

GCE Examiners' Report

History

GCE

Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that 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.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
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Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Unit 1 – Period Studies	7
Unit 2 – Depth Studies (Part One)	11
Unit 3 – Breadth Studies	14
Unit 4 – Depth Studies (Part Two)	16
Unit 5 – Non-examination Assessment	19
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	22

Executive Summary

GCE History covers three assessment objectives: AO1 (knowledge and understanding), which is assessed in Units 1, 3, 4 and 5; AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material), which is assessed in Units 2, 4 and 5; and AO3 (analysis and evaluation of historical interpretations), which is assessed in Units 2 and 5 only.

AO1, which accounts for 50% of AS and 55% of the overall A-level qualification, demonstrated a sound performance from candidates this year. As always, many of the candidates have a superlative grasp of the historical material, knowing and understanding its nuances to a degree that allows them to engage with the set questions to a very high level. Indeed, several examiners pointed out that reading this work was a pleasure. The majority of the work seen did not meet this high bar, however, there was still much to commend: candidates are increasingly agile in their responses to individual questions, and more of them are at least trying to tailor their responses to the set questions. Where the candidates are not doing this, the usual trend to subvert the question continues to hamper those candidates' outcomes. This can only be remedied by those candidates having a better understanding of the material so that they can engage in debates more effectively.

Overall, for Unit 1 the performance across all seven options was fairly consistent (once again, there were no candidates for Option 1.6 in either English or Welsh), with Option 1.7 doing especially well, and Options 1.1 and 1.8, which are the most popular topics taught by centres, indicating, unsurprisingly, a slightly broader spread in outcomes. For Unit 3, it is slightly more difficult to draw conclusions due to the enormous preponderance of candidates studying the US in Option 8, whereas several options provide data that is less statistically secure. Nonetheless, by and large the outcomes are comparable across options with no issues of concern emerging. For Unit 4, the essays also demonstrated a pleasing level of consistency across all options. There were only two questions across the sixteen available essay questions in Unit 4 that had unusually low mean marks; however, across the two options where these were identified, only six candidates attempted them in total. Nevertheless, we will closely review these ahead of summer 2026.

AO2, which accounts for 25% of AS and 25% of the overall A-level qualification continues to be an area of strength for candidates nearly – though not quite always – accounting for the highest mean mark in all the examination papers in which it occurs. It is clear that many candidates have some excellent skills here, and that others are able to make up for any shortcomings they may have in knowledge by utilising those skills as best they can. However, the application of knowledge to these AO2 questions should not be ignored by the candidates here: if they are to undertake a meaningful analysis and evaluation of the sources in terms of their collective value to an historian studying a specific question, then it is imperative that the candidates have a solid factual armoury against which the material in the sources can be tested. A substantial number of candidates in the lower to middle bands continue to make statements that require little knowledge and stand up to even less scrutiny. For example, stating that a private letter is an accurate source from beginning to end, simply by virtue of it being a private letter. For more information on trends and habits such as this, please review the guidance material for AO2 in both the Unit 2 and Unit 4 feedback sections later in this report.

One final comment for AO2 is that the responses tend to be far, far too long. In many cases they are a very detailed trawl through the sources one-by-one, and this is not an effective means by which to analyse and evaluate the value of three sources – collectively – to an historian studying a specified issue.

For AO3, which accounts for 25% of AS and, due to the NEA, 20% of the overall A-level, there is some indication of improved performance in candidates' efforts to elucidate how and why interpretations are formed. There continues to be evidence of pre-learned responses that don't especially fit the interpretations that are used in Unit 2, and this can be remedied by fuller engagement with the summative concept of each of the Unit 2 options (*Historical interpretations of key issues from this period*). There could also be improvement in candidates' use of historical material to support their discussion of the validity of the view in the question, the alternative view presented in the examination paper, and a third view, which is necessary to reach the top bands.

Overall, across the eight Unit 2 options, candidate performance was largely consistent, with the mean mark for Option 1 a fraction lower than its counterparts and Option 3 a fraction higher.

As for the NEA, this continues to be the Unit in which candidates gain the highest marks, and we continue to see some excellent work as well as some less excellent work. Plagiarism continues to be an issue and there is some creep in the use of AI. Several centres have been extremely vigilant in identifying this and have dealt with it accordingly before the work was submitted for moderation. Other centres have clearly made a great effort to deal with it, and while a few issues slipped through, these were subsequently picked up on by the moderators. We sincerely thank those centres for their hard work and ask that they continue their efforts in this area. The NEA is a valuable piece of work in that it reflects – perhaps more realistically than any other Unit – the work of an historian, and so teachers' assurance of the veracity of the work submitted is an essential part of maintaining public confidence in the NEA as an assessment strategy.

HISTORY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1 – PERIOD STUDIES

Overview of the Unit

Unit 1 provides candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in Assessment Objective 1 (the ability to demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding, to analyse and evaluate the key features of the period studied, making judgements and exploring concepts). The paper covers eight options of British (Options 1 to 4) and non-British History (Options 5 to 8). The demand in the questions across all eight options was comparable to previous years and the papers were a fair and reasonable test of candidates' abilities. Overall, the questions from Sections A and B performed well and candidates accessed the full range of marks available.

In the main, the papers were accessible and the requirements for their successful completion were clear. This was evidenced by the fact that, unlike last year, far fewer candidates either misread or misunderstood individual questions. On the other hand, some candidates continue to tailor their responses to questions they either expected or wished had been set. In these circumstances where candidates attempted to invert the question, the responses tended to explore areas of study that were at odds with the questions set in the examination papers.

There was a wide range of abilities demonstrated in responses to the questions set in Unit 1 this year. It is pleasing to report that there were a significant number of Band 4 and, more noteworthy, Band 5 responses. Band 5 responses mostly answer the set question and although there may be a little drift, the candidates maintain their focus in order to reach a substantiated judgement. At Band 5 historical knowledge is mostly accurate and relevant and is used by the majority of candidates to support their argument. In Section B, Band 5 responses tend to show a greater understanding of the period. At Band 4 candidates attempt to answer the set question but they sometimes lack consistency and there is often evidence of some narrative drift. More often than not, candidates' focus on the set question is not sustained throughout the response and the judgement lacks substantiation.

Generally, candidates were able to demonstrate depth in their answers although they sometimes compromised on range and scope particularly in Section B where they must ensure that their answers are broad enough to meet the criteria demanded by the question. The extent of the analysis and evaluation in candidates' responses did vary. There were some well supported responses which were, for the most part, clearly structured with appropriate evidence selected and deployed to support a judgement.

Some candidates still produce descriptive/narrative accounts where they rely too heavily on contextual knowledge rather than creating an analytical response supported by precise or relevant evidence. These responses tend to elicit a Band 3 mark because they tend to be limited in scope and largely topic based.

Although many candidates do attempt to provide a balanced answer, some responses are inconsistently focused on the question, which means that they tend to achieve no higher than Band 4. Candidates are encouraged to support and challenge the statement/question and try to ensure that there is a clear analysis of both sides of the argument.

One of the issues inhibiting candidates from accessing the higher Bands is due, in part, to the fact that their overall judgments were not developed enough. Candidates often made a passing judgment in the introduction or conclusion of their response, but failed to make a clear, clinching argument. For example, an effective judgement could be focused on the impact of the named issue on different groups. The strongest candidates sustained their judgments throughout their answer. However, candidates should be discouraged from the deployment of seemingly endless mini judgements (usually at the end of each paragraph) because they tend to be repetitive and add little to the debate. They should be used sparingly and effectively by linking contrasting arguments that progresses the overall debate.

It is clear that when candidates plan their essay in advance of writing their answer (as evidenced on some scripts), their ideas are often clearer and better focused on the question. Some, though not all, unplanned responses tended to display a stream-of-consciousness approach to writing, which meant that candidates could not achieve the higher Bands. Candidates are advised to spend a few minutes to plan their essay before starting to write the full answer.

Answers that focused on the wording of the question and confidently illustrated specific examples stood out from those that tended to take a more general approach to the essays. However, candidates should avoid overuse of the wording of the question which, in some instances, became repetitive and tended to highlight their paucity of understanding and knowledge.

Candidates earning the higher Bands used extensive knowledge to underpin their answers. These candidates used well-selected and relevant evidence which frequently led to convincing judgements. The skill is in successfully integrating all four strands of the mark scheme to provide a holistic response. Even at Band 6 these holistic responses are not necessarily perfect, but they are characterised by effective analysis and evaluation allied to a consistent focus on the set question.

Responses from candidates in the lower Bands were characterised by description, narration, irrelevance and/or lack of knowledge. They tended to demonstrate a superficial understanding of the historical context and were unable to offer a more conceptual and nuanced approach to the questions.

Sadly, again this year there were no candidates for one of the optional papers – Option 6: Europe in the age of absolutism and revolution c.1682–1815.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A (Assessment Objective 1)

For the most part candidates were aware of the need to debate the wider history surrounding the questions, but the quality of their responses varied. Those candidates that embraced the challenge of debate did so with confidence and there were some fine examples spread throughout the Options but particularly in Option 1 Question 1, Option 3 Question 2 and Option 7 Question 2. These candidates maintained their focus on the key issue and thereby challenged its validity when set against contrary and/or related factors.

However, many candidates appeared content to simply discuss the other factors rather than the specific one stated in the set question. This was seen especially in Option 4 Question 1 where many preferred to focus on social, economic and cultural changes and Option 4 Question 2 where some candidates seemed happy to list the changes in the lives of women.

Fewer candidates this year either misread or misunderstood individual questions though there are some possible exceptions. For example, in Option 4 Question 2 candidates may have misunderstood 'legislative change'. Some candidates continue to tailor their responses to questions they either expected or wished had been set, and in these circumstances often attempted to invert the question. This was particularly evident in Option 1 Question 2 where some candidates insisted on discussing the causes of the rebellions, and Option 3 Question 1 where listing the reasons for parliamentary reform was preferred to dealing with the middle-class demand for parliamentary representation.

With regard to timeframes expressed in the questions, some candidates' apparent reluctance to deal with this aspect of the examination continues to be a feature of some responses. This was especially noted in Option 3 Question 2 in which candidates were keen to discuss protest in the period before 1830 and Option 4 Question 2 where the Suffragettes were often referenced and/or discussed.

Overall, in these short-timeframe questions, there was a tendency among some candidates to ignore some aspects of the question, be that the requirement of the command term, the key issue raised in the question or the specified period. For example, in Option 7 Question 2, while candidates analysed the importance of key individuals and economic factors, they did not always fully develop debate between which was more significant and why, and why the other issues were less significant.

Section B (Assessment Objective 1)

Many of the responses to the Section B questions reflected the issues that were observed in Section A; however, there are some longer-timeframe-specific notes that are worth drawing attention to. As in previous series, there was the usual attempt to deal with material chronologically. This was particularly evident in earlier periods. For example, in Option 1 Questions 3 and 4, and in Option 2 Question 4. While many candidates tried to engage with the debate, they tended to glide through the various reigns, often making comparisons via mini judgements, rather than considering the issue thematically across the period indicated in the question.

As in previous series, the tendency to narrate rather than analyse was very noticeable this year. For example, Option 5 Question 3 where some candidates were content to describe the religious changes in Europe between 1500 and 1564 and in Option 7 Question 3 in which the causes of tension in Great Power relations between 1780 and 1856 were simply listed by some candidates.

While there were many examples of well-focused, analytical and evaluative responses, a sizable number fell short in this respect. For example, in Option 7 Question 4, many candidates analysed the significance of opposition, and many judged that opposition to Alexander was more significant than that faced by Nicholas, but they often failed to develop the debate by exploring and explaining why this was the case.

There was also a little bit of confusion witnessed here and there, for example in Option 3 Question 3, a number of candidates appeared to be confused about the political/party affiliation of Gladstone, and they also suggested that the Second Reform Act was passed during Disraeli's second ministry.

As mentioned above, there was much to be commended. It was evident that many candidates had a comprehensive grasp of the material: those candidates focused their responses on the set questions and offered some detailed and effective analysis and evaluation. Indeed, there were many examples of Band 6 responses across several of the options.

HISTORY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 2 – DEPTH STUDIES (PART ONE)

Overview of the Unit

Unit 2 provides candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in Assessment Objective 2 (the analysis and evaluation of appropriate source materials, primary and/or contemporary to the period, within their historical context) and Assessment Objective 3 (the analysis and evaluation, in relation to the historical context, of different ways in which aspects of the past have been interpreted). These are assessed discretely, with AO2 tested in Question 1 and AO3 in Question 2, both of which are compulsory questions. The paper covers eight options of British (Options 1 to 4) and non-British History (Options 5 to 8). Question 1 requires that candidates assess the value of three sources to an historian studying a specified issue. Question 2 requires that candidates assess the validity of a given interpretation (Interpretation 1) against an alternative (Interpretation 2), considering how and why these may have been developed, and what other interpretations may have been formed.

Although candidates performed more strongly in Question 1 than they did in Question 2 there was a significant improvement in the performance of candidates in Question 2, with this pattern being consistent across all eight options. Candidates' skills of source analysis are definitely improving year on year, although we would still like to see more consideration of the sources as a collective and a more focused discussion of comparisons between the sources in terms of their agreement and disagreement about the issues in the question set. Question 2 continues to be more of a challenge but, pleasingly, more candidates this year were able to demonstrate an understanding of how and why interpretations may have been formed and thus achieved higher marks.

It is worth emphasising that a focus on the skills needed to engage fully with Question 2 will not only benefit candidates in their Unit 2 examination but also lay a firm groundwork for their NEA in the A-level year of the course.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1 (Assessment objective 2)

The demand in the questions across all eight options was comparable to previous years and the papers were a fair and reasonable test of candidates' abilities to analyse and evaluate source material. The item level data available shows that the mean marks for Question 1 are higher than Question 2.

The most common way for candidates to answer the source-based question continues to be a consecutive assessment of each source. Whilst this approach can cover the ground it sometimes reduces the time spent on a collective assessment of the sources or reduces the opportunity to point out where the sources agree or disagree about issues relevant to the question set.

It is important to emphasise that AO2 requires candidates firstly to analyse and evaluate the strengths and limitations of the sources, paying particular attention to their provenances. Secondly, it requires candidates to evaluate the sources in terms of their specific context (what is going on when the source was produced) and their wider context (the general background to the issue in the question and the period framed by the question). Lastly, there must be an answer to the question set which is always about the value of the sources to an historian studying a named issue.

Those three processes were evidenced in the work of high-scoring candidates with adequate attention being paid to each process. The very best responses were able, in addition, to point out links between the sources – how the sources supported or undermined each other in the assessment of their value to an historian studying the named issue.

Examiners noted that there were some approaches adopted by candidates that did not answer the question set. One worrying trend is that some candidates do not consider any of the sources' provenances neither do they have much to write about the strengths and limitations of the sources. Such answers usually only focus on the context of the sources with only general comments about value, and not the value to the named issue being studied. Such an approach cannot score very highly. For some candidates the main comment on provenance is to state that the source is biased and, consequently, has no great value to an historian. These comments are common and ignore the point that, on the contrary, biased sources can be very valuable to an historian if they are critically assessed.

Another less successful approach is for candidates to describe the content of the sources in some detail, supported by extensive quotations. Such an approach wastes the time and effort of candidates: they should focus on the tasks of analysis and evaluation as the examiner already knows what is in the sources. Appropriate references to the content of the sources can be made to illustrate analysis and evaluation but that is very different to exhaustive descriptions without purpose.

There is no requirement for candidates to itemise omissions from the sources (and then, perversely, pronounce the source as not valuable). Such an approach distracts candidates from their essential work on provenances, context and value to an historian. There is also no requirement to identify the most valuable source, after all, the question requires the sources to be assessed holistically.

In general, contextualisation of the sources continues to improve. However, merely referring to the specific context of a source is not enough. The reference needs to be explained, and a developed response should refer to the value of this specific context. For example, in Option 8, Source B is referring to hyperinflation, a reference most candidates identified. However, there needs to be an explanation of hyperinflation and its dire economic and political consequences as the question was about the "economic challenges" facing the Weimar Republic.

Question 2 (Assessment Objective 3)

The demand in the questions across all eight options was comparable to previous years presenting a reasonable test of candidates' abilities to analyse and evaluate (in relation to the historical context) different ways in which aspects have been interpreted.

2025 saw continuing improvement in answers to Question 2 with much greater evidence of understanding of the wider historical debate. There were fewer answers where the wider historical debate was restricted to a mention of another possible interpretation without development or linkage to the debate.

For each option in Unit 2 a list of historical interpretations of four key issues is provided in the specification for each depth study, so candidates can prepare by studying the historical interpretations about those key issues, assessing how the historiographical debate has evolved over time and how various influences may affect how and why historians have made different interpretations about those issues. Those influences could include the availability of primary evidence, the emphasis an historian may place on particular events and developments, their focus on the varying importance of political, social, religious economic or other aspects of history, and the influence of other historians who represent a similar or different school of thought. It is important that these interpretations are not studied in isolation but are linked to the contextual detail of the depth study specification. Candidates should be encouraged to show that they understand the different ways in which an issue has been interpreted.

Examiners noted that successful approaches to Question 2 identified the interpretations being made in the extracts, used their contextual knowledge to debate the interpretations, explained how these interpretations fitted into the wider historical debate and were also able to discuss how and why historians might have reached different interpretations about the issue in the question. They could also make a judgement about the validity of the view in the question that was based on that discussion. Better answers certainly understood that events and developments can legitimately be seen in a variety of different ways. In Option 8 successful answers to Question 2 provided contextual support for the proposition that the period 1924–9 might be seen as a “Golden Age”, explaining as well why some historians might also have taken a more sceptical view of those developments. The wider historical debate was exemplified by reference to the structural political problems of the Weimar Republic and the alienation of key elements of German society.

Less successful responses ignored the wider historical debate and focused exclusively on the content of the given extracts with no attempt to use their depth study contextual knowledge to inform their discussion. Weak responses just provided a commentary on the material in the given extracts. Candidates are advised not to speculate about an historian – discussion should be based on their study of the historical debate and the contextual material of the depth study. Speculation about how much research the historian might or might not have conducted is pointless, especially if it is based upon the title of the book or article from which the extract is taken.

HISTORY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3 – BREADTH STUDIES

Overview of the Unit

Unit 3 assesses Assessment Objective 1. Unit 3 is divided into five British and five non-British options. Learners answer one of the two questions from Section A along with the question in Section B. Demand across all of these options was comparable to previous years. Performance in this unit is consistent across the options, giving candidates plenty of opportunities to deploy their historical knowledge to make nuanced judgements about the issues. Pleasingly, it is apparent that there is some improvement in candidates' performance in the upper mark range for this unit: while the number of candidates scoring 23 or fewer marks, remained stable, above this, many more candidates achieved 38 or more marks, with many of those scoring in the high 40s and upwards.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A (Assessment Objective 1)

Questions in this section cover shorter periods of time from within the specification. They focus on a different theme than the question in Section B.

The most common way for candidates to respond to these questions is still to trawl through key events, issues, monarchs or governments. For example, in Option 10, Question 2 asks for a comparison of Brezhnev to other leaders between 1953 and 1991, the vast majority of responses started with Khrushchev not Brezhnev. While this usually means that responses can have good coverage of the period it also results in them being more of a narrative and less evaluative. Sometimes candidates focused on material outside of the date range in the question without linking their point to the question, such as those who talked about Supreme Court decisions in the 1890s for Option 8 Question 1, but did not link it to the period from 1909 to 1945 as required by the question.

The most effective responses across the whole range of the different questions asked were those that focused directly on the debate in the question. Evaluation that compared the issue being discussed relative to other relevant issues scored highly, as did those that considered the relative strengths and weaknesses of each issue considered in its own right. The "Examine" questions also elicited this kind of response from candidates, with many of the higher scoring of their number finding these questions an ideal springboard for an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the issues raised. Wide coverage – both in terms of events between the dates in the question and the breadth of issues considered – also made for strong responses.

Less successful responses tended to lack the level of specific detail that questions covering a narrower date range require. Some responses to Section A and Section B questions were indistinguishable in terms of their depth. Responses that took a more narrative approach, especially those that trawled chronologically through the period instead of adopting an issue-led approach, tended to lack engagement with the debate in the question, favouring period coverage over analysis. There were also issues with the extent of coverage. For example, in responses to Question 2 of Option 8 there was a lot of focus on civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, but little after 1968. Responses to Question 1 on Option 3 tended to favour the early part of Luther's challenge over the Church and largely ignored his later influence and legacy. In Option 7 Question 2, the post war Labour government and the 1980s' Thatcher governments were considered, but with little reference to anything in between. Focus on the debate in the question could also limit responses. For example, responses to Question 1 in Option 7 focused on the nature of government actions rather than the extent of improvements in the lives of the poor.

Section B (Assessment Objective 1)

Questions in this section cover longer periods of time, often the whole period of time covered by the specification. These questions focus on the other theme from the specification that is not assessed in Section A.

As in Section A, the vast majority of candidates respond to this question by trawling through the monarchs or leader or key events that cover this period of time. This can take the form of a monarch-by-monarch response or, in the case of Option 10, grouping leaders together: Tsarist policies – revolutionary policies – policies of the later leaders, being one example. In Option 8 this became a chronological trawl through pre-learned themes such as imperialism, isolationism, interventionism. Responses like this tend to be narratively driven rather than evaluative, and they tend to only make direct reference to the question in their conclusions.

As in previous series, the best responses to these questions most frequently took a thematic rather than chronological approach. In Option 2, when candidates arranged their response around different reasons for poverty under the Tudors it made it much easier for them to consider the relative merits of each reason – rather than looking at the policies of each individual monarch.

Weaker responses tend to be descriptive rather than analytical. They are generally relevant but focus more on the narrative content of a theme rather than addressing the issue being debated by the wording of the question. In Option 7, this meant running through a list of social changes across the period, sometimes not even including education, which was mentioned in the question, but without addressing the relative significance of these changes which is what the question was asking. Coverage was also an issue with many responses. In Option 8 a significant number of responses focused on pre- or post-1945 historical events but often lacked equal consideration of both. In Option 2, the period from 1485 to 1536 was largely ignored.

Candidates should aim for period coverage but also should maintain their focus on an evaluation that develops in light of the debate in the question set.

HISTORY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 4 – DEPTH STUDIES (PART TWO)

Overview of the Unit

Unit 4 provides candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in Assessment Objective 2 (the analysis and evaluation of appropriate source material within its historical context) and Assessment Objective 1 (the ability to demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding, to analyse and evaluate the key features of the period studied, making judgements and exploring concepts). The paper covers eight options of British (Options 1–4) and non-British history (Options 5–8). The demand of the questions across all options was comparable and as accessible as previous years and allowed candidates to access the full range of marks available.

Unit 4 requires candidates to answer a source-based question and one essay-based question from a choice of two. For the source-based question the focus is on AO2. To show their understanding of the demands of AO2 candidates need to consider the value of three contemporary sources in respect of their specific and wider context while also considering the strengths and limitation of the sources for a particular enquiry. Wider context means that candidates generally know what was happening at the time (and an excess of this usually appears when the candidate is not giving the actual question set its due focus). Specific context means that candidates are able to show an understanding of the specific event or development that influenced the author to say what they did, at that particular period of time. This must be done in relation to the actual question set and not mechanically without reference to it. Discussing strengths and limitations require candidates to discuss the provenance of the sources and possible influences on the author and how that affects the value for an historian studying a particular enquiry.

The essay question requires a debate that reaches a substantiated judgement regardless of the question structure. Most candidates were able to provide a reasonable amount of analysis and evaluation within their answers.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1 (Assessment Objective 2)

In 2025, answers improved in substance, becoming more concise and context driven. However, some responses were still too lengthy and lacked focus, invariably meaning that less time was available to answer the essay question. Introductory paragraphs rarely added value and were generally unnecessary. Conclusions with judgements showed progress, with some candidates effectively connecting sources to answer the question, though many continued to simply comment on which source has the most value, which remains unhelpful.

In respect of strengths and limitations, this continues to be done quite well by some candidates. They look at the provenance and the situation the author was in to provide valid evaluative comments. These answers go beyond the simplistic 'this is biased' approach, understanding that for an historian, the bias within a source is often its strength. Such answers understand that this element of AO2 is equally as important and deserving of attention as the contextualisation mentioned above. However, for a significant number this element needs development. One-line comments about 'bias' are not enough and, generally, candidates need to give the provenances of the sources much more attention. Some continue to critique sources for what they omit, even though previous reports have stated this is not a valid approach. A source is not required to provide any more information than it does. For instance, dismissing William Seward's 1861 speech (Option 7, Source B) as having less value because he didn't mention certain Civil War battles or events in 1865 is both incorrect and misguided. Candidates should also develop their comments beyond the assertive when engaging in a discussion of strengths and limitations. For example, in Option 2 Source B, saying that the author was 'an ambassador from Venice' or that the dispatch 'was confidential' does not really explain why that would be a strength or limitation.

Most candidates were able to provide some wider context. This means they were able to generally discuss what was happening at the time, but weaker responses did not link this to the actual question set. For example, in Option 8, Source B, most candidates could specifically name the event being discussed as 'The Night of the Long Knives', but many did not contextualise it to the question set which was 'its significance to the Nazi consolidation of power'. The same could be said of Option 4 Source B, where most candidates recognised the event as the General Strike but were unable to contextualise it to the actual question set, which was economic change. Specific context therefore should be regarded as specific not only to the events that influenced the author to say what they did, but also specific to the actual question set. The vast majority treat the sources individually which has merit in ensuring that the three sources are given equal treatment. However, to reach the higher bands candidates should discuss the sources as a collective, as invariably from Source A to Source C a line of development will be seen which should allow candidates to draw the sources together.

There were less mechanistic responses this year, meaning there was less narrative on issues such as the purpose of the source or the tone of the source, though a minority still seem to think this is always required, when it is limited to some specific questions and some specific sources. For example, for Option 8 some discussed at length how Source A had a sense of urgency and alarm yet how this linked to the question of the Nazi consolidation of power remained unanswered. Invariably there would then follow a discussion on the purpose of the source being to 'inform and educate' but again how this linked with the actual question set remained unanswered. These types of responses are mechanical and have nothing to add to the debate on the sources' value unless linked in some way to the actual question set.

Question 2 and Question 3 (Assessment Objective 1)

Generally, responses were able to provide a reasonable amount of focus on the question set. Candidates seemed to be more aware of the need to reflect on the demands of the question and there was more evidence of planning responses before beginning to write. For the most part the main key issues were identified and the coverage required of the questions was handled well. Many answers provided clear structure. When candidates struggled it was because they did not address the demands of the question. For example, in Option 8 Question 2 it was necessary to identify the aims of Nazi economic policy before discussing its success, and also in Question 3, a discussion of how successful Hitler's conduct of foreign policy was really depended on what Hitler was trying to achieve, and this needed to be identified before answering the question set. It is advisable for candidates to engage in thorough reflection on the question set prior to commencing their written responses, but it is clear that candidates are becoming more adept at this and are practising various question options. However, more work needs to be done on approaches to some questions, as too many responses were little more than narrative accounts. An example would be Option 7 Question 3 where candidates discussed 'other issues' rather than reconstruction and Option 1 Question 2 where issues were not dealt with in an evaluative manner. Also, in Option 1 Question 3 some candidates went beyond the demands of the question and discussed 'other challenges' faced by Elizabeth rather than emphasising the set issue in the question.

Candidates, for the most part, provided a reasonable amount of knowledge and understanding in their responses. However, knowledge has to be used to answer the question set and a considerable number of responses continue to list events or factors. For example, in Option 1, Question 2 religious changes were often listed while the critical analysis and evaluation of those changes were in short supply. In Option 6 Question 2 there were frequent narrative accounts on the revolt in the Vendée, and in Option 2 Question 3 there was frequent listing of the reasons for the victory of Parliament in the Civil War. Candidates also need to develop their responses beyond the assertive. For example, in Option 5 Question 2 candidates were able to describe what the Catholic Church did to try and deal with the Lutheran threat, but how successful they were was only briefly discussed by some with comments such as 'this was very successful' or 'this was not so successful' without the all-important explanation of 'why' it was very/or not very successful.

On a positive note, there were fewer examples of flipped responses this year (answers where the candidate ignores the issue in the question and opts to discuss other issues).

UNIT 5 – NON-EXAMINATION ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

The standard of work produced by candidates this year was, in many cases, exceptionally high, with some submissions reaching a level more typical of undergraduate study. Centres are to be commended for their continued commitment to supporting their learners through this demanding and rewarding component of the qualification. It was also a pleasure to see a wide range of centre-devised titles and to read and moderate those presented by candidates, although the standard for some of these varied considerably.

Centres have coped well with the logistical aspects of the NEA, including the uploading of material to IAMIS. In the majority of cases, administrative requirements were fulfilled efficiently and with attention to detail, and there were very few issues regarding this. However, two areas of concern emerged in this series:

1. **Plagiarism and the use of AI-generated content** appear to be on the rise. While not widespread, there were enough instances (on both English and Welsh assignments) to emphasize the importance of teachers monitoring this closely.
2. An **increased number of centres conflated the formal review process** (which is a requirement) with the provision of specific advice (which is permitted but carries a cap on the Band awarded). Centres are reminded that candidates must work independently, and any infringement may result in a reduction in marks. Where clarification was requested, centres generally responded promptly and cooperatively.

Tasks

Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

Assessment Objective 1 (AO1): Knowledge, Understanding, and Argument

The majority of candidates demonstrated the ability to write fluently, using appropriate and often sophisticated language. A clear understanding of the chosen topic was typically evident, with most candidates drawing on accurate and relevant historical knowledge to support their arguments.

- **Analysis and evaluation** were attempted to varying degrees of success. Some candidates produced focused and well-substantiated judgements closely tied to the question set. Others presented conclusions that lacked sufficient evidence or drifted into general commentary. It is essential that candidates be made fully aware that they are answering a question which requires a judgement.
- A number of candidates adopted a **template approach** that limited the analytical depth of their essays. Where these approaches were adopted, it was impossible to see the responses as coherent – they were not far above lists. Only responses which are integrated, where the sources neatly dovetail into the argument, can pass the threshold for coherence and gain Band 6 marks for AO1.

Template responses typically consisted of:

- a general introduction
- an isolated section on historiography with possibly fleeting reference to how or why and interpretation might have been formed
- a trawl through sources
- and a short conclusion.

This structure often left the central historical argument underdeveloped or fragmented, and limited candidates' ability to display their individuality and creativity.

- **Word count compliance** was another area of concern. More candidates appeared to exceed the recommended word limit this year. Centres are reminded that candidates who exceed the word count should be restricted to **Band 5**. Additionally, a significant number of candidates failed to note their word count at the end of their essays.
- The **quality of written communication** varied considerably. Some candidates misused or misspelled key historical terms and names. Centres are encouraged to reinforce the importance of clarity, accuracy, and precision in written expression.

Assessment Objective 2 (AO2): Use of Primary Sources

Appropriate contemporary/primary source material was evident in the vast majority of submissions. Most candidates were able to select relevant sources that aligned with the scope of their enquiry.

- However, a number of candidates relied too heavily on **visual sources**, particularly photographs. While the analysis of one well-chosen image can be valuable, it is difficult to derive meaningful new insights from multiple similar visual sources. Some candidates attempted to evaluate several images without offering anything distinct, which diluted the analytical impact.
- A more serious concern was the noticeable **increase in the use of secondary sources presented as contemporary/primary**. Centres are reminded to ensure that candidates understand the difference between the two. The only acceptable maps and statistics are those which are drawn from contemporary sources.
- In many instances, candidates **did not apply AO2 skills in the same way as in Unit 2 or Unit 4**. Evaluation of sources often lacked critical engagement with provenance, purpose, context, and limitation. Instead, there was a tendency toward descriptive or sequential “source trawling” without reference to the question set or a clear analytical framework.

Assessment Objective 3 (AO3): Understanding and Evaluation of Interpretations

Performance in AO3 varied significantly across centres.

- Some candidates lost marks by failing to consider **three distinct historical interpretations**, a requirement for accessing the higher mark bands. Centres must ensure candidates meet this standard.
- While the “**how**” of differing interpretations was generally addressed with competence, the “**why**” proved far more challenging. Many candidates were unable to explain the reasons behind differing viewpoints, such as changes in context, perspective, or methodology over time by historians or other relevant observers. A number of candidates see the need to create artificial labels for groups of historians irrespective of whether there is any evidence that they are/were justified.
- Historiography was too often treated as a **discrete section** within the essay rather than being integrated into the broader analysis. The most successful responses wove historiographical debate throughout, using it to inform and challenge their own argument. Remarkably moderators still (rarely it must be said) came across examples of work which did not mention any historians at all.
- While a number of candidates use descriptors such as Orthodox, Revisionist, Post-revisionist, it remains a bit of an oddity when an analysis of interpretations begins with coverage of either revisionist or post-revisionist work without seeming to explain what it is they are revising or revisiting.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

Centres' assessment of their candidates is, overall, sound and there were far fewer adjustments made to centres' marks this year. However, it is relevant here to reiterate several key points with regard to the number of sources permitted (no fewer than six) and the importance of candidates providing an accurate word count (which would be greatly assisted by teachers requesting an electronic version of the work so that spot checks on the veracity of these can be carried out).

While it is not compulsory, some of the most effective assessment of candidate took place via comments in Word. In many cases, centres requested that candidates submitted their work electronically and then assessed them electronically, using highlighting tools and comments that did not obscure the candidates' original submissions. Where centres did this, it was often easier to discern sections of candidates' work that were being credited for AO1 material or AO2 and AO3 skills.

Overall, submission via IAMIS was a great success and centres are thanked for adopting this method of submission with such ease. Please note, however, the importance of submitting all relevant forms (which must be signed), as well as the original approval form for the titles used, so that moderators can check the titles against those that have been agreed with WJEC.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: **029 2240 4277**

Email: GCEHistory@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [AS/A Level History](#)

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

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Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

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