
AS

History

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Report on the Examination

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General comments

As last year there were very few incomplete papers, with the vast majority of students writing full and substantial answers. However, the quality of written expression was very mixed. Question 01 in particular requires relatively sophisticated reading, writing and comprehension skills to reach clear, logical and well-constructed judgements. Many students probably need greater support in developing a 'critical' vocabulary. For example, terms such as 'valid', 'valuable', 'reliable', 'untrustworthy', and 'useful' seem almost inter-changeable for many; the term 'biased' is vastly over-used and applied uncritically, and often incorrectly in order to dismiss a source as of little or no value. It seems to persist as a GCSE level stock phrase sadly thought essential for source evaluation. 'Invaluable' is regularly and frustratingly used incorrectly. Question 03 was the least popular choice of the two essay questions in Section B.

Section A

Question 01

It is worth reiterating the reminder set out in this report last year: students are required to consider three elements in answering this question: an evaluation (analysis) of provenance and tone, an evaluation of content and argument – requiring support from contextual (own) knowledge, and a comparison. It is not expected that all three are covered in equal 'thirds' but all do need to be addressed to reach the higher mark levels.

This question focused on the Labour Party's reasons for replacing the tripartite system of secondary schooling established by the 1944 Butler Education Act in favour of the comprehensive school model. Most students understood this context but a minority seemed poorly informed and were unable to distinguish, for example, secondary from higher education, or confused 'grammar' schools with 'private' schools. It seems many leading Conservative politicians such as Eden and Macmillan were educated at good grammar schools such as Eton; conversely some believed Wilson was famous for being the first secondary modern-educated prime minister.

The evaluation of provenance was very mixed. Less able students were unable to go beyond stock phrases inherited from GCSE. Most do appreciate that provenance is about more than 'who' and 'when' but they need to be encouraged to move towards more nuanced evaluation and away from generalist commentaries. Misconceptions abound: 'articles' cannot be trusted because they are written to 'entertain' and 'make money'; a 'speech' must be well-researched, therefore 'valuable'. The best answers showed an understanding that there were both strengths and limitations to the evidence presented by Hopkins and Rosen, that they were both partial, subjective commentators, but that this did not necessarily make what they had to say any less valuable for understanding the issue. Students need to go further than arguing that Hopkins must be 'reliable' because he was an M.P. or that Rosen could not be 'trusted' because he was a socialist (aka a rabid revolutionary). Students are finding the concept of tone challenging. Many approach it like a simple English comprehension exercise or mistakenly as a euphemism for argument: Rosen's tone was 'pro-comprehensive'; Hopkins' tone was 'anti-Labour'. An evaluation of tone must always be linked to value for it to be credited. For example, some elements of Rosen's tone and language were very personal, which is valuable for indicating how strongly he still felt, even more than 50 years later, that the whole school system he experienced had been fundamentally unfair and socially divisive. Given that this is a depth unit, the best answers applied a good range of relevant contextual knowledge both of a specific nature – such as references to Circular 10/65 or Tony Crosland's strongly expressed anti-grammar school passion – and of a broader context, such as Wilson's 'white heat of technology' aspirations and his belief that an expansion of higher education required

fundamental school reform (as alluded to by Rosen). In terms of evaluating content, students need to consider the value of the source as a whole in order to reach a comparative judgement of the two sources overall. Merely adopting a sentence by sentence approach can lead to simple paraphrase, which is not rewarded. Nevertheless, it is also important for students to evaluate the value of specific statements. For example, the more forensic-minded students were able to recognise that the situation in Bristol described by Hopkins – ‘60 per cent of the children attending secondary modern schools in Bristol are going on to take ‘O’ level exams’ – might not necessarily reflect a similar outcome everywhere, and was not particularly valuable without any reference to outcomes (how many exams did they take and how many ‘passed’ and stayed in education or went to university, and how many were of working class origin – all of which could be compared to Rosen’s points). The best answers sustained a focus on the value of the content for understanding the reasons for abandoning the tripartite system.

Comparison is a key element of this question but was too often relegated to a minor afterthought by many students. It is quite appropriate for comparative judgement to emerge in a concluding section but it needs to be more than a cursory one sentence ‘A’ is more valuable than ‘B’ because.... Many good answers maintained a comparative focus throughout the answer.

Section B

Question 02

Answers to this question tended to show a good understanding of Conservative strengths but were less secure in respect of Labour divisions, resulting in some relatively unbalanced responses. Most students had a broad awareness of the split between Bevan and Gaitskill but were unable to develop this in any depth, with many not being able to go much further than a discussion of the disagreement over prescription charges, which was not within the time scale of the question and was not rewarded unless it was made explicitly relevant to the post-1955 period. The better students were able to develop discussion around internal party disputes over unilateralism, Europe and Clause IV as well as the furore caused on the Left of the party when Bevan switched his position over nuclear deterrence. Teaching seemed to have focused much more in this period on the personalities of Eden and Macmillan than Gaitskill and Bevan.

Arguments challenging the view tended to focus on the Conservatives benefiting from ‘affluence’ and the general rise in living standards (many students became side-tracked here, quoting innumerable statistics about fridges, washing machines, motorways, Butlins holidays and the somewhat romanticised vision of women being freed from household chores) and consensus politics. Some were able to refer to the election giveaways of stop-go economics which ‘bought’ votes in the elections of this period. Others contrasted ‘effective’ Conservative leadership against perceived Labour division, though weaker students were not able to get further than Eden’s good looks, Macmillan’s charm and their televisual skills. The best answers offered developed judgement, balancing the inability of Labour to be a more effective opposition against pragmatic Conservative leadership and policies.

Question 03

Though there were some good answers to this question it seemed too often to be the refuge of the under-prepared student. As a consequence, many answers proved highly generalist, catch-all, anti-unionist commentaries accusing strikers of creating joyful, militant mayhem throughout the 70s, bringing down a succession of governments. Many could not resist drifting back to Edward Heath and the 3-day week, partly as a result of having little meaningful to say about Wilson or Callaghan in relation to industrial relations, perhaps the key issue of the decade. Certainly, it was disappointing to find so much confusion and generalisation about the final decade covered in this

part of the specification. The best answers concluded that neither Wilson nor Callaghan, but especially Callaghan, had no long-term solution to the 'union problem' and that militant unionism was a persistent issue for both prime ministers, but were able to identify a range of ameliorating actions: Wilson's 'social contract' creating some initial goodwill, the popular repeal of Heath's Industrial Relations Act and the swift negotiated end to the miner's strike and the state of emergency; Callaghan was generally given shorter shrift but some recognised that he had some residual popular union appeal as having been the leading opponent in the party to Barbara Castle's 1969 proposal 'In Place of Strife', which the unions had strongly resisted.

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.