

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y101/01 Summer 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper Y101/01 series overview

Y101 is one of thirteen units in Paper 1 for the revised A Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests an extended period of History of about fifty years through an Enquiries or source-based option and an essay. The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates have to answer a compulsory source question based on four written primary sources. The question requires them to use all four sources to assess the validity of a view. In Section B candidates are required to answer one essay question from a choice of two.

To do well on Section A, candidates need to be able both:

- consider the provenance of the sources, and
- apply contextual knowledge to the content of the sources.

This allows them fully to answer the question set by reaching a judgement **about the sources** in relation to the issue in the question.

It is important that the judgement reached is based on an evaluation of the reliability of the evidence given, and that it is not merely the candidate's own judgement on the topic based purely on their own contextual knowledge.

In order to reach Level 6, a good strategy is to make a judgement at the end of the analysis of each source, with an overall judgement in the conclusion.

To do well on Section B, candidates need to address the issue in the question, using detailed supporting knowledge. In order to reach the higher levels candidates will need to assess the issues they discuss and reach a supported judgement at least in the conclusion. To reach Level 6 candidates should also make an overall judgement as well as interim judgements when assessing each factor.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considered the provenance of the source(s) and used relevant contextual knowledge • clearly linked the contextual knowledge to the source being discussed to show whether the view of the source was valid or not • reached an overall judgement as to the extent to which the sources supported the view in the question • discussed at least two relevant issues in depth • wrote supporting detail that was both accurate and relevant to the question set, not just the topic • reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question • made a series of interim judgements about the issues discussed in relation to the question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not consider the provenance and use contextual knowledge to evaluate the sources • wrote an unbalanced response in their treatment of the sources, with very little consideration of one of the sources • reached a judgement based on their knowledge rather than the sources • showed a poor understanding of the major issues relevant to the essay • were unable to support their response with relevant material • did not focus on the precise wording of the question • made unsupported comments about issues which were assertions.

Section A overview

The Enquiry section in this unit is focused on decision-making in government and administration; in particular, it looks at the role of Alfred and whether he took decisions on his own or with the support of others. The question requires candidates to critically assess evidence and reach judgements. The critical evaluation of sources is the central theme in this section with all marks given against AO2.

Question 1

Alfred the Great

- 1 Using these four sources in their historical context, assess how far they support the view that the main decisions in government and administration were taken by Alfred alone. [30]

The majority of the candidates were able to relate each of the four sources to the key issue in the question. In general, candidates were also aware of the need to use both provenance and relevant knowledge of the historical context in order to engage with the sources and to provide a supported analysis of each one in relation to the key issue in the question. However, the quality of provenance and knowledge varied; comments on provenance in particular were less developed. While candidates usually demonstrated good understanding of the provenance of Source B (Asser), there was less understanding of the provenance of the three remaining sources, notably Source C (Law Code). This had the effect of limiting the mark given for some responses, usually with a ceiling of Level 4.

Many candidates recognised that Alfred was acknowledging the need for support when making decisions in government and administration in Source A. This can be seen in the king's reference to the 'tools and resources with which to rule', which many candidates interpreted as a reference to the ealdormen and thegns who assisted him in governance. This was developed in some responses by reference to the tripartite division of society, cultivated by Alfred, which the king alludes to in the next sentence when he mentions the 'praying men, fighting men and working men'. Some candidates used their knowledge of local governance to contextualise the content of the source, as well as the role of the witan. In terms of provenance, when this source was handled well, candidates were able to locate the king's translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* within the broader aims of the renaissance of learning which he himself inspired. The decision to translate Boethius' work reflected the king's interest in human nature, free will and justice, and, as such, his introduction to the translation provided an insight into Alfred's own conception of the king's role in governance. Other candidates, however, had little knowledge of the work and so could say little more than that the source had been authored by the king.

Source B, by Asser, was also seen as being supportive of the view in the question. Candidates noted how Asser's description of Alfred's administration highlighted its cooperative nature: the royal household was managed in turn by three shifts, which highlighted how the king was supported in governance by the members of the court. Candidates tended to be aware of the shift pattern but could add little more contextual knowledge to Asser's comments. In terms of provenance, Asser's biography, his relationship to Alfred, and the context for the inception of the work – specifically, the desire to forge an alliance with the Welsh – were well known.

The Law Code, Source C, proved problematic for some candidates who were unsure as to the nature of the source. Many candidates noted Alfred's authorship of the text. References to the laws of Ine, Offa and Æthelbert were often interpreted as an acknowledgement by the king that he did not make governmental decisions on his own. Rather, he indirectly lent on the contributions of his predecessors. Others noted Alfred's admission that he 'rejected' laws of his predecessors which displeased him 'with the advice of my councillors'. This, too, was taken as evidence of the collaborative nature of decision-making at court. However, other candidates noted the king's clear use of the first person in the text – 'I collected herein' – which, they argued, suggested that Alfred alone made decisions. In other words, the source contained elements that could be interpreted as being either for or against the view in the question, but most candidates asserted the latter. In assessing its provenance, some candidates struggled. Some simply noted that it was authored by Alfred and should therefore be considered as trustworthy. Too many candidates didn't fully understand what a law code actually was or, more importantly, the context in which it was created. Some candidates were able to discuss the *domboc* ('Doom Book'), but in general this contextual knowledge was not well known.

Source D, an extract from the chronicle of Florence of Worcester, was generally seen as being supportive of the view. According to Florence, Alfred was quick to provide 'instruction, reproof and command' to those bishops, ealdormen and thegns who were not properly supporting the public good, as if he alone was responsible for effective governance. Some candidates expanded on this interpretation by offering contextual knowledge on the role of ealdormen and thegns in local governance; others made reference to Alfred's conception of the role of a bishop in the society of his diocese, as reflected in his translation of Gregory the Great's *Liber regulae pastoralis*. Some candidates were able to evaluate the provenance of the source by suggesting that Florence's objective was to glorify the Old English past from his post-Conquest vantage point. Some responses even talked about potential revisions to the work undertaken by his continuator, John. Most candidates simply offered a comment on the date of the source, noting that it wasn't written until several hundred years after Alfred's reign and that as a result it was less reliable. This was usually found in weaker responses where attempts at evaluation were rather superficial.

Exemplar 1

Source A does support the view that the main decisions in government and administration were taken by Alfred alone. Firstly, there is reference to the fact that Alfred specifically was entrusted with the right to rule ('I was commanded' and 'entrusted to me') which suggests also that it was him alone who had the right to make governmental decisions. Additionally, Alfred describes the men who assisted him in his administration ('the praying men, fighting men and working men') as 'tools and resources' suggesting Alfred needs them but also that their actions are subject entirely to the decisions of their user (i.e. Alfred). As for whether this can be trusted, ~~Alfred's~~ Alfred's preface to the Consolation of Philosophy would be an entirely accurate account of his own view on the matter. However, Alfred may naturally see himself as the only figure involved in governmental decisions ~~and thus~~ and thus this perspective may not actually hold true. We know, for example, that ealdormen still held immense power at the local level and that the witan (as referenced in Source C) took a prominent role in both the legal reform and the cultural revival (especially the latter since Alfred was relatively unskilled in the literate arts).

~~was~~ compared to advisors such as Grimbold or Pledgmond). As a result, while this source does suggest that Alfred saw himself as the main decision making figure in government/administration we cannot reliably extrapolate that claim to be the actual case.

Source D is another Source that suggests that Alfred alone was the main decision maker but it hints at others still playing a fairly important role. Alfred is stated to have 'stood alone' in the 'helm of government', clearly suggesting that the main decisions were entirely made by him. However the final line of the source tells us that Alfred had to through 'gentle instructions, reproof and command' (and where that failed 'punishment') 'win over' clergymen, ealdormen and thegns to his wishes. This suggests that Alfred struggled immensely to get his noblemen to comply with his decisions and that power for enactment of government (at least at the local level) remained in the hands of others. As for whether this source can be trusted, Florene of Worcester, while not a contemporary source, likely had access to material from Alfred's reign that has since been lost and as such the account should somewhat correlate with real events. That said, Florene's position as a monk may make him more inclined to promote the

qualities of the Christian king Alfred and so the extent to which Alfred was alone in his governance may have been amplified to increase the incredulity of the king's achievements (this agenda is hinted to in 'yet God being his helper') and thus demonstrate the strength of divine favour. The idea that Alfred stood alone in his government does not correlate with the existence of the witan as well. As such, this source does suggest Alfred was alone in his decision making but it may be ~~exaggerating~~ exaggerating in order to ~~put~~ put Alfred in a more positive light.

Source B somewhat supports the view that Alfred alone made the main decisions in government but also suggests that many managerial, day-to-day decisions were taken by others. 'Alfred decreed that' and 'serving him in various capacities' both imply that Alfred's decisions were absolute and carried weight. Furthermore, the fact that it is state finances being discussed shows that Alfred had control over the major aspects of the administration ('his revenue' emphasises this). However, the description of 'three shifts' by 'noble thegns' as the managerial system of the royal court suggests that some matters certainly were left to the noblemen. The royal court

was a major part of the kingdom's operations and its management was certainly a key set of decisions - thus the role of the thegns show that Alfred wasn't the sole decision maker in all aspects. As for whether this can be trusted Asser's life of King Alfred was written in 893 and so offers a contemporary account of the governmental process. However, Asser himself was a dear friend of Alfred and the *vita Alfredi* may have specifically been written to convince the Welsh to ally with Alfred in the face of Hastein's Danish army. As a result, the source portrays Alfred in a quite positive light to emphasise his kingliness. That said, Alfred's direct control over the government's funds is supported by other sources such as his will (where he grants £2000 worth of gifts) and the *vitan* suggests that Asser's description of the royal court as managed by thegns is accurate. Thus this source suggests that Alfred was the sole decision maker in some of the major decisions.

Source C only slightly supports the idea that Alfred was the sole decision maker.

'I gathered the laws' does imply that Alfred's role in the legislation of his government was great but the line 'I rejected with the

advice of my councillors' and 'I dared not... [write] many of my own' both suggest that the advice of the witan and past custom was very important in influencing governmental decisions. As for whether this can be trusted, the introduction to the Domboc was, as with Source A, written by Alfred and as such is likely to present the king in a more prominent position than he actually was. Due to this, its surprisingly distributive perspective on the decision making in government is likely to be true. Additionally, the importance placed by Alfred on the "England of old" in ~~his~~ his government's decision making is reflected in his cultural revival for example, where (in his preface ~~to~~ to the Pastoral Care) he expresses a desire to return to an educated and ecclesiastical England of the past. Thus this source suggests that other factors were ~~more~~ important regarding governmental decisions.

In conclusion, while at face value the majority of these sources support the idea that Alfred was the only person involved in the main decisions in his government and administration both Sources B and Ohint to the importance of the witan particularly in the important day-to-day local governmental

decisions (e.g. the running of the royal court). Furthermore, Source C highlights the importance of the witan and past customs in the king's decision making. Most of these sources are contemporary and so likely draw on accurate information, but most also have clear incentives to emphasise Alfred's personal importance in the running of the government. As such many of their exaggerated claims have to be taken with some salt, especially when considering the role of Alfred's witan in the legal and cultural reforms and the power ealdormen held at a local level. Thus in light of this all, these sources do not support the view that the main decisions in government and administration were taken by Alfred alone.

This is an example of a Level 5 response for Question 1. This response is characterised by a good focus on the question, evaluation of the sources which uses both knowledge of the historical context and provenance, and a judgement (albeit less developed) which addresses the key issue in the question but which is based on the reliability of the sources. Note that the evaluation is uneven: it is not as effective on Source A as it is on Source B and Source C in particular.

Section B overview

Section B is made up of two essays, with each one focused on a different topic area. Candidates were asked to (2) assess the reasons for Edward the Elder's success against his opponents, or (3) to consider how much change Aethelstan brought about in the way England was governed. The questions set required candidates to analyse causes and consequences of major historical issues.

Question 2*

The Making of England 899–1016

2* Assess the reasons for the success of Edward the Elder against his opponents.

[20]

More candidates answered this question than Question 3. In general, candidates were able to explain the relevant factors with a reasonable level of detailed knowledge. Edward's relationship with Æthelflæd of Mercia was particularly well known, with many candidates arguing that it was only because of her contribution (specifically, from a military point of view and through the construction of burhs) that he was able to find success against his opponents. Luck was also highlighted, as seen in the way he overcame the dynastic threat from his cousin, Æthelwold, who was fortuitously killed at the Battle of the Holme without the king having to do anything. Other reasons discussed included Edward's own military leadership, the king's ability to force the submission of the Welsh and Scottish rulers, and, somewhat more tenuously, the state of the kingdom he inherited from his father. Some candidates misread the question by focusing instead on the extent of Edward's success in tackling his opponents.

Exemplar 2

One would argue that chance was the main reason for Edward the Elder's success against his opponents because it is the factor that is deciding in his conquest of all his ~~own~~ opponents, despite politics or military strategy. One would define success as putting a permanent end to the threat of an opponent as that secures triumph over them.

One would argue that chance was the main reason for Edgar's success over his enemies because in all cases it puts a permanent end to his opponent or as close as he can be to a permanent end under his reign. For example, Edward's ~~triumph~~ ~~own~~ final and permanent success over Aethelwold was due to the Kentish army ignoring 7 of his messengers initially telling them to retreat since they ended up advancing and killing Aethelwold in his 902 invasion. This shows that outside factors of chance caused Edward's success because it puts a permanent end to Aethelwold. Also, the Battle of Corbridge in 918 was

completely outside of Edward's control and caused the weakness of his Northern opponents since it was a stalemate of Scotland and Raegwald's Northumbria. This event outside of Edward's control led to their need of protection due to lack of military strength and, thus, they submitted to him in 920, showing this lucky event led to his success over them. Although it could be argued that Raegwald was still a threat because he was mainly active in his name in Northumbria throughout the 920s, this is less important because Northumbria wasn't part of Edward's kingdom and so it wasn't a threat to him directly. We also see that Aethelfred died in 917, allowing Edward to take Mercia almost immediately. It is by chance that this event took place at a time that Edward was strong enough to advance to Mercia. Therefore, the opponents that challenged Edward's power were triumphed by him due to factors outside of his control. This is more important than factors like his politics or military

strategy because these events put her opponents to a permanent end.

However, it could be argued that political moves of Edward led to his success over opponents. We can see this in the fact that there were no coins minted in Athelstan's name in Merca, only in Edward's name. This shows his political move of strategic control by the crown kept his opponent from becoming more powerful. Edward also made the political move of reburying Alfred in 901 to get Wessex's nobility on his side against the dynasty that of Athelstan. This shows that Edward's political strategy would have led him to have success over his enemies as it encouraged the support for him and weakened the power of his opponents.

Therefore, chance is still more important ~~feature~~, although these political moves do help deal with his opponents, they don't put them to a permanent end which

wasn't they're not the main reason for Edward's success. On the other hand, the chance of Kent's military independence and the death of Æthelred put the threat of these opponents to a permanent end.

It could also be argued that military strategy caused Edward's success over his opponents. We see this in the strategic construction of fortified burhs. For example, the construction of a burh at Thelwell in 914 led to the submission of the Welsh in 920 due to intimidation and the construction of a burh in Tamworth in 917 meant that Edward had enough military influence to conquer Mercia in the same year. This shows that the strategy of building burhs militarily led to Edward's success over his opponents since he gained territory from these strategies. However, this evidence is limited because Wulfstan wasn't an opponent, they had previously submitted

to Alfred in 886 and thus had a history of friendly relations with Anglo Saxon kings. Also the only reason Mercia could be conquered was because Aethelstan had died and it had a power vacuum which ~~was~~ was a factor of chance. Therefore, military strategy is less important in Edward's success over his opponents.

In conclusion, chance is the main reason for Edward's success over his opponents because it puts the threat of power from Aethelstan, Aethelstan and the North to a permanent end and the political and military factors - while sometimes helpful in getting success - never lead to the permanent conquest of an opponent. Although it could be argued that the conquest of Wales was due to military strategy, Wales were not an active threat to Edward's power. Chance also defeats all his opponents whereas military strategy and political strategy, while being less effective than chance, also deal with less opponents. Thus chance is the main reason for Edward's success over opponents because of its reach and permanence.

Exemplar 2 is an example of a Level 6 response for Question 2. This response includes explanation of the relevant factors, but it is characterised more by the strength of its argument and the use of judgements. There is a clear, final judgement which identifies the most important reason – and explains why it is the most important. It also includes some interim judgements towards the end of the response, which help to develop the argument.

Assessment for learning



In relation to Questions 2 and 3, judgement is needed in order to reach the higher levels. A judgement provides a valid explanation as to why a factor is more or less important, for example; it is not simply an assertion stating that a particular factor is the most important one.

Question 3*

3* How much change did Athelstan make in the way England was governed?

[20]

There were fewer responses to this question. Some candidates struggled to properly address the extent of change brought about by Athelstan in the way England was governed; instead, these candidates simply provided explanations of some of the initiatives put in place by the king, in particular his law code and the increase in the amount of responsibility associated with the office of ealdorman. In some responses, candidates argued that Athelstan brought about little change to institutions which owed more to the initiative of King Alfred. Some candidates were able to take this comparison further by explaining the links between Athelstan's law code and those of his predecessors.

Exemplar 3

Aethelstan improved the governance of the kingdom through his new law code, uniting the kingdom under one rule, as well as the links made with the continent in order to defend attacks from the vikings and strengthen his position as the king. ~~What~~^{However,} this could be considered as a continued development of the governance, especially ~~the~~ Alfred's Burn building legacy, initially taken over by Edward and Aethelflaed. It is important to note that Aethelstan's law code ~~pre~~ named him as an innovative leader, further strengthened through his ~~own~~ administrative units.

~~Aethelstan~~ One of Aethelstan's most successful changes was the Administrative Units. Shires were now declared the centres for administration, making them into a kingdom of their own. This improved the power and position of Reeves who were now, under Aethelstan III, were to ensure shires allegiance to them. ^{in their twice yearly meetings} Furthermore, the hundreds were the new judicial centres for applying the law. Here they would meet every 4 weeks (failure to attend lead to expulsion or a fine) to discuss loyalty and reforms to the law. Here they would catch things and decide punishments. Finally, Burns were the only place you could find moneyers. They were central to trade and in turn improved the economy. A law was made that any product

worth up to 20 pennies could only be traded in Burhs. These administrative units improved Aethelstan's ability to govern his kingdom.

Additionally, Aethelstan provided more power to the ealdormen, improving the governance. Mercia was split into two so ealdormen could focus on administering smaller areas of land. Furthermore, the shires were to pledge allegiance and ealdormen became part of the king's trusted advisors. However, this kind of adaptation is similar to Alfred's reformation, linking back to the idea that Aethelstan was continuing the legacy.

Opposing this is the links to the continent which improved the kingdom's protection and insured Aethelstan's strong position as king. He married off his half sister to Sihtric who then promised not to support each other's enemies or attack each other's land. Then he married another half sister off to Richard Duke of Normandy to prevent the Vikings from using French land as a base for their attacks. Furthermore, Aethelstan gifted a sword to Harald Hairfair to congratulate him on his kingship. In response he was sent his son Hakon who took an oath before the king and was then raised by Aethelstan. Once

Hakon became king of Norway, he was supported by Aethelstan and gave him men in return for continued peace. As well as this, he married off a half-sister to the ~~cont~~ contemporary leader and king Louis of the Franks. These continental links prevented many invasions from the kingdoms as well as provided extensive protection from ~~the~~ ^{against the} Vikings, securing his position as king and advocating the strong governance he had over the kingdom.

As well as this, he ~~is~~ changed the power of the king's council who were now in charge of ~~creating~~ the king's charters. This level of ^{importance} ~~importance~~ improved Aethelstan's relation with his council. Furthermore, they held yearly feasts in order to see who the most loyal were and therefore whose power should be developed.

A significant change in the law code was the introduction of an age limit on the death penalty. Anyone 12 yrs or older was to be killed if found guilty for a crime.

To conclude, Aethelstan changed the way England was governed through the administrative units and their new purposes for

ensuring his control over the kingdom. Furthermore, the continental links were a clever way to defend from viking invasions, opposed to Alfred and Edward's offensive approaches.

This exemplar is an example of a Level 4 response for Question 3. This response includes explanation of some of the relevant factors, but it lacks a clear and substantiated judgement. There is a tendency to impart knowledge which means that the response only generally addresses the question.

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