

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

**HISTORY A
(EXPLAINING THE
MODERN WORLD)**

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/10 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 responses are 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 10 series overview

This paper examines the thematic study of War and British Society, c.790 to c.2010. It requires candidates to display their understanding of change and continuity across a broad sweep of British history, including a significant event. Knowledge is assessed through four questions asking for recall, causation, significance and analysis of an issue over two eras identified in the specification.

The examination focus on Assessment Objectives 1 and 2; demonstrating knowledge and understanding as well as explaining and analysing historical events.

In order to perform well on the British thematic study, candidates needed to apply their knowledge and understanding to identify and explain the impact of war on people and society. This includes an extended essay that requires the use of examples from across two of the three periods of study. Successful candidates responded well to the challenges the paper presented and had a secure grasp of the chronology of conflict. Their grasp of the detail of many wars continues to be excellent. Candidates' learning is examined through questions asking for recall, study of impact, significance, and analysis of an issue over two periods.

Candidates' responses spanned a wide range of ability, they demonstrated an understanding of the 'broad sweep' of this specification. Marks were given across the entire mark range for all four questions. However, there was an increased number of very weak or blank scripts this year. Equally, some candidates showed excellent knowledge on some sections of the paper, for example, answering Question 2 very well, but for Question 3 had very sketchy knowledge, or vice versa. Question 4 presented issues for some candidates, but it allowed others to demonstrate, in a sophisticated way, their grasp of the impact of wars over time and their analysis of them.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used examples, issues and events relevant to the time periods examined by the question (Questions 1 to 4) • had a secure grasp of the chronology of conflict • managed their time effectively, balancing their responses proportionally to the mark allocations for each of the questions (especially important for Question 4) • established clear explanatory links back to the issues in the questions (Questions 2 to 4) • displayed an understanding of how historians assess significance (Question 3) • had a clear grasp of the key concepts required from study of the specification such as the different reasons for and causes of wars over time (Question 4). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offered material that was outside the chronological scope of the question (especially Question 1 and Question 4) • displayed less secure historical knowledge, for example by confusing information about wars that were less relevant to the question, or by comparing wars that were civil wars (Question 4) • described and identified issues without analysing them for impact or significance (Questions 2 to 4) • offered responses to Question 4 that were unbalanced, whether by looking at only one side of the argument or considering only one of the two relevant time periods.

Question 1

1 Describe **two** features of the feudal system.

[4]

This question focuses on AO1 knowledge and understanding about the past, and requires candidates to identify two features, and support them with accompanying detail/development. This question was well answered with most achieving at least two marks. Candidates were clearly very familiar with the feudal system and its features. Many different examples were acceptable, and an extra mark was given for supporting detail. The published mark scheme illustrates in detail common identifications updated in light of candidate responses.

In answering, many candidates focused on the hierarchy it gave to society and the fact that the Normans introduced it as a means of control. Most could identify the different levels within it. Many commented on the idea of land for loyalty, and the service element that the system depended on. Fewer referred to oaths of fealty which bound the upper echelons of the system together.

Less successful attempts tended to focus on the relationships within the feudal system being dependant on monetary transfer. These candidates talked about either rent being paid to knights and barons, or tax being collected for the King. It is important for teachers to stress the reduced importance of monetary transactions in this period, and the bonds of loyalty and delivery of services which characterised relations in the Middle Ages. Another common error was to reference the Divine Right of Kings and include God at the top of the system.

Exemplar 1

The feudal system was brought to England in 1066 by the normans. Barons recieved land from the King in return for loyalty towards him. The barons then offered some of this land to knights, but only if they agreed to fight for the king during times of war. This shows that power decreased going down the system.

This response was given full marks.

Question 2

2 Explain the impact of English privateers during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603).

[8]

This question was tackled well and many candidates were given four marks or more. They attained this in a variety of ways. Some described the actions of privateers and ended up with an explanation of impact because they developed their response sufficiently. Others, from the outset, concentrated on the impact and developed the response from there into an explanation. Both approaches were acceptable and would get Level 3. Candidates who repeated this for a second impact were given Level 4. At Level 2 candidates identified impacts or described the actions of privateers.

Most candidates concentrated on the role of privateers in increasing the wealth of Elizabeth, or in provoking Philip II of Spain to retaliate by launching the Spanish Armada. Many could successfully develop this into an explanation by adding detail of what was stolen, or why Philip would be provoked. Candidates were considered to have reached 'explanation' with some development of what the results of this were, either riches from the New World that meant Elizabeth could fund costly wars in Ireland and the Netherlands, or the ultimate failure of the Armada.

The areas favoured tended to be economic impact, usually arguing that the revenue gained from the exploits of the privateers enabled Elizabeth to fight her wars without significantly raising taxes or extending debt, and the skills of privateers like Drake and Raleigh which contributed to the defeat of Spain. Candidates often referenced Drake's raid on Cadiz in 1587. Another line of argument was that the exploits of the privateers worsened relations with Spain and were a factor in the outbreak of 'official' war and the sending of the Armada.

A significant minority of candidates seemed unfamiliar with the term 'privateers' and therefore just spoke generally about the events of Elizabeth's wars, which was unlikely to be given above Level 1. Similarly, some candidates could identify the impact of the privateers, particularly economically, but were unable to give detail to support this and were therefore unable to go beyond Level 2. Some candidates treated 'privateers' as synonymous with the Elizabethan Navy, and therefore wrote about the defeat of the Armada, without specifying if and how this was the result of privateering activity. Again, this was unlikely to gain above Level 1.

A few candidates gave the impression that the actions of privateers were signs of Britain's dominance of Europe, and that plundering Spanish ships was the death knell of Spain. It may be worth emphasising when teaching this section that at this point Britain was yet to reach its heyday, and that even after defeat for the Armada, Spain was certainly a potent global power, and Britain a minnow swimming in a pool of much bigger European fish.

Exemplar 2

One impact of English Privateers was an increase in wealth for England. Privateers were like pirates for the queen and would loot ships for goods and money that were then taken back to England and resulted in an increase in the country's wealth. However, privateering and the looting of ships for wealth (especially the ~~span~~ Spanish ships) caused a negative relationship between England and other countries. The pursuit of wealth ultimately led to negative impacts of relationships between countries and caused wars such as the Spanish Armada in 1588. The increase in wealth brought by ^{privateers} ~~pirates~~ impacted England's ~~economy~~ economy and relations.

This is the first part of a response that continued to get full marks, Level 4/8. Here, the first explanation can be seen, where an identification of impact is made. At first it is quite general: 'wealth increased', so achieves Level 1, then more specific detail is added, that this was from 'looting ships' and 'returning the money and goods to England', so Level 2 is activated. Then the candidate goes on to explain the impact of this action, the negative relations and provoking of the armada in retaliation.

Question 3

3 How significant was the Crimean War (1853–1856) for Britain?

[14]

Question 3 requires candidates to structure a response around the concept of significance. This was done successfully this year. Candidates certainly understood that they should look for depth and breadth of impact to explain significance rather than change. However, lack of details about the improvements to nursing or the army hampered many in getting the highest level.

To get to Level 4 candidates needed to identify a way in which the Crimean War was significant, develop this with specific supporting detail, and make clear why this war brought more than just a change, but was significant. Most candidates had knowledge about the war, the growing role of literacy and spread of news reportage, the Charge of the Light Brigade, Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole's assistance to wounded soldiers. Many could develop an explanation of why the war was important in this light. However, what fewer could do was combine specific knowledge about the events and outcome to convince that they had really explained the significance. For example, in the case of Florence Nightingale, we would expect them to refer to her role in hospitals in the Crimea where she introduced new hygiene measures, and then how that led to the Sanitary Commission, which began the process of longer-term reform of hygiene in hospitals back in the UK. Likewise with the significance of the war for the military, we were looking for more than detail about the soldiers being more celebrated than the generals, because of coverage of disasters like the Charge of the Light Brigade, but how that led to longer term change in perceptions or reform of military administration. However, even if some of the details were sketchy, we were still prepared to consider lower Level 4 or Level 3.

Many were able to explain the impact of the Crimea and reach Level 3 at least. Candidates tended to focus on three main areas. Firstly, the role of the media, often referencing WH Russell. Secondly, the work of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole as nurses and the development of ideas of hygiene followed up by longer term changes. Finally, the shift in attitude towards ordinary soldiers as opposed to generals, often linked to the Charge of the Light Brigade and frequently referencing Tennyson's famous poem.

There were areas of difficulty here, particularly when referencing nursing. The vast majority of candidates knew about Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole, but struggled to say why they were significant. Candidates were often reduced to saying Nightingale and Seacole were significant because they are still famous today, or especially in the case of Nightingale, making unwarranted claims that her role led directly to the creation of the NHS or women's emancipation and the right to vote.

Some candidates had excellent knowledge about raising literacy levels and changes to newspapers but were held back by a lack a focus on the question. Equally, saying that this was the first war to receive mass coverage in newspapers, without qualification, was not accepted as significance as that could also be said for the Napoleonic Wars.

Another problem was that candidates confused the Crimean War with other wars of Empire, particularly the Boer War. Perhaps because of the link with nursing. Furthermore, the claim that the Crimean War revealed how many soldiers were unfit and therefore led to Welfare reforms was put forward by a significant minority of candidates, and there were also references made to concentration camps by some others.

Only a few claimed that the Crimean War was not significant and then wrote instead about another war (which the candidate presumably knew better) which was claimed to be more significant – even so, a few examples of this approach, which will inevitably score little, still made an appearance. However, fewer candidates were placed in Level 1 this year as most had some knowledge about the Crimean War, possibly in light of current resonances as a war fought because of Russia's desire for expansion.

Exemplar 3

The Crimean War was significant for Britain because it was the first time soldiers were recognised as heroes. This recognition was gained when more up to date news about the war reached Britain by telegram which was a new technological advancement. The telegrams meant that people were more aware of what the soldiers were experiencing and so the British people gained a new admiration towards them. Admiration that led to governments awarding the new Victoria Cross to soldiers. The Victoria Cross is still significant today as it is still awarded to soldiers after a war meaning the Crimean War was significant as it resulted in changes towards the attitudes of soldiers.

This is the first part of a response that ultimately achieved almost full marks, Level 4/13. This explanation is very clearly a solid Level 4 explanation of significance. It includes excellent factual support about why soldiers' actions in war would start to be recognised, with accurate detail about more up to date news coming from telegrams, which led to greater public appreciation of soldiers. It then explains the longer-term significance of this, the introduction of the Victoria Cross, reflecting greater appreciation of the contribution of ordinary soldiers.

Question 4

4 'The impact of civil wars was different to the impact of other wars in the period 790 to 1750.'

How far do you agree?

[24]

Question 4 requires candidates to consider a statement across two of the three study periods and offer explained examples of how the statement could be both supported and challenged. Three explained examples covering both sides of the argument and both time periods gives access to the higher marks in Level 4.

Candidates found this question more difficult than in some previous years. There were a number of possible approaches that were credited. The most successful approach was to address the question thematically – choosing a theme and comparing the issue. For example, pointing to the destruction and loss of life of the English Civil Wars, and comparing this to the Viking raids and invasions or the Harrying of the North in the Norman Conquest as an example of disagreement. In terms of agreement, candidates could proceed to point to the major political results of certain civil wars (Magna Carta or the establishment of a Republic in 1649) as being of greater impact than political results of other wars. However, relatively few candidates approached the question in this way. More common was to compare civil wars to other wars as a whole – so the English Civil War had a similar impact to the Viking raids, for example, but a different impact to the Elizabethan Wars. There was nothing wrong with this approach, and many candidates were able to access Level 5 approaching the question this way, identifying the similarity or difference as they answered. However, it did raise a greater danger of the candidate writing about a series of different conflicts, without explicitly comparing their impact to assess whether they were different or not. In some cases, this tied responses in knots, or resulted in not moving beyond a description of the impact of different wars at Level 2.

Some candidates were unclear as to what constituted a civil war. Many candidates wrote simply about 'the' civil wars of 1642-51 (and a candidate could perfectly well reach Level 5 by comparing those civil wars to other conflicts). However, candidates did not often recognise other wars as civil wars, such as the Anarchy of Stephen's reign, or the Barons' War of John's reign. This became a problem if a candidate tried to compare the impact of 'the' civil wars to that of either the Anarchy or John's wars, as in the terms of the question, there was no credit for comparing one civil war to another. Some candidates did not appear familiar with the term 'civil war' or interpreted it as referring to wars that were more 'civil' (therefore milder) than other wars.

The majority of candidates demonstrated relevant knowledge that covered the whole period, often using the Elizabethan Wars, the Viking invasions, and the Norman Conquest as counterpoints to the civil wars discussed. There were some candidates who ignored the dates of the question and wrote about later wars, such as the World Wars of the twentieth century.

The main conclusion for centres is to encourage candidates to approach essay questions thematically, issue by issue rather than war by war – this makes it easier to achieve the higher levels and reduces the risk of drifting into narrative.

Assessment for learning



Centres are encouraged to practice grouping wars and comparing their impacts thematically. This will assist in approaching questions such as Question 4.

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