



**General Certificate of Education
June 2012**

History 2041

Unit HIS3E

Report on the Examination

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Unit HIS3E

Unit 3E: France and the Enlightenment: Absolutism Under Threat, 1743–1789

General Comments

There was a full range in the quality of response to this paper, with a distinct weakening at the lower end. It was in fact remarked that students seemed to struggle to identify specific events and especially to deploy a good knowledge of specific dates and names. Whilst there were, as usual, a number of good scripts, it is clear that students would do well to revise specific events and terminology with much greater precision and focus.

Question 1

01 This was answered with the greatest level of confidence by students. There was a very good understanding by many of the nature of the financial crisis in France and there were some very convincing accounts of why this crisis worsened. Impressively, there was – from these students – a good focus on the dates set in the question. However, at the lower mark range there was an excessive resort to general comments, often dismissing the role of war entirely and trying to spin out the impact of Marie Antoinette to the entire essay. For those that referred to war in more detail, it was often unclear exactly what war the students were referring to – some suggesting that France was defending America from an attempted British invasion, others suggesting that France was at war with America. Few indeed made reference to the impact of the Seven Years War. Students that gave specific dates for specific events and could detail how the war impacted upon domestic financial arrangements tended to do well. Likewise, those that suggested the financial system was hindered by ineffective reform were able to balance the cost of war with other factors. Indeed, some students made much of the point that other countries were able to bear the cost of more expensive wars much more effectively and that thus there had to be more pertinent reasons for the crisis in France. Whilst some students made reference to key events such as the *Compte Rendu*, very few were able to suggest the date of publication or indeed the author. It was somewhat sad to see a number of students that resorted to very general comments about the Estate System and the exemptions of the First and Second Estate. Even here these students were inaccurate suggesting that the top two Estates paid no tax. However, few of these students seemed to recognise that inequality of the taxation system had been a feature of French Government for centuries and they therefore made no effort to link to the sense of worsening crisis in the years 1743 to 1787. Unfortunately, a number of students spent a considerable amount of time examining events in the period 1787 to 1789 and thus received no credit for this material.

Question 2

02 There was a wide range in quality of response to this question. The strongest responses made reference to the role of specific ministers and were able to offer a proper evaluation of events within the time period set by the question. In addition, such responses focused on royal authority and offered some attempt to exemplify occasions in which royal authority was weakened. At the lower end there was a clear misunderstanding of the role of ministers. Even where students were able to refer to the Maupeou Revolution, there was some deep misunderstanding of the events. This was matched by students that

attempted to suggest it was the Parlements that weakened authority but could offer few specific examples. It really was the minority of students that could offer specific acts – or indeed *lits de justice* – which illustrated weakening authority. There were some promising references to the rise of the public sphere, coffee houses and salons, but again little that moved beyond the generic. Whilst reference to the Enlightenment might be made relevant, it took the much better student to link the thought of writers relevant to the period to occasions when royal authority might be said to have weakened. As in Question 01, there was some notable lack of discipline in conforming to the dates set by the question.

Question 3

- 03** This question was answered the least successfully. There were a few really confident responses in which economic and social conditions were not only supported by means of specific evidence but were compared to a good range of other possible motivating factors. At the other end, students tended to see reference to ‘social and economic’ as the excuse to refer in some detail to the ‘Marxist interpretation’. It really is worth reminding students that whilst historiography can be a good indicator of the student that has a good grasp of the period, historiography *per se* is not a requirement of A2 History. Indeed, in many cases the use of historiography hinders performance as there is a tendency to simply relate what a historian thinks. This sort of response is little beyond narrative and does not support argument or an attempt to arrive at a substantiated judgment. Historiography can be used well if it supports the argument put forward by the student. However, reference to general schools of history and some summative comment rarely achieves this. Unfortunately in this case there were some really lengthy references to class-based interpretations, but very little actual history relating to the period. Another issue was the lack of specific supporting knowledge. It was clear that quite a number of students were unclear of precisely when the king summoned the Estates General. That said, there were some very impressive references to the gamble of the Assembly of the Notables but very few indeed that suggested the Estates General may not have been forced upon the king at all.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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