



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2B (A-level)
Question 02 Student 2
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 2B (A-level): Specimen question paper

02 'The ambition of Richard Duke of York was the main reason for instability in England in the years 1450 to 1461.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

During the 1450s England had a lot of domestic conflict and instability within the government. Henry's failure as king and his illness made way for noble feuds and a rivalry between Somerset and York which plagued this period. However it wasn't Richard's ambition that led to instability but more the enmity and fear between Somerset and York, which later was between York and Margaret.

Richard Duke of York's ambition contributed to the instability as during 1450-1455 he wanted to remove Somerset as leading Advisor to the King and become Protector. However this caused conflict between the two which continued throughout the period creating disunity between the nobles who wanted peace and demonstrations in 1450 in London, as the public supported York's ambition. This finally led to the battle of St Albans where Somerset and Northumberland were killed. York's ambition then grew and after Margaret convicted him and other Yorkists of treason in 1459 (Act of Attainder) York's desires grew and he began to plot to overthrow the king. In October in 1460 York walked into Parliament and declared himself the king. The nobles then signed the Act of Accord making York king after Henry and the Battle at Wakefield, the second Battle of St Albans and the Battle of Mortimer's Cross followed. Even though York had died in December 1460 and Wakefield his ambition to be king lived on in Edward and so did the instability that continued until Towton in March 1461. York's however first ambition was only to be a leading councillor. It wasn't until Henry's failure to rule and Margaret's decision to attain him that drove this desire to be close to king into a desire to want to be the king. Therefore Margaret's fear of York and the actions she took due to that fear caused instability.

Margaret had always feared York's influence which had caused enmity between them. York had a strong claim to the throne and was the heir until Prince Edward was born. He also had support from the people which had proved important after the Cade's rebellion. Margaret then tried to limit the influence he had during this period, supporting Somerset instead of him and excluding York from the Great Council meeting in 1459. In November 1459 she then passed the Act of Attainder, convicting the Yorkists of treason and forfeiting their land. This therefore kick-started further conflict and turned enmity into war as the Yorkists were reinvigorated and had nothing to lose. Somerset and York's mutual fear of each other also led to instability in 1455. The situation after Henry's illness and recovery and the switch of the balance of power between the two and increased the fear of who would act next between the two. The fear between York and Lancastrian leaders therefore intensified the conflict and was the main reason for instability.

Henry's failure as king and illness meant that Somerset and York's enmity was allowed to grow. Henry was an ineffective ruler, allowing advisors to have too much power and creating the situation for the rivalry between Somerset and York. When Henry fell ill in 1453, Somerset was Protector but he lost this role due to his failure to stop noble feuds and his defeats in Gascony. Somerset was then accused of treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London under York's influence. York then became Protector. In December 1454 when Henry finally recovered Somerset was released and York's protectorate was removed in April. This then caused instability in the government due to the changes in power however this also caused fear as Somerset and York feared what the other would do next.

Noble feuds were the main reason Somerset's title as Protector was relinquished. The Percy, Neville feud plagued this period creating instability in areas in the North and within the nobility. This was made worse when the feud grew between the Cromwells and Exeter.

In conclusion mutual fear and enmity caused instability in England during 1450 -1461. Henry's failure as king, and illness, helped contribute to that but the fear and enmity between York and leading Lancastrian leaders turned what was conflict into war and caused deeper instability within the country.

Commentary – Level 3/4

The introduction clearly signals an intention to challenge the question and the next paragraph, assessing the role of York in the period, ends with clear judgement as to his significance in relation to instability. The assessment of the role of Margaret of Anjou drifts into narrative in places and lacks development of some key points raised, especially in the last two sentences of this paragraph. It is not made fully clear what Margaret was seeking to achieve and how far, for example, she might be seen as a force for stability in turbulent, factional politics.

The assessment of the importance of Henry himself as a source of instability is assertive more than fully convincing and is not fully developed, as is also the case in the references to the Percy-Neville feud.

The answer has potential but lacks development. Points are made without full and relevant exploration of them.