Pearson Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level In History (WHI03)

Paper 3: Thematic Study with Source Evaluation

Option 1B: The British Experience of Warfare, 1803–1945

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Introduction

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 candidate 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 candidates the opportunity to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. Also this helped to keep the candidates focused more clearly on the task in hand. Most plans were of a reasonable length and detail so as to outline the overall argument but occasionally they became so lengthy that they constricted the time available to actually write the response.However, 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 candidates as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. There was some evidence that greater familiarity with this type of question was resulting in less very weak, generalised and ill focused answers. 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. This was particularly the case when dealing with the provenance of the sources where unsupported references to the bias in a source continue but with little reward. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources, supported them with appropriate quotations and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made. The question requires candidates to use the sources 'together' and it was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates continue to be aware of this requirement. It can be achieved using a variety of different approaches.

In section B centres do need to be aware that questions can address the same time periods from the specification and that there is no requirement to always cover all key topics in an individual paper. 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. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-points which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these descriptors progress through the levels. Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

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 threats to civilian morale posed by enemy bombing. Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility of the sources to the historian in the context of the enquiry (e.g. Martin suggests that civilians were mostly resilient in the face of the bombing and that morale remained buoyant 'but bombs do not induce surrender').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 Joyce source or the praise for the qualities and adaptability of civilians by Martin. 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 enquiry under consideration. The latter point is important as the focus of responses needs to be directly on the area of enquiry 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. 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. On occasions the answers drifted away from the focus on the threats to civilian morale posed by enemy bombing and concentrated simply on the results of bombing to the detriment of the overall mark. Direct focus on the specific issue in the question is essential. Moreover many responses focused too much attention on what the sources left out and used this as the basis for their evaluation. Unless candidates can show that omissions are deliberate, this line of argument carries little value. Source material cannot be expected to include everything, so observing that the source doesn't mention a specific point, unless being used for an example of deliberate omission is unlikely to be valid criteria for judgement. Candidates are asked to evaluate what is there rather than what is not. If the author of the source has omitted something intentionally in order to modify meaning or distort the message of the source, then it will be relevant to discuss that in reaching a conclusion. However, discussion of all the things that the sources might have contained but failed to do so is unlikely to contribute to developing the argument. This approach was still evident this year, although less so than last.

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 a mixture of misunderstanding (Joyce was female), stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions such as Joyce was Irish and they like the English or Martin was a socialist and so would support the government.

Question 2

This was the least popular of the two questions. The question considered whether the candidates agreed with the statement that financing the war was one of the lesser problems faced by the British in both the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15) and the Crimean War (1854–56). Stronger responses clearly weighed up the two issues in both periods, established criteria such as impact on the National Debt or ability to finance allies to judge success and even considered the impact of individual politicians such as Pitt or Gladstone. Key areas such as taxation, difficulties experienced in developing winning tactics and logistical difficulties encountered in prosecuting the two 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 it's demands and to make supported judgements relevant to the question.

Question 3

There were more responses to this question in which candidates had to consider whether good leadership of the war effort was more evident in trench warfare on the Western Front (1914–18) than in the Crimean War (1854–56). Good leadership could be interpreted in a number of different ways including military and/or political. Credit was given to all approaches and responses judged on the strength of argument and detail. Strong answers successfully considered leadership during both periods to make judgements about the significance of their contribution. The best answers considered, weighed up and linked such issues as military planning and execution and/or the role of politicians in successfully organising the war effort. Judgements made were clear, well supported and based on clear criteria which often considered the changing context of warfare over the two periods in time.

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 found it harder to bring in supporting examples from across the two periods and this made it harder to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses showed little understanding of the meaning of leadership and became a narrative of events. This limited severely their ability to score highly.

Students are offered the following advice for the future:

Section A

- Candidates need to draw from the sources inferences that are both supported and 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
- Candidates need to move beyond stereotypical judgements or assumptions that are questionable and unsupported when engaging with the provenance of the source
- Candidates need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry
- Candidates 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. The sources should be used together at some point in the answer
- Candidates 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

- Candidates 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
- Candidates 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.
- Candidates should consider what criteria might be used to shape or reinforce the judgements being made For example in a continuity/change question criteria such as political, social or economic, if relevant, might help to provide a framework.
- Candidates need to avoid description and develop analytical responses which make clear and supported judgements relevant to the question
- Candidates should try to establish links between the arguments being made and, if relevant, weigh up the relative importance of them.