

AS

History

7041/1L The question for political stability: Germany, 1871-1929
Report on the Examination

7041
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General

It was encouraging to see that the majority of students had been well-prepared for the demands of the AS examination, now in its third year, and were able to show appropriate skills in their analysis of the extracts in Section A and an ability to write an analytical essay with range and balance, in Section B. Timing was rarely a problem and most answers were of an appropriate length, with a concluding comparison in question 1 and a final summary – and in the better answers, judgemental – conclusion to the essay. Some showed that they had thought quite deeply about the issues they had studied and, in response to all three questions, there were students who were ready to provide individualistic and thoughtful comments, be it on how economic growth changed over time or how successfully Kaiser Wilhelm II was able to rule.

Since this is a breadth paper demanding an appreciation of chronology and an awareness of change and continuity, the better students responded to historical developments over time (particularly in question 1) 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, to select appropriate and relevant historical evidence in support of an analysis that was closely focused on the questions posed and supported by an understanding of the full 20 years or so which these various questions covered.

At best, students wrote with confidence and interest in the debates thrown up by the extracts and essay questions. There were some who muddled events and issues, or whose ability to deploy appropriate knowledge let them down. Nevertheless, there were very few who failed to complete the paper or write unable to write anything of relevance.

Question 1

The majority of students considered the two extracts in turn, occasionally making some comparative comment in the body of their answer, but mostly developing the comparison further in their conclusion. Those who adopted a more comparative approach throughout sometimes found it harder to address all the elements of the question, although they were equally rewarded when they did so.

Examiners were looking for three key elements in the answers:

1. An understanding of the interpretations in Extract A and Extract B.

The best students were able to look at the extracts holistically then explicitly identify the overall interpretations, in relation to the focus of the question, of each extract in their own words rather than just quoting extract content. In this way they clearly showed understanding of what the historian was arguing before then analysing specific arguments made within the extracts and using own knowledge to help explain their context. On this paper the examiner wanted to know the students could clearly state that Extract A's overriding interpretation was that democracy in Weimar Germany was unstable whereas Extract B's was that democracy was stable. Students then addressed other key subsidiary arguments and evaluated these in a similar way, using appropriate contextual knowledge. Weaker students found the concept of what is the overall interpretation difficult, and simply developed whatever particular line or comment they could. This meant that Extract B was negative about democratic strength in Weimar because the opening line was 'Critics of the Weimar constitution'.

The ability to understand this overall interpretation of an extract, in relation to the question focus, is a key skill that needs to be embedded in the students.

A key concept of question 1 is how ‘convincing’ an interpretation is and it would be good to see students use this word more throughout their answer in terms of an extract interpretation/argument being ‘convincing’ or ‘not convincing’. Equally, question 1 uses extracts as the focus of analysis and not sources, as many students seem to think they are.

2. An understanding of the historical context

The best students provided appropriate contextual knowledge to both to support the interpretation being considered and to challenge it. Just what is appropriate contextual knowledge is another key skill. Component 1 is the breadth paper. Students are expected to be able to deploy own knowledge to help explain the interpretation and context, but are not required to write vast swathes of detail when developing arguments within the extracts. Weaker students were generally guilty of this. For example, in Extract A, there was a reference to ‘problems created by the peace treaty’. This would then result in a student describing all the different aspects of the Versailles Treaty which ultimately was not required. Getting the balance right where the student has enough own knowledge to explain a point, but not to overdo it, is a key skill.

3. Comparison between the two Extracts

The comparative element of the question is crucial and was often the weakest aspect of a student’s answer. A simple paragraph is not really enough here. This element needs sufficient development that compares both extracts with a well-substantiated judgement. Some students thought it sufficient to assert that one extract was ‘better’ than the other and a number justified their choice by the amount of factual content contained within the extract, or that the extract covered a greater period of time. The better responses were more aware of the need to judge the ‘interpretations’ themselves and drew on their analyses of each extract to provide a meaningful and substantiated judgement. In this case both Extracts had convincing, and not convincing elements to them, so the strongest responses were the ones aware of this and were able to make more subtle judgements as to the most convincing. Too many weaker 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.

Question 2

This was slightly less popular than question 3 but there were some very good answers produced with some impressive support. Most students were able to use their knowledge of economic developments in Germany to respond to the question posed. They had to consider two aspects, both industry and agriculture and relate developments to how consistent they were. The main issue was one of range and balance. Most students were able to provide a reasonable range with support arguing for consistent economic growth but had more difficulty developing a range to challenge this beyond considerations of agricultural decline. There were also some issues where students turned the question into one of exclusively social developments. Given this is a breadth paper students need to be reminded of the key questions which are the basis of this whole study.

Question 3

There were some excellent answers to this question from students. Most responses were able to offer some evidence for and against the Kaiser being successful in maintaining authority. Stronger students were able to provide a range of ideas from the Kaiser's approach to rule and the role of the constitution, through to more conceptual ideas like the German response to authority, militarism etc. Such responses were rewarded highly. Others took a more literal approach of assessing each chancellor and their relationship with the Kaiser. Hohenlohe was the 'straw dog' etc. This had merits but was also more restrictive in terms of reaching the higher levels. As with all essays, having a reasonable range of ideas with the appropriate detail to explain them is vital. Again, having the right amount of detail to explain a point, but not overdo it, is the key. Finally, students who had an appreciation of chronology and who covered the full range of dates indicated in both questions performed better at achieving the higher levels.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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