



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2B (A-level)
Question 02 Student 3
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

In the years 1450 to 1461 there was widespread disunity across England that culminated with Edward IV winning the crown at the Battle of Towton in March 1461. Richard, Duke of York's ambition created the opposition necessary to depose Henry VI. However, Henry's role as king in addition to the actions of Queen Margaret and the Lancastrian Leaders also played a significant role in creating instability.

One reason for instability in England was Richard, Duke of York's ambition. York initially wanted power, seeking to be recognised as heir apparent and remove the Duke of Somerset as the King's leading adviser. This is shown by his continuing proclamations of loyalty to Henry, such as after the Battle of St Albans in May 1455 at the Battle of Northampton in June 1460. In addition, after returning from Ireland, York sent out public propaganda in November 1450 proclaiming his loyalty to Henry and reinforcing the opinion of the commons that the king was being advised by 'evil counsellors', now headed by Somerset, who should be replaced to someone loyal to Henry, such as York himself. However, their loyalty to Henry was abandoned in October 1460 when York claimed the crown, saying that he was the true king. York's ambition and continuing opposition led to the passing of the Act of Attainder in November 1459, convicting the Yorkists of treason. It is also likely that York's own ambitions combined strongly with the force of public opinion. Grummitt says that in Cade's rebellion in 1450, the commons saw York as an 'antidote' to the 'traitors' surrounding the king. Therefore, Richard, Duke of York's ambition created instability as it caused widespread discontent, particularly amongst the Lancastrian leader as he believed he had a right to advise the king. York's ambition gave Edward IV a claim to the throne as he claimed the Lancastrian leaders had broken the Act of Accord by attacking York at Wakefield in 1460. However, without the actions of Margaret of Anjou and the Lancastrian leaders, York's ambition may not have affected the country as much as it did.

Hence, another reason for instability is the decisions of Margaret and the Lancastrian leaders. Margaret's decision to move the court to the Midlands in March 1456 created anger amongst Londoners as it caused a decrease in trade in the city. Leaving London open to Edward after the Battle of St Albans in 1461, when the Lancastrian leaders decided to return north, was another big mistake. These two decisions meant that Londoners were more inclined to support Edward and welcomed him into the city. Hence this created instability as it meant that Edward was more likely to attack with greater support. The Coventry Parliament in June 1459 and the Act of Attainder in November 1459 in which the Yorkists were declared traitors increased the chances of the Yorkists attacking. The Attainder was intended to suppress the Yorkists and

increase support for Henry but this was not the outcome. Hence, by increasing the chances of the Yorkists opposing, Margaret's decisions greatly increased the disunity and instability in England. Therefore, the decisions of Margaret and the Lancastrian leaders played a large role in the increasing instability in England as they gave the Yorkists no choice but to fight back. However, if Henry had been a more successful king, Margaret would not have had to make these decisions.

Hence, a final reason for instability in England is the role of Henry VI as king. The absence of effective leadership meant that enmity between York and Somerset was not settled and noble feuds were allowed to escalate. Both of these caused widespread discontent across the country. McFarlane observes that 'only an undermighty monarch had anything to fear from overmighty subject' and this holds true for Henry VI who was said to have always remained childlike by his peers. The absence of a strong ruler led to Margaret's fateful decisions and also meant that York was more likely to create opposition. Henry's illness from August 1453 to December 1454 let York rise to a very powerful position and hence increased York's ambition to be at the centre of power. Therefore, Henry VI was the main reason for instability in England because his failure to lead effectively meant that any unexpected problem led to increased discontent. It is likely that, had he been a better king, York would never have opposed him in the first place and certainly would not have had as much support as he did.

In conclusion, the ambition of Richard, Duke of York, did cause instability in England, however it was not the main reason Henry VI's inability to rule successfully meant that York was able to rouse support in opposition and ultimately gave York's son Edward IV the opportunity to win the crown in 1461.

Commentary – Level 4

Although brief the introduction sets out the balanced argument that is (hopefully) to be advanced in the rest of the answer.

The assessment of the impact of York's ambition is clear, with a convincing statement of his aims and with good and generally accurate supporting detail. It would be useful to develop further the assessment of the nature of York's ambition. Given that he strove to be the leading adviser, how significant a threat was this?

The assessment of other reasons for instability in the period is generally appropriate and well supported, but there is no clear and separate assessment of the significance of Cade's rebellion and that this represented in relation to instability. What is argued in relation to Margaret of Anjou and Henry VI is supported and convincing.

This is a good answer with supporting detail, but it lacks some development and range as indicated.