



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1H

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

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Unit HIS1H

Unit 1H: Tsarist Russia, 1855–1917

Comments from the Chief Examiner: Unit 1

In this examination session some issues generic to all the Unit 1 papers were noted:

- Candidates are required to answer two questions from a choice of three, each consisting of a part (a) and a part (b), i.e. 4 sub-questions in total. Whether due to timing issues or to a misunderstanding of the rubric, a few candidates either answered all six sub-questions or answered only one question. The format of Unit 1 papers is significantly different from AQA's legacy units, so it is vital that all candidates are aware in advance of what they will be required to do.
- Timing issues caused other problems too. This is a one hour 15 minute paper, thus allowing roughly 12 minutes in which to complete the (a) questions and 25 minutes for the (b) questions. A number of candidates failed to complete the paper and in addition to those who attempted only one question, there were others who missed out a part-question or lapsed into notes. Selecting relevant material and maintaining a strong focus on the question is part of the skill being tested in this examination and candidates need to realise that they will penalise themselves heavily if they fail to tackle the two questions required, in full. Furthermore, since they are asked to write in continuous prose – which is the only way any sense of argument can be conveyed – notes will never score highly.
- It was clear from some scripts that candidates had not studied, or revised, the full specification content for their chosen alternative. It must be emphasised that the three questions may be drawn from any part of that content. Without a secure understanding of the complete content, candidates will find it extremely difficult to perform well.

Report from the Principal Examiner

General Comments

This was the first examination for this specification. Time did not appear to be a major issue for most candidates on this unit: most scripts appear to have been completed in good time. Many candidates wrote a considerable amount. There were very few unfinished answers. There was only one rubric offence, where one candidate attempted all three questions.

Question 1 was the question most attempted by candidates. Question 3 was the second most popular. Question 2 was the least popular, although it was still attempted by a significant proportion of candidates.

In some respects the overall candidate response was disappointing. There may have been several reasons for this. Some candidates and centres may still be coming to terms with a new examination. Some candidates may not have completed the specification before sitting the examination: this may account for the discrepancy in performance which often occurred in the performance of individual candidates, usually shown by a much stronger performance in response to one question than another. There was also a considerable variation in the literacy skills of candidates. Although there were some very knowledgeable answers, many candidates

showed an alarming lack of knowledge and/or understanding of some key events in the history of this period. However, the relatively poor performance of many candidates, which sometimes affected almost complete centres, was caused by the simple fact of them not answering the question set, so that even candidates who were knowledgeable about a particular period, earned relatively low marks. This particularly affected the quality of answers to Question 1(b).

Question 1

- (a) This question was answered relatively well, with over half the candidates getting into Level 3 or above, and a significant minority gaining Level 4. Most candidates showed a good understanding of the various motives for Alexander II's reforms, and the best answers linked or prioritised the various motives as well. A minority of candidates overly concentrated on the reasons for the emancipation of the serfs, which while relevant, led to candidates ignoring other factors. A sizeable minority of candidates did not read the question carefully and wrote more about the impact of the reforms, not the motives.
- (b) In contrast, this question was not answered well. Some candidates did not know enough. Many candidates were knowledgeable but did not answer the question set. Only a quarter of the answers got into Level 3 or above, and relatively few earned Level 4 or above. This was because many candidates failed to address the question of modernisation, or did so only by implication. Many candidates described the content of reforms (not always accurately), but produced little analysis. Many answered the question purely in terms of whether the reforms were 'successful' or not. Whilst some of this analysis and evaluation could be pertinent to the question, too few candidates treated it this way, and such candidates used the reforms to state whether they were 'successful' in terms of the intention of each reform, without addressing the specific question of modernisation. Many candidates were determined to write an answer about opposition to Alexander II, and wrote about groups such as the Populists or Liberals without ever addressing the question. Some answers which did try to address the question contained significant errors, for example overstating Alexander II's supposed commitment to 'democracy'. Some candidates, in an attempt to write a 'balanced' answer, simply contradicted themselves and never produced a consistent and well constructed and supported judgement. Many candidates showed very little contextual understanding, since when they were trying to evaluate Alexander's reforms in a European context; they often made statements about 'democratic' political systems in other European countries, or referred to advanced state education systems in countries such as Britain and Germany. There were some very good answers which did address the question directly, for example examining where the economy was modernised during Alexander's reign, and the extent to which the army, the legal system and so on were modernised.

Question 2

- (a) Answers to this question were variable in quality, with almost half of the candidates reaching Level 3 or above. Many candidates had a reasonable understanding of the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution and the impact of events such as the October Manifesto in helping the regime to recover. Too many candidates wasted valuable time describing the causes and events of the 1905 Revolution, which was not the focus of the question.

- (b) Most candidates understood the question, but many had insufficient knowledge to answer it well. There were good answers which examined a range of factors affecting Russia's stability before 1914, including the activities of the Dumas, economic developments and the impact of Stolypin's policies of reform and repression. However, there were relatively few balanced answers, and many factual inaccuracies: for example, too many candidates confuse a government with a parliament, and many do not distinguish between liberal and radical opportunism to tsarism.

Question 3

- (a) This question was not done well. Only one fifth of candidates got into Level 3 or above. The majority of answers concentrated almost exclusively on the immediate events of the February Revolution, describing with reasonable accuracy the role of the army. However, too few candidates adopted a wider perspective and considered the impact of Russia's military performance throughout the war and how this impacted, for example, on factors such as morale and the economic situation. Too many candidates went off at a tangent, writing about Rasputin. Several candidates lacked basic knowledge, for example confusing the First World War with the Russo-Japanese War.
- (b) Answers to this question were variable in quality. Most candidates understood the question, and there were some good answers which examined the role of Lenin in 1917, whilst also examining other factors such as the problems and weaknesses of the Provisional Government, and then making an overall evaluation. However, the main problem for many candidates was simply a lack of basic knowledge and understanding, which led them to make wild assertions which they could not substantiate with any conviction. There was a basic lack of knowledge about Lenin: for example, there were all sorts of assertions about his 'mass support' throughout Russia, including from the peasants. There was very little understanding of the context of events in 1917, for example the power vacuum which increasingly existed and which the Bolsheviks, through the work of Lenin, Trotsky and others, were able to exploit to carry out a coup. Considering the centrality of the issues under discussion, the level of knowledge, with some exceptions, was very disappointing.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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