**STATEMENT: ‘The main reason why there was a rivalry over the throne in 1066 was because Edward the Confessor did not have a son.’ How far do you agree? Explain your answer. [16 marks + SPAG = 20 marks]**

I agree with the statement that Edward the Confessor not having a son was the main reason for the rivalry over the throne in 1066. The criteria that led to this judgment is that the lack of an heir had both an immediate and long term impact over the stability of the Monarchy in England.

It can be argued that the lack of a son for Edward was the fundamental cause for the rivalry over the throne in 1066. The lack of a son was important because only a man was considered capable of ruling over the kingdom. In addition to this, the lack of male heir meant that the vacancy for King existed in the first place. Harald Hardrada, William of Normandy and Harold Godwinson are unlikely to have pressed their claims so forcefully to succeed Edward or gained support for any claim had a male heir existed. Although English custom did not automatically favour the nearest blood relative as the legitimate heir it could be inferred that Harold Godwinson in particular would not have gained the support within England to become King. It is also highly unlikely that Edward the Confessor would have handed over so much power to Harold Godwinson in the latter period of his reign had he an adult son to take on his responsibilities. Furthermore, it was the act of Harold Godwinson becoming King that was the catalyst for both William and Tostig to prepare to invade.

However on the other hand it could be argued that the main cause for the rivalry for throne in 1066 was the actions of Harold Godwinson both in becoming King and his actions in the preceding years. For example, Harold effectively assumed the role of King by ignoring Edward’s wishes for dealing with the revolt against Tostig. In exiling his brother and consolidating his position as the wealthiest and most powerful Earl in England, it can be argued that Harold Godwinson was making a clear attempt to position himself to become King and this in turn provoked rivalry from the other claimants. A further example can be seen in the alleged oath sworn by Harold Godwinson in 1064 to support the claim of William to succeeding Edward which he failed to honour. This act demonstrates that it was the actions of Harold Godwinson that was the main cause of the rivalry for the throne in 1066. In addition, the exiling of his brother Tostig led to his brother seeking support to overthrow his brother first from Malcolm III of Scotland and the Harald Hardrada in Norway. Again this demonstrate that it wa the actions of the Harold Godwinson that was the main cause of the rivalry for throne in 1066.

Alternatively it could be argued that rivalry for the throne could have occurred in 1066 even if Edward had a son. For example, Edgar Aethling was a male blood relative yet his claim to the throne was initially rejected by the Witan in favour of Harold Godwinson due to his youthfulness and lack of experience. This demonstrates that for Edward’s son to be considered the rightful successor he would need to be of suitable age and experience. Harold might still have been selected by the Witan with resultant rivalry amongst the other contenders. In addition, Harald Hardrada’s claim was unrelated to the line of succession from Edward the Confessor and he might still have seized the opportunity to invade when England was perceived as unstable regardless of who was named King of England

In conclusion, whilst it is clear that many factors were responsible for the rivalry between the claimants for the throne in 1066. Hardrada, Godwinson and WIlliam of Normandy might all have attempted to seize the throne of England in 1066 even if Edward had a son, the lack of a son made it far easier for Harold Godwinson to present a credible claim to the throne and it was the accession to the throne by Harold Godwinson which was the catalyst for the invasions from the Vikings and Normans. Overall, the lack of a son provided a long term and immediate reason for the rivalry for the throne in 1066 and so for this reason I totally agree with the statement.