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## Revision

# The Seven Years' War

*Nicholas Fellows*

Consider the following question, then take a look at the sample student response and the examiner's commentary (in red).

## Question

*Assess the reasons why Britain was successful in the Seven Years' War.*

### Student answer with commentary

British success in the Seven Years' War was the result of a number of factors, but it was Pitt's recall in 1757 that turned the tide after a series of defeats in America at Fort Oswego in 1756 and Fort William Henry in 1757. Pitt himself commented, 'I know that I can save England and no one else can', and in this he was proved correct. He was able to take advantage of the naval reforms of Anson, the abilities of Newcastle and the financial resources of Britain to defeat the French and secure a favourable peace in 1763.

The question requires candidates to identify and explain a range of reasons for British success. At the higher levels the reasons will be weighed up and their importance explained. In the opening paragraph the response identifies a range of reasons and offers a view, in this case Pitt, as to the most important factor. The key to a strong answer will be whether this line of argument is consistently followed through in the main body and is well supported.

Pitt's appointment, according to Marshall, was the crucial factor in Britain's success. This is evident in the changing fortunes of Britain following his appointment. First, he established a global strategy, realising that victory over the French in America and the Caribbean had to be the priority. This was most clearly evident in the three-pronged strategy to attack Louisbourg, Ticonderoga and Quebec, as well as the recapture of Fort Duquesne. He ensured this was achieved by appointing aggressive commanders, in the form of Amherst and Wolfe, who would go on the offensive. In order to allow troops to be sent from Britain to fight in America he used Britain's financial might to pay Prussian troops to fight in Europe. At the same time, he repaired the damage done by men such as Loudon in the American colonies, winning their support by abolishing the precedence of British officers regardless of rank over colonial militia officers and by paying and equipping colonial forces. As a result, he was able to raise a large number of colonial volunteers who outnumbered the French by three to one. However, not only was Pitt successful in his global strategy and in winning the support of the colonists, but he also united the country behind his war effort. In particular, the passing of the 1757 Militia Act ensured that Britain was protected from invasion, allowing him to send frontline troops to fight in America. Pitt's role was crucial, as he was able to exploit British advantages and focus on the weakest point of France: its colonies.

The response begins by focusing on Pitt, who was identified in the opening paragraph as the most important factor. This is a good approach, as it ensures that the most important factor is given sufficient coverage. Not only is it explained, but there is detailed knowledge used to support the explanation, with reference to the places captured. The coverage of Pitt's contribution is wide ranging, and the last sentence offers some judgement as to why this is the most important factor.

His success was also made possible by the strength of the British Navy. Pitt was aware that, in order to achieve his 'global strategy', he needed naval superiority and was able to take advantage of Anson's reforms and increase in the size of the Navy. This was important, as not only did the strength of the Navy allow Louisbourg to be seized, but Quebec was taken using 18,000 sailors and 100 ships. More importantly, he used the Navy to prevent France from supplying New France, with Hawke and Boscawen's naval patrols in the Channel being particularly effective in preventing French vessels leaving port. This position was further consolidated by victory at Quiberon Bay in 1759. The strength of the British Navy enabled Pitt to implement his strategy, but it was possible only because of the earlier reforms.

One of the strengths of this response is the ability of the candidate to link the factors discussed. This is seen clearly in reference to the role of the Navy and how Pitt is able to exploit its strengthening. As with the previous paragraph, the response is well supported. A judgement is reached at the end of the paragraph and it follows from the view offered in the introduction.

Pitt's strategy was also only possible because of the financial strength of Britain. This allowed him to pay Frederick the Great of Prussia to attack French forces in Europe so that most of the British effort could be concentrated in attacking French overseas possessions, which the naval blockade prevented them from strengthening. Very few British troops were used in Europe, with the exception of the aid given to the Duke of Brunswick in the Battle of Krefeld in 1758. However, without the strength and security of the parliamentary system it is unlikely that Pitt would have been able to secure the loans needed or raise the taxes needed to fund the war – a contrast to the French difficulties. Furthermore, the prosperity generated by the growing economy added to the finances available. With Newcastle's support in parliament, Pitt was able to exploit this and fund his 'global strategy', leading to ultimate success.

The linking of factors continues, and the response explains how the financial strength of Britain was used by Pitt. Again, there is relevant supporting knowledge, and the final sentence offers a limited judgement.

Pitt was also able to use the situation in America to Britain's considerable advantage. Not only did he improve relations with the British colonists, but he was also able to win support from the Native Americans. The Native Americans had usually supported France, playing a crucial role in the defeat of Braddock earlier, but British naval dominance meant that France could no longer supply them or offer them gifts. They realised that British success meant they would gain more, particularly in terms of trade, if they backed the British. Similarly, the colonists also responded to Pitt's policies, financial support and his reversal of developments, such as precedence, under Loudon and Braddock. Although the colonists did little fighting, they built roads and forts which freed up British forces and allowed them to move more easily.

The response develops further the role of Pitt, linking it to another factor: the situation in America. The argument is supported and wide-ranging. However, the response does not reach a judgement, and this is something that would prevent it from reaching the top of the mark range.

As the war progressed, many of these issues served only to weaken the French. They found it difficult to maintain their forces, the number of colonists under their rule was small, weakening their ability to resist, and this was made worse by the blockade and the poor harvests of 1756 and 1757. Their concentration on Europe made it easier for the British to succeed in America and the Caribbean, fulfilling Pitt's 'global strategy' and ensuring ultimate victory.

The final factor discussed, French weakness, brings together a number of issues mentioned in earlier paragraphs. There is some hint of a judgement, but it would benefit from further development.

It is difficult to argue against Pitt's central role in bringing about victory. However, he was helped by other people, such as Newcastle, Anson, Amherst and Wolfe. But it was under Pitt that British success occurred, reversing the earlier defeats. He was able to exploit a range of favourable factors, such as naval and financial superiority, but it was his clear strategy and focus on the Empire that brought about success and led to the favourable terms in the 1763 Treaty of Paris.

The conclusion follows from the thesis offered in the opening paragraph and there is a consistent line of argument throughout. Examiners may disagree with the view, but if there is a consistent and supported line of argument then candidates will not be penalised. Judgements are reached in most paragraphs and material is linked back to Pitt, but there are some paragraphs where this is less convincing or developed. Therefore, although the essay would be in the top band, it might not be placed at the very top.

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