

History Pilot

General Certificate of Secondary Education **GCSE J938**

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course) **GCSE J038**

Reports on the Units

June 2010

J938/J038/R/10

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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 specification 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 (Short Course)
History Pilot (J038)**

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B871 Medieval History

Candidates performed across the mark range in both Raiders and Invaders and Power and Control. However, there was a heavy concentration achieving bands 2 to 4 with relatively few in bands 1 and 5. There were a number of positive features this year including:

- the selection of material;
- overall knowledge and historical understanding;
- balance.

In comparison, the following represented some of the stumbling blocks to candidates achieving the very highest marks:

- deployment of material;
- ability to compare;
- use of sources.

Each of these is covered in more detail below along with other issues that reveal inconsistency across centres such as length of response, candidate awareness of what is required, referencing and centre administration.

Candidates usually had at their disposal a range of information about Saxon and Viking life or about King John and Edward I. There were hardly any instances of mistaking the question and writing about a different society or a different monarch. On the whole they showed reasonable skill at selecting appropriate information and grouping this information in a fairly logical way. Most candidates also demonstrated a reasonable balance in their treatment of the two societies or monarchs. Saxons and Vikings were usually dealt with in equal measure as were John and Edward I although there was a tendency for a few to devote too much space to King John. There was also little evidence of answers that were unfinished although a few candidates obviously spent too long gathering sources.

Candidates' **knowledge** of the societies and monarchs was usually sufficient, with some of the better ones recognising the complexity and range of issues. Many candidates though depicted issues as fairly simplistic and polarised. For example, many saw the Saxons and Vikings as completely similar or completely different. Similarly, John was reported to have major problems with the Church whereas Edward I had none. There were thankfully few howlers, although it was surprising to find that several candidates thought that King Alfred was a Viking.

The single biggest reason for losing marks was a **failure to answer the question set**. Both Raiders and Invaders and Power and Control required a comparison and both had specific content areas. Whilst the majority of candidates focused on the everyday life of the Saxons and Vikings, there was a sizeable minority who concentrated more broadly on life or who simply wrote all they knew about them. This meant that there were swathes of irrelevant or, at best, semi-relevant material on legal systems, where they settled, the structure of society and government organisation. Likewise, with the monarchs, the question was clearly focused on problems but large numbers wrote at length on their successes, comparing their achievements. Other candidates failed to address sufficiently the extent of the difficulties and instead wrote exclusively about how they solved the problems.

The end result was that a number of candidates selected appropriate material but that this was then lost amidst chunks of tangential content. A particular issue was the long introductions which some insist on and which provide little but background context to the societies or monarchs – in the most extreme cases this can be up to a half of the whole answer.

Comparison is clearly a challenge for many candidates and it was noticeable that attempts fitted into a number of levels. At the lowest level were those candidates who made no attempt to compare. Information was chosen for the two societies or monarchs with no real attempt to select similar themes or issues for the two elements. Any relevant links were accidental and the response was likely to be heavily descriptive and sometimes scrapbookish.

The next level up still tended to keep the societies and monarchs separate but the ability to select was better and candidates ended up discussing similar issues such as children, women, clothing, houses for the Raiders and Invaders and religion, barons and foreign affairs for the Power and Control options. However, the responses still tended to be in the form of separate mini studies and so comparison was implicit – ie through selecting common issues.

A variation on this took candidates to the next level up. Here the two societies or monarchs were still largely treated separately but explicit comparisons were made, usually at the end of sections and more thoroughly in a conclusion. On the whole, this still largely consisted of a similarities and differences exercise. Candidates adopting this approach could still earn good marks, although better marks were usually reserved for those with good quality explanation. In other words, the similarities and differences were both identified and explained.

Some of the best responses were from candidates who organised their work by themes or aspects, such as houses and leisure for the societies and religion, or over-mighty subjects for the monarchs. Here the comparisons were clear and explained. Such responses were invariably more analytical and evaluative, probing issues such as the extent of the similarities and differences, the significance of the problems, how much things were of their own making and how much due to external factors.

Some whole centres were source-free zones, whereas others contained scripts which were replete with **source extracts and interpretations**. In different ways, both could prove problematical. The use of evidence is built into the generic mark scheme and there is an expectation that candidates will consider the nature of some of the evidence – at least for the higher marks. This does not, however, mean that the question is designed as a source evaluation exercise. Again the deployment of sources by candidates seemed to fit into a number of hierarchical levels.

At the lowest level were those who simply ignored any reference to the evidence. The end result was usually an uncritical reconstruction of an historical situation. The next level was often characterised paradoxically by a very extensive use of source material. Long quotes or whole extracts of minimal relevance were sometimes cited. Source extracts were introduced often at inappropriate points so that the flow of the argument was disrupted. The problem could be compounded when the candidate attempted evaluation of a source or an interpretation. The evaluation was often simplistic, eg 'this is a primary source so we can trust it', 'this is written in a textbook so it must be true', 'people do not lie when they write books'. It was noticeable that, in a sizeable number of answers, candidates were almost too condemnatory of written sources, seeing them as totally unreliable whereas archaeological evidence and websites were regarded as much more objective. Few candidates questioned the reliability of websites.

The better responses were often characterised by a judicious use of source material. They used information in a number of ways to support or qualify their points. Sometimes a source extract (shorn of irrelevant parts) was used to help the narrative. Any evaluation was specific to that source and not generic, eg 'our knowledge of Saxon and Viking homes is limited because the materials with which they were constructed has not survived' or 'this source probably gives such a negative view of John because it was compiled by monks who were amongst the main groups that John upset'. The use of sources came over as an integral part of the response and not a bolt on. There were no disruptions for generic statements about source reliability but rather low key statements that a particular source has to be treated with caution for a particular reason

which makes any conclusion provisional – just enough to demonstrate to a reader that the judgement or conclusion needed to be treated with an element of caution.

The same situation pertained to the interpretations of historians and archaeologists. Many candidates ignored these completely but they were still able to achieve good marks without referring to them. Others used them in various ways – the least useful being name dropping or referring to them in a way that was tangential to the question. The most valid use of interpretations was adopted by a relatively small number of candidates who linked the societies and monarchs to a valid historical debate quoting the occasional view of an historian or even summarising a school of thinking; for example, interpretations connected to the degree of civilisation in the everyday life of the Vikings or changing viewpoints about how much John's problems were of his own making.

Although centres with large numbers tend to have a good spread of candidate responses, it is noticeable that there are some distinctive features of some centres. Some have been referred to above, such as the use of sources, but there are others.

One of these is the **length of responses**. Whilst this is likely to be determined largely by the time available for writing up, it is surprising how long some answers were. It was difficult to see how some candidates had managed to write all they did in the allocated time. Others were flimsy, with some whole centres producing no response that extended much beyond 1-2 sides of A4.

Clearly, there is no ideal length – the basic criterion is whether it is an efficient and effective answer to the question. Brevity could be a virtue and some candidates earned very good marks for well focused, fairly laconic answers. However, the very short answers tended to lack some or all of breadth, balance and substantiation. For example, they might cover one of the societies or monarchs more fleetingly; they might home in on just one or two aspects and, above all, provide too much assertion and not enough information to demonstrate their judgements. In contrast, long answers did not necessarily address these issues – sometimes being characterised by poor selection, too much contextual background, journeys into generic source evaluation and repetition. Repetition was, in fact, a problem with a sizeable number of candidates. Sometimes whole sections were covered more than once.

Centres are allowed to organise the sitting of this task in ways that suit their circumstances as long as they operate within the parameters of the requirements. Some try to do this over one day whereas others clearly use two or more days. There was no evidence that one method worked better than any other. In a few cases though there was some indication that candidates changed direction after the first session – not always leading to an improvement as responses sometimes became less cogent and occasionally inconsistent.

The **guidance given to candidates** also seemed to vary across centres. Again there is a happy balance to strike. The most worrying were the extremes – either where the candidates were obviously unprepared as to what they really had to do or where the approach was too mechanistic and formulaic. In the worst cases, the candidates followed almost a template often making almost identical points in the same order – sometimes the same irrelevant points. The information provided by one candidate was largely the same as all the other candidates. Marking proved quite challenging as there was often little to distinguish responses. What was apparent though was that such approaches rarely achieved the highest marks.

The better centres had obviously prepared their candidates for the techniques and given summary guidance but had stopped short at templates. Work done throughout the teaching programme had prepared candidates to cope with comparative questions and how sources might be introduced. The sharing of the mark scheme and the use of past questions can sometimes backfire. There were examples where centres had disaggregated the mark scheme and encouraged their students to make sure they covered all the statements associated with the

bands. The result was often disjointed answers where the argument took second place to the statements. The mark scheme is a best-fit one which means that a cohesive, well supported response will always succeed over one that has been too heavily influenced by the separate statements.

In terms of preparing candidates to answer the task, some use of past questions can be helpful. This year though there was evidence that this could be to the candidate's detriment especially with the Power and Control question. A number of responses actually answered completely or, in large measure, a past question. No doubt this had been done as a practice piece but ended up being reproduced as a response to this year's question. The better centres train their students to analyse the specific question very carefully. The evidence for this obviously comes in the final product but also sometimes in the plan. A number of centres encourage their students to spend time on a plan, highlighting what the key words are and how these might be addressed.

Some centres obviously provide advice on **introductions and conclusions**. At one end of the spectrum are those that avoid both whereas, at the other end, are those who devote more than half their answer to an introduction and conclusion. A very common annotation from markers was 'irrelevance' against much of the first page of answers where candidates thought they needed to show the examiners their knowledge of who the Saxons and Vikings were, where they came from and how they got to England or alternatively to the family dynasty or early upbringing of John or Edward I. The best answers often defined their parameters in a brief introduction outlining what criteria they were going to use to answer the question.

Conclusions proved a significant aspect of many responses as this was sometimes the only occasion when the comparisons were discussed in any detail. This at least had the advantage of leaving the reader with a positive reaction to the work. This was not the case, however, with a number of conclusions which tended to be divorced from what the rest of the answer was saying or where completely new elements were introduced which would have been better in the main part of the answer. The better answers often recognised the complexity of the issues being discussed and tended to be more provisional and tentative.

Most candidates provided a list of **resources** used. Some even provided regular footnotes where relevant in the main body of the answer. Most were fairly limited in their bibliographies – sometimes a single textbook or on a few occasions 'class notes'. Quite a few relied quite heavily on primary school resources especially for the Raiders and Invaders. Some though provided impressive and extensive lists often containing websites but occasionally some 'learned monographs'. In just a small handful of cases, there was a brief commentary with regard to the value of the sources used. Obviously many of the sources come from textbooks but it would be helpful if the candidates identified the original source in any analysis rather than just referring to the school textbook.

Centre administration was usually competent and often exemplary. The work was well organised with cover sheets and despatched promptly. A small number of centres confused the parallel operation of 4971 (legacy) and the new B871 and entered candidates for the wrong specification. In a small number of cases, the work enclosed did not match the attendance list but this happened very infrequently; there was one instance of a centre marking its own candidates first before sending them on to the external examiner.

Despite the comments above, it is important to remember that many centres coped admirably with the organisation and administration of this paper. Candidates clearly had some understanding of the issues and many made valid attempts to compare their societies and monarchs. On the whole, new centres as well as old seem to have prepared their candidates to select and deploy their material and there is implicit evidence that many candidates and, hopefully their teachers, have enjoyed teaching children about this important period in the country's history.

B872, B873, B877, B878, B880, B881, B882 Coursework

The work submitted for moderation this year was a mixture of work from centres that have been using the Pilot for a number of years and work from centres that have just started the Pilot. This was also the first year when centres had more flexibility in terms of the order in which they completed the units. However, despite this increased flexibility nearly all centres submitted work for either the Local History unit or the International History unit and most of the comments that follow refer to these units.

Most of the coursework was marked carefully and accurately by centres and only a small minority of centres had their marks changed at the moderation stage. The summative comments on each candidate's work were most helpful, especially when they summed up the key characteristics of the work in terms similar to those in the generic mark scheme.

The new system of submitting marks and of choosing the sample caused some confusion. Centres should be aware of the fact that the request for the sample now comes direct from OCR via an email, and not from the moderator. Centres should also ensure that the correct entry option is used. Many centres this year entered, by mistake, for the repository (option 01) when they actually wanted postal moderation (option 02).

Much of the work submitted for moderation was appropriate and covered the relevant assessment criteria. However, some of the work from new centres did not have quite the right focus. In both the Local History unit and the International History unit an important issue is that of historical significance. In some centres candidates did not use this as their focus. The issue of significance is at the heart of both units and should be the focus of candidates' work. In the Local History unit the significance of the site/issue/topic for the local community today should be the focus. In the International unit the international significance of the topic should provide the focus. To be able to consider focus properly candidates need to have some understanding of the concept itself and how criteria can be formulated to measure it. These aspects should be explicit features of any work and should also be addressed in the teaching and learning for the unit.

The best work identified, and used, clear criteria. These provided for candidates a useful framework and a basis for analysis, argument and judgement. However, there were some examples of 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 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.

In the Local History unit the question of why the site/issue/topic matters to the local community today should be explicitly addressed. It should be the main feature of the work. Candidates can be helped to explicitly address this by coursework questions that also explicitly address it.

In the International History unit the international significance of the topic was sometimes missed or dealt with almost as an afterthought. This requirement means that, for example, candidates studying the Vietnam War need to consider the international significance of the war as well as its significance internally for Vietnam and the USA. Candidates cover this aspect best when they have a question that explicitly requires it.

Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

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.

Centres are reminded that OCR coursework consultants are available to comment on centres' questions and programmes of study and to offer advice on all matters related to coursework and teacher assessment for the History Pilot.

B874, B875, B876, B879 Teacher Assessment

The vast majority of centres choose the Heritage Management and Marketing unit for teacher assessment. As a result most of the comments that follow refer to that unit.

This report should be read in conjunction with the report issued for teacher assessment units 4974, 4975, 4976 and 4979.

Candidates overall produced much good work that was marked carefully and accurately. Centres new to the Pilot and completing the teacher assessment unit for the first time appear to have adapted to the requirements well and there was no evidence that they were having any more difficulties than centres who have been entering candidates for the Pilot for a number of years.

Most centres made detailed annotations to candidates' work. This was helpful to moderators but because teacher assessment involves making a holistic judgement about the work as a whole, most useful were overall summative comments about the work as a whole. These comments, often five or six lines long, summed up the most important characteristics of the work in relation to the mark scheme and explained why a certain band of marks had been awarded.

All of the centres entering candidates for the Heritage Management and Marketing unit used version (b) Heritage Marketing. Although there was some interesting and valid work, there was also some work that was not entirely appropriate. The key objective for this unit is to market a site, theme, topic or individual on the basis of its historical significance. This should involve some teaching and learning in the classroom about the historical context and importance of the site/topic being studied. This is crucial. All the work that candidates complete about marketing must be connected to their understanding and knowledge of the history of the site/topic.

The weakness of some present schemes is that the history and marketing are kept separate. In some centres the marketing is strong but the history almost non-existent, while in other centres the opposite is the case. These problems can be avoided by bringing the marketing and history together. This can be done in a number of ways.

Firstly, candidates can be required to assess the present marketing (if it exists) of the chosen site/topic. This assessment should be based on the following issues: is the marketing historically accurate, does it properly represent the site/topic, is it based on historical issues, does it stress/explain the historical importance of the site/topic? From this list it is clear that any assessment carried out of existing marketing must be largely based on historical issues. At the moment some of this work is based on non-historical issues such as whether the posters are colourful enough or whether the entrance is clearly signposted.

When candidates move on to their own marketing plans they should be aware of the key objective – to market the site/topic on the basis of its historical significance. They must use the history to sell the site/topic. At the moment much of the candidates' efforts go into designing items for the gift shop such as pencil holders and tee-shirts. In fact the gift shop appears to be the main matter of concern for some candidates. Instead, candidates should be asking themselves why their site/topic matters historically, for example, its uniqueness or the fact that it is an excellent example of something, its importance in national or local events or its iconic importance. The marketing plan and the sample of marketing materials that are produced by candidates should be about using the history to convince people to visit the site/attraction. It should also be aimed at educating visitors so that they leave with much more knowledge and understanding than they had when they arrived.

Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

If the approach outlined above is adopted then history and marketing will be brought together more successfully than is sometimes being achieved. Overall, the teacher assessed unit has been a success and now produces a wide range of varied work where candidates have had to use much initiative. It is hoped, and expected, that centres can now move on and further improve the work produced for this unit.

The small number of centres studying the Multimedia in History unit often produced some very interesting work. The best work was again a product of bringing together historical knowledge and understanding with multi-media products so that they could be evaluated as representations and interpretations of history.

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