



Oxford Cambridge and RSA

For the attention of: Gráinne Cassidy and Prof. Sharon Marshall
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Our Ref: #4032540/AO/DW

Dear Gráinne and Sharon,

Thank you for your email sent on 26 September detailing a range of concerns with our GCSE Classical Civilisation qualification. I will address each concern in turn.

Advance Information notices

I appreciate that there was a common misconception that the Advance Information was designed to reduce the content needed for the exams. However, as stated in the Q&A webinar I ran in February and then the [blog I produced in early March](#), the aim was to help focus students' revision for the 2022 exams. We strongly recommended that all of the specification content was taught and that students should continue to revise everything but should focus more time and effort on those areas listed in the Advance Information.

For the Literature and Culture papers, we felt that there was a strong possibility that if we created an Advance Information notice that covered all of the questions in the respective Culture and Literature halves, we would simply be listing all of the specification content. Therefore, we decided that the Advance Information for the Culture half of the paper should focus on the 8- and 15-mark questions (the “detailed and extended response questions”).

In the Literature half, the Advance Information listed a narrower selection of the prescribed literary sources from which the extracts printed on the Question Paper Insert would be taken. The precise wording used in the Advance Information was designed to make it clear that the selection of prescribed sources was only related to the passage-based questions where the sources would act as a stimulus, so not the 15-mark extended response questions. The need to teach and revise all of the prescribed literature was reinforced by the statement in the Advance Information that appears beneath the narrower selection of prescribed sources and further emphasised by the statements printed on the front cover of the Advance Information.

In addition to these statements in the Advance Information, I made it explicitly clear in the Q&A webinar and my blog that all of the prescribed literature should be studied (see screenshot below).

Do we still need to teach Pliny's Letters for Section B of the Roman City Life component as it is not mentioned in the AI?

Short answer: yes.

The AI provides information of where the extracts printed on the Question Paper Insert will be taken from. As you will be aware from looking at the SAMs and past papers, all of the knowledge and understanding questions, stimulus questions, significance questions, and detailed response questions are linked to the passages printed in the question paper insert.

The only questions in Section B of the Literature and Culture papers that are not linked to the passages printed on the question paper insert are the 15-mark extended response questions. Therefore, Pliny's *Letters* and Horace *Satires* 2.2 and 2.8 (i.e. all of the prescribed texts listed in the specification) also need to be studied and revised to ensure students are fully prepared for the exam as the 15-mark questions could target these.

Despite all of these statements in the Advance Information, the Q&A webinar and my blog article, we know that some teachers did not teach, and some students did not revise Pliny's *Letters* and Horace *Satires* 2.2 and 2.8.

We are not aware of any centres writing to us nor any posts on social media claiming that the Myth & Religion paper involved topics that had not been included in the Advance Notice Information. We believe that the Myth and Religion papers targeted the key topic areas listed in the Advance Information.

Since you wrote your letter, the Department for Education and Ofqual have confirmed the arrangements for summer 2023. They have confirmed that there will not be Advance Information notices for the forthcoming summer 2023 exams. They have also confirmed that there will be a return to pre-pandemic grading standards.

Questioning

General concerns

The question papers which were sat in Summer 2022 were created using our normal question paper writing process. The papers were created to be of a comparable level of demand as papers that were sat in 2019, 2020 and 2021. Our setting teams were not given instructions to write easier papers for 2022 to take into account any potential lost learning due to the pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic were addressed through the release of Advance Information to help students revision and the more generous grading. The question papers were also designed prior to the agreement that we would have to produce Advance Information, so again question paper authors were not given a steer to assess a narrower range of the specification content than would be the case in any 'normal' year.

In the thematic papers, 40 marks are available for demonstrating knowledge or knowledge and understanding in questions targeting AO1 in isolation. Whilst the detailed response (8-mark) and extended response (15-mark) questions differentiate by outcome, it is recognised that in order to ensure a decent spread of marks, some of the knowledge and knowledge & understanding questions do need to be harder than others. The same is true for the Literature and Culture papers even though they have fewer marks available for these types of questions.

I appreciate that there could have been a gentler way to ease candidates into the Myth and Religion and Homeric World papers. However, if something is listed in the specification, we have every right to ask questions about that content. Question 1(b) targeted some of the key knowledge, understanding and skills associated with the underground cistern – a prescribed visual / material source. The same is true for the question asking about the dating of the Lion hunt dagger, which is also a prescribed source. I will suggest in the post-series review that the setting team think carefully about what the opening questions in the paper are so that candidates can make a confident start to the papers.

I also note your concerns regarding unclear questions that can hinder some candidates from performing confidently. We acknowledge that some of the 'Explain' questions in Section C of the Myth and Religion papers have not conformed to the design intention for these questions and will remind the setting team in the post-series review of the requirements for these questions. We also acknowledge that some questions can require students to answer the preceding question correctly in order to stand a chance of picking up the mark, although, as explained below, there are probably fewer cases of this in practice than teachers claim.

I will also raise the concern that some teachers reported that some of the sources were very hard to read or interpret. In terms of the specific concern raised about Source D in the Myth and Religion paper, a number of concerns teachers have raised are supported by arguments that there is limited information in the textbook. Source D is a source that appears in the Bloomsbury-produced textbook – figure 1.16.

Please be reassured that all of the concerns raised will be mentioned in the post-series review meeting for GCSE Classical Civilisation so that we can make improvements to future question papers.

Myth and Religion question paper

Orpheus and heroism

We do not believe that Question 20 went beyond the specification requirements. Question 20 targeted the content from the 'Journey to the Underworld' key topic area and students' knowledge of the prescribed section from Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As stated in the examiners' report, examiners were not looking for a classical definition of heroism but their understanding of the myth and picking out areas that could be considered heroic such as bravery, courage, and skill and determination.

Question 25 on Athena and Mars

Again, we feel that Question 25 was fair and did not go beyond the specification requirements. Question 25 targets the content from a range of key topic areas: 'Gods', 'Religion and the City: Temples', 'Myth and the City: Foundation Stories', 'Festivals' and 'Myth and Symbols of Power.' It also targets material from the following prescribed sources: Livy's *History of Rome*, The Parthenon and the Ara Pacis. I appreciate that students might have found it more challenging to think of examples for Mars, but they are clearly present in the specified content and sources.

Homeric World question paper

Question 4(b)

I don't think that the mark scheme did prevent candidates from picking up marks for question 4(b) if they could not correctly identify the two different types of shields. None of the three answers in the mark scheme are dependent on correctly identifying the types of shields. I have looked at the item-level data for question 4(b) and a number of candidates, including one from the centre that raised this concern with us, received a mark for question 4(b) despite either not attempting to answer question 4(a) or answering question 4(a) incorrectly.

Approach to marking

Our examiners are instructed to mark positively, rewarding candidates for the knowledge that they have been able to demonstrate. If a candidate brings in relevant information from outside of the prescribed content or sources that is relevant to the question posed, it will be rewarded. This is not to say that candidates must do this to score highly. It is perfectly possible to score full marks by only drawing upon examples from Books 9, 10, 19, 21 and 22 of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Suggested actions

When going through the accreditation process for GCSE Classical Civilisation (and all of our GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications), we also had to produce an assessment strategy in addition to the specification and specimen assessment materials. The assessment strategy, amongst other things, provided details and justifications for the decisions we made during the development and how we would run the live qualification. There is a large section justifying our assessment model. Therefore, we cannot make drastic changes to our assessment model without amending the assessment strategy and getting Ofqual's approval.

We can certainly explore having 3 and 4-mark questions in Sections A and B of the question papers instead of a large number of one and two-mark questions. This has been something I have fed back to the question paper authoring team in the 2019 post-series review and there are fewer 1-mark questions in the 2022 thematic papers than in 2019. However, these questions would still have to be marked using a binary point-by-point approach whereas the questions in the legacy J280 GCSE Classical Civilisation qualification were marked using a holistic level of response grid.

When it comes to the next round of reform, we can and will look carefully at the design of the GCSE Classical Civilisation assessment model just like we did when creating the current assessment model. The assessment model in the J199 GCSE Classical Civilisation was designed to address specific concerns that had been raised with the J280 GCSE Classical Civilisation qualification so careful consideration will be needed to ensure any future assessment model doesn't repeat any issues that have been raised previously.

Assessment and grading standards

Examiners had a fixed and narrow view of what answers they would accept

I will alert the Assessment Standards Manager to the fact that some teachers felt that examiners had a fixed view of what they were looking for in candidate answers and that felt they did not credit

other reasonable answers. I will flag that some teachers felt that sometimes this was inconsistently applied, with specific reference to the mark scheme for question 5 in the Homeric World paper. I will also raise these concerns in the post-series review meetings.

It is worth pointing out that examiners were instructed to mark to the same standard as in 2019, and we have every reason to believe that this was the case. Examiners were not given the leeway to allow certain answers in 2022 that would not have been credited in 2019. The impact of the pandemic was taken into account through the awarding process. Grade boundaries were selected so that outcomes reflected a midpoint between outcomes achieved in 2021 and 2019.

This year the standardisation meeting was conducted via Microsoft Teams, and the Assistant Examiners standardised remotely. In 2019 we held face-to-face standardisation meetings for all examiners as it was the first assessment of the new qualification. A more detailed mark scheme that contains extra guidance is probably needed if Assistant Examiners are standardised remotely. I appreciate that the extra guidance might come across as giving the impression that examiners had a fixed view of what they were accepting, but it is one of the ways to help ensure our examiners mark consistently.

Inconsistencies in the Examiners' Reports and textbook relating to the 8-mark questions

It is important to consider the advice within the context of the specific questions that were asked. Both Myth and Religion 8-mark questions this year were phrased "In what ways ...", so we were not looking for candidates to provide a counterargument. This would explain why it was not felt that a conclusion was warranted.

In contrast, the Homeric World questions were phrased in a different, but equally valid, way. Candidates were expected to come to a judgement as to how far they agreed with the statement. Therefore, it makes sense for candidates to include a short conclusion to address the "how far" element of the question, especially if they had structured their answer with one paragraph arguing for the statement and another arguing against the statement.

Regarding the textbook, our endorsement statement is quite clear that we have not endorsed any comments relating to the assessment. The statement which can be found on the inside front-page states "Any reference to assessment and/or assessment preparation are the publisher's interpretation of the specification requirements and are not endorsed by OCR."

The difference in grades between the two papers

Given the context of the last few years, it is perhaps expected that there would be a little more variation in marks between papers than in a 'normal' year. This year, the mean mark for the Homeric World paper was lower than the Myth and Religion paper. This potentially suggests that the Homeric World paper was harder and/or marked slightly more harshly than the Myth and Religion paper. However, we also have to consider a range of other factors that may help explain this difference, including, but not limited to, the impacts of the pandemic and the Advance Information.

We set grade boundaries at qualification level and then create notional grade boundaries for each individual paper. These notional grade boundaries give centres and candidates an idea of how they would have performed **if** we gave out grades for each paper. When awarding the grade

boundaries, we take into account a large range of statistical information, including the mean mark, as well as the professional judgement of our senior assessors. This year, we also had to take into account the steer from Ofqual that the outcomes in 2022 should aim to represent a midpoint between outcomes in 2019 and 2021.

The lower mean mark for the Homeric World paper has been reflected in the specification option grade boundaries for Option A and Option D (the two options that include the Homeric World paper). The grade boundaries for these options are lower than the other options in the specification. The notional grade boundaries for the Homeric World paper are also lower to account for this difference.

Thank you for detailing the concerns of teachers, some of whom have not written to OCR. I feel it is vitally important that there is a strong subject association voice in the KS4 and KS5 sectors (and also all school levels) and welcome the recent moves to work more closely together to help improve our current and potential future qualifications. We recognise that there are improvements that can be made to our assessment materials and elsewhere and will strive to work to improve these areas.

I hope that this letter goes some way to reassure you.

Yours sincerely

Alex Orgee
Subject Advisor – Classics