

History Pilot

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J938**

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

Examiners' Reports

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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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B871 Medieval History

Overall candidates performed similarly to last year although there was greater evenness of performance across the two options. Traditionally "Power and Control" has produced a higher range of better responses, but there was little to distinguish between these and the "Raiders and Invaders" answers this year.

In general, the quality of responses seems to have slotted into five different levels of progression, namely:

- responses that consisted largely of unsorted material, sometimes with a great deal of copied work. Very thin answers also tended to fit in here;
- those that grouped material that could have been made relevant to a focused answer, but the relevance was largely implicit and often very descriptive. Unbalanced answers also tended to belong here;
- those that attempted some balance and covered both dimensions of the comparison but the two issues were treated largely independently with only occasional attempts to make the comparisons clear, sometimes largely confined to the conclusions or at the end of each section;
- either those that adopted a largely analytical and evaluative approach but still mainly addressed the two comparators separately, or those that attempted explicit comparison but where the argument was sometimes unclear and lacking substantiation;
- those where the comparison was central and convincing and where the information, including the use of sources and interpretations, was used to strengthen the argument. The conclusions followed logically from the rest of the discussion.

These different levels did not equate exactly to the bands and there was quite frequently a mixture of these characteristics, but it was still very noticeable that many responses fitted comfortably into one of these descriptions.

The rest of this report unpacks some of these characteristics.

Examiners are primarily seeking evidence of one feature above all others – a coherent and focused answer to the question set, devoid of superfluous material and with clear logical judgements backed up with carefully-selected evidence. Within such responses, one looks for evidence of sufficient understanding and knowledge to add some depth and breadth to the response.

There was no shortage of such responses. The majority of candidates did at least answer the question, although a few wrote about Saxons rather than Vikings. However, there were large numbers of candidates who found it quite difficult to focus on the specific question. Whilst a sizeable number did adhere to the issues of reasons for invasion and the impact on ordinary people, many others were easily sidetracked onto other matters such as what happened after the invasion and how successful the monarchs were. Also common was the tendency of candidates to cover the background of the various elements extensively – often writing in excess of 2-3 pages and sometimes consisting of more than half the total response. At the top end though, there was a considerable amount of work in which candidates discussed and debated issues such as what subjects really valued from their kings and what were arguably the more/less important push/pull factors for Viking and Norman migration.

Although there is no recommended length for the work, it was very noticeable that responses varied considerably from just a few lines to around 20 pages. A few focused pages tended to achieve the best results as the candidates were more likely to home in on the question substantiating the points made whilst retaining flow and clarity to the discussion. In such cases, sources and interpretations were used but not extensively.

Whilst understanding of the content was usually sound, there were areas of confusion and a certain polarisation especially amongst the weaker candidates, e.g. the Viking and Norman invasions were either identical, or completely opposite, or Edward I never helped the ordinary people, whereas Henry V did nothing else. Another gap in understanding was the inability of a sizeable number of candidates to understand the concerns and interests of those living at the time, such as the importance of religion, the attitudes to, and of, the lower social orders, and the acceptance of social structures. The inevitable outcome of such a lack of understanding was the tendency of candidates to resort to everyday empathy and the application of modern ethics to medieval situations.

The B871 questions always ask for comparisons to be made but it was apparent that many candidates still found this difficult to do, although there was a slight improvement this year in those able to compare by reasons or themes. Whilst a large number treated the two elements (Vikings and Normans or Edward I and Henry V) largely discretely with only some token comparison at the end, there was a sizeable minority who were able to look for similarities and differences for reasons or impact and integrate the comparisons.

A number of candidates produced unbalanced answers. This was slightly more common with the "Raiders and Invaders". It was often the case that the Vikings received extensive treatment, with candidates recognising the pressure they faced at home and their desire for wealth, whereas the Normans were often regarded as coming for a single reason - "the promise" given by Harold to William. Many candidates obviously then realised that their answer was somewhat unbalanced and padded out the Norman section with descriptions of the Battle of Hastings. Only a minority delved much into the similarity of both Vikings and Normans in wanting greater wealth, with the better ones able to argue that sources such as Domesday Book proved that the Normans were also motivated by a desire for wealth.

One of the characteristics of the better responses was the way in which sources were incorporated into the structure of the argument. The weakest candidates often made their answer a largely source-free zone, but even the better work was not necessarily characterised by extensive use of sources or interpretations. The very best candidates almost knew instinctively when enough was enough and simply used sources just enough to back up the argument without the sources becoming ends in themselves and disrupting the coherence and power of the whole argument. Sadly source work was both limited and rather contrived in many cases. It was quite common to find source extracts incorporated almost for the sake of it – sometimes boxed separately from the text, and being tangential to the argument, and used at best to aid the description or narrative.

Evaluation was often disruptive and frequently had the negative impact of making an answer look incoherent and often naïve. There was a fair amount of stock, mechanistic and simplistic evaluation, e.g. "*Shephard and Rees cannot be trusted because they were not there*" or "*Shephard and Rees would not lie as they are writing my school text book*". In a few honourable cases though, the sources were used in a natural way to support the argument. At the top end, there were also impressive examples of cross-referencing of sources to validate or interrogate the worth of judgements or a recognition that a particular source was a significant or, in some cases, the only support available for a key judgement.

There is evidence that the vast majority of candidates pursued their work independently. However, there were a number of centres where the candidates seemed to work from a very similar template – rarely did this help the candidates, and in a few cases it proved disastrous. Candidates in such a situation tended to make the same points, often almost in the same sequence. This formulaic approach occasionally applied to sources, signifying that centres had advised their candidates to comment critically on the sources they referred to. This frequently ended up as naïve and disruptive. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that structuring rules and mantras given by well-meaning teachers often left candidates reluctant to develop their own

historical reasoning. Fortunately evidence of extensive plagiarism or copying from other candidates was very rare.

Most candidates organised their answers reasonably well, although some were poorly structured with false starts and a surfeit of crossing out, or additions at the end of the response. Some candidates were keen to add illustrations, but these rarely contributed positively to the overall quality. Instead, if anything, they gave the impression more of a scrapbook, rather than a coherent response to a specific question. It was pleasing to see referencing and footnotes in a number of instances. Where this was the case, the work was likely to be well-organised. A majority included a bibliography at the end. It was impressive in a few cases with academic monographs even being cited but the majority referred only to the two main textbooks or "history notes". A sizeable number referred to a wide range of websites, sometimes with no books cited.

In making an overall assessment, it is difficult to avoid the judgement that many candidates still find the single comparative question difficult to answer. They were challenged by the need to focus on the question, to incorporate disparate information, to utilise sources in pursuing their argument and to make substantiated comparisons between the two elements of the question.

In a few instances though there is evidence that centres prepared their candidates well for some of the key requirements of this specification. Such candidates recognised that comparison questions require frequent and explicit relationships between the two elements. Such centres also prepared their candidates in writing a coherent and discursive answer that remained focused and was not inconvenienced by disruptions such as separate source evaluation sections.

Although there were a large number of centres for which B871 was a new experience, most coped well with the requirements. The administration was efficient with prompt despatch of materials. The candidates' work was collated well with accompanying documentation such as cover and mark sheets.

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

Most of the coursework was marked carefully and accurately by centres. The 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. It is not necessary to meet all the bullet-points in the band descriptors in order to award marks within that band: the approach should be holistic, looking for a "best fit" of the work to the descriptors. This has implications for task-setting as well – see below.

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 the postal moderation (option 02).

In this specification, the initiative is handed over to teachers to set good enquiry tasks for the two coursework assignments to be carried out from the five options available. Careful planning is therefore essential. Coursework consultants are ready to respond to queries from centres at this planning stage. There is also a Teachers' Guide to the course on the OCR website. Many new centres had made use of this service, and set original and worthwhile assignments to which their candidates responded with some excellent work. However, some had not, but set off on their own and disadvantaged their candidates as a result. It was disappointing to see, at the moderation stage, assignments which did not meet the basic requirements of the Unit as laid out in the specification. In the absence of clear understanding of the requirements of a unit, candidates were inclined to fall back on collecting factual material; even the ominous word "project" was seen this year.

The assignments that worked best took the form of a question or questions. Candidates are advised to copy this carefully at the head of their work – there were cases of mismatch between the question as set by the teacher and the question dealt with by the candidate. In general candidates produce better work if they do not have to cover too broad a topic, or too many examples. Best marks are for depth of analysis, not for quantity of coverage. Well-designed assignments should give an opportunity for candidates to produce their own argument. Nor is it necessary to drag in work on sources or interpretations if the enquiry question does not demand it. Often this was done clumsily, and superficially, with quite low level evaluative remarks being over-credited by teacher-markers. (See also comments on marking above.) Teachers will make their own decisions about how much structured support their particular candidates need. There were examples, however, of over-structuring the enquiry, producing assignments which were fragmented, or very similar across all candidates, so that able candidates could not show what they could do.

B872/881. Local History. There was much excellent and original work here. The choice of site, or person, is crucial and needs not to be too well-interpreted already, so as to leave room for candidates to come their own conclusions. Then the enquiry question should lead to an argument about significance. Significance in the past is usually not problematic, and some ingenuity is needed to lead candidates to consider significance in the present. Sometimes this is treated as just legacy or remains. Several centres have found the provision of given criteria have helped candidates put together their argument, although there were examples of criteria being listed at the start of an assignment, and then ignored. Working out their own criteria could allow more able candidates to show their ability.

B873/B882. International Study. This remains the most popular unit, although not always the best done. Most centres are now dealing with genuinely international issues. Significance is again the key focus and the same comments made above for the Local History unit apply here. Some candidates are asked to cover too broad a sweep of history, and some are asked to make comparisons of too many, and/or too dissimilar, events. Superficiality and low level repetitive narrative is often the result. Keeping the focus on significance is most likely to lead candidates into addressing more serious historical issues.

B877. Whose History. As with all assignments, careful task setting is needed, firstly in the choice of subject, then in avoiding superficial narrative or biography. Fewer, well-selected examples of interpretations are likely to guide candidates to really examine their nature and purpose. In general, candidates were well able to analyse the characteristics of a portrayal, but found it much harder to draw on their knowledge of the historical context to explain it.

B878. Very few examples of this unit were seen

B880. Society in Depth. The specification requirements for this unit are very clear: a discussion of a period involving some source analysis and an examination of the role of an individual. Yet several centres failed to meet them. Source analysis was sometimes formulaic, and detached from the historical discussion. The role of an individual is not the same as a biography or an obituary. It should analyse how far the individual changed the flow of events

B874, B875, B876, B879 Teacher Assessment

There was a substantially increased entry for the Teacher Assessment units with a wide range of different approaches being used. The Heritage Marketing unit was overwhelmingly the most popular unit with very small entries for the other units. The extent to which centres have successfully coped with the demands of these units varies greatly. The most successful centres submitted extensive and varied portfolios of work covering a wide range of skills and based on valid and imaginative exercises that provided both a clear focus for candidates but also scope for independent planning. These centres, while covering vocational aspects, did not lose sight of the fact that this is a History specification. Their candidates' portfolios contained good solid history that was connected to, not detached from, the more vocational activities.

The assessment requirements of these units were usually handled well. Many centres were able to assess portfolios holistically and make appropriate best-fit matches with the bands in the mark scheme. However, it needs stating that marks in Band 5 should only be awarded to truly outstanding work. Marks in Band 5 attracted most of the adjustments made by moderators because the work, although good, was not outstanding. Centres should note that there is scope to award candidates marks based on ephemeral evidence, e.g. for particular contributions to group work or class discussions. These marks need, however, to be awarded with care and discrimination to *individual* candidates and an explanation as to why the marks have been awarded should be provided. It is not intended that such marks should be awarded indiscriminately to all candidates.

The majority of the rest of this report refers to the Heritage Marketing unit as a large majority of the entries were for this unit.

Heritage Marketing

This unit works best when all the work is based on a solid understanding of the historical context of the site/person/issue being marketed. The best portfolios contained several pieces of work that were carefully focused on particular assessment objectives. Although these exercises covered the historical context, they were connected to the site/person/issue by providing historical context and by considering the issue of significance. In order that candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate high level skills, centres need to exercise sufficient control to ensure that work covers historical context but avoids the inclusion of too much descriptive and narrative material. Candidates need to be given some freedom and flexibility, but it is also important to monitor what they are doing to ensure that the work they are producing is sufficiently challenging. Exercises clearly targeted on, for example, source use and evaluation, significance, interpretations or causation can provide candidates with a useful focus and produce work that is sharper and more ambitious than description and the production of time-lines and lists.

It is important that candidates are reminded that they should be planning how they can use the history to sell their site/person/issue. They need to persuade people that, for example, the site is worth visiting because of its historical significance. They need to explain why the site mattered in the past and why it is important that people should know about this today. Much of this understanding on the part of the candidates should come from solid work on the historical context conducted during lessons early in the course. This can be based on individual research but there is also a role for some teacher-led sessions. It may be appropriate to spend some weeks on the history of the topic before doing any work on marketing.

Once candidates have a sound understanding of the history they can then begin to think about how they can use this to market their site/person/issue. There is clearly much good work being completed in lessons on the principles of marketing. Some centres require their candidates to evaluate existing marketing and to consider how it can be improved. This often works well. However, the major challenge for candidates is to bring the history and the marketing together and to produce a marketing plan and marketing materials that are full of history. For example, if a poster or a web site is to be designed then it should contain some history. The time spent on the design of marketing materials such as tee-shirts, mugs, key rings and the organisation of coffee shop functions, etc, should not be excessive to the extent that it impinges on other aspects of the work. The history should be used to market the site/person/ issue. If a questionnaire is to be used the questions need to be carefully planned. They should not just be about whether visitors think the toilets are kept clean. They should relate to the history. Candidates also need to show that they have thoroughly analysed the results of their questionnaires and carried their conclusions forward into their marketing plan.

Some centres have helped their candidates bring history and marketing together to good effect by encouraging them to set the site or person into a local and a national historical context. This can immediately raise issues of significance which can then be used in the marketing.

Multimedia in History

There was some interesting and varied work produced. The unit worked best when candidates were required to evaluate a wide range of different types of media presentations and when they focused on how far these presentations had ended up producing good history. Candidates need to be familiar with the historical topic the media presentations are about. The Specification makes clear that 'the teaching programme should involve some research into the historical topics on which the resources are based'. This history should then be a central part of their own multimedia presentation.

An Archaeological Enquiry

There was much good work produced by the centres using this unit. The key to success is to have a genuine, clear and challenging historical enquiry, with candidates comparing the contribution that archaeology can make to such an enquiry with that of other approaches.

Missing Pages -The Migrant Experience

This unit worked particularly well when the candidates had a personal interest and where it was a significant feature of their local area. This often led to questionnaires playing an important and useful role. The best work was based on a sound understanding of the historical context. Often the work about the reasons for migration was more successful than that on evaluating the experiences of migrants after they had settled.

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