



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/1B Spain in the Age of Discovery, 1469 - 1598
Report on the Examination

7042/1B
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General

This was the first cohort of students to sit the full A-level paper without advanced material since 2019. Many were very well prepared, with considerable knowledge across the breadth of the time period, with a good and often very good understanding of examination technique across the assessment objectives.

Question 01 enabled students to demonstrate their knowledge of Philip II's foreign policy, which many students were able to do with considerable depth. The three extracts, by McKinnon-Bell, Kilsby and Williams took a different stance on the aims and outcomes of different aspects of foreign policy. Whilst there was some reliance on description here, many students were able to analyse and evaluate the arguments effectively, with many supported comments on how convincing the overall and supporting arguments were.

The questions in section B covered the full date range of the course, and although most students opted for Question 02, which had a focus on the reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella, there was generally a good spread of responses across questions 03 and 04. Question 02 allowed students to address a range of social issues in order to show their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of social policies under Ferdinand and Isabella. Question 02 was very popular as expected and many students demonstrated precise and specific knowledge, though this was not always applied consistently to the question.

Question 03 focused on the domestic policies of Charles V, allowing students to assess a broad range of policies in their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Spanish crown by 1556. Whilst there was a good range of knowledge displayed, there was a tendency to describe rather than analyse, and many answers required further focus on the relative strength of the crown.

Question 04 gave students the opportunity to assess Philip's financial policies, and the extent to which they were caused by the mismanagement of his overseas empire. Overall fewer students opted to answer this question, and there was some lack of understanding of financial policies and overseas empire, although at the top end knowledge of both was detailed and precise, with some very good analysis of the reasons for his financial failings.

Question 01

Students were required to evaluate three separate extracts in relation to the foreign policies of Philip II. They had to assess the extent to which the interpretations were convincing by drawing on contextual knowledge to corroborate and challenge the arguments presented by: McKinnon-Bell, Kilsby and Williams. They were not asked to make comparisons between the extracts, nor were they required to offer comment on provenance, tone or bias, although some did. Students were not rewarded, but equally not penalised for having done so. The answer did not require an introduction nor an overall conclusion, however some concluding evaluation of each extract in relation to the question was helpful in meeting the criteria for the higher levels

Many students identified the different aspects of Philip's foreign policy and were largely aware of the key events but did not proceed to use, or reference, the evidence presented in the extract beyond a simplistic acknowledgement and instead wrote everything they knew. Many students failed to address the overall argument presented within the extract, focusing instead on a narrow point or piece of evidence that wasn't necessarily relevant. Students should be aware that they should only comment on the arguments and evidence presented in the extracts, rather than making comments on how convincing an extract is on the basis of what it does not say. The evidence within the extracts must be addressed as part of the answer, the inability to do so can place an answer in a maximum level 3. It is also important for students to address the issue, which follows the "in relation to" in the question and then assimilate the whole extract before starting to write. Students should be mindful that the key argument of an extract is not necessarily in the first line. Furthermore, there was some repetition of evidence, particularly in extracts A and B. Students should think carefully about when to deploy specific evidence and try not to repeat it in relation to a different point.

Extract A, from McKinnon-Bell, argued that Philip II was largely defensive in his foreign policy before 1580 but following the acquisition of Portugal in 1580 became more aggressive and took increasingly large risks. It also made the assessment that Philip believed he was doing God's work, and his commitment to this led him to make poor decisions. Some students were able to engage with these arguments, using specific evidence to evaluate the extent to which 1580 could be seen as a "turning point". However, there was also much descriptive and generalised content, with students focusing on a particular event (such as the Spanish Armada) giving a detailed description with little analysis or focus on the extract, with little or no attempt to evaluate Philip's motives.

Extract B, from Kilsby, focused on the different motives for foreign policy, giving religion, a desire to protect his empire and inheritance, and a need for finances as the key motives. Again, some students engaged with this very well, giving detailed evidence to support or challenge Kilsby's arguments on the differing motives. Weaker students were somewhat descriptive, with a tendency to focus on one or two particular events or battles and describe them rather than use them to analyse and evaluate Kilsby's arguments on the motives for foreign policy.

Extract C (Williams) proved to be the more challenging extract. The first part of the extract argued that the acquisition of Portugal had a profound impact on Philip's foreign policy, causing him to become more aggressive. More able students were able to evaluate the impact the acquisition had on Philip, Spain and his wider foreign policies, whilst weaker students used this as a spring board to give a narrative account of the acquisition with little attempt to evaluate the impact. The second part of the extract was addressed more effectively, with most students making some attempt to evaluate the extent of the success or failure of Philip's foreign policy.

Question 02

There was a mixed range of responses to this question, which required the students to analyse the extent to which the Spanish crown had successfully achieved control over Spanish society in the years 1478 to 1516. There was some excellent subject knowledge, and students who answered this question well were able to give a range of examples, and provide good analysis and judgement on the relative strengths the social policies of the crown, and the extent to which Spanish society had been controlled.

However, weaker responses focused on a narrow range of evidence, with many only giving an assessment of one social group, such as the nobility, or covered several groups with limited development. Some students had included evidence with a political or economic focus, such as the role of the Cortes or conciliar government. Where there was an attempt to link this to the question with a specific reference to social control this was credited, but for many students this approach restricted answers to a level 2 with generalised and irrelevant detail.

Question 03

Question 03 required students to assess the domestic policies of Charles V, and the extent to which they had strengthened the Spanish crown by 1556. There was some excellent subject knowledge displayed, with stronger students making a very good analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Spanish crown by 1556. Better answers to this question drew on a broad range of domestic policies, with detailed knowledge of political, religious and economic policies. Some students included evidence of foreign policy or Charles' role as Holy Roman Emperor. Unless there was a clear attempt to link this to the Spanish crown, this restricted answers to a level 2.

In general, students were well prepared in terms of their subject knowledge on the policies of Charles V. However, as with question 02, this did lead to a tendency to describe rather than analyse. Responses that included lengthy description of the revolts of 1520-22 were also generally restricted to level 2, unless there was a clear attempt to link this to the strength of the Spanish crown by 1556.

Question 04

Question 04 was the most challenging question, with fewer students opting to answer it. Overall, it was tackled extremely well and the quality of the responses in general were higher than those for questions 02 and 03. The question required students to assess the impact of mismanagement of the overseas empire as a reason for Philip's financial failings. There was far less tendency to describe or give narrative accounts, with many students giving an analytical account of the extent to which Philip did mismanage his empire, and the impact this had on his financial policies.

Stronger answers were able to put forward other reasons for the failures, such as failure to reform the taxation system and the inherited debt from Charles V. There was also a focus on the impact of foreign policy here, with weaker students repeating evidence from 01 and simply describing certain foreign policy events, whilst stronger students were able to analyse the impact of foreign policy with precise and detailed evidence. Stronger answers also questioned the extent of Philip's mismanagement, putting forward a more positive analysis.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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