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# A-level History

7042/C Historical Investigation  
Report on the Examination

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There were some excellent responses in this first year of the NEA. At the very best, students devised strong analytical answers to interesting but relatively straightforward questions. In addition, such questions allowed students to evaluate a clear debate between academic historians and also allowed a good analysis of the value of three or more primary sources. However, there were also a number of responses that struggled to achieve the higher levels. This was often for a variety of factors, but was most commonly because of a failure to cover the full date range set in the question, or a lack of focus on the actual value of the primary sources. Some of the better responses approached the NEA as a lengthy essay requiring similar skills of analysis and judgment as might be seen in any argued response. However, a misinterpretation of the requirements also led some students to see the NEA as a research exercise or as an opportunity to describe views rather than to use such views as a means of advancing an answer to a set question.

Footnoting was generally good, as was the use of bibliography. AQA does not stipulate a particular format or system, but does ask that students are stylistically consistent throughout their individual piece. It would also be very helpful indeed if students were to identify at the end of their work the primary sources and also the interpretations that they wish to be assessed for the AOs. A reminder that, whilst there is guidance to the length that AQA expects a typical NEA response to be, there is no word limit and no penalty applies for lengthy NEAs beyond the fact that very long responses seemed to struggle more with the requirements of analysis and evaluation. Indeed, very long responses were commonly of the type where the student was keen to convey a great deal of narrative information but, in doing so, lost their argument and the powerful and directed attempt to address their question. Conversely, responses of less than 2000 words often lacked the means to really address the three AOs sufficiently. The typical response was about 4000 words long. The shortest seen was 1200 and the lengthiest was just short of 13000 words.

There was quite some variation in the standard of administration from centres– something that may well be expected in the first year. The submission of the sample should also include with it the Candidate Record form, The Centre Declaration form, the Topic Proposal form and also the Question Proposal form if one has been used. In addition there should be evidence of internal moderation having been applied, unless only one teacher has marked the entire cohort. Annotation of the work also saw quite some variation between centres. The more detailed explanation for the award of a particular level, the easier it was for the moderator to assess if this standard was in line with the national one. At its worst, a centre that simply listed individual marks without any indication at all as to why that level or mark had been awarded, left the moderator with much to do in order to judge the standard applied. Surprisingly, a very small minority of centres decided not to use the services of a Coursework Advisor. It is considered very good practice indeed for centres to check all proposed questions with their Advisor. It became very clear early on that one of the most important determinants of success was the selection of an effective question. The Coursework Advisor is therefore to be seen as a vital part of the process of arriving at a question for students each year. Overall, there was a good range of marks seen, and centres are encouraged to continue to use the scripts on TOLS as exemplars at the various levels of response.

There are a number of points that are pertinent to each of the Assessment Objectives:

### **AO1**

One of the most important considerations in this AO was how effectively chronological breadth was addressed. A set question of c100 years demanded a response that covered that very date range. Lengthy periods in which little appeared to happen within the broader date range were entirely

worthy of commentary as they often said something about the continuity across the period. Whilst it is certainly not the case that every single year should be addressed – this is after all meant to be a contextual response – there should be clear sense that the student understands concepts of change and continuity across the entire period. Some topics seemed to offer more of a challenge to students seeking to provide this full chronological coverage. Black civil rights in the USA, although a popular topic, offered its own challenges. Often, students set a period that covered 1865 to 1968, yet the response began in the late 1880s, with no reference to 1865 at all, or indeed to radical reconstructionism. It was difficult to credit this as a full answer when the first 20 years or so were entirely absent in the response. Even more common was the response that covered the period from 1880 to about 1910, but then jumped rather abruptly to the 1950s and 1960s. Again, this is not a response that effectively covers the c100 years. A response that failed to cover an appropriate chronological breadth was limited to the top of Level Two, 8 marks at the very best. Tudor Rebellions also proved something of a poisoned chalice for some students. It is not sufficient to jump from one rebellion to another, missing out 20 or 30 years of the chronology in-between. This type of ‘stepping stone’ approach failed to convince moderators that the student was addressing the full date range and at its worst became an answer that simply compared two or three rebellions. Students should consider if the question that they have devised allows them the opportunity to easily produce a truly contextual response.

Beyond the issue of chronological range, centres were generally good at identifying analytical and balanced answers which typified the higher levels. As with essay responses, students should aim at providing a substantiated judgement and at arguing their case throughout the response. In essence, the NEA should be predominantly analytical in style and is in this sense similar to the type of response expected for any good A-level essay. Unfortunately, some students embarked on lengthy descriptive paragraphs and in so doing lost any semblance of a fully analytical style. The fundamental purpose of the NEA is to provide an answer to a set question. Some questions proved much easier for students to establish a clear answer to, and it was these questions that prepared students for the higher grades. At the other extreme there were some questions that were frankly unanswerable. For example a question that considered the causes of an event but within the context of a date range that stretched long after the event actually happened. Alternatively there were some questions that were so complex with many sub clauses that even the most able students would have been unable to arrive at a substantiated judgement in response. This reinforces the importance of the role of the Coursework Advisor in guiding centres towards the more effective questions. This is not to suggest that students should only consider the more obvious topics, simply that the question should be a manageable one that allows the student to hit the top levels of each AO.

## **AO2**

This was generally addressed well, perhaps because it utilised the very same skills that students should have honed for the examined paper. However, the effective evaluation of value of a source was hit and miss. It is worth reminding students that the purpose of this AO is to evaluate the value of at least three sources. Simply paraphrasing the sources or providing a précis is little more than description and doesn't even necessarily prove that the sources have been understood. Even more pertinently, students should be very well aware that, whilst accuracy and reliability might well feed into the value of the source, they do not count as an evaluation of value in their own right. Indeed, it is perfectly possible for a source to be inaccurate, but for it to be very valuable. Students might see the value of a source as being derived from the content or indeed from the provenance, but they need to make clear and explicit attempts to consider value. A failure to consider value very seriously limits the level awarded in this AO. It is unfortunate that some students simply accepted the primary sources at face value and offered absolutely no evaluation at all—these students

struggled to advance into Level One. Moreover, the value of a source is determined by how far it helps to advance the answer to the set question. This means that students should integrate the evaluation of the source within the broader answer, and not offer an evaluation out of the set context or in a separate section. The sources should be integrated within the broader and sustained analytical response to the set question. Inclusion of the sources within an appendix can be very helpful indeed.

### **AO3**

There was some considerable variation in the type of approach seen to this AO. At its core, students are required to identify and to evaluate two differing interpretations. Such evaluation must consider the time and/or context and the limitations placed upon the historian writing the interpretation. This evaluation should be in quite some depth and thus students that chose to identify more than two interpretations seemed to lose the overall argument of their NEA as they spent many pages needlessly analyzing what could have been achieved by only considering two.. Simply, the interpretations are best used to support the view being put forward by the student and thus are used to advance an analytical and argued response – perhaps by means of the student suggesting that one interpretation supports their own argument better. There is no extra credit applied for the use of more than two interpretations. The interpretations should be integrated within a clear line of argument, but they may cover the full c100 year context, or focus on one small event within this time range. Much as was seen in AO2, some students simply accepted the material at face value, The clear objective of the AO is to analyse and to evaluate the different ways in which aspects of the past have been interpreted. It is quite apparent that very careful selection of the interpretations is required and some questions do not lend themselves as well as others might to finding accessible and differing views. Not all interpretations need be from modern historians, and at times a potentially exciting and informative contrast in time and/or context was lost as the student decided to evaluate two interpretations with really no differences in argument or in context at all. At its best, this AO produced some very perceptive answers indeed in which the student moved beyond the formulaic and rather basic type of response that suggested that one interpretation was more convincing as it was written closer to the events. In these cases, students were able to apply a contextual knowledge effectively and showed evidence that they had researched the work of the historian being quoted. It is also perhaps worth emphasizing here that students are not expected to evaluate the entire body of work of a particular historian – the evaluation is of an interpretation which may be very similar in length to that seen in the examined papers. Inclusion of these interpretations within an appendix can be helpful.

Finally, it is worth reminding centres about the support available for the delivery of the NEA. Face-to-face AQA inset is available looking at the management of the NEA itself and also looking at research skills and the effective evaluation of sources across all three components. In addition there is face-to-face feedback sessions and also online feedback for the NEA over the autumn term.

### **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.