



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2F: The Sun King: Louis XIV, France and Europe, 1643-1715
Report on the Examination

7042
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General

The examination seemed to be well received by students, as it enabled most students to demonstrate a good level of understanding in relation to the key issues and features of the reign of Louis XIV.

The standard of entry for this exam was very wide, with some more able students writing responses that surpassed the standard expected at A Level, whilst, at the other end, there were students who struggled to fully engage with the questions or demonstrated very limited knowledge of the reign of Louis XIV.

Out of the four questions on the paper, students seemed to find 04 the most challenging, with the average mark for this question being slightly lower than its counterparts. However, there were still a range of attainment levels awarded to students across all questions on the paper, suggesting that the examination proved effective at differentiating between students, with roughly an equal number of more and less effective answers found in response to each question.

Question 01

Students were required to assess the value of sources A, B and C to a historian studying the problems surrounding the issue of the Spanish Succession. It was pleasing to see that the majority of students analysed each source in turn in order to assess its value in relation to the issue stated in the question, with very few students attempting to compare the sources.

There was an active attempt made by most students to engage with the problems surrounding the issue of the Spanish Succession when assessing the value of sources. However, the effectiveness of this varied widely. For some students this was implicit rather than explicit, which limited the overall quality of the response. Some students would identify points relevant to the question, but would not fully explain why the point raised made the source valuable/limited.

The key problem surrounding the issue of the Spanish Succession raised by source A was that if Louis XIV did not agree to the partition proposal he had negotiated with William III, then it was likely that an anti-French alliance would be formed once again. Most students were able to use their contextual knowledge of previous anti-French alliances to explain why this was an accurate concern. In doing this, they added value to the source when considering the problems surrounding the issues of the Spanish Succession.

Most students also acknowledged that a letter sent from Louis XIV to his ambassador in London would most likely be valuable, as Louis would need to be truthful about his concerns in this context. Some students did struggle to find limitations of source A, with many turning to omission as a way of balancing their analysis. Stronger answers considered the tone of the source and used this to suggest that Louis XIV was deliberately trying to make France seem less aggressive, and considered the purpose of the source as a potential limitation. As with all three sources, less able students tended to refer to the issue stated in the question but failed to explicitly explain why the points raised were or were not valuable.

The key problem surrounding the issue of the Spanish Succession raised by source B was that war was very likely if a partition agreement was not finalised before the King of Spain died. Some good answers acknowledged that the fact that a partition treaty was very valuable to a historian studying the issue stated in the question, as former enemies were willing to work together to avoid war at all costs. This demonstrated how high the risk of conflict was.

In relation to limitations, some students again focused on omission and commented on the absence of Emperor Leopold and the King of Spain in the negotiations. However, some of the more able students actually saw the absence of these figures when deciding how the Spanish empire should be divided as valuable. These students reflect that their lack of involvement in the first partition treaty is a key problem surrounding the issue of the Spanish Succession. Unfortunately some students lacked a secure understanding of the chronology, which weakened their response as they were unable to engage successfully with the content of the source as a result.

Source C proved to be the most effective in allowing students to demonstrate their contextual awareness, especially when assessing the content of the source. More able students considered the statements made by Louis XIV regarding the union between France and Spain, and his desire to remind his grandson that he was 'born French'. More able students were then able to use Louis' blunders the following year to explain why this was particularly valuable to a historian studying issues surrounding the problem of the Spanish Succession. Other students failed to see the value in these statements, and tended to focus instead on the tone of the source and dismiss the overall value that a source like C possesses.

At the higher levels students were able to come to some very well substantiated conclusions on the value of each source, in light of the issue stated in the question. Some students attempted to provide an overall conclusion that assessed all three sources together at the end of the answer. However, this tended to list points of value/limitations rather than explain in detail or, alternatively, compared the sources, which is not a skill required by the A Level examination.

Question 02

Question 02 required students to assess Cardinal Mazarin's domestic and foreign policies in the period 1653 – 1661 in order to judge whether or not his foreign policy was more successful than his domestic policy. The time frame stated in the question not always observed, with a number of students making reference to the Treaty of Westphalia when assessing foreign policy, or commenting on Mazarin's role in the outbreak of the Frondes when considering his domestic policy. Points that were not successfully linked to the time frame received no credit, as they demonstrated a lack of awareness of the demands of the question.

More able students tended to focus on Mazarin's success during the Peace of the Pyrenees, both in relation to confirming territory gained at Westphalia and in his negotiation of the marriage between Louis XIV and Maria Theresa of Spain. Good answers tended to also consider the long term significance of the marriage match, which demonstrated good conceptual awareness. In relation to domestic policy, students tended to be more critical and considered the state of France's finances at the start of Louis XIV's personal reign in 1661. More able students balanced their argument by considering foreign policy failings such as continuing a costly war with Spain for so long, using this to suggest that domestic failures were a result of a costly foreign policy. Alternatively, students also explored domestic policy success, such as Mazarin's role in preparing Louis XIV for kingship.

Due to the nature of the question, some students failed to provide balance as they focused only on foreign policy success and domestic policy failure, which did not demonstrate a full understanding of the demands of the question.

Question 03

On the whole, students performed slightly better on this question than question 02 or 04. Question 03 required students to assess whether or not Louis' policy of Reunions in the years 1680 to 1684 was more defensive than offensive. More able students were able to demonstrate an impressive understanding of what the Reunions entailed, commenting on different geographical regions and using different examples to provide evidence for both sides of the argument. For example, many students used the legal basis of some Reunion claims to suggest Louis was acting defensively, in comparison to areas such as Strasbourg where Louis had no legitimate claim and was, therefore, acting aggressively. Some students engaged with Louis' intentions and compared them with his actions, suggesting that whilst Reunions may have been defensively motivated, they were ultimately aggressively pursued. This was a very strong line of argument when executed successfully, as it demonstrated clear conceptual understanding.

However, some students did not have the level of knowledge required to successfully engage with the question. Some students confused Reunions with other examples of Louis' foreign policy, whilst others seemed to know what the Reunions were, but did not have enough precise detail to make their explanations convincing.

Question 04.

On the whole, students did not perform as well on this question than question 02 or 03. Question 04 required students to assess whether or not Louis XIV's religious policies changed significantly in the 1690s. More able students commented on Louis' policies towards the Papacy and towards Gallicanism to demonstrate the 1690s as a time of change, acknowledging that the two very much link with one another. In order to do this successfully, students tended to provide evidence from before 1690 in order to explain the changes that took place in the decade stated in the question. This was often balanced by Louis' continued commitment to Catholicism during his reign and his desire to eradicate France of heretics, using the 1690s to demonstrate a period of continuity.

However, some students seemed to struggle with the decade stated in the question. For example, some students attempted to use evidence related to the Huguenots, but focused too much on events prior to 1690 without successfully linking to the time period stated in the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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