



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2012**

**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 overall quality of response from students was secure and convincing. Most students made effective use of the time available and produced answers that were substantial and relevant to the question. Standards of presentation and the quality of written communication were mostly good, although too many students allowed high-speed urgency to take over their answers. Such students often seemed determined to overpower the question with sheer weight of thoroughly-prepared material. A more selective and controlled approach would have been beneficial. A shorter, more focused, more controlled answer will always be more effective than a lengthy answer that is frayed at the edges because of undue haste. Many students would also have performed better with a more secure understanding of chronology – the sequence of events was often rather muddled in answers to Question 3, for example, and the end date of *Question 2* was often ignored. There was also a tendency to adopt a rather second-hand approach to historical interpretations, including numerous, rather descriptive quotations, for example, without integrating them into the argument. These reservations should not be overstated. The work of the best students was impressive.

### Question 1

**01** The majority of students responded confidently to this question on the extent of unity in Spain by 1516. Many answers differentiated between religious and political aspects and showed solid understanding of the differences between Castile and Aragon. Two widespread weaknesses should be noted, however. First, a number of answers were tempted into lengthy discussions of the relations between the nobility and the Crown, as if still conscious of the question set in the 2011 paper. Second, all too many students provided massive descriptive accounts of the *Reconquista* as if they were unaware that the question, and the specification as a whole, began with 1492. Selective explanation of relevant factors resulting from the years before 1492 could, of course, be highly relevant but *not* extensive narrative description for its own sake.

### Question 2

**02** Answers to this question, on the consolidation of royal authority between 1516 and 1529, were rather mixed. A number of students wrote analytical answers showing good understanding of the political constraints faced by the monarchy in the 1520s but too many responses were generalized and ill-defined. As noted above, there were weaknesses in handling the basic chronology of the 1520s; many students also ignored the end date of the question and strayed into irrelevant material about Charles V and the empire after 1529.

### Question 3

**03** Answers to this question, on the impact of the ambitions of the Crown on Spain's economy, were often wide-ranging and analytical. The best responses showed good synoptic understanding, with a secure grasp of change over time. Less impressive answers struggled to control the mass of prepared material and, to a lesser or greater

degree, descended into chronological confusion as they raced to include everything they knew. This was also a question in which many students deployed an extensive range of prepared quotations, not always fit for specific purpose.

One particular aspect of this topic in which the understanding of students might be improved is the inflow of bullion from the New World. Too many students seemed to think that mass imports of bullion began from the early years of Spanish settlement in the Caribbean, when in fact they became significant much later, especially after the conquest of Peru and the discovery of the 'silver mountain' of Potosi. There were also rather uncritical assertions implying bullion was the single cause of inflation, lacking awareness of other factors. On the whole, however, the response to this question showed good understanding of the burdens and benefits of the empire in the Americas and its double-edged impact on the wider economy.

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