



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2011**

**History 2041**

**Unit HIS3C**

***Report on the Examination***

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## Unit HIS3C

### Unit 3C: The Emergence of a Great Power? Spain, 1492–1556

#### General Comments

The quality of response to this paper was generally good and sometimes of high quality. Most answers were well-organised, wide-ranging and clearly based on careful preparation. The work of the best candidates was directly argued, fluently written and supported by confident knowledge. It was pleasing that most answers, at all levels of ability, showed willingness to respond to the specific wording of the questions; unrelated factual description for its own sake was relatively rare.

There were, however, some weaknesses that led to a degree of under-achievement. One was undue haste. Many otherwise convincing answers were rushed and uncontrolled, seemingly attempting to overpower the question by the sheer weight of pre-prepared material. The very best answers were those that were more concisely expressed and more selective in the use of supporting evidence. A second weakness was chronology and attention to the key dates of the question. This applied to all three questions but most of all to Question 3, where very many answers ignored the starting date of 1529 and included vast reams of material on the early years of Charles's reign. Another problem was a tendency to describe the views of historians in a loose, rather second-hand manner. Answers were not helped by extensive and uncritical use of the term 'revisionist' by candidates who no real grasp of previous interpretations. The words 'it could be argued that ...' were deployed over and over again to very little effect. More effective answers integrated the views of historians into their own, clearly-stated line of argument. These shortcomings should not be overstated. The work of very many candidates was highly creditable.

#### Question 1

**01** Answers to Question 1, on the impact upon Spain of the expulsions of Jews and Moors, were often substantial and well-informed on the policies of Isabella and Ferdinand. There was a tendency, however, to focus too closely on the desire of the joint sovereigns to achieve religious unity, neglecting the specific economic and political issues involved in the actual expulsions. There was also a widespread tendency to include far too much background material on the *Reconquista* from the 1470s on. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that too many candidates bundled together the war against Granada, ended in 1492, and the expulsion of the Moors, begun almost a decade later, as if they were one and the same thing. Many otherwise promising answers would have benefited from a more secure sense of chronology.

#### Question 2

**02** The response to Question 2, on the importance of the Cortes for Spanish government in the years 1492 to 1529, was generally convincing. Most candidates offered balanced assessments of the importance of the Cortes in relation to other aspects of government such as the Royal Councils. It was also pleasing that so many answers were able to show differentiation between Castile and Aragon or to trace changes after the arrival of Charles I.

### **Question 3**

**03** Answers to Question 3, on whether or not Spain became a 'stronger nation' between 1529 and 1556, differed widely in quality. Many candidates wrote crisply and effectively about a wide range of political, religious and economic factors, focusing the answer on a retrospective assessment from 1556. Less successful answers were disappointingly vague and uncertain. A significant number of candidates included extensive irrelevant material on the 1520s, ignoring the starting date of the question, 1529. Many candidates revealed a weak grasp of basic chronology, with little focus on the last years of the reign.

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