



A-level

History

7042/2S The Making of Modern Britain, 1951–2007
Report on the Examination

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General

Most students seemed to cope very well with the new A-level format. There were few incomplete scripts and barely any rubric infringements. It seemed that ‘time’ was not an issue; indeed, students seemed to have followed the recommended guidelines closely, spending approximately one hour on the compulsory source question (01) and 45 minutes on each of their chosen essays in Section B. There was no significantly ‘most popular’ question in Section B; all three questions were relatively equally chosen. The best students overall showed an impressive range of detailed subject knowledge, as befits a depth unit, coupled with excellent question technique to produce sophisticated and convincing answers. It was encouraging to be able to award full marks to some outstanding students.

Section A

Question 01

The following comments indicate some of the common weaknesses seen in students’ answers. The generic mark scheme makes it very clear that students should focus on analysing the value of the sources – their strengths and limitations. However, it is clear that some students do not fully understand the concept of ‘value’. Discussion of provenance, tone, content and argument all need to be related to ‘value’ – the merit, worth, usefulness or importance of the sources for explaining ‘the particular purpose given in the question’, which, in this case, was why the miners decided to go on strike in 1984.

Less able students still tend to get side-tracked by a one-dimensional, simplistic grasp of provenance and offer bland black and white statements largely related to ‘reliability’ or ‘bias’. For example: ‘Arthur Scargill was the miners’ leader so he will be biased in favour of the miners so his views cannot be trusted which makes the source not reliable.’ Perhaps a better starting point is for students to abandon GCSE style stock phrases and to focus more on ‘interpretation’ – how does Scargill interpret the causes of the strike; what aspects does he stress; where does he point the finger; how does he express himself; how important are ‘time’ and ‘audience’; what does he tell us that is illuminating? It is obvious that what he has to say will be valuable – he was the NUM President, the most high profile miners’ leader of modern times – but what can the historian learn from what he says, how he speaks and what he emphasises?

‘Tone’ is also weakly understood, and often confused with ‘argument’: ‘Thatcher’s tone was anti-union’. Not all sources will have a significant, obviously identifiable ‘tone’ but the language used can often present us with useful insights. Commentaries on tone need to be clearly linked to value. For example, Scargill in Source A clearly remains very angry and bitter even 25 years after the strike, which is valuable in helping the historian understand the passions and depth of emotions that must have raged throughout the strike; Ridley’s derogatory use of the phrase ‘jobs for the boys’ in Source C gives us an important insight into his negative attitude towards the nationalised industries.

Generally, students were relatively skilful in supporting their analysis with contextual (own) knowledge. For example, many students were able to link Thatcher’s comments to her wider political and economic agenda to limit the power of the unions and to privatise the nationalised industries. Nevertheless, some students showed a limited depth of knowledge about such a key aspect of Thatcher’s premiership and seemed unprepared for questions that focused on one event or one issue, as will be the case in a depth unit.

Fundamentally, students need to show that not only can they evaluate the value of the provenance and content of the sources and that they can support their evaluation with relevant contextual knowledge, but that they can also reach an overall, judgement about the value of the source. 'Judgement' need not be extensive but there is clearly a need for a summative statement for each source related to value: what it can tell us about the issue, what its strengths and limitations are, what it adds to our understanding. A few students still try and compare the sources but it is worth reiterating that there is no requirement for a comparative judgement; comparison is not rewarded.

Section B

Question 02

Good answers maintained a sustained focus on 'stop-go' and whether this 'fundamentally' weakened the economy. Many understood the limitations or short-termism of stop-go policies and the more perceptive students were able to explore the balance between the Conservative Party's political pragmatism - using budgets to 'win' votes - and its economic priorities to maintain employment, limit inflation and balance imports and exports. Many justifiably argued that the period 1955-1964 was a period of relative affluence, thereby suggesting that stop-go did not necessarily fundamentally damage economic growth or limit living standards, but less able students tended to drift into a description of consumer growth rather than evaluating the depth or strength of this apparent prosperity, which generally limited them to a maximum Level 3 mark. Credit was given to students who explored other factors which might have weakened Britain's economic performance in this period, such as costly military and defence spending, but students needed to maintain a clear focus on stop-go as a factor to reach the higher levels. Again, less able students tended to become side-tracked by writing long narrative accounts of events such as the Suez crisis or Britain's special relationship with the USA without clearly linking this to the question.

Question 03

This was perhaps the least well attempted of the three essays. Many students found themselves in Level 2 because they misinterpreted the question, focusing on whether Britain was or was not a world power in this period rather than on why Britain applied for EEC membership at this time. The most able students were able to differentiate between the Wilson and Heath applications whereas others were too generalist in their approach. Many students, perhaps influenced by current affairs, mistakenly assumed that the EEC was at this time a fundamentally political institution and that Britain saw it as a vehicle for maintaining an influential voice in world affairs given its loss of empire.

Question 04

There were some very impressive and well informed answers on this question. Many students were clearly thoroughly prepared on New Labour's social policies allowing them to reach quite contradictory but equally thoughtful and convincing judgements. Again, the more able students kept a clear focus on whether Britain was 'a fairer and more equal society' after 10 years of New Labour rule, whereas less able students tended to adopt a relatively scatter gun approach to the question writing detailed but rather 'all I know' type essays about Blair's governments, incorporating very loosely linked material on foreign policy, Ireland or constitutional reform. This question (and question 02) tended to show that many students relied heavily on single text book resources, quoting the same 'facts' and 'judgements', whether it be about 'Blair's babes' or disengaged youth. This reliance resulted in some quite mechanical answers, nevertheless it was apparent that many students knew a great deal and were able to reach Level 4 by showing a good range of relevant knowledge and balanced analysis.

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.