



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2012**

**History 2041**

**Unit HIS4X**

***Report on the Examination***

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# Unit HIS4X

## Unit 4X: Historical Enquiry

### General Comments

***'We always seem to see a vast plethora of successful, well observed enquiries from the vast majority of centres. I say this every year but it always has to be reiterated in recognition of the majority of young people who work hard to produce work of quality which they can be proud of.'***

The above statement, from a senior moderator this year, is a very fair reflection of the standards observed by the moderating team in 2012. It confirms good levels of achievement and, as the coursework component is now in its third year, speaks well of the dedication of student and teaching staff alike in encouraging enquiries of such consistently high quality.

There are some superb centres and some brilliant students, producing work of the highest quality. At times the quality of what we have moderated is breath-taking and a pleasure to read. The best students have produced enquiries which are well defined and have titles which allow them scope to research, debate and evaluate key issues within a 100 year context. They are not artificial or forced in terms of context and are furnished with appropriate, challenging and sophisticated sources. The bibliographies can be lengthy but quality enquiries clearly show that a student has read and taken on board the salient points from the text and then applied them skilfully into their essay.

However, what has become apparent is the need for some centres to return to the drawing board in terms of formulating an accessible title. There remains a small but significant number of centres where titles are not well defined or indeed valid and these clearly have constrained students from achieving their best. The vast majority of centres do use their adviser appropriately and the students reap the benefit of this advice. Where centres do not use advice, the results are often very disappointing. As stated in last year's report, it is critical for a student that his/her enquiry should not be disadvantaged by an unworkable title. Whilst there was much less simple narrative and unsupported comment this year, the demands of A01(b) remain a major stumbling block for some centres. Where a title simply does not work students are condemned to Levels 2 and 3 on A01(b) as they cannot fully explain any meaningful context with such a restrictive title.

Below are some of the key perceptions from the 2012 series of HIS4X:

- as stated last year, a poor question = a poor answer = a poor mark. This usually meant that marks had to be lowered on A01(a) and A01(b) as the titles were not well defined or valid and some students could not access the 100 years adequately
- there continues to be fewer personal, innovative enquiries and there appears to be some contraction in the range of topics studied. However, highly effective centres are ones that allow their students to fly and give them the freedom to choose what they do. This naturally assumes that the centre knows their students well enough and have confidence in their ability to cope with defining a title which works and has sufficient debate in the title to produce a quality enquiry
- most students were within the word count boundaries for the main body of the enquiry and the source evaluation exercise (A02(a)). Furthermore, there were many examples of high quality work seen around 3,500 words. However a few students went over the word

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limit and were penalised. The maximum for the enquiry is 3,999 words and 599 words for the source evaluation. Students should always be encouraged to aim for 3,500 and 500 words and be prepared to edit if necessary

- although there was some improvement in dealing with A02(a), i.e. there were fewer 'lists of sources' and more attempts were seen at trying to highlight utility and reliability, too many students simply refer to the qualities of the book under review and there is very little, if any, discrimination between the merits of the sources. Much more comparison is required. Also, there is no value in students explaining the difficulty in acquiring sources or why they chose the title of their enquiry. As they only have a relatively small number of words to use, they should look at a few sources and concentrate on their value to the enquiry
- most students used an appropriate range of sources, including some quite challenging ones and many understood the difference between an A Level text and a specialised university text. Weaker enquiries still rely too heavily on the Access to History series or a vast array of websites which are often superficial, insubstantial or barely used in the enquiry
- the quality of the written work was an improvement on last year overall and there were fewer scripts which were adversely affected by weak spelling, punctuation or grammar
- virtually all students produced a bibliography but some students continue to believe that quantity is better than quality. Simply listing every book or website they could find on the topic is fairly pointless as there was often a serious dysfunction between the list and an inability to refer to the majority of the sources in the enquiry
- all moderators have commented on the helpful annotations and comments on the enquiries. There has been a major improvement since last year and most centres annotate well in the body of the enquiry and now submit separate summative sheets which explain in detail the marks awarded for each of the A0s
- it is clear that in most centres an effective internal standardisation has taken place
- overall assessment of a student's work seemed fairly accurate. The one obvious area where students were still over-rewarded was in A02(a), where students had been placed in Level 3 and above without any sign of 'relative merit' or discrimination being observed. This meant that on occasions a student's work was marked out of tolerance and penalised. There were some examples of severity at the lower end and some inconsistency in marking but overall centres were able to place their students in rank order of ability. In terms of A01(b) some centres still over-reward simple narrative or description. Enquiries which only offer a narrative of a 100 year period will only receive a low Level 2 mark. It is also slightly disconcerting when centres place the word 'analytical' against a passage of narrative. As in 2011, in a very small minority of cases, some centres appeared unsure of how to apply the mark scheme and they should seek help from the board. Reviewing archive exemplars offered by AQA would be a useful way of trying to interpret the demands of each of the A0s
- there is further evidence that some centres are breaking the spirit of the specification by over-coaching students, where they are all attempting the same topic. This appears as a form of 'teaching to the title'. Personal research is the aim of undertaking an enquiry and in some cases the result is a lowering of marks at A01(a) as students have clearly had an excess of teacher input
- there continues to be a situation where too many centres stubbornly refuse to seek approval of their intended title. This remains a serious issue and students are often let down by centres that have either not sought advice or in certain cases ignored advice. Even if the centre's title appears to be operating well after 3 years, it is essential they continue to seek approval so that each cohort of students receives the same amount of advice offered by their adviser. If a centre has had its marks lowered in either of the two previous years, the centre should seek advice from their adviser and take serious note of the remarks on the feedback form. As stated last year, a centre may chose to ignore the

comments of the adviser but now after three years of evidence, it is abundantly clear that there is a correlation between non-approval and a disappointing mark

- this year there was a considerable number of centres who did not attach the relevant forms with the student's work and such centres need reminding of the requirements. We need evidence of approval, centre mark forms, the declaration that it is the student's own work and that HIS4X does not contravene the specification's requirements in terms of options 1, 2 and 3.

## Choice of titles

After 3 years of evidence, it has become clear to moderators (and advisers alike) that the ability to adopt a workable title remains the single most important factor in students being able to achieve a good mark and enjoy the experience of completing a successful enquiry. A good enquiry remains a good question and unfortunately there were still too many titles which had either not been approved by an adviser, or if they had, the titles had not been refined to take account of the adviser's comments. Most centres, even if they have kept their original subject matter focus, have tended to refine their titles in light of student performance over this period. Therefore it remains an **imperative** that all centres use their adviser to obtain a relevant and workable title that takes into account the demands of the four AOs, particularly the 100-year context. Whilst most centres work very hard on setting up viable enquiries and in the main they have adopted a sensible approach when dealing with the 100 year context, a small but sizeable number of centres find difficulty in producing titles which 'demonstrate understanding of the past through explanation, analysis and are able to arrive at a substantiated judgement of key concepts...within an historical context'. At times some centres appear to demand too much of their students.

In previous reports I have identified titles which seriously constrain students and there remain enough titles which affect student performance. These include the following examples with brief comment in brackets:

***'Within the context of the period 1700 – 1800 which factors best explain why the French Revolution broke out in 1789.'*** (Causation questions which have a contextual period that extends beyond the focus of the causation)

***'The early history of the Norman Conquest (1055–1155) reflected the interests of the chroniclers'. How far do you agree?*** (Responses tend to be simply extended source evaluations with little or no reference to the history itself or the work of current historians)

***'In the context of 1898 and 1998, what were the consequences of the Easter Rising?'*** ('What were' questions invite description and explanation but lack meaningful evaluation and analysis)

***'In What Ways Did the European Balance of Power Change Between 1815 and 1920?'*** (Although approved, this question usually produces narrative, descriptive chronological surveys)

***'In the context of the period 1500 to 1945 to what extent was the Holocaust a natural extension of German anti-semitism?'*** (To cover 500 years makes the question virtually impossible).

***'In what respects and to what extent did the Crimean War set precedents for conflicts in the period 1792–1918?'*** (it would be very difficult to justify anything pre-1850s)

***'In the context of 1855–1955, to what extent does Alexander II deserve the title of "Tsar Liberator"?' (the focus simply doesn't work within dates offered)***

There were several other titles which were highly problematic but the message is clear. A centre needs to re-define when the question does not work. All the evidence from the first three years of moderation confirms that 'straightforward' titles often produce the best answers. For example, where a student takes a depth topic and places it in a 100-year context rather than taking the broad brush approach, the results can often be very satisfactory for all concerned. Increasingly centres are tending to forgo more personal idiosyncrasies in their range of topics and currently the following topics are very popular:

Black Civil Rights, Tudor rebellions, the Golden Age of Spain, the Renaissance and Reformation, the Middle East, Ireland and Russia.

Very few centres offer questions on social and economic history. Likewise, questions involving the Third Reich are less frequent for, as in previous years, the title of the enquiry was often unworkable in terms of the 100 year context. Causation questions on the Holocaust are now fewer in quantity but much more refined and successful in terms of the question title as issues such as nationalism or anti-semitism are used as the fulcrum of the question instead of Adolf Hitler.

Finally, some students still tend to use sub-sections to break up their enquiry but all that does is create short periods of time as opposed to synoptic analysis, evaluation or assessment. The enquiry should be written as a continuous piece.

### Addressing the Assessment Objectives

As in 2011 most centres appear to have explained the four Assessment Objectives to students quite successfully and only a handful of centres were unable to produce a discrete source evaluation (A02a). Most students offered substantial pieces of work and centres should remember that students can achieve highly in one or two areas and less well in another, yet still achieve a good mark as the specification is split into 4 discrete objectives.

An issue which has become slightly more apparent this year is where a few centres have obviously 'taught to the question' and then saddled their students with a poor model for answering it. Several moderators have noted that those centres who are all doing the same question or minor variants thereof, tend to answer in a rather uniform, 'template' fashion. All too often the students produce a chronological narrative with at best brief linking, analytical comments utilising a couple of A-Level textbooks. This approach clearly runs counter to the spirit of the specification.

### A01(a)

In terms of A01(a), the vast majority of students produced valid enquiries. A01(a) has several components and it is important for centres not to over-reward if a student has a valid enquiry but the range of sources is poor and based purely on websites and/or standard textbooks. To achieve Levels 4 and 5 students must use some challenging and specialised texts. To be able to communicate clearly is very important. Even at Level 3, we expect students to be making only a few mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In this sense some centres are over-rewarding by 1-2 marks.

Constructing an enquiry and being able to organise information carefully is a difficult skill and hence centres need to convey this to students as they start preparing and researching the enquiry. As stated last year, students should only be placed in a level which is commensurate with what they have produced. In terms of advice given to centres, it is important to reiterate to teachers that **students should be researching and producing work of their own, and the writing of the Historical Enquiry should be the work of the student alone**. The amount of advice and guidance given must be taken into account, when centres award marks from the

generic mark scheme for A01(a). For enquiries to achieve a Level 4 or 5, students must be able to demonstrate an ability to examine complex subject matter and produce a coherent, fluent response.

In 2012 many students offered references and footnotes but the picture was not uniform. The use of footnotes was patchy and was dependent on whether a centre had explained the nature of the exercise. It might be worthwhile for some centres to spend a short period of time explaining how referencing and footnotes might be introduced or enhanced. Footnotes should only give basic knowledge about a text. Students should not use 'extended footnotes' to keep the word count under 4000 words.

As last year, virtually all students produced a bibliography and in the main it was obvious that most sources had been read and then used appropriately. However, weaker students clearly had not read or researched many sources, and a long list of websites and/or texts cobbled together at the end of the enquiry does not inspire confidence. Where challenging and diverse sources were named, it was often apparent within A02(b) how well they had been applied as the level of historical interpretation and debate was usually much more effective.

### **A01(b)**

The 100-year objective, A01(b), which requires students to configure a title which fits into a 100-year context, remains the key discriminator for a successful enquiry. This assessment criteria is worth 20 out of 60 marks and centres must reinforce the need for a synoptic answer in order to access Levels 4 and 5. As in 2011 coverage of this synoptic element was patchy in some centres.

Good centres and students do it extremely well, and their enquiries are characterised by excellent analytical responses with sustained judgement and some excellent analytical responses with sustained judgement and exceptional conceptual awareness. Often this is because the title of the question fits into the 100-year context quite naturally and hence applying concepts throughout the period works well.

However, a minority of centres are yet to fully get to grips with the demands of A01(b). Perhaps these centres need to re-visit the question, as taking a title and simply adding on 100 years artificially restricts the chances of getting above Level 3. Some students still feel that a chronological narrative covering 100 years means that A01(b) has been covered effectively. As in previous years there is some evidence that certain centres have under-rewarded in this objective, especially where there was some overt evidence of analysis and judgement, however limited in scope.

In summary, students can go no higher than Level 2 or 3 if the enquiry lacks evidence of analysis and judgement of the facts. We don't expect students to cover the 100-year period in great detail, given the 3,500 word constraint, but the key events and issues need to be addressed satisfactorily. There has to be due relevance to the **whole** period to score good marks. For example, if students have used the years 1865 to 1968 in their title, it doesn't help if the first 15/20 years are not addressed. Students must clearly demonstrate that 20% of the answer has been dealt with satisfactorily and not cursorily.

The key areas of A01(b) remain the ability to highlight connections, linkage and patterns; the ability to stress the importance of change and continuity; and to be able to offer contextual understanding and evaluation across the 100 year period. There was a definite improvement this year and many more enquiries at the lower end did attempt to move away from a chronological narrative and offer a degree of historical context.

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**A02(a)**

Perhaps in some ways the most improved area of the enquiry in 2011 was A02(a) and it appears more students are spending time on this aspect of the enquiry and not just rushing it at the end. There was further progress this year and there are fewer 'lists' of sources and how they have been acquired. What is pleasing is that generally centres are encouraging students to examine fewer sources but with much greater emphasis on evaluation and discrimination.

However, some centres are still over generous in the awarding of levels and have settled on awarding everyone 7-8 as a default position when in fact the mark scheme points to Level 2 or 3. Superficial and even generalised comments are often over-rewarded and there is still a perception that GCSE and standard A level texts are classed as specialised and challenging.

A few centres persist in sticking to the legacy Plan of Procedure approach and achieve a lower mark but this is less evident than in the previous two years. Also some centres, few in number, mistakenly saw this as an exercise in historiography rather than the need to analyse and evaluate the sources they had used.

Students need not waste time in their introduction telling the moderator how difficult a task it was to find texts which fitted the dates of their enquiry; likewise the provenance of a source whereby a 'well renowned historian' from a leading university must obviously be reliable as he/she is an expert and has researched this area for many years! Thankfully students are slowly moving away from the mantra that 'all sources are useful'.

The ability to access Levels 4 and 5 remains the main obstacle to a good mark. Students must evaluate sources, discriminate effectively between them and offer some supporting judgement if they wish to attain the higher levels.

Whilst there is nothing inherently wrong with using the internet to obtain information, weaker students tend to rely on it. Hence their source evaluation rarely contains more than a list and there is little if any attempt to comment on these sources. Often the list is quite small. On the approval form advisers usually have flagged up this deficiency and students and centres need to take due notice of their comments. If a student does not produce a source evaluation they are awarded zero for A02(a) and if a student goes over the upper word limit of 600 they are penalised.

To conclude: A02(a) demands that students should evaluate sources with an appreciation of their reliability and utility and, as the levels increase, students must discriminate between the sources and show some considered judgement.

**A02(b)**

There is clearly a positive correlation between A01(a) and A02(b) in the sense that centres which had adopted titles which had in-built debate or conflict are then able to access a good range of supporting sources and historians to confirm or deny the premise of their title. Many enquiries demonstrate ample evidence of historical debate and overall A02(b) appears to have been assessed more accurately this year although occasionally centres gave Level 5 for awareness of different historians/interpretations but did not make judgements about their relative importance. Increasingly, however, most centres do seem to recognise the difference between describing interpretations and actually assessing and evaluating them. The very best work did allow students to use historiography skilfully and to reach judgments on the strength of one historian's comments against another's.



Conversely, some centres and students still find A02(b) a difficult assessment objective. The main fault is for students to assume that simply mentioning an historian's name in a descriptive, not evaluative way enhances the argument or illuminates the discussion. There is also still an over-reliance on standard A Level texts and the internet when to achieve the widest possible perspective, additional reading is obviously required. Overall there remains a slight tendency to over-reward on A02(b) and centres should not award Levels 4 and 5 just because a student has mentioned an historian and offered a one-line quotation. We require relative importance and evaluation of interpretations, assisted by judgement.

A major discriminator remains where too many students continue to rely on the *Access to History* approach whereby students can summarise the arguments and describe them rather than appraise them, in the context of their enquiry. Quotations are often used descriptively, rather than as evidence of a particular line of thought accompanied by the student's own opinion. Much more is needed to get from Level 3 to Levels 4 and 5.

Constructing an argument which runs through the enquiry is naturally difficult and requires a lot of planning, particularly in terms of collating and selecting appropriate historiography. It is essential for students to produce an introduction which informs the enquiry and the moderator that the debate identified is inherent in the chosen title and invariably some contrasting views are offered right at the start and throughout the rest of the essay.

### **Centre Marking**

As in 2011, there was clear evidence that most centres understood what was expected of them in terms of the application of the mark scheme. For most moderators there was a very obvious improvement in the quality of teacher assessment. Not only did centres provide clear and substantial summative evidence to justify why marks are awarded but they also annotated throughout the enquiry. This approach is extremely helpful to moderators and is much appreciated. There are a few centres that have adopted an approach whereby no comments are put on the enquiries and they only award a cursory mark at the end. Likewise certain centres only put a mark for each assessment criteria at the end and in the body of the enquiry they simply place 'Ao1a' or 'A02b' against a paragraph. This is very unhelpful to all concerned as moderators wish to see sufficient justification as to why marks were given. To be meaningful there should be a comment indicating the quality of the criteria as opposed to the simple fact that a paragraph was focused mainly on one assessment criteria. The standard of internal moderation within centres appears generally high, and centre organisation and management overall appears very sound.

The mark scheme was applied quite appropriately in the main but there were some centres who seemed to have some difficulty, mixing up A02(a) and A02(b), as in the previous two years. Hence it is essential that centres check the feedback forms to make sure they are interpreting the scheme accurately.

As in previous years moderators had to adjust marks down, invariably in centres where there was a degree of leniency in its interpretation of the criteria. Like last year, some centres had over-rewarded simple narrative on A01(b) or simplistic comments on the sources in A02(a). Also A02b was occasionally over-rewarded when students, who may well have identified historians and their relevant works but failed to evaluate the relative merits of their differing interpretations.

Only in a few cases was there any real and sustained misapplication of the mark scheme and clearly these centres had not grasped the standard required for particular levels. In essence in 2012 the vast amount of centres had made serious and professional judgements. Moderators recognise that the task does involve a great deal of effort and time for teaching staff but the

work produced by so many students was of a very worthy standard, and I am sure students do genuinely appreciate their diligence and support.

## Administration

Centre administration on the whole continues to be of a good quality. Most centres followed AQA procedures with some efficiency. However some complacency is apparent in certain centres and it is time consuming all round when centres need to be prompted to send to moderators the relevant forms. The specification makes it quite clear which forms are required. Some centres had to be reminded to forward the *Centre Declaration Sheets* but the main failure by a significant number of centres was the inability to forward the *Outline Forms*. All the forms are important, particularly the *Outline Form* which indicates which units were studied at AS Level and Unit 3, and whether the title was approved or not. This is critical so that a check for any overlap can be undertaken. It is self-evident that all of this puts stress on moderators and school examinations secretaries, and could be avoided. More centres are now stapling their enquiries which is much appreciated. Placing them in plastic wallets or bulky folders is not essential and again only slows down moderators. There has been some improvement in students numbering their pages but it would be helpful if centres could re-iterate this request.

Overall deadlines were kept; in fact many centres send work to the moderator even before sampling was requested.. A few centres struggled with arithmetical exercises but eventually students did receive the correct mark!

## Summary

For the third year running, moderators have been impressed by the sheer amount of high quality enquiries that they have seen. Other than the continual problems for some centres of unworkable titles leading to lower marks, there have been notable improvements as students and centres become more acquainted with the demands of the four AOs. Added to last year's advances, extended teacher comment and annotation and a willingness by students to offer greater evaluation and analysis as opposed to narrative, have meant that a high degree of professionalism has been maintained and probably increased. Apart from the dilemma of creating an historical title which allows all four of the assessment criteria to be met and some residual issues with A02a, the overall performance has been very good. Clearly many of the enquiries at the middle to top of the range are of university level.

Pleasingly few enquiries appeared rushed, so centres clearly are allocating sufficient time for their completion. Only a handful of students failed to produce a discrete source evaluation. The presentation of the actual enquiries was an improvement on the high standards observed last year. It would help moderators but I suspect teachers and students as well if their work could be double spaced to allow for comments to be made more clearly.

The overriding message from this year's performance continues to be the need for some centres to re-examine their titles. An unworkable title does disadvantage a student and means that some of the AOs are harder to interpret and achieve good marks in.

## Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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