

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Was Charles I's choice of advisers the main reason for the problems faced by the monarchy in the years 1625–49?

Strong student answer

The monarchy faced a number of problems between 1625 and 1649. Charles' inability to finance his regime at times led to increased tensions with parliament, and indeed 11 years without parliament came about because of arguments over this issue. As well as this, religion was at the heart of political life in the 17th century and, as head of the Church of England, decisions made by Charles and his advisers had a dramatic impact on the religious lives of citizens. Charles' advisers, in particular Buckingham, Laud, Strafford and even his wife Henrietta Maria, must take some of the blame for the increasing tensions and ultimately Civil War. There are also other factors that must be addressed in order for an adequate conclusion to be drawn. Charles' own actions caused many issues, such as the implementation of the English Prayer Book in Scotland, and opposition from religious and political figures added to his problems.

Charles' advisers link to a number of problems for the monarchy. A theme that runs through the entire period 1625–49 is the poor relationship between king and parliament. It can be argued that figures such as Buckingham encouraged this poor relationship. Buckingham led the expeditions to La Rochelle that caused fury from parliament and a reluctance to allow the king to collect further subsidies. It can also be argued that the Petition of Right was put forward in 1628 as a reaction to the questionable advice the king was getting from Buckingham. During his personal rule, Charles surrounded himself with high church Arminians such as Laud and Wentworth, as well as so called 'crypto-Catholics' such as Cottington and Windebank. This fuelled the suspicion among the political nation that there was a Popish Plot at court, a situation that was made worse by Charles' marriage to Henrietta Maria in 1625. Henrietta became a close adviser during Charles' personal rule, and assisted Charles in his preparations for the Civil War in 1642 and 1643. Wentworth was selected as Lord Deputy in Ireland in 1632, and ruled in a heavy-handed way, as he had done as President of the Council of the North. Wentworth was chosen because Charles was well aware of his uncompromising reputation, and he ended up alienating all the key interest groups in Ireland. It is clear, then, that a great deal of political resentment was caused as a result of Charles' choice of advisors.

Another major problem Charles experienced was religious opposition. It can be argued that much of this opposition came about as a result of him choosing William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud, like Charles, was authoritarian and believed strongly in divine right. He encouraged Charles' drive towards religious uniformity, and personally oversaw the 'beauty of holiness' project. This consisted of returning organs to churches, putting in stained glass windows, placing statues in churches and most crucially ensuring that hymns were sung and the Book of Common Prayer enforced. It is true that many happily accepted the reforms, and indeed encouraged them: in 1642, a large crowd gathered around Norwich Cathedral in order to prevent the organ being destroyed by parliament. His reforms did however create new resentment and opposition not seen before. Church taxes were levied to pay for the new additions to churches, and outspoken Puritans caused problems for Charles and Laud. In 1637, Bastwick, Burton and Prynne, Puritans who had spoken out against the regime, were punished in the Star Chamber, with Laud acting as chief judge. William Prynne, for example, had written a book attacking stage plays and the theatre as ungodly, and was imprisoned for life and mutilated. They became heroes of the opposition cause, and were promptly released when the Long Parliament met. The problem of religion continued, aided by Charles' choice of advisers throughout the Civil War, when parliament depicted Charles' followers as ungodly Papists.

This is a good opening statement. The events that need to be covered are made clear, and some key themes that will be referred to throughout the answer are made clear.

Also, a firm conclusion is not reached at the start, but the fact that other factors need to be addressed before such a conclusion can be reached is made clear.

The issue of Charles' advisers is the key concern of the question, so it is right to dedicate a large paragraph to it. The paragraph has secure knowledge, but an explanation of why the advisers link to specific problems could be stronger.

There is a clear explanation that demonstrates why advisers were to blame for religious opposition. Perhaps too much space is dedicated to Laud, although he is the chief architect of religious reform and should be discussed in relation to this question.

Charles' advisers cannot take all the blame for the problems faced by the monarchy, although they often encouraged him in his mistakes. In the fields of finance and religion, as well as government administration, Charles was the author of his own downfall. He continued to rule without parliament for 11 years between 1629 and 1640, and in this time relied on dubious prerogative taxation. Though not technically illegal, innovations such as Ship Money, which raised an average of £200,000 per year, created resentment and ultimately problems for Charles. In 1639, after Charles' decision to enter into war with the Scots, the majority of taxpayers simply went on strike and refused to pay Ship Money. This led to him recalling parliament and began the chain of events that would end in Civil War. Despite Charles' rôle in enforcing prerogative taxation, the responsibility can again be given to his advisers. It was William Noy, Attorney General under Charles, who revived many of the medieval taxes such as Ship Money and Forest Fines that Charles relied on.

After the Civil War Charles continued to anger the opposition as a result of his stubborn nature and unwillingness to compromise. The opposition themselves can be blamed for some of the problems faced by the monarchy. John Pym's Nineteen Propositions, issued to Charles in June 1642, were far too radical for him to ever accept, and included clauses that would mean the education of the king's children would be controlled by parliament. The Newcastle Propositions, associated with the Presbyterian Party and Denzil Holles in 1646, were also unrealistic, and were the basis for the negotiations between Crown and parliament that would lead to Charles' execution in 1649. However, Charles delayed his response to the Propositions for a year, and never intended to accept them. He instead entered into secret negotiations with the Scots, and a Scottish army entered England on Charles' behalf in order to start the Second Civil War. This would seal Charles' fate as he could no longer be seen as trustworthy.

In conclusion, there can be no doubt that Charles' choice of advisers contributed to a number of problems. His choice of Wentworth in Ireland alienated key interest groups and helped to cause the Irish Rebellion, his choice of Buckingham began calls from parliament to restrict the king's ministers, his choice of Laud caused friction and enhanced the idea that a Popish Plot was taking place at court. The role of the opposition is also important, as parliament could have negotiated with Charles on more realistic terms if they wished, but time after time they failed to offer settlements that would be acceptable. The factor that caused many of the problems is undoubtedly Charles' own personality and actions. If it was not for Charles, more moderate advisers may have been chosen, and if a monarch who had more sympathy with the opposition was on the throne, the Civil War may have been avoided.

There is good understanding shown here of Charles' rôle in causing resentment to his financial policies. This is linked to the factor given in the question, as the rôle of advisers is also addressed.

There is a good understanding of the issues that informed negotiations between 1640–42 and 1646–49. This might have been strengthened with some more specific references, such as the rôle of Ireton in the negotiations and a reference to the Civil War itself.

This is a strong evaluative conclusion. The rôle of advisers is discussed and other factors are commented on briefly. Charles' personality and actions are given as the most important factor explaining the problems, and the point is made convincingly.

Verdict

This is a strong response because:

- the answer considers a number of problems and addresses advisers, opposition and the rôle of Charles before reaching a persuasive conclusion
- sufficient knowledge is demonstrated and there are no inaccuracies at all
- there are some less strong passages, but it must be remembered that the answer covers a long period
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.