Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2021

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In History (1HIA and 1HIB)
Paper B4: British Depth Study (1HIA and 1HIB B4)

Option: B4 Early Elizabethan England, 1558-88

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Introduction

Section B of Paper 2 assesses the British Depth Study, with candidates required to answer three questions targeted at Assessment Objective 1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and Assessment Objective 2 (Analysis of Second Order Concepts). As of the 2019 series, the British Depth Study forms a separate booklet to the Period Study and, for 2021 entry, was sat at in a different session to the P section of Paper 2, a scenario which will be repeated in the 2022 series.

Question 1a follows an identical format to Question 1 on Paper 1. Candidates should identify a characteristic of the topic and, having identified a feature, they should add a further detail which will explain the feature or provide context. It is important that candidates understand that the details need to be connected – four disparate facts were limited to a maximum of two marks.

Question 1b is scored out of 12 marks and the mark scheme is identical to Question 4 on Paper 1 and Question 2 on Paper 3. The question targets the second-order concept of causation. The stimulus points are provided to act as prompts to remind candidates what they have studied. Use of the stimulus points is not compulsory, but where they are used, it should be noted that the mark scheme requires an additional point of content to reach the top of Levels 2 and 3 and for entry into Level 4.

For Question 1c, students have a choice between (i) and (ii) and the questions may target any second-order concept. This question follows the same principles as Question 5 and Question 6 on Paper 1. The stimulus points should be useful reminders of the alternative aspects of the issue. It should also be noted that the stimulus points will usually relate to aspects of content rather than directly indicating a factor that should be included; their use is not compulsory. To achieve high marks, there is an expectation that there will be both depth and breadth of knowledge, shown by three discrete points of content being covered.

This question also requires a judgement to be made. Typically, answers that move into Level 4 demonstrate a good grasp of the conceptual focus of the question and provide a supported judgement, based on criteria; this judgement is often evident throughout the answer as well as forming the conclusion, showing careful planning and a coherent line of reasoning. Often, answers at Level 4 present a balanced argument but it should be noted that this is not a required structure, as long as the candidate's judgement is in relation to the full conceptual focus of the question. Level 3 answers often have good sections of analysis and argument but this is not sustained throughout the answer.

At Level 2, candidates usually provide a good range of relevant content but struggle to apply this to the second order concept dictated in the question. It is important that candidates consider the question carefully and shape their answers in relation to the

focus, whether this be causation, consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference or significance.

Within section B, Question 1a uses a points-based mark scheme, while Question 1b and Question 1c are marked using a 'best fit' approach applied to a levels of response mark scheme. Progression in Assessment Objective 1 (knowledge and understanding) is shown by the candidate's increasing ability to select information precisely and show wide-ranging knowledge and understanding. Progression in Assessment Objective 2 (analysis) is shown by a candidate's response moving from simple or generalised comments to analytical explanations, showing a line of reasoning which is coherent, logical and sustained. Centres are also reminded that the Indicative Content in the mark scheme does not imply what must be included in a response, nor does it give any expectation as to how candidates are expected to structure their responses. Any valid analysis and detail is rewarded and examiners noted that some candidates demonstrated impressive knowledge and understanding.

Question 1a

Candidates were asked to describe two features of the role of the Babington Plot. The vast majority of candidates were able to provide some valid comment about plots organised to remove Elizabeth from the throne, with those scoring more highly able to bring examples specific to the Babington Plot, for example, linking it to the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Strong answers included comments relating to the involvement of other groups of people, such as Phillip II.

Question 1b

Candidates were asked to explain why Elizabeth faced challenges to her rule in 1558. Many candidates were able to write a response extrapolating accurately from the stimulus points and include a relevant third point of content, most often referring to concerns around Elizabeth's legitimacy, gender or marital status; or the debt that the Crown was in when she ascended the throne.

Most answers showed an understanding of problems that Elizabeth faced but a significant proportion of answers failed to focus on 1558, instead writing about issues she faced throughout her reign, such the Northern Rebellion, the plots involving Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Spanish Armada. A number of candidates chose to develop the religion stimulus point by detailing the crucifix or vestiarian crises. Unfortunately this knowledge was not relevant to this question, which focuses very specifically on the problems that Elizabeth faced at the start of her reign. Candidates are advised to take

note of the date range stipulated in the question, in order to avoid drawing on knowledge that is out of period.

At the higher levels, candidates were able to describe accurate examples of the problems that Elizabeth faced and then explain how these problems challenged Elizabeth. Some were able to show how one problem led to another – although this is not necessary to achieve the highest marks, it was pleasing to see such a strong grasp of the complex challenges Elizabeth faced when she became queen.

Question 1c

Question 1c required students to analyse a statement related to a debate from the topic and reach an evaluative conclusion. Where candidates achieved Level 4, this evaluation was most often evidenced throughout the essay, demonstrating linked analysis and showing nuance. Conclusions usually involved discussion of the conceptual focus and a weighing up of the different evidence to reach an overall judgement. Responses in Levels 2 and 3 often included a judgement, but this was often stated or repetitive and did not supply justifications and select criteria that were relevant to the question. These responses also typically failed to display a consistent line of reasoning throughout their answer, instead giving evidence relevant to the question and not analysing that evidence in relation to the question.

This year there was a concerning lack of debate evidence across the responses submitted. A high proportion of candidates approached this essay by explaining a list of relevant factors, rather than arranging these to support or deny a particular point of view. While a sense of balance is not necessary for the top level of the markscheme, indicating an awareness of the argument is, since the question is an evaluative one: asking candidates how far they agree. In addition, the exclusion of a clear judgement directed at the question may prevent candidates from achieving level 4 on the markscheme.

Question 1ci had a causation focus. Candidates were required to evaluate the extent to which religious rivalry was the cause of war between England and Spain. This was the more popular of the two option questions.

Answers showed a reasonable grasp of the issues leading up to open conflict between England and Spain. Many were able to describe the issues caused by Elizabeth's involvement in the Netherlands; some also brought in more unusual aspects of content, such as the Genoese Loan affair. Few candidates accurately expanded on the stimulus point relating to Robert Dudley and several candidates confused him with Drake. Many answers included reference to piracy in the Caribbean and the impact this had on relations, as well as Elizabeth's refusal to marry Phillip II.

Question 1cii had a similarity and difference focus. Candidates were required to evaluate the extent to which entertainment in early Elizabethan England was similar for rich and poor. This was a significantly less popular option than Question 1ci and, of the responses available, a significant number were weak and lacking in specific subject knowledge. Therefore candidates struggled to make a valid judgement.

Most candidates were able to share some knowledge of entertainment in Tudor England, with the most common knowledge being related to the theatre and its availability to all classes of Elizabethans. Some were able to use hunting as an example, with one notable response differentiating between hunting for sport, a pastime enjoyed by the rich, and the fishing and trapping for food more usually undertaken by the poor. A few answers noted the difference in availability of leisure time. However, a majority of responses to this question drew on very generic knowledge, sometimes not specific to the period.

Conclusion

Based on the performance seen on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:
- Ensure that you revise content from all the sections on the specification.
- When answering a question, focus on all parts of it, paying particular attention to any dates specified.
- Take care to learn the topic-specific vocabulary and practise using it.
- Use your time wisely – there is no need to write at length for question 1a and the time would be better used in 1c, where a short plan may be beneficial in improving the organisation of your answer.
- Demonstrate depth of knowledge by including two or three pieces of evidence in each paragraph, where possible.
- Select connectives carefully to introduce a sense of debate among the points you make in your response to 1c, weighing the evidence before reaching an evaluative judgement.
- When forming a judgement, be explicit about what criteria have been used and, when revising, spend some planning answers to different styles of questions and think about what criteria might go with each question style'.