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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2017

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in
History (WHI03) Paper 1B

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June 2017

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Principal Examiner Report WHI03 B

WHI03 is a new International Advanced level examination and this is the second examination series for it. WHI03 1B is divided into two sections. Section A comprises a compulsory source based question and assesses source analysis and evaluation skills(AO2). Section B consists of two essay questions of which the student is expected to answer one of them. They will assess the knowledge and understanding of the period in breadth (AO1). Questions, in this section, will be set so that they connect two or more of the key topics in the specification and will target a range of concepts which might include cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity.

The time available for the paper did allow students the opportunity to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. However, this was not the case with all and it would be advisable for candidates to spend a short while getting their thoughts in order before writing their answers. This would be relevant to both sections of the paper.

In general, it was section A that seemed to present the greater challenge to the students as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. Difficulties were encountered in moving beyond surface comprehension of the sources and evaluation which was little more than either stereotypical judgements or, at best, questionable assumptions drawn from the sources. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made.

Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater focus and engagement with the stated issues in the questions. Many responses showed good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed the key topics being considered. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative they were in a minority.

Comments on Individual questions.

Question 1.

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources and were able to draw out inferences from them which related to the abilities of Winston Churchill as a wartime political leader. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived. Therefore some students focused successfully on the extent of criticism as shown in the Hopkinson source or the personal qualities and style of leadership as developed in source 2. The very best interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements which weighed up the strengths or otherwise of the material in relation to the investigation under consideration. The latter point is important as the focus of responses needs to be directly on the area of investigation asked in the question.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. Often the issue of Churchill as a wartime political leader was ignored. In these types of responses contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. However, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with almost no or exceptionally limited references to the sources. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly. In other instances, where utility was addressed through the provenance it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions such as Hopkinson was left wing and so cannot be trusted or Eisenhower was American and consequently knew little about Churchill.

Question 2

This was the least popular of the two questions. The question considered how accurate it was to say that politicians and the government machine were more successful in organising the war effort in the years 1803-15 than in the years 1854-56. Stronger responses clearly weighed up the efforts in both periods, established criteria such as finance or recruitment to judge success and even considered the impact of individual politicians such as Pitt or, in some cases, Gladstone. Key areas such as supplies, taxation and difficulties experienced in keeping armies in the wars were explored and discussed using valid criteria to judge success.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both

range and depth. Weaker responses also often only considered one of the time periods in any depth and so made it difficult to address all its demands and to make supported judgements relevant to the question.

Question 3

There were more responses to this question in which students had to consider the extent and nature of support from the British public for Britain's involvement in both the Second Boer and First World Wars. The best answers considered the extent of support through exploring such issues as recruitment, opposition and the role of government in shaping public attitudes towards the two wars. Valid criteria to establish the level of support were established and developed and the issue of 'firmly' considered.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also, in a number of cases mistook the Second Boer War for the Second World War and so compromised the relevance of their answer. This made it harder to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses only engaged with one of the two periods in the question, normally the First World War, and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Students are offered the following advice for the future:

Section A

- Students need to draw from the sources inferences that are relevant to the enquiry in the question. These inferences should be developed through the use of contextual knowledge which is relevant to the enquiry in the question.
- Students need to move beyond stereotypical judgements or assumptions that are questionable and unsupported when engaging with the provenance of the source.
- Students need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry.
- Students should consider the stance or purpose of the author of the source and be aware how this might be affected by the values and concerns of the society from which it is drawn.
- Sources should be interrogated with distinctions being made between such things as claims and opinions.
- Students must avoid engaging with the enquiry simply from their knowledge. The answer needs to be focused on how the sources help the historian and knowledge used to discuss the inferences or points arising from the sources.

Section B

- Students need to read the question carefully so as to fully understand the time periods being considered and the full range of issues that they are being asked to consider.
- Students would benefit from taking some time to plan their answers. As the examination is quite generous in its time allocation this would still allow plenty of time to write the answers.
- Students should consider what criteria might be used to shape or reinforce the judgements being made.
- Students need to avoid description and develop analytical responses which make clear and supported judgements relevant to the question.
- Students should try to establish links between the arguments being made and, if relevant, weigh up the relative importance of them.

