the problems of the Ancien Regime.
- 02** It was difficult for candidates to score high marks here when they knew very little about the Paris Parlement. Some tried to dismiss it in a sentence or two and subsequently devoted the essay to the 'other factors' which impelled Louis XVI to summon an Estates-General. Whilst alternative reasons certainly had a place in a well-balanced answer, at least some evaluation of the Paris Parlement was called for in response to this question, not least its refusal to register financial reforms, which ensured that the King had to look elsewhere. Those who were better informed about the role of the Parlement were usually able to produce a good argument, either seeing its intransigence as the most important reason for the Estates-General or relegating it to a lesser role behind the many other factors. Some also displayed admirable conceptual grasp of the King's position and his desperation to avoid accusations of despotism. Whatever view was adopted, such thoughtful, balanced and judgemental answers scored very highly.

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**Question 2**

- 03** This was a very popular question with most candidates having a firm grasp of the events of July 14th, although a few got carried away with a description of the attack and the decapitation of de Launay and so wrote around the question, rather than answering it directly. There were also those who seemed to feel it necessary to begin with a description of the Ancien Regime, often followed by an account of the problems of the Estates-General and a detailed explanation of the formation of the National Assembly, in order to explain the storming of July 14th. Whilst some reference to the long-term or underlying reasons for the attack was certainly welcome, candidates should guard against writing all they know from the beginning of the content of their unit in order to explain specific later events. As with 01, the more successful answers emphasised the short-term reasons, often referring to the deadlock at Versailles, but not distorting the answer away from what the question was asking for.
- 04** Most candidates were well informed about the decisions taken in the National Assembly in August 1789, but beyond that, knowledge could be patchy. Some mentioned the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, some, local government and judicial reform and others, the new political constitution and the limits it placed on Louis's powers. The actual details offered, however, were too often imprecise, although there were certainly some who had an excellent grasp of the degree to which such changes weakened the King's position and argued accordingly. Most tried to offer balance by looking at other ways in which Louis was weakened, which was also acceptable if well done. They thus concentrated on balancing the Assembly's actions against the ways in which Louis undermined himself—most particularly with his flight to Varennes and his too frequent use of the suspensory veto. Yet others argued that he was primarily weakened by the behaviour of the 'court party', or the formation of the political clubs, the sans-culottes or perhaps the threat posed by the émigrés and the position of Austria and Prussia. The main issue which separated the successful from the weak answers, whichever approach was adopted, was the candidate's ability to draw precise supporting information from the whole period of the question.

**Question 3**

- 05** Poor answers sometimes turned into a catalogue of the failures of Louis XVI, including generalised comments such as 'he was executed because he was a weak and indecisive King'. However, once again, the best answers adopted a fairly short-term perspective and explained the reasons for his execution (as opposed to his imprisonment) with reference to the formation of the Republic, the power of the sans culottes, the dominance of the Jacobins and the pressures of the war-time situation. The armoire de fer documents featured appropriately in many answers, but surprisingly few referred to the weakened position of the Girondins or the demand for an open declaration from the Convention deputies as to the King's guilt and subsequent fate.
- 06** When candidates recognised that 1795 referred to the establishment of the Directory and 1804 to the year Napoleon crowned himself Emperor, and chose this question because they knew something about the Directory and Consulate, they generally wrote well. Some paid more attention to 'restoring stability' than others whose essays tended to assess 'success' in more general terms. However, some evaluation of both regimes generally took candidates into Level 3 and higher. Unfortunately, there were also those who thought this question referred to the Terror or to the whole of Napoleon's rule or to some mixture of regimes partly within and partly outside the given dates. The importance of a sound chronology was obviously crucial to success here, and although credit was given

for such relevant material (used in support of argument) as appeared, some candidates penalised themselves quite severely by attempting a question they knew little about.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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