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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In History (WHI02)

Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source Evaluation

Option 1C: Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to Yeltsin

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Introduction

It was pleasing to see a range of well-informed and well-written responses from candidates on IAS Paper WHI02 1C which covers the Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to Yeltsin. The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question for the option studied, each part based on one source. It assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting five second order concepts - cause, consequence, change/ continuity, similarity/difference and significance.

In common with the previous series, candidates found Section A more challenging than Section B. Some candidates were still not clear on what was meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. Performance in Section A was also affected by the absence of the detailed knowledge base required to add contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. There was a noticeable trend this summer for some candidates to use the structure of the generic mark scheme to write their answer. Whilst this meant that they addressed all three bullet points, it did mean that they did not integrate the ideas in their answer so that, in particular, knowledge was free standing and not used to develop and explain inferences. This technique would be best avoided for candidates who wish to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. Most candidates did use their time effectively and, although a few responses were quite brief, there was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions both sections. The ability range was diverse, but the design of the paper allowed all abilities to be catered for. Furthermore, in Section B, most responses had an analytical focus and there were very fewer that were wholly descriptive essays which were devoid of analysis and, for the most part, responses were soundly structured. The most common weakness in Section B essays was the lack of a sharp focus on the precise terms of the question and/or the second order concept that was targeted. This meant that some candidates wrote at length on topics that were only peripherally related to the question or which did not cover the whole time period.

It remains important to realise that Section A topics are drawn from highlighted topics on the specification whereas Section B questions may be set from any part of any Key Topic, and, as a result, full coverage of the specification is enormously important. There was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions from Sections A and B.

The candidates' performance on individual questions is considered in the next section.

Question 1 (a)

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about impact of the breakdown of traditional controls under Gorbachev. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about artistic freedom and the response of the population to the lifting of controls. The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity. Candidates would do well to remember that contextual knowledge does need to be used to explain and develop the inferences drawn from the source and not just to provide free-standing knowledge. Some candidates provided lengthy passages about the control of art under Lenin and Stalin which were not focused on the question set. In other cases, candidates did not use any contextual knowledge at all and this did depress their achievement within the levels. Some candidates were able to use the attributes of the source effectively to develop their ideas about the value of the source from an American newspaper. Those candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of part a responses.

Question 1b)

Candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some inferences about the significance of Boris Yeltsin's election as President of Russia in June 1991. There were some effective answers that weighed up the strengths and limitations of the source and used this as a basis to reach a judgement about the weight that should be attached to the source for the enquiry. Some candidates made effective comments about the nature of the source as an American newspaper and considered its reliability in the light of its obvious partiality towards capitalist ideas. However, many candidates still approach the consideration of weight by writing about adding and subtracting weight rather than considering the strengths and weaknesses of the source material and then reaching a judgement about the weight that the source would bear in an enquiry. Although many candidates were able to use their contextual knowledge to interrogate the source, there were a considerable number that attached free standing knowledge about August Coup which was not focused on the enquiry and did not satisfy the criteria in the higher levels of the mark scheme. There were many candidates who did not use any contextual knowledge to answer the question and consequently they were not rewarded in bullet point 2 of the mark scheme.

Question 2

This was the most popular essay question. Most candidates had a good knowledge of methods used by Stalin to maintain control. The most effective answer which achieved level 4 were those that kept a tight focus on the wording of the question which asked for control of the government rather than control in general. These candidates contrasted the use of the purges with alternative factors such as Stalin's control of the party bureaucracy, the system of *nomenklatura* and control over the official message of the government through control of the media. The most common error was to write more generally about control and focus more on control of the people rather than the government. However, those candidates who related control of society in general to the control over the government were able to access marks in level 3 and level 4 depending on the quality of the argument and the range and depth of the supporting knowledge. Some candidates did not take note of the date range in the question and wrote about control in the period 1942-53 which could not be credited in answering this question.

Question 3

This question prompted a good number of answers. Most candidates had knowledge of Khrushchev's rule and many were able to develop their detailed knowledge of his policy towards industry to consider the extent to which his policies succeeded. Candidates looked at the focus on light industry, the expansion of consumer goods production and the changes made to economic planning and assessed the success by looking at the statistical evidence for production, the quality of goods produced and the impact on living standards. The most common error by candidates was the failure to distinguish between industry, as required by the question, and agriculture, which was not relevant to answering this question. This did mean that a significant proportion of candidates devoted a lot of their time to material that did not assist them in answering the question.

Question 4

This was the least popular question on the paper with only a few students selecting it. Most of these candidates achieved in level 3 and level 4. Some included lengthy descriptions of policy under Lenin and Stalin that were not relevant to addressing this question. The best responses focused on policy in the specified years, usually including marriage and divorce, birth rate and abortion and female employment, and assessed the extent of change.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(a))

- Candidates must be more prepared to make valid inferences rather than to paraphrase the source
- Be prepared to back up inferences by adding additional contextual knowledge from beyond the source
- Move beyond stereotypical approaches to the nature/purpose and authorship of the source e.g. look at the specific stance and/or purpose of the writer
- Avoid writing about the deficiencies of the source when assessing its value to the enquiry.

Weight of Source Question (1(b)/2(b))

- Candidates should be prepared to assess the weight of the source for an enquiry by being aware that the author is writing for a specific audience. Be aware of the values and concerns of that audience.
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to use contextual knowledge to support/challenge statements and claims made in the source
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- Knowledge should be integrated with the source evidence, to discuss the inferences drawn and their validity in the light of the contextual understanding of the period.
- In coming to a judgement about the nature/purpose of the source, take account of the weight you may be able to give to the author's evidence in the light of his or her stance and/or purpose
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to assess reliability by considering what has been perhaps deliberately omitted from the source. However, simply stating that a source is limited because it does not cover certain events or developments does not establish weight since no source can be comprehensive.

Section B

Essay questions

- Candidates must provide more factual details as evidence. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Take a few minutes to plan your answer before you begin to write your response
- Pick out three or four key themes and then provide an analysis of (for e.g.) the target significance mentioned in the question, setting its importance against other themes rather than providing a description of each
- Pay more careful attention to key phrases in the question when analysing and use them throughout the essay to prevent deviation from the central issues and concepts

- Pay careful attention to the date range in the question. Plan the answer with a focus on this range and avoid lengthy exploration of events outside of the time period set
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.