



AS LEVEL HISTORY

7041/2S The Making of Modern Britain, 1951-1979
Report on the Examination

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General

The paper proved largely accessible, however, question 03 was attempted only by a small number of students. There were very few spoilt or incomplete papers. The actual number of students sitting the paper fell again, from 589 entries in 2018 to 348 in 2019. The quality of the responses overall suggests, perhaps, that the more able students in the cohort are not being entered for the examination. Nevertheless, some students provided high quality answers for all questions.

01

The question targeted a key aspect of 70s society: the balance of attitudes among the UK population towards immigration and race relations.

The sources offered strongly contrasting provenances; first, an extract from an interview on national TV with Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher at the beginning of 1978; second, a retrospective article from a mixed-race campaigner for racial equality, reflecting on the mix of attitudes towards racial minorities in the 1970s. The best answers recognised this contrast explicitly and were able to develop a well-supported comparison of both provenance and content in relation to the focus of the question. Weaker answers, as last year, tended to resort to generalist stock words and phrases related to provenance - such as 'one-sided' or 'biased' (variously spelt), or offered basic comments, often not far removed from simple comprehension and paraphrase, about the content provided.

Source A

Strong answers to Source A offered good insights about the value of exposure on national TV and were able to provide some accurate context, particularly by using hindsight to acknowledge that the run-up to the 1979 election had already begun, with Mrs Thatcher taking the opportunity to set out her election stall on the controversial topic of immigration and race relations. Good answers commented that the source provided particular value, not only for understanding Mrs Thatcher's own attitude but also for anticipating the likely policy on immigration of an incoming Conservative government. The very best used their own knowledge very well in this respect, citing the rise of the National Front to become Britain's fourth largest party as a key factor in explaining Mrs Thatcher's hard-line on immigration controls. Others distinguished Mrs Thatcher's view both from her predecessor Edward Heath and from Labour's focus on challenging discrimination (the 1976 Race Relations Act) rather than getting to the root of the problem: 'numbers'.

Students sometimes discuss 'tone' and 'language' in a very abstract way. Teachers still need to guide students away from highly generic comments related to tone, which is, in many respects, a difficult concept. Not all sources are open to this kind of interrogation. However, good answers targeted Mrs Thatcher's phraseology and particular choice of words very well. This was a source where students were able to gain a lot of credit for a close analysis of Mrs Thatcher's use of language, particularly the use of the highly charged word 'swamped' (and its repetition) and her focus on 'fear'. It was actually very encouraging that a number of good answers challenged Mrs Thatcher's reference to 'fundamental British characteristics'. Clearly, this whole issue resonated very closely with many students' own views and experiences of current attitudes to race and immigration.

Weaker answers merely offered simplistic, generalist comments about either Mrs Thatcher or TV or both, focusing on Mrs Thatcher's so-called 'Iron Lady' image or on the ubiquity of TVs in the

home compared to 'earlier days'. Weaker commentary relied on generalisation or assertion, simply stating that immigration had become 'a big problem', or that immigrants 'all lived together' which 'upset' and 'frightened' the 'native' residents.

We have thankfully moved a long way from the study of History being 'all about dates'. However, it is important to remind students of the importance of chronological precision. Many students rightly referenced the Notting Hill riots as evidence of growing racial tensions, but did not make it clear whether they were referring to 1958 or 1976, which was an additional problem if they went on to discuss 'teddy boys' and 'skinheads' without identifying even the decade under consideration.

The best answers reached well-substantiated and well-supported judgements discussing the extent to which Mrs Thatcher truly represented the prevailing attitudes towards race and immigration in the later 1970s.

Source B

Source B provided a significant contrast to source A. Most students commented on the obvious contrast of background and ethnic origin between Hassan Mahamdallie and Margaret Thatcher and how this might shape attitudes to race and immigration. However, fewer students noticed, or understood, the political standpoint of the journal, which opened up valid discussion about how ideological/political differences would also affect attitudes. Weaker students focused only on Source B's provenance as an article, with still too many writing in very weak, generic terms about such sources being written 'for entertainment' or 'to inform', whereas the left-wing nature of the journal itself was the key for developing more meaningful evaluation. Some thought this a secondary source, therefore automatically 'unreliable' because of the passage of time. Better students explored the value of a mixed-race family's likely experience in London in the 1970s and how this may have contributed to Mahamdallie's attitudes and his choice of adult vocation. Some students also took the opportunity to discuss the contrasting value of 'reminiscence' – stronger with hindsight and longer-term perspective, or weaker because of the possible distortions of time or selective memory.

Weak answers tended to rely on comprehension and assertion; better answers drew on own knowledge and applied it to support or challenge the source content. For example, some referenced the case of Blair Peach to corroborate Mahamdallie's veiled accusation of institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police; others challenged the idea that 'mass mobilisation' and 'direct action' actually achieved very much, pointing out the short-lived impact of movements such as Rock Against Racism and the limited demographic from which its support was drawn.

The best responses maintained a focus on comparison related to value and sustained this focus throughout their answers. Such answers were more likely to reach the top levels than those that merely tacked on a token statement of comparison as a conclusion.

It was interesting that no consensus emerged about which source was more valuable. Some argued convincingly that source A was more valuable because Mrs Thatcher best represented prevailing 'white', negative attitudes to immigration and racial discrimination, which successive Race Relations or Immigration Acts had done little to ameliorate. Neither were some students convinced – as implied by Mahamdallie – that the 'young' were more enlightened than their elders, citing sub-cultures such as skinheads being attracted by National Front rhetoric, and arguing that those young people attracted to organisations such as the Anti-Nazi League did not necessarily represent the views of the majority of this age group. Others argued that source B was more

valuable because it represented a first-hand experience of the limitations and dangers of day-to-day discrimination for Britain's ethnic minority population in the 1970s.

02

This question focused on causation and linked two key aspects of the specification from the early 1960s: decolonisation and Britain's relationship with the European Economic Community (EEC). A variety of interesting and contrasting perspectives on the question were offered but no clear or common consensus of judgement emerged.

Very good answers made it clear that one aspect – losing the empire - did not necessarily lead to the other – an application to join the EEC - and were very nuanced in their judgements. The very best answers acknowledged that decolonisation certainly led to a more Euro-centric view of Britain's role as a nation, but that it certainly was not the only explanation for our application to join the EEC, and that it was not necessarily the most important. Indeed, some rather convincingly challenged the idea that the empire was 'lost', but was rather transformed into a 'Commonwealth' of nations. Others argued, equally convincingly, that Britain's economic weakness relative to the EEC's strengths, together with the limitations of membership of EFTA, was the primary factor.

One particular area of misunderstanding that emerged among a significant number of students was that the EEC at this time offered Britain military as well as financial security, believing that it was some kind of defensive military alliance as well as an economic community of nations. Another fallacy that appeared was the idea that the EEC was some kind of European 'bank' that might dole out loans to the UK in times of need.

It was evident that students still struggle, even at this level, to avoid narrative history. For example, it was valid to offer some context for the loss of empire: the impact of the Second World War and changed views on imperialism, but a long narrative of decolonisation from the independence of India in 1947 through the 1950s and into the early 1960s was unnecessary and received little credit.

Similarly, as stated above, some students provided strong arguments that Britain's application to the EEC was primarily motivated by economic considerations, but again long narratives about 'stop-go' and detailed descriptions of 1950s consumerism led students to drift from the focus of the question. Despite the wealth of accurate information loaded into their descriptions, little credit was awarded for such detail.

In general terms, the biggest areas of confusion and uncertainty revolved around Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth and with the United States. Perhaps more focus needs to be given to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both relationships than to acquiring a detailed blow-by-blow knowledge of, for example, the Suez crisis or the Mau-Mau rebellion. This is a difficult balance to reach – context and detail in a depth study are important – but not if it leads to a drift to narrative at the expense of analysis.

However, there were many examples of students who had acquired a good grasp of a wide range of factors relevant to the question and had been effectively supported in writing focused, balanced responses.

03

This question focused on significance. Unfortunately, only a small number of the students who chose this question reached the highest levels; detailed knowledge about the ‘troubles’ was little in evidence and many students seemed to have chosen the question as the lesser of two evils. Very few students were able to identify key individuals and there was a lot of misunderstanding about the most basic knowledge related to the topic. Some students even confused Catholics/Protestants and loyalists/nationalists; chronology was often vague and generalisation was very common, as the issues were highlighted in the specification content.

Clearly, another question on this area of the specification would require a greater depth of knowledge, particularly in relation to the leading figures involved and the roles and motivations of both the British and Irish governments. Similarly, the roles of the RUC and of the paramilitaries on both sides of the sectarian divide needed greater clarity of understanding.

Nevertheless, students from a small number of centres answered the question with authority and confidence. Such students were particularly well informed about historic and institutionalised discrimination towards the Catholic community, particularly the practice of gerrymandering, and had a good understanding of sectarian divides – even if that term was rarely used.

Although the question focused on the late 1960s, credit was given to students who appropriately referenced the escalation of the ‘troubles’ into the early 1970s, including ‘Bloody Sunday’ and internment.

Overall, therefore, the depth of information and the quality of learning were much less extensive than shown in question 02.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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