



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1H

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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Unit HIS1H

Unit 1H: Tsarist Russia, 1855–1917

General Comments

This examination attracted a substantial number of entries. The overall candidate performance was in some ways disappointing, because a substantial proportion of candidates did not deal effectively with topics which are central to the specification, or in some cases, demonstrated good levels of knowledge but did not adapt that knowledge effectively to the demands of individual questions. Time was not an issue for most candidates, since they generally managed to answer four part- questions. However, an issue with part (a) questions, is that candidates frequently write too much, certainly more than is necessary, turning the answers into essays more worthy of part (b) questions. These candidates possibly then put themselves under undue time pressure when answering those part (b), questions, which carry double the marks. There were very few rubric offences, where a candidate attempted all questions. A small number of candidates did not attempt the requisite number of questions.

As ever, there were many candidates who showed impressive levels of knowledge and understanding and combined this with very good analysis, evaluation and judgement. However, there were also a significant number of candidates with very limited accurate knowledge and understanding, for example confusing the two Revolutions of 1917. Also some had poor literacy and communication skills, which significantly reduced the quality of the answer. Some candidates would benefit from more training in examination technique, since they demonstrate good knowledge and understanding but waste valuable time by undue repetition, especially in conclusions which, instead of synthesising the argument, sometimes repeat word for word what has already been written earlier in the answer.

Question 1 was the most popular of the three questions, with little to choose between Questions 2 and 3, although the latter was usually answered much better.

Question 1

- (a) This question was answered well by many candidates. Weaker answers sometimes showed lack of knowledge, or wrote about the process of industrialisation or its impact rather than Witte's motives in promoting it. Many candidates knew enough about the motives to be securely in Level 3, commenting on facts such as the desire to strengthen the Russian economy and defence capability, the desire to 'catch up with the West', and the desire to make Russia less dependent on agriculture. There were several answers which achieved Level 4 by effectively linking the motives or showing good historical perspective.
- (b) Answers to the question were very variable in quality. Several candidates did not read the question carefully enough, writing too much about the pre-Witte period. There were relatively few answers which focused effectively on the situation in 1914. Consequently relatively few candidates got into the highest two levels. There were too many answers which indulged in unsupported assertions. There was an obsession with the Trans-Siberian railway, whose contribution to the overall Russian economy was grossly over-estimated.

Question 2

- (a) Many answers to this question simply failed to get off the ground, since although liberals are specifically mentioned in the specification, large numbers of candidates did not know who liberals were or what they stood for. Often they were ignored or confused with groups like Populists and Marxists. Therefore, even lengthy answers were often about opposition to the regime generally. There were a minority of candidates who did know what Liberal concerns were, and wrote knowledgeably about the desire for constitutional reform and civil rights, and related this well to attitudes towards Alexander II's reforms and towards his successor Alexander III. Candidates are still prone to make simplistic assertions, believing that Alexander III reversed all reforms, including the abolition of serfdom, or believe that Alexander II was a closet democrat.
- (b) This question was often answered poorly. The wording of the question did allow candidates, if they wished, to discuss various factors which led to the fall of the tsarist regime. However, to access the higher levels it was also necessary to specifically analyse the role of political opposition. Many candidates appeared to simply ignore the question, and wrote about the impact of the War on the economy and the army, and wrote at length about Alexandra and Rasputin. Some candidates wasted too much time by writing about pre-1914 events such as the 1905 revolution, or even worse, confused this with the 1917 revolution. Several candidates confused the two revolutions of 1917. Key aspects of the political opposition were usually ignored, such as the activities of the zemstvos, the Duma and the Progressive Bloc. Where candidates did write about political opposition, there were often assertions about the role of groups such as the Bolsheviks (sometimes confused with SRs), with no real evaluation of their significance. Although there were good answers to this question, showing balance and informed evaluation, they were few and far between.

Question 3

- (a) This question produced a range of responses, but was often answered well. Candidates often understood the concern of the regime to quell discontent and divide the opposition, appealing in particular to those 'moderates' who wanted to focus on civil rights and constitutional reform. Weaker answers tended to explain the background of the 1905 Revolution, which was of course legitimate, but disadvantaged themselves by devoting their whole answer to a narrative of that Revolution. A few candidates also went off at a tangent, ignoring Nicholas II's motives and writing a description of the Dumas, often going well beyond 1906.
- (b) This question was overall answered better than the other part (b) questions. Answers were often knowledgeable and well argued. Most candidates wrote balanced accounts of Stolypin's contribution, although answers are sometimes marred by mechanical references to 'schools of thought' such as structuralism, 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' views and so on, terms which have to be used with care and sophistication or else add nothing to the answer, particularly if not supported by convincing evidence. There were many good answers which focused on key areas such as Stolypin's repression and his agricultural reforms, although his key role in managing and manipulating the Duma was often ignored or played down. It was pleasing that most candidates did attempt to evaluate Stolypin's overall contribution, albeit with varying degrees of conviction.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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