



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **History 1041**

## *Specification*

### **Unit HIS1E**

# **Report on the Examination**

## *2010 examination – January series*

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# Unit HIS1E

## Unit 1E: Absolutist States: The Reign of Louis XIV, 1661–1715

### General Comments

There was again a very impressive level of subject knowledge from a number of candidates combined with a very good understanding of the precise demands of the questions. Indeed, the majority of candidates seemed able to at least show an awareness of what a balanced, argumentative response might be and hardly any responses to the (b) type questions lacked an introduction or a clear conclusion. Impressively, many responses made very good use of paragraphs. The biggest determinant of level of award for many seemed to be depth of subject knowledge as unfortunately a number of stylistically very well prepared candidates lacked the ability to deploy specific subject knowledge in order to advance beyond the heavily assertive. This may well indicate a need from some candidates to develop more rigorous programmes of revision and a deeper appreciation of how to use knowledge to support an argument. There were a number of candidates that infringed the rubrics and only answered one question, although the vast majority of these seemed to be focused in specific centres. Most candidates were clearly prepared for the (a) questions and realised that they needed to give a range of reasons for events. Generally three or more reasons should be given with some support. Ideally these factors should be linked by means of a reasoned attempt at priority or an explanation of how one factor led to another. However, perhaps some candidates would benefit further from instruction on the precise demands of explanation and how it differs from a question that begins 'How did...'

### Question 1

- (a) This was the question that received the lowest marks on the entire paper which was perhaps surprising considering the general popularity of questions on Louis XIV's authority. Whilst some candidates were able to give vague responses that mentioned a desire for absolutism, it was only the better candidates that were able to offer specific detail, or indeed range. Louis XIV's desire to humble Fouquet was mentioned by a surprisingly small number of candidates, as was Louis XIV's personal beliefs in the notion of Divine Right. The desire to root out corruption was the preserve of only a few responses although most could mention the desire to stop any challenge to the monarch's authority. Candidates needed to prove that they had specific knowledge of events and could advance beyond the generic and fairly obvious 'he wanted to make all decisions himself' without giving any context, even to the extent of mentioning Louis XIV's youth and possibly impetuous nature.
- (b) This question proved very successful with some outstanding responses. Yet for some candidates the task of judging degree of success became confused with method of achieving this goal. Hence some of the more mid-range responses were fully able to detail what Louis XIV did to extend his authority but lacked an ability to prove degree of success. A further difficulty for some was the issue of dates. Conversely, the issue of dates caused absolutely no problems for the better type of response that managed to argue that towards the end of his reign, Louis XIV struggled to maintain authority. Outstanding answers considered the role of Jansenism and how Louis XIV's failure to register Unigenitus proved his decline in authority and his need for the authority of the Pope. Likewise there were some excellent responses that detailed how the failure of the

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Revocation in 1685 and the continued existence of the Huguenots in France might prove the poor authority of the King. The very weakest candidates struggled even to mention Versailles or to consider how the effectiveness of the palace changed with the increasing dominance of Maintenon. Interestingly, a number of candidates assumed that Versailles was only of relevance at the start of Louis XIV's reign and therefore simply dismissed the control of the nobility and ceremony at court, failing to register that the court only moved to Versailles upon its partial completion in the early 1680s. Unfortunately there were some who wrote at length of foreign policy successes and failed to explain how these might be evidence of the maintenance of authority within France.

### **Question 2**

- (a) This was answered very well and candidates seemed to have prepared very well. Most impressively there were a good range of reasons identified, rather than simply one in depth, and there was some effort to prioritise. Candidates should endeavour to provide reasons why they consider one factor to have been the most significant however and should realise that simply stating 'this was the most important reason' is little more than assertion.
- (b) Interestingly, the inclusion of dates did not seem to cause many concerns for the majority of candidates. Many candidates were clearly well prepared enough to realise that many of the motives for Louis XIV's foreign policy applied throughout his reign, and certainly the earlier period. Hence the search for religious uniformity, the desire for revenge, opportunism, dynastic goals and natural frontiers were all mentioned to good effect. Indeed, the candidates that could provide some evidence of glory as a motive within the set period, plus some evidence for another factor tended to be awarded well into Level 4. It is worth emphasising to candidates that, given the time constraints of the exam, an exhaustive answer is not expected and indeed not possible, yet we do expect to see, from the very best responses, clear evidence of additional support from the period given in the question. The most common evidence provided was Louis XIV's entry into Strasbourg, although surprisingly few could give the year that this occurred accurately. The really exceptionally good answers mentioned the difficulty in separating motives such as the desire for glory or natural frontiers, and used Strasbourg as an example of this specific degree of overlap. Unfortunately some candidates made lengthy reference to the War of Spanish Succession, it remains vitally important that even the most able candidate spends a little time focusing on the precise terms of the question before embarking on their response.

### **Question 3**

- (a) This question was answered very well with almost every response displaying a good understanding of the partition treaties and the expectations of the European powers. Some candidates did find it difficult to provide a range of reasons and it may therefore be worth re-emphasising to candidates that this type of question looks more for breadth of understanding and the ability to prioritise factors effectively, than an in-depth analysis of one factor on its own. That said, there was some excellent subject knowledge with candidates fully able to explain why Louis XIV took the opportunity of upholding the Will and why this caused an increase in tension. There were relatively few narrative responses although there were some very detailed descriptions of how tension increased. The best answers provided an explanation.

- (b) This question was answered reasonably well, although there was noticeably less subject knowledge deployed by candidates here than in any other question. Given the length and centrality of the War of Spanish Succession, some candidates had clearly not revised enough material, even being unaware of the dates of the war. It was only the good candidate that seemed able to mention the names of specific generals or battles such as Blenheim. It is worth re-emphasising that the average response is not expected to have a detailed knowledge of events in the period such as the course of individual battles but that an ability to at least name them will often raise the quality of a response. The most common support deployed was Louis XIV's religious policy as an example of reasons for the alliance of foreign powers against him. In addition, most were able to mention Louis XIV's decision to uphold Carlos II's Will as further evidence of over-confidence. There were only a few candidates that seemed aware of the notion that Louis' foreign policy changed around mid-reign from offensive to defensive, even if they were to dismiss the argument. Exceptionally strong answers seemed aware of this theory and argued that Louis XIV could not be blamed for foreign policy failure in this period as he had actually lost control over it. There were some response that sought to challenge the premise of the question, this method is often credited but candidates should be aware that the question was not asking whether his policy was successful or not.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.