

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 1

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each element of the coursework assessment task.

Dissertation title: How important was the role of classical antiquity to the development of Renaissance humanism in the fifteenth century?

Structure

The candidate was awarded **marks in the range 30-34** for both the introduction and conclusion.

The functional introduction provides context and introduces the issues to be considered, although a definition of Renaissance humanism is lacking. The candidate indicates that the importance of the role of classical antiquity in the development of Renaissance humanism can be challenged (*'Whilst the circulation of classical antiquity was one of the main factors that led to the development of humanism, the opinion that this was the only factor is strongly debated'*) but there is no attempt to take this further. The introduction then indicates the approach that will be taken and attempts to indicate a line of argument, while failing to address the debate which he/she has just mentioned.

The structure of the dissertation is readily apparent and adheres to the approach identified in the introduction. The three chapters of the dissertation focus on the role of classical antiquity in academic development, civic humanism and in Renaissance philosophy.

The conclusion is very largely summative but succeeds in bringing together the key issues which have been raised. The candidate then attempts to reach an overall judgement but there is little by way of balance. Significantly, there is no evaluation of the relative importance of those other factors which may have influenced the development of Renaissance humanism.

Thoroughness/ relevance of information and approach

The candidate was awarded **a mark in the range 35-39** because it is evident that he/she has done a fair quantity of research and demonstrates width and depth of knowledge throughout the three chapters. Complex ideas are handled very competently. This is exemplified by the section taken from the chapter on the role of classical antiquity in the development of classical humanism: *'Whilst there is some dispute....upholding of republican virtues and avoiding political corruption'*.

All of the evidence used is relevant to the key issue, and although there are some significant omissions (notably the failure to mention the Renaissance rediscovery of the work of Plotinus as a factor in the emergence of neo-Platonism in the third

chapter); the candidate is judged on the evidence presented, rather than omissions.

Analysis, evaluation and line of argument

The candidate was awarded **a mark within the range 35-39**. There is a firm grasp of the evaluative aims of the question and the candidate demonstrates an assured and consistent control of the general line of argument, and the issues identified in the introduction. Within each chapter there is an attempt to consider alternative explanations for the emergence of the particular aspect of Renaissance humanism under consideration, although these attempts are not always fully synthesised into the argument. This is exemplified by the passage: *'Despite this, there are other factors which some historians credit as being the driving force behind Renaissance philosophy...Overall, there are several potential explanations for the development of Neo-Platonism, but the primary reason was the revival of classical antiquity'*.

The conclusions at the end of each chapter attempt synthesis, although there is no real attempt to build a developing line of argument throughout the dissertation.

Historical sources/ interpretations

The candidate was awarded **a mark within the 35-39 range**. He/she has engaged with some challenging historical works, as well as the standard text book by Robert Holes and demonstrates sound knowledge and understanding of historians' interpretations and arguments. There is, for instance, good awareness of some of the major debates relating to humanism, ie Najemy's reappraisal of the Baron thesis and Kristeller's view that there was much continuity with the medieval period in the development of Renaissance humanism. This is evident in the conclusion to the chapter on the role of classical antiquity on academic development: *'In conclusion, it is evident that the revival of the classical antiquities.....a whole curriculum arose as a result of the work of classical writers'*. Generally, though, the emphasis is more on using historians to illustrate points, as in this passage: *'James Hankins summarises the humanist impact on politics when he says 'though the humanists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries produced no great work of political philosophy, they did change fundamentally the intellectual world within which political thought would henceforward have to live'. This suggests that despite the fact that not all of the movement did, in fact, allow a new political environment to flourish'*.

Primary sources are quoted on several occasions, for example, Niccolo Niccoli, Poggio Bracciolini and Coluccio Salutati. Niccoli is quoted in the following way: *'Early humanist Niccolo Niccoli made the comment 'until the ancient source flows clear again, all efforts must be directed ... to recovering... the genuine readings of the ancient works'.'*