



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2021

Pearson Edexcel International A Level

History

International Advanced Subsidiary

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 number of well-informed and well-written responses from candidates in this small entry for January 2021. IAS Paper WHIO2 1C 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.

Candidates tend to find Section A more challenging than Section B with its requirement to deal with source material and to consider the value (1a) or weight (1b) of a source in relations to a specific enquiry in the light of the content of the source, its provenance, and candidates' contextual knowledge. A small number of candidates are still not clear on what was meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. Whilst most candidates tend to use contextual knowledge to confirm details in the source and to expand upon it, there were some very well-crafted responses where candidates displayed a secure understanding of the context and used it to interrogate the evidence in the source, demonstrating a genuine understanding of the values and concerns of the society from which the source had originated.

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 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, especially the time period identified. 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 1a)

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about the reasons for the decline of the Soviet economy by the end of

Brezhnev's rule. At level 3 candidates were able to write effective responses, drawing out valid inferences from the source evidence with a particular focus on the attitude of workers and the impact that had on the economy. 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 did wander from the focus of the question and write at some length about the economy under Lenin and Stalin and this could not be rewarded. Some candidates were able to use the attributes of the source effectively to develop their ideas about the value of the source from leading Soviet academics. 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)

Most candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some explanations about the reasons for the failure of the coup against Gorbachev. This most candidates were able to access at least level 2. Many students went beyond selection and explanation to draw out inferences from the source and achieved level 3. Fewer candidates however produced responses 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, which is necessary for level 4.. Some candidates made effective comments about the nature of the source as a speech by Gorbachev and considered its reliability in the light of its obvious partiality as an instrument of Soviet propaganda. The best responses were able to interrogate the evidence in the light of their contextual knowledge and consider how the extent to which Gorbachev's assessment was reliable. However, there were a considerable number of responses that lost focus on the enquiry and wrote at some length about the reasons for the coup from their own knowledge. This could not be rewarded. There were also 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.

Question 2

About a third of candidates answered this question and all responses achieved a mark in level 4. This was the most popular essay question. Candidates demonstrated a secure knowledge of economic policy under Lenin and the early years of Stalin's rise. All candidates had a secure understanding of the nature of a command economy and were able to examine economic policy in the light of their understanding. All candidates were able to address the second order concept – consequence – and comment on successes and failures of economic policy and reach supported judgements.

Question 3

This was the most popular essay question on the paper with about half of the candidates selecting it. Most candidates understood the question and were able to make some valid points about the status of women in the specified period. Most chose to address the question in a chronological framework. This did help some to access level 3, but it is not necessarily the most effective way to address the

second order of significance since this requires candidates to assess the relative significance of the impact of the Second World War against other alternative factors, and this requires some consideration of the stated factor first. Some candidates had good knowledge of the status of women under Lenin but were less secure on Stalin and had little to say about the impact of the Second World War. Surprisingly, very few candidates drew upon the Five Year Plans and their impact on the status of women.

Question 4

This was the least popular question on the paper. Most candidates who answered this question were able to access level 3 for at least some of the bullet points. There were a number of responses that focused more on Khrushchev's economic reforms than on his policies for controlling the people or on Stalin's terror system and this meant that not all the evidence offered was relevant to the question. Candidates would benefit by taking the time to plan the response – including preliminary ideas on the judgement - and assure themselves that they are focused before writing their response.

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.