

A-level **History**

2B The War of the Roses, 1450-1499
Report on the Examination

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General

There were very few cases of incomplete papers. It is encouraging that students are clearly able to manage their time effectively with regard to the examination. With regard to the essay questions, Question 4 proved the most popular, but there was, nevertheless, a range of responses on all three. One recurring issue, regarding all questions, was a lack of supporting own knowledge. Students are obviously not expected to have completely comprehensive support for every point made, but the paper is a depth study and use of a range of detailed knowledge is being assessed.

Question 1

The source question continues to be the most challenging to students. Although students are being asked to explore provenance/tone and content it is usually a mistake to break them into distinct paragraphs. Too many students consider the provenance/tone of each source first and do so in a mechanistic way that has little or nothing to do with the question asked. They then go on to discuss content but largely restrict their comments to repetition of the information given. This is not an effective method of considering the value of the source for the issue given in the question.

Students are likely to find it more effective to consider the source with reference to value, limitations and judgement. They may consider the view that the source is valuable in one paragraph. In this paragraph they could identify the main emphasis and tone, use quotes to demonstrate this and support the main emphasis with contextual own knowledge. They could also include discussion of the value of the provenance within this section. They may then write another paragraph considering the limitations to the value of the source including provenance and contextual own knowledge that they have. A final view on the overall value of the source for the issue given in the question could then be given. No single approach is expected or required but students must engage with the value of the source using their own knowledge and the provenance.

Provenance is too often handled in a simplistic manner. It is often productive to consider not only the authorship but also the audience. It may also be worth considering the situation at the time the source was written and how this could affect its relationship with the issue in the question. The lack of contextual own knowledge is the limiting factor in restricting too many responses to the source question. This is a depth study and students must demonstrate that they have knowledge that is greater than that which may be determined just by reading the source. This knowledge can be used to support the point/emphasis made within the source and hence support its value. Knowledge can also be used to challenge the main point/emphasis and therefore undermine its value. Far too many attempts at considering limitation fall back to simplistic omission. It is a truism that no source can include absolutely every possible point and piece of information; merely pointing this out is meaningless. Discussion of omission can be relevant if it is argued that the source is misleading, perhaps intentionally, in order to emphasise its main point. However, this is difficult if a main point has not been established and linked to.

Question 2

This essay question was reasonably popular but it was, in too many instances, not handled well. Some students resorted to describing the conflict between Richard of York and the Duke of Somerset. It is important to note that better answers often closely link to the question asked throughout the response. Other responses ignored that it was 'until 1453' and wrote at length about

Henry VI's madness, the protectorate and even the First Battle of St Albans. There was confusion about individuals including Somerset, Suffolk and Queen Margaret. Although the actions of Richard of York were reasonably understood those of Somerset and the government were less so.

Question 3

This essay question was attempted by a similar number of students to those answering question 2. The main discriminator was the ability of the student to apply the question rather than re-write it. Weaker answers often focused far too heavily upon the success of Edward IV, but this was not the question. Others failed to understand what was meant by 'methods of government' and in doing so wrote more generally about Edward IV's second reign. A focus on foreign policy characterised some answers even though, in most cases, it was not clear how this was linked to the question. The best answers appreciated that in asking how far Edward IV 'adopted' new methods that a comparison was being asked for between Edward's second reign and the earlier period (students could effectively compare to his first reign or even to that of Henry VI). Those who used their knowledge of both sides of the year 1471, therefore, did better in demonstrating continuity and change.

Question 04

This was the most popular of the three essay questions and it produced many excellent responses. The best responses were able to identify why the Woodville family were a potential threat and therefore potentially frightening to Richard of Gloucester. Weaker responses fell back on unsupported assertions. Most students were able to identify a range of possible influences on Gloucester. One problem though was a lack of secure chronology. This was particularly important in answering this question as the order of events over the short period of time is important in evaluating the actions taken. The other danger was that of producing a purely descriptive narrative and this was seen in some cases. Some students allowed their answers to drift into consideration of the fate of the Princes in the Tower and Richard III's later reign, although this was beyond the scope of the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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