
AS
History

7041/1H
Report on the Examination

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General comments

It was clear that the majority of students had been well-prepared for the demands of the ‘new’ AS examination, now in its second year, and were able to show appropriate skills in their analysis of the extracts in Section A and in writing an argued and balanced essay for Section B. Timing was rarely a problem and most answers were of an appropriate length, with a concluding comparison in 01 and a final summary –and in the better answers, judgemental – conclusion to the essay. Since this is a breadth paper demanding an appreciation of chronology and an awareness of change and continuity, the better the students responded to historical developments over time, particularly in 01, the more successful answers tended to be. Whilst some students displayed an impressive grasp of content, often over and above that expected in a breadth study, a key requirement was, as always, that students selected appropriate and relevant historical evidence in support of an analysis that was closely focused on the questions posed and supported an understanding of the full 10-26 years which these various questions covered.

Section A

01

There was a clear distinction between the most able students, who identified the overall interpretations provided by the two given extracts at the outset, (or at least at the beginning of their evaluation of each of Extracts A and B) and those less able who adopted a line-by-line approach. The latter generally began with the first sentence of Extract A, which said that the Russian economy was ‘undeniably backward by c.1890’, and spent far too much time supporting (and sometimes questioning) this statement from their own knowledge. This was at the expense of the focus of the question and the overall thrust of the extract, which was about economic development from c.1890 to 1914. Such a literal approach rarely worked well; in this type of answer the overall interpretation of each extract either emerged only gradually, or, in some cases, was never addressed at all and a sense of development ‘to 1914’ was lacking.

Whilst more able students considered the interpretation of each extract holistically and focused on the question posed, the more ‘literal’ students became side-tracked into explaining everything mentioned in the passages, regardless of their relevance to the overall interpretations. So, for example, the Russo-Japanese war and revolution of 1905, which are both mentioned as minor setbacks to economic growth in Extract A, assumed great importance in some responses, leading to lengthy explanations of political issues which were beyond the scope of the extract’s interpretation. Furthermore, the literal approach to Extract B tended to produce a good deal of repetition, and often generalisation, about Russian ‘backwardness’. ‘Villages slumbered on’ and ‘the poverty of workers’ when addressed separately tended to yield similar comment and examples, while, ‘foreign competitiveness, the ‘more advanced stage’ of Western European countries and ‘the higher rate of increase’ in USA and Germany also produced very similar explanations and evidence.

Good answers moved from an overall summary to a breakdown of the interpretation given in each extract, in relation to its key themes. This involved some evaluation of both industrial and agricultural developments, 1890-1914, and reference to each extract’s comments on social issues and legislation. By taking these themes in turn and supporting and criticising the view of each extract with reference to contextual knowledge, it became possible for a full and substantiated comparison to be made. Too many less able students tried to criticise the extracts for what they omitted rather than for the interpretations they offered and this approach made it difficult to draw any meaningful contrast between the two.

Success in this question also depended on a careful reading of the extracts and some awareness of the terminology associated with this content area. In general there were few misunderstandings, but among the less able students, there was sometimes confusion over what was meant by ‘self-sustainable economic growth’ In Extract A, and in Extract B, problems sometimes occurred over ‘foreign competitiveness’ (which produced reference to competing foreign loans to Russia) and Russian firms finding ‘the going hard’ (which was linked to problems with workers and strikes, and occasionally to the inhospitable climate). Such misunderstandings were more predominant when the extracts were taken line-by-line.

Finally, just as some spent too long considering the pre-1890 period, other answers were marred by a failure to appreciate the terminal date of the question. Whilst some drew successfully on evidence from the Russian effort in the First World War to support the argument that Russia was still under-developed in 1914, other students simply provided a lot of detail on the war years (and in some cases the revolutions of 1917), oblivious to the actual question posed.

Section B

02

Answers to this popular question showed that many students had spent time thinking about the reasons behind Alexander II’s reforming impulses, particularly in relation to the Emancipation of the Serfs, and were knowledgeable about a wide range of reforms within the period. Students tended to adopt one of two broad approaches. Some evaluated Alexander’s various reforms separately and weighed up the influence of different factors in bringing these about, others balanced the early reforms against Alexander’s later counter-reforms, suggesting different motivation in each era. The latter approach worked when the earlier impulse to reform was properly addressed, but was less successful when the student chose to agree with the question, using the evidence of the counter-reforms in support and failing to explain why Alexander had passed any reforming legislation in the first place.

Whilst many students produced well-balanced responses, showing an appreciation of a variety of motivational factors and acknowledging change over time, less able students tended to list the potentially influential factors in a descriptive way or to describe the reforms, giving an assertive link to the question at the end of each paragraph. Since it is impossible to prove Alexander’s intentions, some care was needed in the expression of a view and the more reasoned the analysis of factors and the stronger the understanding of tsarist ‘autocracy’, the better the essay was likely to be.

03

There were some excellent answers to this question from students who had a strong appreciation of Alexander III’s policies and were able to balance the measures and initiatives that strengthened the Empire against aspects that weakened it. Many distinguished between the short and long term results of his policies, arguing that repression and measures such as the establishment of Land Captains were strengthening in the short-term but ultimately provoked the growth of opposition, so weakening the Empire. Other able students sought balance by contrasting ‘weakening’ political policies with ‘strengthening’ economic policies and some saw both the strengths and weaknesses of all his various drives, analysing Russification, for example with some vigour. Whatever the approach adopted, it was good to find many students who were able to make a clear judgement and sustain an analysis with appropriate supporting evidence.

Sadly, a few otherwise able students under-performed by offering only one-sided essays, supporting the premise of the quotation without qualification. Whilst it was quite permissible to accept this view after consideration of Alexander's policies, students need to be reminded that all essay answers require argument and a balanced appraisal (and have indeed been carefully worded to permit this) and that one-sided answers will not reach the higher mark ranges. Lower marks also went to the students who could only mention one or two policies, or ignored the question words and dates to write about the policies of Nicholas II and developments into the twentieth century.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.