



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

History 2041

Unit HIS3M

Report on the Examination

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Unit HIS3M

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

General Comments

Candidates' performance in the second examination of Unit 3M was extremely positive. The paper which clearly pleased candidates was straightforward and there were many highly competent answers. There were very few Level 1 and 2 answers and a great many candidates accessed Levels 4 and 5 on both their essays. All the examiners remarked on the high level of understanding and supporting evidence offered by the majority of candidates and it is interesting to note that many of the second essays were equally good, if not better, than the first ones and there was little evidence of candidates feeling 'rushed'. This obviously suggests that candidates were well prepared and were able to display a broad knowledge of the whole period.

Like last year, the majority of candidates were able to provide in-depth, analytical responses. They were balanced in terms of depth and focus and showed historical interpretation and debate. A sign of greater awareness of the demands of the paper was in the fact that many candidates demonstrated their conceptual and synoptic understanding, not only of the years 1951 to 2007 (Question 3) but also showed good synoptic understanding on the other two questions.

Candidates with an appreciation of the premise of the question and who were able to respond more precisely were significantly more successful this year than last year. This year's HIS3M paper appears to have produced well-crafted essays and the level of balance achieved was highly encouraging. This was particularly true on Question 2, where in previous years, candidates have been too ready to offer personal, subjective views on the Thatcher period. In fact, Question 2 was by a fair margin the most popular question, followed by Question 1 but all three questions were readily undertaken and many candidates appeared to have avoided a narrative, factual response and kept to non-chronological, evaluative answers. Again, like last year, candidates were able to locate and use historians' names but there was still a narrowness within some centres where Rowe and Marr are treated as all-knowing. Quotations were observed in many Level 4 and 5 answers and used appropriately; however, a greater range of historians would help, and it would finesse the essay by offering even greater 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 This was the second most popular question and overall candidates' performance was very strong. Answers almost universally were analytical and only in a minority of cases were they spoilt slightly by losing some focus at the end by drifting off the premise of Conservative dominance and trying to 'tidy up' the period by explaining why the Conservatives ran into trouble in the late 1950s and early 1960s. 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. Very strong responses overtly balanced Labour disunity against a range of other factors in their evaluation of the reasons for Conservative dominance. In these answers, there was a full examination of Labour disunity and not simply the division between Bevanites and Gaitskellites. There was an awareness that their differences were not

continuous throughout the 1950s and that there were other issues within the Labour party which hindered their electoral chances. For example: the role of trade unions, nationalisation, nuclear weapons etc. Then, high quality candidates offered other reasons for Conservative dominance. Key factors included Conservative reorganisation under Lord Woolton, the rise in living standards, the roles of Butler and Macmillan, the post war boom and post war consensus, stop-go economics, particularly at election times, and the ability to manage public opinion in a changing age. Virtually all candidates highlighted the fact that the Conservatives did not tamper with the Attlee legacy and that, even despite Suez, the public felt little need to move away from the Conservatives. Weaker answers had less knowledge and often stated that Labour was unelectable from the late 1940s onwards. They seemed to be unaware that Labour got more votes than the Conservatives in 1951 and that if they had won, then they may have benefited from the long post-war boom. There was much, however, to admire in many answers and the level of detail, especially statistical evidence when highlighting the rise in living standards in the 1950s, was impressive. A really pleasing aspect displayed in this question and in Question 2 was the degree of judgement shown and the level of evidential support.

Question 2

- 02** This question was very popular and the response in general was extremely good. Questions on Thatcher and her time as prime minister require a great deal of self-control and objectivity, and thankfully many answers were able to offer balance. This is clearly not easy, as between 1979 and 1990 Britain underwent a period of radical change and at times it was evident which parts of Britain candidates came from and what jobs their parents held (or not) in the 1980s! This question also produced a great deal of synoptic comment and analysis. Candidates, however, need to be slightly careful that they do not go outside the dates of the question if they then do not refer back to the period being analysed. Sometimes it appears that a candidate is simply making a ‘clever comment’ but in fact it did not enhance the overall response. Clearly the question was designed to be provocative and ‘Assess the validity of this view’ allowed candidates to express a range of views on Thatcher’s achievements. As a great deal of contentious history took place between 1979 and 1990, the best answers concentrated on a series of major themes, such as monetarism, privatisation, divisions within society, trade union power and the role of the state, education etc. Whilst it was difficult to do justice to all factors, in terms of depth and time, many answers made reference to a good range and offered counter-viewpoints in their assessment. For example, many candidates showed that, despite the popularity of selling council houses (short-term benefit), the effect of negative equity, recession and a future lack of social housing (long-term deficit) was very damaging. Likewise, ‘selling off the family silver’ may have brought in several billion pounds but was this money squandered? Also, how lucky was Thatcher that North Sea Oil came on stream during her time as prime minister? Excellent answers also broke down Thatcher’s period in power into three distinct phases and this helped demonstrate the fluctuations in her success. Many candidates chose to split their answers between economic, political, social and foreign affairs (basically the Falklands and Europe) and highlighted the many paradoxes of Thatcher and Thatcherism. For example, her words in Downing Street on assuming power in 1979 were contrasted with the widening inequality and polarisation in society by 1990. Likewise, her reservations and hostility towards Europe on occasions were matched by the fact that she took Britain further into Europe than any other British Prime Minister. The very best answers, and there were many, noted the irony in her style of governance – it wasn’t the miners (the ‘enemy within’) who caused her demise but her own cabinet. Weaker answers tended to be too subjective and often used a series of assertive comments, such as ‘to improve Britain needed the destruction of the trade unions and Thatcher was just the person to do it’ as a basis for an essay. What followed was a series of unsubstantiated statements with little evidence to support. Thankfully,

these responses were in the minority; likewise, few answers adopted a narrative approach.

Question 3

- 03** This was the least popular question on the paper and answers were quite variable. Trying to quantify and assess the level of continuity or change in a society can be difficult and candidates would have benefited from greater scepticism, less assertion and more synoptic linkage. Perhaps too many candidates offered stereotypes. For example, it was often taken for granted that the social legislation put forward by Roy Jenkins in the 1960s meant that all women wanted the pill and that all young people became permissive. Some candidates were unsure of what 'society' meant and included a vast amount of factual information, which only loosely might be linked to the question. Also the analysis of continuity and change was often rather superficial. Certain observations were made of a short span of time and then assumed to be representative of the whole period.

Many good answers had used Rowe's textbook as a template and compared a series of key areas between 1951 and 2007. These included immigration and race, class, legislation, technology, education, values and beliefs, the role of women and demographic change. The very best responses usually took three or four key areas and offered a thorough evaluation over the full span of the period. They were almost always thematic and chose to eschew a chronological, narrative approach. Key events and examples were taken selectively from across the years and used to support the line of argument being developed. Weaker answers were either simple narratives of the period or one or two topics and finished off with a cursory comment about continuity or change. Much greater evaluation was required to get to Level 3 and beyond. Most candidates discussed immigration and race but their analysis was either too optimistic – 'Britain in 2007 was a harmonious multi-cultural society' – or completely negative and occasionally somewhat personal – 'The British were totally against immigration from 1951 and I think that...' Surprisingly, many candidates did not discuss the changes in the fortunes of women at all; likewise, education was infrequently discussed and often not linked to social mobility. When it was, there was an assumption that all educational changes were positive. Strong answers were able to differentiate and show that between 1951 and 2007 continuity and/or change was rarely constant. These answers were able to demonstrate that during the period morality and values did not suddenly deteriorate and that youth in general can be a very diverse group in terms of the attitudes and beliefs they hold and the culture they embrace. As last year, it is important for centres to note that coverage of the whole period is essential as questions can be set across the full expanse of the years 1951 to 2007.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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