

Report on the Components

June 2008

1938/1038/MS/R/08

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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General Certificate of Secondary Education History Pilot (1938)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course) History Pilot (1038)

REPORTS ON THE COMPONENTS

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4971 Medieval

This is the second report on Unit 1 (the Externally Set Task) of the GCSE History Pilot. Over 2000 candidates took the externally set task in the summer of 2008. One of the aims of the Pilot is to provide candidates with innovative forms of assessment that enable them to demonstrate genuine historical skills and understandings. Whilst the task is conducted under controlled conditions, by encouraging candidates to use all the resources at their disposal and within a four hour period, it was hoped that they would be enabled fully to demonstrate a range of competencies not normally anticipated in more conventional externally set history examinations.

CHANGES TO THE TASK

It is in the nature of a Pilot that lessons are learned and changes made in the light of experience. Experience of reading and assessing the responses written by candidates in 2007, coupled with feedback from their teachers, led to amendments being made to the wording of the task and to the hints given as to how to set about the task.

- (i) The task was amended so that a statement was made and candidates were asked how far they agreed with the statement. They were told to use sources and their own knowledge to answer the question. This change was made because it was found that to ask candidates to use, and in using, evaluate, sources to support and challenge a given interpretation was simply too difficult. As reported in 2007, candidates tended to focus strongly on using either their own knowledge or source material to answer the question. It was hoped that by slightly shifting the balance of what was required, candidates would be enabled more effectively to meld evidence from the sources with their own knowledge in order to address the task.
- (ii) The hints as to how to tackle the task given in 2007 were found to be too detailed. Intended to help candidates, in effect they deterred by their complexity and provided, for many, an additional hurdle. It was therefore decided to provide five hints for each paper, sharply focused on the question and with fewer words.
- (iii) A decision was made that candidates would not be expected to address all invaders and raiders and all rulers in any one question.

These changes were fully explained to all teachers attending the compulsory meeting in Birmingham in December 2007.

PREPARING FOR THE EXTERNALLY SET TASK

This externally set task provides a completely new way of assessing GCSE History and teachers had prepared candidates well for this. Clearly, more centres than last year had familiarised their students with the range of resources available and the sort of information and evidence that could be obtained from them, and these students generally did well.

- (i) It is appreciated that an enormously wide range and variety of source material is available, in both printed and electronic form, for both options. Some centres had clearly tried to help their students manage this information by preparing source booklets for them as part of the teaching and learning process. It must be emphasised that, whilst this might be a useful teaching tool, it should be treated as such. Students should be encouraged to treat such a booklet as a starting point for an exploration of the richness and variety of material available to them.

- (ii) In a similar way, the provision of writing frames, whilst providing less able candidates with scaffolding which may be appropriate in a teaching and learning context, does not translate easily into an assessment situation with an unseen task. Students should be encouraged as soon as possible to leave this safety net behind.

THE EXTERNALLY SET TASK

Candidates had a choice of one from two options:

- Raiders and Invaders: the British Isles c.400-c.1100
- Power and Control: Kingship in the Middle Ages c.1100-c.1500

The majority of centres taught, and therefore their candidates responded to, the first option. This was the same as in 2007.

- (i) Examiners saw the full range of responses normally expected at GCSE level. There was much praise for really excellent, thoughtful, reflective work produced by high-achieving candidates who provided clear evidence of the ability to produce well-reasoned and well supported analyses, explanations, arguments and genuinely historical conclusions.
- (ii) Examiners found no difference in the range of responses from candidates entering on each of the two options.
- (iii) Fewer candidates than in 2007 mismanaged their time, and very few candidates were not able to bring their work to a conclusion. Centres are reminded that it is completely in order for the supervising teacher to suggest to candidates, after a couple of hours, that it is time to stop researching and to begin to plan and write an answer to the question set.
- (iv) The changes made to the structure of the task and to the hints clearly helped candidates select and deploy the information at their disposal more effectively than last year. The best candidates were able, additionally, to provide support and challenge by effective source evaluation, although for many, source use and source evaluation were of lesser importance than providing a coherent narrative and cogent explanation or argument.
- (v) Source evaluation was, in general, disappointing, as it was last year. Most candidates tended to adopt a simplistic approach: it was written by a monk and therefore biased, or written after the event and so unreliable. Few candidates were able to comment effectively on interpretations. Examiners noted that more candidates than last year were using web-sites, sometimes exclusively. However, many candidates were able effectively, and sometimes scathingly, to evaluate these web-sites.
- (vi) A substantial minority of candidates, when responding to the 'Raiders and Invaders' task, which focused on the reasons for the Saxon and Norman invasions, curiously decided to write about the Vikings as well. For this they could get no credit. Still others strayed far from the task and wrote about the ways in which the Saxons settled, their laws and customs. Centres are asked to remind candidates that they must respond to the task that is presented to them, not the task that they would like to see.
- (vii) In responding to the 'Power and Control' task, a substantial minority of candidates did not attempt to define what was meant by 'achievements' in this context, assuming a definition was unnecessary and writing about whether or not the selected men were effective, or good, rulers.

ASSESSING THE RESPONSES

Three teams of examiners, each led by a team leader, assessed the work of candidates. All the team leaders are involved with other elements within the Pilot and all of the examiners teach the Pilot. Thus candidates' work was marked by those very familiar with its aims and objectives.

- (i) The published, generic mark scheme was used.
- (ii) Each band within the mark scheme contains three bullet points. They focus on selection, organisation and deployment of relevant information, source evaluation and an understanding of interpretations. It was not expected that candidates would perform equally across all three bullets within whatever band was appropriate. Examiners looked always for a 'best fit'. However, for access to Band 5 it was expected that candidates would address, even if in an unbalanced way, all three bullet points.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

(i) Teaching and learning

The specification makes it clear that teaching and learning should concentrate on identifying, investigating and discussing issues related to the organising questions of each of the two options. These should give the students opportunities to investigate a wide range of representations and interpretations from a variety of sources; investigate and discuss the organising questions; make comparisons, and develop their research and planning skills.

However, the situation changes immediately the envelope containing the externally assessed task is opened.

(ii) During the externally assessed task

The specification makes it clear that, whilst teachers may give guidance during the four hours of the externally assessed task, this **MUST** be limited to ensuring that

- all candidates understand the 'Hints' given as to how best to approach the task
- where necessary, individually or collectively, candidates are given assistance in time management.

It would thus **NOT** be appropriate to provide written information further unpacking the 'Hints', nor to provide plans, writing frames or source booklets that are specifically focused on the given task and written by the teacher once the task is known.

Centres are reminded that candidates must not communicate with each other about the content of their work during the four-hour period of the set task, nor may they introduce any new material that is not accessed by them during the set four hours.

CONCLUSION

An externally set task of this nature is exciting, innovative and clearly engages the candidates. There are pitfalls for us all, but what is important is that we are learning from them and are adapting both the task and the way we approach it in order to provide an effective and rigorous assessment of what the candidates know, understand and can do. It must be emphasised here that examiners found much to praise. Effective teaching was evident in the ways in which many candidates approached hypothesis testing with confidence, selecting and deploying information, accessing and discussing a range of relevant resources and so creating a genuinely historical explanation, where evidence was weighed and a supported judgement was reached. The best responses were very good indeed; the weakest responses all had something relevant to say.

There is much to learn from this Pilot for us all, but now, at the end of the second externally assessed task, both teachers and students are to be congratulated on their commitment to the Pilot, on the obvious enjoyment and involvement with which their students are writing and researching, and on the outcome of the assessment of this unit.

4972 Local History Investigation & 4973 International History

General comments

This is the second year that candidates have completed work for these coursework units. The first year was overall a success but certain areas were identified both in the general report to centres and in individual reports to particular centres where some improvement was possible. It is encouraging to be able to report that many centres have clearly responded to the points raised. This has been achieved in some cases by choosing new topics and starting again or more commonly by reorganising the focus of the units and re-wording and re-targeting the tasks. The overall standard of the candidates' work improved and was impressive for Year 10 candidates. The moderation of candidates' work was straightforward. Few adjustments to marks had to be made and a clear consensus has emerged between teachers and moderators in relation to interpreting, using and applying the assessment criteria.

The assignments and the issue of significance

Both the local and the international units worked better this year. Many assignments were sharper, more carefully worded and helped candidates to cover all the relevant requirements. The issue of significance is at the heart of both units and should be the focus of the assignment. There was much greater emphasis on significance in this year's work with fewer candidates simply writing about what happened and assuming that something was significant simply because it happened.

There were a few centres where candidates devoted too much attention to similarity and difference rather than to significance and a few centres where candidates struggled because they did not produce any criteria against which significance could be judged. The best work identified and used clear criteria. These often provided a useful framework and a basis for analysis, argument and judgement. However, there were some examples of such criteria being used rather clumsily and leading to a mechanistic approach while in a few other centres the candidates identified criteria and then promptly ignored them for the rest of the answer. It is clear that criteria for significance do provide candidates with a focus; they give them something meaningful against which they can assess significance. In these ways criteria can help candidates focus on answering the question. However, the danger of work becoming too mechanistic should be guarded against. For example, it is not helpful to provide all candidates with the same criteria to work their way through one by one. It is helpful to encourage candidates to understand the need to have criteria, to come up with their own, and to use them to inform, and to provide direction to, their answers.

The assignments that worked best had the following characteristics: they were given to candidates in the form of questions (problems to be solved); they did not cover too broad a topic as this often leads to superficiality; they had a clear focus but were open-ended enough to allow candidates to develop answers of their own; they encouraged candidates to develop and support their own arguments and points of view; they were not heavily structured – such structure inhibited candidates from developed analysis and led to answers that were similar to one another.

Last year's experience has led several centres to make less use of PowerPoint presentations. These had led to candidates worrying more about presentation than about content and to many presentations consisting of lists of points and a lack of developed explanation, analysis and

Report on the units taken in June 2008

argument. Some candidates used a PowerPoint presentation as the starting point which then led into more discursive work on paper. This approach worked well.

The need to provide an answer to the question set

It is also important to remind candidates that their prime task is to answer the question set. It was evident that some candidates had spent too long studying the marking criteria and too little thinking about the requirements of the question. These candidates attempted to cover all the assessment objectives in their answers. This often led to some artificiality and lack of coherence. For example, some aspects such as source evaluation were bolted-on to the answers. They did little to improve the work as an answer to the question. It is important to remember that the work is assessed using the marking scheme through a 'best-fit' approach. This means that if one strand (or one assessment objective) in a band is not prominent in an answer, this does not automatically mean that the answer cannot be placed in that band. It will be sad if candidates end up using their answers to showcase their knowledge, skills and understandings rather than using these where relevant to help them produce a direct, well-supported and well-argued answer to the question.

Local History

Last year some candidates produced good work on the importance of a historical site, person or event, but did less well when attempting to explain its importance to the local community today. This year's work showed some improvement but this was still the weakest part of many answers. It was sometimes ignored altogether and sometimes bolted-on the end almost as an afterthought. This is a pity as the focus of this unit is the relevance of local history to local communities today. It might help some candidates if they are set two questions - the first on the importance of the chosen factor in the past (locally, regionally and nationally), and the second about how far and why the factor still matters today to local people. There was still some work where candidates find it necessary to write too much background, description and narrative. They should be encouraged to begin to answer the question from the first sentence of their answers.

International History

The main weakness of last year's work – the failure to consider international significance – was less evident this year. Several centres added something to the question, or added an extra question, to encourage candidates to address the issue. It is important that consideration of international significance is not bolted-on as an afterthought. It should be a major focus. It was also encouraging to see more candidates considering long-term significance as well as immediate significance. Some assignments still require candidates to range over too long a period or too broad a topic. This did lead to superficial coverage and provided candidates little opportunity to demonstrate detailed knowledge and genuine understanding. The case study approach was advocated in last year's report and it again produced much of the best work this year.

Conclusion

As this report indicates there is still some way to go in tackling all the problems and weaknesses that are evident. However, as last year's report made clear, there are far more pluses than minuses and it has been encouraging to read so much work that made it clear how much candidates had enjoyed being challenged by issues that they could see still matter in today's world whether that be on a local or an international scale.

4974, 4975, 4976, 4979

Teacher Assessment is one of the main innovations in the GCSE History Pilot course. It has largely been a success. It has involved teachers in the assessment process more than is possible with more conventional methods and it has led to increased candidate motivation and some high quality work. At its best it has motivated the less academic candidates while at the same time allowing the most able candidates to fly. Some of the work seen was judged to be some of the best work ever seen for GCSE History.

Of the four units available for Teacher Assessment: Heritage Management and Marketing, Multimedia in History, An Archaeological Enquiry and The Migrant Experience, the first was easily the most popular with over half the centres choosing it. Only a handful of schools chose one of the other units. Of the two options within Heritage Management and Marketing all the centres chose the second one, Heritage Marketing.

The aim of Teacher Assessment was to allow candidates to follow a meaningful and challenging course which would involve them in completing several pieces of work that naturally emerged from the course of study. It was hoped that these pieces of work would not be purely assessment exercises bolted on to the course but exercises worth doing in their own right, that contributed to a coherent course of study but that would also provide evidence of the attainment of candidates. This was largely achieved. There were a few cases where candidates had been required to complete a series of small and not very worthwhile tasks whose existence seemed to be explained by a desire to cover all the assessment criteria through a checklist approach. The candidates must have felt they were simply completing one assessment exercise after another with little idea of the rationale of the unit as whole.

This approach also made it more difficult for candidates to demonstrate higher-order skills as they were given few opportunities to produce work of any length or depth. Rather more common was a task being added late in the day to cover an assessment criterion that had not been covered in the rest of the work. More successful were those centres that had managed to produce a coherent course of study with all the exercises contributing to this coherence. This usually involved candidates in four or five larger tasks that clearly had a part to play in the unit as a whole. These tasks were also worthwhile in their own right and many candidates had clearly approached them with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Careful planning at the outset had ensured that all the assessment criteria would be covered somewhere although no exercises had been devised simply to cover a particular criterion. Inevitably, many centres covered some assessment criteria in more depth than others. This is perfectly acceptable.

The initial marking of the work was in most cases accurate although a few adjustments had to be made between centres during the first day of cluster-group moderation. Several teachers said how challenging but liberating they found holistic assessment of the work to be. This allowed teachers to ignore isolated weaknesses in a student's portfolio and to reach an overall judgement that accurately summed up the main strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. Little use was made of ephemeral evidence and it rarely had a significant impact on a candidate's final mark. Where it was used, teachers submitted detailed records to support the adjustments made to marks.

Within Heritage Marketing there was an eclectic range of topics including slavery, crime and witchcraft. Many centres chose a local museum, person, castle or town. The most challenging aspect of planning this unit appeared to be the balance between the history and the marketing. In a few instances the marketing took over with little good history evident in the work, but it was more common to see much good history with the marketing bolted on as an afterthought. The challenge for next year is to integrate the marketing more effectively into the unit as a whole.

Report on the units taken in June 2008

The Migrant Experience unit produced some interesting work linked to the local community, for example, focusing on migrant experiences in an area with a large proportion of people with Asian heritages. There was also interesting work based on Windrush and immigration in the late '40s and '50s, and on immigration into the USA.

Some good work was seen in the Multimedia unit, for example, focusing on and evaluating different ways of presenting topics such as the Second World War and the Holocaust. The evaluation of websites was particularly effective.

Only one or two centres tackled the Archaeology unit but some excellent work was seen on experimental archaeology relating to the Saxon period with detailed work on the West Stow site.

The moderation of the marking of the work through meetings of cluster groups worked well. Many teachers said that they had benefited enormously from the discussions on the first day with colleagues from other schools. They learned a lot from being able to see how other centres had approached the units. Several teachers also said that they had a much better understanding of the assessment criteria and a better feel for the appropriate standard after moderating the marking of the other centres in the cluster group. From the external moderator's point of view the process on the first day was clearly effective as few changes had to be made on the second day. This second day gave the external moderators the opportunity to feed back to individual centres although it has to be said that most of the points raised during these discussions had already been recognised by the centres concerned. All the teachers approached the process of moderation professionally with a genuine desire to do justice to all centres and there were very few cases of teachers indulging in special pleading for their own centre. It was rare for the external moderator to have to act as a referee.

Given the lack of experience of most teachers in this form of assessment especially for formal external assessment, Teacher Assessment has been an outstanding success.

4977, 4978, 4980, 4981, 4982

Most of the units and the assignments worked well with centres clearly building on their experiences with the Year 10 coursework units. Whose History?, A Society in Depth, Local History and International History were all popular but only a couple of centres attempted the Change over Time unit. The units that worked best were those that were based on new planning and new material. Some units that were clearly based on previous GCSE courses, for example, Medicine over Time, Nazi Germany and the American West were less successful largely because they had not broken away from traditional approaches and assignments. However, this was not always the case and there was evidence, particularly on the American West, that these topics can work well if centres rethink their approach to the topic rather than merely copying old GCSE work.

The previous year's experiences of using the assessment criteria clearly helped and much of the marking was detailed and accurate with clear evidence of internal moderation having been carried out. The moderators made few changes to centres' marks. The detailed annotations on much of the work were very helpful. The overall standard of work was clearly higher than that presented for the Year 10 units last year providing clear evidence of the progress made in skills and understanding by most candidates.

The Whose History? units covered a wide range of topics, for example, King John, Churchill, President Kennedy, the Battle of Britain, Pearl Harbour and Margaret Thatcher. This unit raised more difficulties than any of the other units. It worked most successfully when the assignments clearly focused on two key issues: comparing and contrasting the ways in which the past has been represented and interpreted; and explaining why the past has been represented and interpreted in different ways. Candidates understood what they were being asked to do more clearly when these two issues were presented as two tasks. However, there was some less successful work where candidates were asked to simply collect together a range of interpretations or where the exercise turned into a source exercise, for example, do these sources prove that X was a hero?

In a minority of centres there appeared to be some confusion as to the distinction between representations and interpretations on the one hand and sources on the other. Some work required candidates to evaluate the different interpretations of historians. This approach is always problematic at this level and it is doubtful whether GCSE candidates have the depth of knowledge and understanding to offer any worthwhile evaluations of the work of leading academic historians. It often leads to trite judgements, for example, he is biased because he is a British historian. Another danger of the evaluation approach was evident when candidates were asked to evaluate representations for reliability, thus turning the work into a source evaluation exercise. A more fruitful way forward is to allow candidates to explore the differences and similarities of representations and interpretations and why there are different representations and interpretations. Centres might find it useful to focus more on representations than on interpretations.

The Society in Depth units covered societies such as Anglo-Saxon England, the American West, slavery in the USA, Victorian society, the USA in the '20s and '30s and Nazi Germany. Candidates produced some interesting work particularly on the role of the individual. There was some excellent work, for example, on Crazy Horse and Custer. This assignment worked best when there were clear issues to be analysed. When candidates were asked to compare the importance of two individuals or they were asked to judge the relative importance of impersonal and personal factors or asked to consider the contrast between the immediate and the long-term impact of an individual, the danger of the work degenerating into a biography was avoided.

Report on the units taken in June 2008

A weakness in some units was the formulaic nature of some of the source evaluation exercises that had been artificially bolted-on to the unit.

So few centres tackled the Change over Time that it is difficult to draw any general conclusions. The units on Local History and International History raised no issues that were different from those raised in the report on Units 4972 and 4973.

Grade Thresholds

General Certificate of Secondary Education
(Specification Codes 1038 and 1938)
June 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

| Unit | | Maximum Mark | A* | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | U |
|------|-----|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| 4971 | Raw | 50 | 44 | 39 | 34 | 29 | 24 | 19 | 15 | 11 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4972 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4973 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4974 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 27 | 21 | 16 | 11 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4975 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 27 | 21 | 16 | 11 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4976 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 27 | 21 | 16 | 11 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4977 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4978 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4979 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 27 | 21 | 16 | 11 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4980 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4981 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 4982 | Raw | 50 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 33 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 0 |
| | UMS | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 0 |

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

| | Maximum Mark | A* | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | U |
|------|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| 1038 | 100 | 90 | 80 | 70 | 60 | 50 | 40 | 30 | 20 | 0 |

| | Maximum Mark | A* | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | U |
|------|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|
| 1938 | 200 | 180 | 160 | 140 | 120 | 100 | 80 | 60 | 40 | 0 |

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

| | A* | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | U | Total No. of Cands |
|-------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------------|
| 1038 | 8.8 | 22.35 | 39.83 | 60.64 | 78.36 | 87.99 | 93.82 | 98.10 | 100 | 853 |

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

| | A* | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | U | Total No. of Cands |
|-------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------------|
| 1938 | 6.82 | 21.59 | 41.61 | 65.21 | 81.71 | 91.28 | 96.37 | 98.83 | 100 | 1888 |

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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