



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2012**

**History 1041**

**Unit HIS2E**

***Report on the Examination***

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# Unit HIS2E

## Unit 2E: The Reign of Peter the Great of Russia, 1682–1725

### General Comments

There was a good standard of work seen this year and it is obvious that centres and students are familiar with the nature of questions and the standards expected on this paper. Comments on individual questions will follow after a couple of general points. Firstly, students are reminded that to reach the higher levels, precise selection of relevant evidence is necessary. This may mean, in some instances, that students must be prepared to leave out material which they have learned; however, a bigger issue in this year's examination was students who did not support their answers with sufficient detail. Secondly, students are advised to use historical quotations sparingly. There were occasions when students included so many quotations which were irrelevant to the question that their focus became distracted and their argument lost clarity. Whilst it is commendable to see students engaging with contemporary and secondary historical material, they should always consider, before adding a quote, whether or not it enhances their argument or whether it is merely on the same topic. Furthermore, a quotation that puts forward the argument of a historian is not, on its own, support for that argument and students need to include historical detail if their arguments are to be convincing.

### Question 1

- 01** The majority of answers seen to this question showed strong technique. Students were usually able to identify differences between the two sources, although it was clear that some found similarities harder to identify. However, most were able to reach Level 3 by developing the differences with their own knowledge. Students are becoming more skilled at using knowledge to enhance the comparison, although there were still a few who tacked on own knowledge to the comparison. There are still a number of students that persist in summarising the whole of one source followed by the whole of the second source; whilst they usually go onto to compare the two sources, they would be better advised to focus solely on the comparison.
- 02** Students tended to do well on this question and most looked at a range of different aspects of Russia to assess change rather than focusing on a couple in more detail. There was still a small minority of students who failed to use the sources at all and so were limited to the top of Level 2; equally, there were a few students who relied entirely on the sources and so were similarly limited. Some students wrote two separate answers, one based on the sources and then one based on their knowledge, failing entirely to integrate them. Students are advised that it is only by integrating sources and knowledge that they will reach the higher levels. A number of students tried to answer this question by going through the sources line by line adding own knowledge as they went. Some of these struggled to construct a coherent line of reasoning as their points became muddled when the sources contradicted each other or the knowledge they wanted to include. There was also some conflation of success and/or improvement with change, leading to statements such as, "Peter didn't change Russia as Source A says the serfs' lives got worse". However, the best answers showed a sophisticated understanding of change over the period, selecting and integrating relevant material, both from their knowledge and from the sources, to assemble a convincing and sustained argument.

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**Question 2**

- 03** Most students had some understanding of Peter the Great's foreign policy aims and were usually able to apply these to the Pruth campaign. However, there were some answers which showed a very limited understanding of the context in 1710–1711 and so were only able to make general comments about, for example, the limitations of Archangel, seemingly unaware of the progress of the Great Northern War. Weaker answers sometimes drifted into a narrative of the events of Pruth or started to explain why the Pruth campaign was not successful, analysis which might have been more usefully deployed in the following question. Nevertheless, there were some very good answers with clear detailed explanations for rising tensions, linking long term reasons such as traditional enmity and on-going Tartar raids to the situation in 1711 in the aftermath of Poltava.
- 04** Most students produced focused answers assessing why Peter the Great was unable to gain access to the Black Sea during his reign. However, what differentiated students was the detail of their knowledge and understanding. Weaker answers were sometimes confused, arguing that the second Azov campaign had produced access to the Black Sea, or assumed failure, in itself, meant there must have been mistakes, without any support for this view. There were some answers which only covered one or other of Peter's campaigns and it should be noted that students should endeavour to cover the whole period in the question if they are to reach the higher levels. However, at the other end of the spectrum were students who had obvious command of the facts surrounding Peter's campaigns in the south and were able to utilise these to produce convincing arguments in answer to the question.

**Question 3**

- 05** Most students were able to explain some of the reasons why Peter ordered the Streltsy to be disbanded. Most knew something of the Streltsy revolts though, sometimes, there was confusion between the different revolts. Weaker answers tended to become more narrative or explained why the Streltsy revolted. However, there were some excellent answers which linked the revolts to other issues such as the Streltsy's conservative attitudes and their limitations as a fighting force demonstrated at Azov.
- 06** Again, what differentiated the quality of the answers seen to this question was the detailed knowledge and understanding that students could harness. There were clearly some students who were not sure who the Tsarevich Alexis was and so either took a guess or ignored this element of the question altogether. Some students had very limited knowledge on specific opposition or rebellions and so depended on sometimes rather general points about the Church, nobility or serfs; quite a few skewed their answer into explaining why there was opposition, rather than assessing the seriousness of it. However, there were also many well-organised and detailed answers with some really impressive knowledge of Alexei's actions in 1716–1718 and an understanding of him acting as a focal point for the passive opposition and discontent of the anti-Menshikov party at court. This allowed them to assess the seriousness of this opposition, against other opposition that Peter faced.

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