AQA

A-level
History

7042/2D Religious conflict and the Church in England, c1529–c1570
Report on the Examination

June 2017

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General Comments

This is the first year in which this specification has been examined at A-Level. Despite the uncertainty and trepidation inevitably experienced by students and their teachers, the quality of the responses was pleasingly high. In order to make further gains, centres should be aware of the following points.

This is a depth study. Students have two years in which to study just 41 years' worth of material on the English Reformation(s). As a result, detailed analysis and precise evidence are expected. Moreover, the whole course should be covered. It was disappointing that relatively few attempted the essay (Question 04) on the Northern Rebellion. Although most of those who gave it a go answered it well.

The compulsory, source-based question caused the most problems. This is understandable: whereas students have presumably had years of experience of answering essay questions, the challenges offered by Question 01 are unique to A-Level History. The question requires students to assess three primary or contemporary sources, analysing their provenance, tone, content and argument, demonstrating contextual awareness in the process, and ultimately reaching a judgement as to their value for the particular purpose in the question. It is advised that students should spend 1 hour on this question, which equates to 20 minutes on each source. It is essential that centres prepare their students appropriately: it should be stressed that, unlike the AS component, this is not a comparative exercise and there is no requirement to reach a judgement as to which source is the most valuable. Indeed, writing a paragraph or more of this sort (as some students did) is a waste of valuable time. The same could be said of the introductory paragraph, which is curiously popular – and equally extraneous to the task.

Teachers and students alike may derive reassurance from the knowledge that the sources are chosen, not to trip students up, but to be accessible and to give them maximal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of an important theme of the course. As is made clear in the 'indicative content' section of the mark scheme, there are numerous points that students could make on the basis of each source. It is unnecessary, however, to make every single one to achieve a high mark. Indeed, as already mentioned, there would not be the time. Students are urged to read the source and, rather than taking a line-by-line approach, to analyse it holistically.

In order to secure a high mark, it is necessary to assess the sources' content and provenance. If the analysis of one or the other is omitted from the answer, the answer is partial and more than likely will achieve a mark in Level 2. An answer that shows understanding of both provenance and content, and includes some contextual understanding, will receive a mark in Level 3 or above if it considers the sources' value for the purpose given in the question. It is worth noting that to achieve a mark in Level 4 or 5 it is necessary to present a balanced argument, taking account of the aforementioned elements but also identifying the sources' limitations – again, for the purpose given in the question.

Finally, an unfortunately common mistake this year was to focus not on the sources' value, but their accuracy or reliability. While there is, of course, some overlap, they are not the same: unreliable sources can still offer value to a historian.

Question 01

The source-based question in the 2017 examination was on the early months of Mary I's reign: two of the sources dealt, from differing perspectives, with the succession crisis of 1553; the third described Mary's coronation.

Source A was a letter from Mary to the Privy Council, informing the Privy Councillors that she knew of their 'consultations' to ignore her right to succeed her brother and advising them to switch their loyalty to her. If they did, she was 'right ready to fully pardon'; if they did not, there was a thinly-veiled threat of 'bloodshed and vengeance'.

Almost every student identified something of value in this source. Popular were insights into Mary's character – ruthless, determined, sure of herself – and explanations of the circumstances in which she found herself after the death of her royal brother. The source offered the chance to describe the succession crisis – an opportunity taken up with relish by many. Excellent knowledge was shown of Edward VI's attempts to deny Mary the throne, of the support she enjoyed as she rose up against the usurpers, and of the inclusivity that marked her early reign. The source's limitations were noticed by fewer, but there were perceptive comments made about the inevitable disparity between Mary's plans, as described in the letter, and how she actually proceeded to thwart the conspiracy against her.

Source B, a letter written in 1554 by Lady Jane Grey while captive in the Tower of London, was generally well handled by students, who found much on which to comment. That Jane was appealing to the 'goodness and clemency' of Mary I led most to conclude that her description of the palace coup of 1553 lacked reliability and, thus, value as an accurate account of events. Thankfully, the source's value in allowing a 'behind-the-scenes' view of the machinations of Edward VI, the Duke of Northumberland and the Privy Council was also thoughtfully analysed and corroborated by often extremely detailed knowledge of Henry VIII's three Acts of Succession, Edward's 'devyse', and the motives of Northumberland, the privy councillors, and Jane Grey herself.

Source C, from Holinshed's Chronicles, was found the most difficult on which to comment thoughtfully. Many students resorted to fruitless speculation about the chronicler's religious beliefs and purpose: responses variously claimed that Holinshed was a Catholic sympathiser or a protestant propagandist, that he was reminiscing fondly about Mary's reign and that he was criticising it with the benefit of hindsight. The fact that Holinshed's account was written in 1577 gave rise to more stock responses about bias and reliability than did the other sources put together. It was disappointing to read so many times that, because time had elapsed between the events and the description, that the chronicler's memory would have faded, or details would have been forgotten. Before students write that there is no way that an observer (or, worse, somebody who was not even there) could possibly recount events that took place more than two decades previously, they would do well to remember that they themselves are answering questions about events that occurred five centuries ago!

Question 02

Not unexpectedly, this was a popular question. The changes made to the Church by the Reformation Parliament, including the Break with Rome, are of fundamental importance to the component (and to English history, as illustrated by the rich historiography that the issue has acquired), and one on which all students will have been prepared. There were some very impressive responses, which evaluated the significance of demands for religious reform alongside

other, probably more important, factors. These included: Henry's desire for a solution to his 'Great Matter' and, thus, dynastic security; the Crown's financial needs, prompted by the possibility of a Spanish invasion but also by Henry's love of war and wish to assert himself on the European stage; and Henry's growing interest, encouraged by Cromwell and others, in Caesaropapism. The best answers were able to knit together the various motivations into a coherent whole, arguing, for example, that the paucity of actual religious reform passed by the Reformation Parliament suggests that its MPs did the bidding of a royal master for whom personal power and glory came first.

Question 02

A significant number of students did not read the question properly, or did not understand its thrust; as a result, they described (often in great detail) the ecclesiastical corruption that gave rise to the demands for religious reform instead of focusing on the changes to the Church that resulted. Furthermore, rather too many answers identified the changes the Reformation Parliament made in very general terms, referring vaguely to 'the Break with Rome'. To gain high marks, it was necessary to refer precisely to the Reformation statutes.

It is interesting to note, finally, that almost every student answered this question as though all that really mattered was what Henry himself wanted. This was surprising, given the once near-unassailable orthodoxy of GR Elton's thesis, which put Thomas Cromwell (and, to a lesser extent, Henry's other advisers) centre-stage and downplayed the importance of a king whom he described as 'a bit of a booby and a bit of a baby'. Despite the astonishing success of Hilary Mantel's novels, in which Cromwell is the undoubted hero, the current crop of British students seems to have relegated him to a bit-player. It only goes to show how history is forever created and re-created.

Question 03

This was the most popular option and one that was answered well. The extent to which Edward VI's government was successful in establishing a Protestant Church of England is an interesting question and one that led to a range of answers. The best and worst of these differed not in their judgement on the matter – equally persuasive cases were made by answers arguing both for and against the proposition – but in the coherence of their arguments, the thoughtfulness of their analysis, and the range and precision of their supporting evidence.

Most students organised their evaluation of the regime's success by assessing doctrinal changes, liturgical reforms, popular reception of the changes, and the legacy of the Edwardian Reformation. The doctrinal and liturgical reforms, such as those introduced by the First and Second Books of Common Prayer and consolidated by Acts of Uniformity, were generally well known and understood. Although it was reasonable to argue that these changes represented success in the gradual creation of a protestant Church, some impressive responses identified the government's failure to gain support for the Forty-Two Articles and the Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum as evidence that Protestantism had not been truly implemented by England by the time of Edward's death. Most students balanced against each other evidence of Protestantism's popularity, seen for instance in the numerous outbreaks of iconoclasm, and evidence of opposition to the changes, evidenced most dramatically in the Western Rebellion. Those who argued that Edward's government had failed pointed to Mary's succession and the ease with which she reversed the Edwardian reforms; those who reached the opposite conclusion viewed Mary's success in 1553 as due to her Tudor blood, not her religion.

Question 04

As stated above, this was the least popular question. Many of the responses were of a high standard, demonstrating good understanding of the role of Elizabeth I's Religious Settlement in provoking the rising of the Catholic Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland. There was a good deal of discussion of the continuing strength of Catholicism in the North and the rebels' anger at the radical protestant activity of Pilkington and Whittingham, respectively the Bishop and Dean of Durham. However, although the religious conviction of the Rising's leaders is undoubted, answers that focused entirely on religious reforms passed more than a decade before the Rising began did not score highly. Better answers evaluated the relative significance of the Religious Settlement alongside such factors as the arrival of Mary, Queen of Scots, in England, Elizabeth's discovery of the Howard marriage plot, and the rumours of Pius V's intention to excommunicate the Queen, all of which acted as catalysts for the Rising. Some argued, persuasively, that the Northern Earls were motivated by opposition to the Crown's encroachment on their traditional liberties, and that the Rising, like the Pilgrimage of Grace before it, should be seen as a response to Tudor centralisation.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.