**The problems posed by Mary, Queen of Scots**

Candidates will use their knowledge of the threat posed by Mary Queen of Scots – both before and after her arrival in England – to explain why certain ideas and beliefs were held, why certain actions were taken and why certain events happened.

Candidates may be asked, for example, why Mary’s behaviour in Scotland caused such outrage; why Mary repeatedly refused to renounce her claim to the English throne; why she became involved in several plots against Elizabeth’s life; or why Mary’s trial and execution, having been delayed for so long, finally took place on 8th February, 1587.

**Past Questions**

Specimen question:

1. **What was it about Mary that made her such a threat to Elizabeth and her government? 25**

The initial focus should be on empathetic explanation, with religious and succession issues emphasised. Mary was a Catholic and Elizabeth’s heir in hereditary succession. This may be developed via attitudes towards Catholicism from Mary Tudor’s reign, coupled with xenophobic attitudes stemming from the association of Mary’s anti-Protestant actions with her husband, Philip II, as well as hostility towards French influence from Mary Stuart’s relations. Candidates may also refer to moral outrage at some of Mary’s actions while Queen of Scotland, for example her association with Darnley’s death and her marriage to Bothwell. Ideas of obedience may also be cited as explanation for the lack of widescale support in England for rebellion and the plots associated with Mary. The perception of danger from Mary is also important: what Elizabeth’s government could believe was possible in terms of internal Catholic plots and support from Catholics abroad. In offering complex explanation, candidates may refer to circumstances such as the extent of Catholic survivalism in England and the danger of foreign intervention on Mary’s behalf.

1. **Why did Elizabeth consistently resist calls for Mary’s execution? 25 marks**

The initial focus should be on an intentional explanation, identifying Elizabeth’s motives in refusing to countenance Mary’s execution. Candidates may consider the implications for Elizabeth of killing a fellow monarch and cousin, the legal implications of putting a Scot on trial in England, perhaps for alleged crimes committed in Scotland, or for treason against Elizabeth. At a simple level they may consider the problems of proof of guilt. At a more sophisticated level they may consider the implications for relations with James VI of Scotland. Candidates may broaden the scope of the explanation to invoke causal factors such as the international situation and the possible reaction of France and Spain. They may consider the changes in circumstances that influenced Elizabeth’s resistance to sanctioning Mary’s execution, including increasing pressure from parliament and her Councillors after various plots and Elizabeth’s excommunication.

**January 2010**

1. **Why did Mary Queen of Scot give up the Scottish throne in 1567? 25 marks**

This is what the key part of the answer might look like:

L1: Having offended the Scottish lords by her suspected involvement in the murder of Darnley in February 1567. Many compounded the scandal by agreeing to marry the unstable Bothwell only months later. By June she had been captured by Protestant lords and imprisoned at Loch Leven castle where she miscarried the twins fathered by Bothwell. Having suffered political and military defeat, having scandalized Protestant Scotland, and with no other surviving children, Mary was forced to abdicate in favour of her son, James.

L3: Mary found herself in a hopeless situation. She had gambled and lost on Bothwell. Her only option was to abdicate and seek the protection of her cousin, Elizabeth.

L5: When she arrived in Scotland, Mary assured the Scottish lords that she would not interfere with their religion. But she did.

1. **Why was Mary Queen of Scots executed in 1587?**

This is what the key part of each answer might look like:

L1: It was the discovery of the Babington Plot that set in train the sequence of events that led to Mary’s trial and eventual execution. However, I have tried to demonstrate that this was only the trigger causing this dramatic event. There were preconditions which I have outlined, which include most notably the pressure within Elizabeth’s Privy Council and successive parliaments to be rid of this aggravating problem. However, the most important cause of her downfall was that she refused to renounce her claim to the English throne; this alienated Cecil and the Council.

L3: The Babington Plot caused Mary’s downfall. Cecil and the Council had suspected her all along of betraying her Queen, and here was the proof they had been waiting for.

L5: Mary’s Catholic beliefs meant that she had to be executed.