Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

History
Pearson Edexcel Advanced
Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source
Evaluation
Option 1C: Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to
Yeltsin

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Examiner Report: WHIO2 1C Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to Yeltsin

Introduction

It was pleasing to see a range of well-informed and well-written responses from candidates on IAS Paper WHI02 1C which covers 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.

For some candidates Section A presents a greater challenge than Section B. However, it is pleasing to see that many centres and candidates are now familiar with the demands of Section A and the performance of candidates is improving. Although 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 are now many candidates who are able to consider these concepts and provide valid, supported arguments. In this series there were a few candidates who considered the limitations of Source A but the majority 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 and to interrogate the claims made.

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 many candidates are accessing marks in levels 3 and 4 in section A. 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. The great majority of responses were soundly structured with very few achieving below level 3 and many candidates achieving level 4 in this section. The most common weakness in Section B essays remains a 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 responses were not directed at the question and this impacted upon achievement within the levels.

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.

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 Khrushchev's policy of liberalisation.   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. Nearly 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 the significance of the change brought about by the policy of liberalisation compared to Stalin's control of all forms of culture. The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity. Candidates used examples such as the American exhibition of 1958 and the presence of foreign tourists to develop inferences about the significance of the opening of the Soviet Union to more western influences. In weaker responses, candidates did not use any contextual knowledge, 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 a Russian dissident reflecting on the liberalisation of Soviet cultural life in the 1950s from his ;position in exile two decades later. Those very few candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of Section A, Question 1a responses.

Question 1b)

Candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some inferences about the opportunities for women in Soviet Russia in the early 1920s. 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. Many candidates were able to access level 4 in bullet points 1 and 2 of the mark scheme by distinguishing between claim and opinion and using well-selected contextual knowledge to discuss the claims made, showing an awareness of the values and concerns of early soviet society. There were a very few candidates who did not use any contextual knowledge relevant to the time period specified to answer the question and consequently they were not rewarded in bullet point 2 of the mark scheme.

There were some well-considered responses that discussed the merits and limitations of Bukharin's position as a leading Bolshevik and the impact that this would have had on his article. Candidates analysed the strengths of his inside knowledge compared to the potential propagandistic nature of the source.   However, 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. This is more difficult where candidates evaluate the source material before considering its content in the context of the time. Here candidates tend to speculate about the likely issues rather than applying the source content to justify their claim re. propaganda, for example. Candidates who evaluate the source in the light of its content, context and authorship are more likely to be able to reach supported judgements about the weight that can be attached to the source.

Question 2

There were only three responses to this question. Most candidates had good knowledge of education in the 1920s and 1930s and were able to engage with the second order concept – change and continuity. Thus, most candidates scored in level 3 and level 4. Candidates considered changes in teaching methods and in the use of examinations and homework and commented on features that continues such as fees for the education of secondary pupils.

Question 3

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 consequences of collectivisation and were able to consider a range of consequences including the impact on production, the migration of peasants to towns and cities, the impact on the industrialisation policy, the development of socialism and the famine in the countryside. Candidates consideration of the destruction of the 'kulaks' was varied. Some candidates explained at length the reasons why Stalin targeted the class but were unable to say much about the destruction beyond the claim that they had been destroyed. Other candidates considered the famine in the context of the destruction of the 'kulaks'. The best responses engaged with the word 'main' and were able to compare the relative importance of the destruction of the 'kulaks' with other consequences in order to reach an overall judgement in relation to the question. Approximately half of the candidates achieved level 4 with their response.

Question 4

About a third of candidates answered this question. The majority produced well-informed answers that were rich with detail. Most candidates were able to focus on the second order concept- change and continuity and the majority of these considered the changes brought in by Gorbachev in comparison to the soviet government at the end of the Brezhnev era. The best answers were also able to refer to developments under Andropov and Chernenko. Many candidates referred to the reforms introduced under the policy of glasnost, the changes in the Constitution and the changes to the electoral system and counter-balanced the argument with the continued domination of the Communist Party in government and in key institutions such as the KGB.

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(a))

- Candidates should focus on making valid inferences rather than focusing 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.

<u>Weight of Source Question (1(b)</u>

- 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.