



A-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 1H Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1964
Report on the Examination

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General

Responses to the questions on this year's paper ranged from the well-focused, convincingly argued and conceptually aware to the generalised and irrelevant. On the whole, students coped marginally better with the essays than the 01 extract question, not least because a choice of questions enabled them to select the topics they knew best. They were thus able to demonstrate their learning, even when they found it difficult to think more analytically about the question focus. There were some exceptions to this. Some clearly able students offered thoughtful responses to 01, only to fall down on the essays through lack of knowledge. Nevertheless, it can never be stressed enough that success in History at A-level depends on the students' ability, not only to digest the historical content of their option, but also to deploy that knowledge in response to questions designed to test their analytical skills and elicit individual judgement.

Both Sections A and B were marked according to the respective generic levels mark schemes which offer a range of 5 levels of attainment, carefully graded to assess a combination of understanding and knowledge. Adjustments to the marks within these levels were made according to how well the student's work matched the level requirements. There was little difference seen in the quality of the responses to the different areas of the specification content, and, to this extent, the questions proved effective at differentiating between students, with a roughly equal number of strong and weak answers being found in response to every question.

Question 01

The A-level extract question for Component 1 is, necessarily, a demanding one and students generally fared best when they took time to read and think about each extract carefully, in relation to the focus of the question, before beginning to write. Strong answers usually began with a direct reference to the key arguments contained in the extract; more mediocre ones summarised everything the extract said, whilst weaker responses often adopted a line-by-line approach with no real feel for the overall view being expressed.

Those who assimilated the extracts as a whole generally found two key arguments in relation to 'tsarist political authority' in each. Extract A referred to the autocracy's reliance on repression and its narrowing support base after 1905; Extract B to the way social and economic developments had undermined autocracy and Nicholas' own responsibility for its ultimate failings; Extract C to the replacement of autocracy by a 'constitutional monarchy' which, until 1914, promised stability, but gave way under the pressure of war. Some broke the arguments down further, but strong students were able to differentiate between the 'views' expressed and the factual content of the extracts. Such students examined the validity of the arguments and not the 'truth' of the facts.

There were some students who paid little, if any, heed to the focus of the question. Instead of considering the arguments affecting 'tsarist political authority', such students addressed the 'convincingness' (by which they understood veracity) of almost everything the extract said. So, for example, with regard to Extract A, there were some long discussions of whether Russian society was 'changeless' and whether the peasantry and workers were 'dark masses'. Time was also spent describing the degree of 'modernisation' (lines 5/6) of the Russian economy. However, if comments were not linked to the focus of the question, such information was of little worth.

There were also some students who showed a very limited understanding of what 'tsarist political authority' actually meant, even though, 'How did political authority change and develop?' is a key question for this option. Where there was misunderstanding, authority was often associated with control, eg tsarist political authority was shown in 1905 when Gapon's demonstrators were fired on,

but was completely lost after this when a Duma was granted. However, at the other end of the scale, some demonstrated a sophisticated understanding which distinguished between theoretical and actual authority and, in some cases, between personal and institutional authority — a useful measure when evaluating Extract B.

Answers were judged both on the quality of the understanding and on the choice and use of contextual 'own knowledge' to support the comments made. Most students were keen to show what they knew but this could lead to long lists of only marginally relevant information. For example, there were some who used the reference to 'modernisation' in Extract A, to produce a lengthy description of Alexander II's reforms. Students' ability to discriminate between appropriate and irrelevant supporting detail was therefore an important element in assessment decisions.

Those who addressed arguments directly were more likely to support and criticise them with a range of well-chosen examples (and since both A and B refer to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, information from the reigns of Alexander III and Nicholas II was more appropriate than developed reference to Alexander II). The 'line-by-line' answers, on the other hand, too often contained one rather cursory piece of 'own knowledge' following each extract reference.

Finding the right balance between identifying the arguments and evaluating them in the light of own knowledge is not an easy task. Some students managed it to perfection, addressing arguments and integrating comment and context to offer supported judgements. Others floundered, though not only through lack of understanding or knowledge but also, and rather disappointingly, through lack of forethought and an apparent inability to organise an answer effectively. Such responses ranged from the indirect answers, where students largely wrote around the extract, to the over-formulaic, which doggedly listed 2/3 ways the extract was convincing followed by an equal number of ways it was not. The latter approach frequently led to contradictory statements which mitigated individual judgement. Such answers were also weakened by repeated criticism of each extract for what it did not say.

Question 02

Addressing the option's key question 'How and with what results did the economy develop and change?', this question required students to evaluate the part played by serf emancipation in Russia's economic growth to 1894. There were two possible approaches to the answer and both were deemed equally acceptable for the full range of marks. Some students looked solely at the emancipation measure balancing the ways in which it had a positive influence against its limitations. Others considered emancipation and balanced its contribution against other factors promoting economic growth. Many combined both approaches and this was equally creditworthy. The key criterion was that students assessed 'significance' and understood factors creating and mitigating economic growth.

The best answers tended to be quite critical of the effects of emancipation, particularly 'by 1894', although some noted that after the reduction in redemption payments under Alexander III, some of the benefits, previously only theoretical, began to be felt. There were some excellent 'balancing' discussions of the work of the finance ministers Reutern, Bunge and Vyshnegradsky, but whilst reference to Witte could be made relevant, rather too many failed to appreciate that he only took office in 1892 and that the adoption of the gold standard and building of the Trans-Siberian railway took place after the end date of the question. When students chose to weigh up the effects of emancipation against other factors, stronger answers were distinguished by the extent to which they appreciated the inter-relationship of these factors. When discussions centred on emancipation

alone, the better answers showed a superior understanding of the reality of emancipation and made distinctions, for example, between the kulaks, the subsistence peasants tied to the mir and the landless labourers.

Weaker responses were less discriminatory and often took the promises of emancipation at face value. These answers tended to overuse the word 'many': 'many moved to the cities', 'many worked harder and produced more grain'. Some were also confused about the part of the mir and redemption payments, whilst some omitted these altogether. Even when knowledge was good, some students fell back on description and, when considering the policies of Vyshnegradsky, for example, this sometimes led to irrelevance. Finally, it should be pointed out that the question centred on the causes of economic growth, not its extent. A number of students, perhaps recalling a practice essay, really wanted to answer the question 'Was the Russian economy backward in the years 1861 to 1894?' Obviously this produced unsatisfactory answers.

Question 03

This question explored issues raised by the key question 'What was the extent of social and cultural change?' By focussing on two particular groups, this gave students the opportunity to look at the social, as opposed to the political/economic, impact of Communist rule under Lenin and Stalin before the war in 1941. Most were aware that policies changed during this period, but the main thrust of the question was on the impact of Communist rule, and the most able students made constant comparisons with what had gone before and noted the extent of change and continuity from Tsarist times. Most adhered to the question dates although there were those who chose to write irrelevantly about the role of women, and sometimes young people, in wartime as well as before.

Successful responses avoided becoming overly descriptive by analysing lives by theme. These were often work, marriage and family for women, education, home-life and youth groups for young people. Comments on communist ideals were supported by evidence of daily life in practice and the extent of change was duly addressed. A few thoughtful students even distinguished between the effects of Communist rule and the results of economic development and modernisation more broadly; a few argued that change was more a result of Stalin's personal prejudices than 'Communist rule' as such.

Weaker students were often able to list the changes that took place, particularly with respect to women — although changes in education seemed rather less well-known — but they made little attempt at comment, or only offered assertions in relation to the question. Some fell back on changes which applied equally to men and the older generation, writing generally about economic or political policies and the impact of the Stalinist Terror. Sometimes these were made explicitly relevant to the two social groups of the question, but too often they were merely linked by a statement to the effect that such developments 'badly affected the lives of women and the young'.

Question 04

This final question was concerned with the second part of the key question 'Why did opposition develop and how effective was it?' Since the period addressed covered the later years of Stalin until the end of Khrushchev's time in office, there was plenty of scope for considering the impact of opposition to the leader, which the question neatly divided into that inside and outside the Party, with the latter also embracing the cultural dissidents.

Most students were fully aware that Stalin actually faced comparatively little actual opposition, but that his increasing paranoia during and after the war led him to believe that he was surrounded by opponents that needed to be eliminated. Students considered a variety of examples ranging from ethnic minority groups in the war years to rival politicians, Jewish doctors and writers persecuted in the Zhadanovschina of the post-war era. Successful answers not only distinguished between the different types of opposition but also commented on the degree to which such challenges posed a real threat to Stalin.

Many answers argued that Khrushchev faced a bigger actual threat, both from political rivals and outsiders, although the question did not actually demand a comparison between Stalin and Khrushchev. Knowledgeable students referred to Khrushchev's struggle for power, the activities of the anti-Party group and his enforced resignation in 1964 in examining the 'insider' opposition. They balanced this against internal disturbances and the activities of the cultural dissidents who became more active during his years in power. It was generally felt that the insiders posed the greater threat since they challenged Khrushchev's own position, and this judgement was often held to be true for Stalin also. However, a few successfully argued that the outsiders were to prove the more undermining of the leaders' legitimacy and were thus, in reality, a greater, although less obvious, threat.

Weaker responses were not only more limited in range and awareness of opposition activities, but also tended to skate around the degree of threat. Everything mentioned was seen as a threat to the leader with no finer distinctions made. Some also tried to turn this into a question on threats from other countries, even though this is not part of the required content for this option. Where this was made relevant to a personal threat to the leader, for example insofar as Khrushchev's part in the Cuban missile crisis weakened his authority within the Party, it was credited, but where an essay addressed external threats to the USSR as a state, this showed a misunderstanding of both the question and the option requirements.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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