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AS

# History

7041/1L

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 Q01 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 the political and social impact of socialism to Bismarck and the role of the individual in history.

There was evidence that students had taken time to plan and structure their answers and there was some careful reading of the extracts in Q01. Not surprisingly, some were more confident than others in assembling their answers to the compulsory extract evaluation question and it is hoped that the comments which follow will provide some helpful guidance for future examinees. Most, however, adopted a focused and balanced approach when writing their Section B essay and the very best showed judgement and upheld an argument, linking well to the question throughout, whilst providing some conceptual awareness.

It needs to be remembered that Component 1 is a breadth study and that students have to be able to use second order concepts such as an appreciation of chronology and continuity and change in their analysis of a time period. As such knowledge needs to be deployed carefully.

## Section A

### Question 01

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 most able students here explicitly identified the overall interpretation, in relation to the focus of the question, of each extract in their own words rather than just using the extract content. In this way they clearly showed understanding of what the historian was arguing before then using specific extract context to explain the interpretation. Some students are still finding the concept of what is the overall interpretation difficult, relying instead on developing the extract's various subsidiary arguments, or whatever particular line or comment that takes their fancy. Teachers need to be embedding this key skill in their lessons. On this paper the examiner wanted to know the student could clearly state that Extract A's overriding interpretation was that the impact of socialism was feared and seen as a threat whereas Extract B's was that socialism was not a threat. Students then addressed other key subsidiary views and arguments and evaluated these in a similar way. Clearly, this showed a high-level skill of reading with understanding. Another key skill here is to make sure students understand what are key subsidiary views and arguments to develop as some waste time developing simple 'filler' information. A classic example was the first sentence

of Extract A, which stated the ‘mild enthusiasm’ which the SPD felt about Caprivi’s ‘New Course’, and spent far too much time supporting (and sometimes questioning) this statement from their own knowledge, at the expense of the focus and the impact of socialism between 1890 to 1914, and the overall thrust of the extract, which was about how socialism was feared by the elites.

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. A few students did produce reasonable answers by taking a line-by-line approach, although interrogating almost every sentence of the extract ran the risk of spending time on less relevant material that was not always ‘an interpretation’. Furthermore, this style of answer made comparison between the two extracts more difficult, since students found themselves trying to compare, not between two broadly contrasting interpretations, but between a multiplicity of differing statements. The weakest students usually only addressed, one or two statements in each extract - or, in some cases, failed to understand an interpretation. Such students showed limited appreciation of what is meant by ‘interpretation’. There were also cases of unnecessary analysis of provenance by some students. This is not a requirement of the exam. A key word in this question is ‘convincing’ and it would be good to see students use in more throughout their answer in terms of an extract interpretation/ argument being ‘convincing’ or ‘not convincing’. Finally, and a gentle reminder, but the question 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 most able students provided material both to support the interpretation being considered and to challenge it. There were some very good examples of the application of appropriate own knowledge (particularly in support) and many students provided precise examples, giving dates as well as details to show the relevance of the interpretation and to explain context. Weaker answers were more generalist and thin with support. Given this is the breadth paper students are not required to write in vast depth to explain points and some students overly developed context with very long detail to explain an event, whilst others used limited detail and undeveloped it and getting the balance right between too much, or too little, own knowledge to explain context is a skill that needs to be developed.

## 3) Comparison between the two Extracts

The comparative element of the question is crucial and was often the weakest aspect of a students 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 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.

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## Section B

### Question 02

Bismarck is a popular choice for students and most were able to use their knowledge of political developments in Germany to respond well to the question posed. Most focused their responses on key developments to do with the National Liberal's, Kulturkampf, the ZP, tariffs and socialism. All this material was relevant but the key here was how it tied in with the question focus of strengthening unity, or not, and the best answers were always linking back to this. Some students were keen to display everything they knew about key developments but then end up writing too much on events that were not actually moving the answer on. Analysis on the Kulturkampf was a particular culprit. Students need to remember this is a breadth study and that when developing material to answer the question they do it so that it has enough detail to explain the point being made but does not then simply become descriptive and which little reward is given.

Many essays did the basics well of focus, reasonable range with some detail and balance. In order to move higher in the levels students need to show greater depth of analysis in terms of how the material they use truly understands the focus of the question, and that it is linked throughout the answer. The highest rewarded answers had a conceptual element which meant they were able to relate their analysis in terms of continuity or change over time; to see trends or to relate their analysis to a deeper understanding of the nature of Germany, its politics and people. For example the Bismarckian constitution was both a force for unity and disunity.

### Question 03

There were some excellent answers to this question from students who understood that this was a social question about the changing nature of society between 1914 to 1929 and were able to deploy knowledge that indicated the varying fortunes of different sections of society, from the elites to farmers, or indicated developments that would impact on society, be it welfare reforms or cultural changes. Some students concentrated too much on political and economic developments and were keen to tell all about the Ruhr crisis and hyperinflation, to Stresemann and the Rentenmark. Of course such events have an impact on society but the key focus here, as one of the key questions of the specification, is the extent of social and cultural change. The best responses were those able to make the distinctions between significant change in terms of social equality brought about by the impact of the First World War and the creation of the Weimar Republic, but also continuity in terms of class division and divide between urban and rural areas. Given this is a breadth paper students needed to be aware of the main social trends that occurred between 1914 and 1929 and relate this to the key idea of continuity and change. Having an appropriate range of ideas with the appropriate detail to explain them is vital. Again, having the right amount of detail to explain a point is the key. Too many students were keen to describe all about the cultural changes that occurred in the Weimar Republic where what was needed was how much such developments impacted on society generally.

Finally, students who had an appreciation of chronology and who covered the full range of dates indicated in the questions, along with the use of specific supporting detail to help make arguments and judgements more convincing, performed better at achieving the higher levels.

### **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.