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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in Bangladesh Studies (4BN0/01)

Paper 1: The History and Culture of Bangladesh

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General comments

There was an increased entry this year compared with 2016, which was very pleasing. The entry is now in three figures for the first time. The standard of work presented this year by candidates was comparable to that of last year. All the candidates answered the required three questions, and few if any displayed signs of problems relating to time or rubric infringement.

As with last year, many candidates tended to write about or describe the topics/characters/events listed in the question rather than focussing on the question posed. It appears that candidates know their history of Bangladesh and can describe what happened but many are unable to explain and comment on the importance of individuals or events. The content suggested in the question is merely there to guide candidates rather than be prescriptive and few candidates used other knowledge. The most popular questions were 1, 2 and 4. However, there are signs that this is changing and far more candidates are now explaining their answers than in previous years.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

There were some good attempts in which candidates could explain the ways in which Bengal changed under the Pala dynasty. Many answers tended to be descriptive, with little emphasis in the way of explanation of how the Buddhism, administration, art and architecture contributed to the development of Bengal under the Pala dynasty. However, it was noticeable this year that there was a cohort of candidates who were able to explain their answers well and as a result achieved very high marks.

Question 2

Question 2 was popular but attracted mainly narrative responses. The question required candidates to explain how Bengal developed under Shaista Khan in the seventeenth century. Aspects suggested in the question included the role of European traders, muslin and the administration of Shah Shuja. Many candidates described these aspects well but there was little explanation of these or other aspects of their knowledge of the period. However again, there was a small group of candidates who clearly understood the importance of explanation and as a result scored high marks.

Question 3

This was also a popular question on the development of Bengal in the nineteenth century. The topics in the question included the Bengal Renaissance, the War of Independence and the Indian National Congress. These were well known but most responses were again descriptive of these factors involved in the development of Bengal rather than addressing an explanation of these reasons. As a result, few candidates were able to score more than half marks.

Question 4

This was a popular question on the reasons why Bengal was partitioned in 1947. The detail of the role of Direct Action, Lord Mountbatten and the Radcliffe Commission were well known, attempts in relating these factors to the reasons for partition were less good and as a result high marks were very limited.

Question 5

There were a few good attempts at this question. Many candidates were able to describe the factors that included the formation of the Awami League, the United Front and Basic Democracy but few were able to explain how these factors were important in the political developments in Bengal between 1947 and 1962. However, there was a small number of candidates who addressed the demands of this question well and as a result were able to score highly.

Question 6

This question asked why Pakistani forces were unable to defeat Bangladeshi forces in the War of Liberation with reference to the Pakistan army's tactics, guerrilla warfare and Indian support for Bangladesh as well as own knowledge. Answers were inevitably dominated by description of the war or the factors listed, without explaining why the facts candidates stated answered the question. As a result, many answers were only able to attract up to half marks.

Question 7

There were few or no attempts at question 7, which was concerned with the ways that sport, women's rights and popular culture have developed in Bangladesh since 1975. However, those candidates who did answer this question had clearly prepared for it and there were fewer poor answers than in previous years.

Question 8

There were few candidates who answered this question on the importance of Begum Sufia Kamal to the development of Bangladeshi culture, which was surprising given her role in society. Most of the candidates could describe the factors given (the magazine Begum, the Language Movement and social work) in some detail but very few were able to explain their importance in the development of Bangladeshi culture and as a result no more than half marks were generally scored for such answers.

As last year, the overall impression given in the examination is that some Centres have begun to prepare candidates to explain their answers as required by the questions. This trend needs to be repeated by other Centres if their examination results in this subject are to be improved in the future.