

Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2019

Pearson Edexcel International A Level
In History (WHI02) Paper 1C

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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, some candidates found Section A more challenging than Section B. A minority of candidates were still not clear on what was meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. There were, however, fewer candidates who considered the limitations of Source A in this series and did maintain a focus on the positive value of the source which was a very pleasing development. In a minority of cases, performance in Section A was affected by the absence of the detailed knowledge base required to add contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. In a number of cases answers tended to be driven by knowledge in Section A rather than by the sources.

Most candidates used their time effectively and, although a very 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. It was pleasing to see that more candidates accessed marks in levels 3 and 4 in section A than in previous October series. Furthermore, in Section B, most responses had an analytical focus and there were very few 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 a few 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 1a)

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about the centralisation of power under Lenin. This topic has been a weakness in some past papers, so it was pleasing to see that there were many well-focused responses that were able to analyse the source and selected appropriate examples from knowledge to support and explain inferences drawn from the source. Approximately half of the candidates answering this question were able to access level 3 in at least one of the three bullet points. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about growing centralisation of power using the evidence in the source to argue, for example, that the Republics were being turned into vassal state. The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity. Candidates used examples such as Lenin's unilateral decision at Brest-Litovsk to develop inferences about control over foreign policy. A minority of candidates provided lengthy passages about the Lenin's personality 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 the Soviet Constitution, a document carrying the full authority of the state. 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 response.

Question 1b)

Candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some inferences about the impact of Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Soviet economy. 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. There were some well-considered responses that discussed the merits and limitations of Pozner's position as a Russia in America and the impact that his background would have had on his attitude to Gorbachev. To access level 4 in bullet point 3 (source evaluation), it is important that use the source material to justify the claims made regarding nature, origin and purpose. Although most candidates were able to use their contextual knowledge to interrogate the source, there were a considerable number that attached free standing knowledge about the Soviet economy or even the fall of the Soviet Union which was not focused on the enquiry and did not satisfy the criteria in the higher levels of the mark scheme. There were some 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. A number of candidates did not consider weight as a factor and focused on answering the enquiry from source and knowledge. This approach meant that they struggled to access bullet point 3 and this depressed their overall achievement.

Question 2

This was the most popular essay question with the vast majority of candidates choosing to answer it. Most candidates had a good knowledge of the agricultural policies pursued under War Communism and collectivisation. Most candidates did engage with the second order concept – similarity and difference and were able to access marks in level 3 and level 4. The most effective answers which achieved level 4 were able to draw out well-developed comparisons for a range of features and to reach decisions about whether War Communism and collectivisation were very similar or whether there were notable differences. These candidates discussed the reasons for the policies, the response of the peasants, the methods used by the state and the consequences of the policy. Many regarded the circumstances in which the policies were launched to be a fundamental difference whilst the ideological basis and the response of the peasants showed similarities in the key features. The most common error was to write more generally about economic policy and stray into the Five Year plans or to focus on Stalin and collectivisation at the expense of War Communism. However, overall, candidates were well informed on the policies, able to identify and discuss key features and reach a judgement. Approximately half of the candidates achieved level 4 with their response.

Question 3

There was only one response to this question. The response showed some knowledge of changes in the school curriculum in the years 1953-85, but there was also some confusion with schooling in Nazi Germany.

Question 4

There were no responses to this question.

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 focus solely on comprehension of the source
- Be prepared to develop inferences by using 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))

- 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.

Section B

Essay questions

- Candidates must provide more factual details as evidence. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Candidates are advised to take a few minutes to plan answers before beginning to write the response
- Candidates are advised to select 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.

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