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General Certificate of Education

History 2041 *Specification*

Unit HIS3E

Report on the Examination *2010 examination – June series*

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Unit HIS3E

Unit 3E: France and the Enlightenment: Absolutism Under Threat, 1743–1789

General Comments

There were a good number of very impressive responses to this paper with quite a number of candidates showing a very good grasp of specific subject knowledge in support of balanced argument. Indeed, the purely narrative response was very rare indeed for it appeared that most candidates had been well versed in the demands of a balanced, analytical response. Consequently, the key determinant of level awarded tended to be the ability of a candidate to deploy specific knowledge, including names and dates. There was a trend for candidates to quote the views of historians, some excessively so. Historiographical reference can indeed bolster the argument of a candidate but should not be seen as support in its own right and is almost never sufficient as evidence at A2 level. It was the response that included historical evidence that tended to do well.

There was pretty much an even split between the questions, although Question 3 perhaps proved the least popular.

Question 1

01 This was generally answered very well, although there were a notable number of responses in which anecdotal stories of Louis XV's hunting or love life dominated without any explicit indication of how this might be linked to his weaknesses as monarch. It was the candidate that was able to name specific incidences during the period and to ascribe these to certain factors that did well. In addition, the candidate that was comfortable with defining the difficulties faced in this period did find it easier to consider reasons throughout their response. Given how central the topic is, it was surprising that few candidates seemed comfortable with the Maupeou Crisis or the role of ministers in general. Again, the weaker response gave vague commentary on the ambition of those at the top and the indifference of Louis XV but was unable to provide support for this. There were however some very impressive answers which tended to avoid a chronological structure and instead paragraphed by themes, including the role of Parlement; the Ministers; finance etc. Most candidates argued that it was the combination of a range of factors that created the instability of the period.

Question 2

02 There was some range in the quality of response to this question. The very best were able to give specific examples of financial crisis being caused by certain factors. The most common of these was the role of Necker and other ministers in weakening the financial system for their own ends. There were some very impressive responses that argued the ministers actually tried to avoid the crisis and that it was the reluctance of the monarch to challenge vested interest that was the main cause of financial instability. Generally, knowledge of the role of Parlement was good with the magistrates attitude to specific events such as the Six Acts being considered in some depth. Unfortunately, there were, however, a number of weaker responses that struggled to advance beyond generic comment on the greed of the rich and the inequitable structure of French society. Whilst the taxation system might be considered a sound long-term reason for financial failings,

most of the arguments deployed by candidates in this respect could have been made in any period of the late Ancien Regime. Even those that argued it was an excessive burden to go to war that was the main cause of financial crisis were unable to name the components of the period or how much debt these contributed to the French state. Specifics were the key.

Question 3

- 03** This question was answered well with many candidates engaging very well with the ideas of the Enlightenment. Indeed, it was very pleasing to note how confident a number of candidates were with the specific ideas of the Enlightenment and how well they linked them to specific reforms. This was most commonly done in relation to the Physiocrats but there was also very good knowledge of the role of salons and of the press. A full range of other factors were also deployed in explaining possible reasons for reform in the period. The most common argument being that reform was actually forced upon the government by financial crisis or by the ambitions of the privileged and that it had little to do with ideological ambition. It was clear that a number of candidates that answer this question were able to use very sophisticated essay structures.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.