



**General Certificate of Education
June 2012**

History 1041

Unit HIS2L

Report on the Examination

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Unit HIS2L

Unit 2L: The Impact of Stalin's Leadership in the USSR, 1924–1941

General Comments

Most students appeared to respond positively to the demands of this summer's examination. There was only one question which appeared to cause difficulty for several students. In keeping with previous examinations, there was a significant number of high-scoring scripts, with students responding well to the time pressures of the examination and answering four questions fully, if anything sometimes writing more than was probably required. Most students, as usual, seemed well-prepared for the demands of the examination, for example using sources sensibly when required to. There were no obvious rubric offences. The quality of written communication was variable: where there were what appeared to be a lot of spelling mistakes or careless errors, in some instances this may have been due to students being under pressure to write at length in a short space of time.

Question 1

- 01** Students dealt well with this question, and there were many high-scoring answers. The three sources appeared to be accessible and very comprehensible to the great majority of students. They understood that there were debates and different views about the effectiveness of economic policies in the early 1930s, and usually managed to find relevant differences and similarities between the views expressed in the sources; whilst in the best answers, also illuminating the comparison with reference to their own knowledge of the topic. Some weaker answers just summarised the content of the sources or directly paraphrased them, and did not make the comparison very direct. The provenance of the sources posed a problem, as it has in other recent examinations. It needs to be emphasised again that dealing with provenance is not required for this type of question, and it is possible to gain Level 4 without ever addressing it. If students choose to examine the provenance, it will be rewarded if dealt with appropriately. However, for many students, the approach is simply too simplistic. Whether a source is primary or secondary is not intrinsically a significant fact. Assumptions that a Soviet source is automatically 'inferior' to a 'Western' source is dangerous. Most students assume that there is one 'western' interpretation of Soviet history, which of course is not true. Some students are still obsessed with 'reliability'. Students are prone to refer to 'revisionist' or 'structuralist' views in a distinctly unhelpful way. The better answers focused instead not just on direct source comparison, but used knowledge to examine the context of the sources, and to differentiate between the focus and results of the Five Year Plan, dealing with issues such as consumer goods and defence requirements.
- 02** Students are mostly well versed in this type of question, and the great majority remember to use both the sources and their own knowledge in their answers, which is necessary to get beyond Level 2. The level of knowledge of the Soviet industrial economy was often impressive, and many students combined relevant use of all three sources (and it is important to use all three) with knowledge. Many students reached Level 4, because as well as doing the above, they produced good, supported analysis, and Level 5 answers made relevant and well-supported judgements. Weaker answers did not necessarily lack knowledge, but did lose their focus. Some students examined the motives for industrialisation: this could be a useful way of introducing the topic, but was not relevant as a major part of the answer. Several students wrote at length about Collectivisation and

its impact. Material on agriculture was credited only if a clear link with industry was established, for example the fact that freeing up labour from the countryside contributed significantly to the growing urban workforce, but long explanations of Collectivisation were not credited. Other answers wrote a narrative account of the Plans, which might well be interspersed with analysis, but tended to neglect the 1941 aspect, so that there was a limited awareness of what exactly was the position on the eve of war. The best answers did 'take a step back' and consider the overall situation by 1941 in contrast to the end of the 1920s. Although levels of knowledge were often impressive, there are some aspects of that knowledge which are still treated rather simplistically. Whilst it is true that quantity often featured more than quality in industrial production, not everything produced by the Soviets was 'inferior': for example some of their armaments were of good quality. Most literature on the gulags discuss the contribution of the slave economy to Soviet progress and are sceptical about the overall economic value of convict labour, but many students exaggerate its value, regardless of the 'human' factor.

Question 2

- 03** This question was answered well. Most students had a good understanding of the role of 'socialism in one country' in Stalin's probable thinking. They understood that there was a strong political element in Stalin's struggle with Trotsky and there were alternative visions of the way ahead, such as 'Permanent Revolution'. They also understood the Soviet concern with promoting industrialisation and the road to socialism. They also appreciated that many Communists were concerned about the NEP and wanted to move the country on to socialism. The best answers linked the political, personal, economic and ideological factors.
- 04** This question posed more problems for many students than any other question, and produced the worse response, although it was also not chosen by as many students as options 05 and 06. The question is clearly related to an important part of the syllabus, since it encompasses the economic impact of NEP and also the whole debate about what should follow NEP, because NEP resulted in economic 'issues' as well as evoking strong ideological objections amongst many Communists. One cannot understand the drive to Collectivisation and the motives for industrialisation without having an understanding of NEP. The question was not about the motives for NEP, and could not be so, since NEP began in 1921, which is outside the specification (although the many students who did briefly discuss this were rewarded where appropriate). It was certainly not a question about the power struggle, although several students wrote at length about the changing alliances and the struggles between Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin *et al*, without specifically addressing the economy at all.

Those students who did directly address the question, sometimes did it well. However, too often they wrote just about agriculture under NEP and ignored industrial developments or dismissed them in a few sentences, and in this respect, even relevant answers were often unbalanced. Those students who did write about industry often made sweeping generalisations, not appearing to appreciate differences such as those between the successes of some small-scale privately-owned industries, and the heavily subsidised and inefficient state-run sector. Students do need to be aware of economic developments between 1924 and 1929 beyond the 'rise of the kulaks', and be aware that Soviet history in this period was not just about who should succeed Lenin. Rather the economy was a vital issue for state and Party, as well as for individual workers and peasants. The references made in previous reports about useful sources such as V.Brovkin's *Russia after Lenin* and Alec Nove's *Economic History of the USSR*, are still pertinent here, and last year's statement about students needing to be better prepared for this period of Soviet history is just as pertinent now.

Question 3

- 05** This question was answered very well by many students. They understood precisely why Kirov was perceived as a possible threat by Stalin: factors such as Kirov's popularity, his party base in Leningrad, Stalin's 'paranoia', the shock at the Party congress, Kirov's disagreements with Stalin, and so on. The range of students' knowledge was impressive and there were very few disappointing responses.
- 06** Responses to this question were often good, certainly better overall than answers in response to Question 4. Students clearly know a lot about the Terror and the Purges, and often demonstrated their knowledge and their ability to use it to support relevant analysis. Some students wrote about Collectivisation or other events before 1936, and were not credited for this, but most did focus on events such as the show trials, the purge of the military and the activities of the NKVD. Balanced answers often debated also the impact of other 'events' such as industrialisation on the strengthening or the weakening of the USSR. There is a tendency sometimes to over-simplify issues. For example, the purge of the military in 1937 was extensive but did not kill all senior officers, and there were later rehabilitations. Although there is a strong argument that the military was weakened in some ways by 1941, there were also reforms (it could be argued that the weakness of the army in the first stages of Barbarossa was more to do with Stalin's leadership than intrinsic weaknesses in the army itself). Sweeping generalisations about all peasants being hostile to the regime by 1941, or that all Soviet citizens lived in absolute Terror, are also dubious, as reflected in many historical works produced during the last ten years. Nevertheless, most students did address the question directly and there were many impressive answers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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