



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS2L

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

Unit HIS2L

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

General Comments

This examination had a substantial number of entries. The response was very encouraging, and there were large numbers of high-quality scripts, demonstrating an impressive combination of knowledge and analytical ability. Candidates often wrote at length, and did finish answers. There were very few rubric offences, caused when candidates opted for unacceptable combinations of questions. Of the two optional questions, Question 2 was more popular than Question 3. There were relatively few scripts which showed very low levels of knowledge or understanding or were overly disadvantaged by very poor literacy or communication skills.

Question 1

This question was answered successfully by many candidates. The great majority understood the two sources well. A small minority misinterpreted Source A, believing that the author was trying to paint a very negative picture of the changes going on in rural Russia. As in last summer's examination, it was pleasing that candidates were often skilled at integrating the use of sources with their own knowledge. When dealing with issues of provenance, many candidates remain less secure. There is still a tendency of some candidates to assess the quality of sources by defining them as primary or secondary, assuming that one is automatically more 'useful' or 'reliable' than the other.

- (a) This question was usually done well. Candidates picked out both the obvious differences and similarities in the tone and content of the two sources. They also identified aspects such as the fact that Source A was written during the early stages of Collectivisation, and was as much about the 'advance of civilisation' generally as about agriculture. Own knowledge was used effectively to reinforce comparisons and contrasts, for example by tying in Stalin's temporary halt to Collectivisation during the 'dizzy with success' phase with the recognition in Source B that there was some disruption during Collectivisation, albeit this was in a source which was overall positive about the process. There were some weaker answers which did little more than regurgitate the content of both sources, but most candidates did attempt a reasoned evaluation.
- (b) Answers to this question were more variable in quality, but still showed many good qualities overall. It was pleasing that most candidates did remember to use both the sources and their own knowledge, often integrating them well, but there was a still a minority who showed good understanding and knowledge in the answer but never used the sources even implicitly, and therefore did not get beyond Level 2. A relative weakness was that many answers focused almost exclusively on the period from 1928 to the early 1930s. It was disappointing that there was often little or no analysis of the situation in the late 1930s, given the evidence, for example, that attitudes by 1941 were less polarised perhaps than ten years previously. Some candidates also spent too much time analysing industry. Nevertheless, many candidates did get into Levels 4 and 5 because they were able to combine knowledge with analysis and show convincingly and in a balanced way how agriculture fitted in with the Soviet economy as a whole. They were also able to sustain judgement throughout their answers or at key points.

Question 2

- (a) This question was generally answered well. Most candidates knew extensively about the context of Lenin's Testament. They were knowledgeable both about the various 'contenders' for power, and also about the uncertainty which followed Lenin's death. Consequently many answers achieved Level 3 or Level 4, particularly when making effective links between the various factors. Some answers went too far beyond 1924, really addressing the power struggle later in the 1920s. Also some candidates, although writing good answers in terms of content, wrote too much, almost complete essays, which may have put them under pressure later on when answering part (b) questions which carry more marks.
- (b) This question was also often answered well, because many candidates were very knowledgeable about the power struggle and events generally during the 1920s. They recognised that the issues were about both personalities and policies. There were many impressive, balanced answers, which explored in some depth the relationship between the weaknesses of the Left and other factors, such as Stalin's 'strengths' and the role of the Right, although this latter aspect was sometimes ignored. Weaker answers were those which either treated the whole question as 'Stalin versus Trotsky', focused almost exclusively on Trotsky, or worst of all, ignored the Left altogether and treated the whole answer as an analysis of Stalin, which whilst showing good levels of knowledge, did not answer the question.

Question 3

- (a) This question was usually answered well. Candidates understood the various motives for Stalin promoting the policy of 'socialism in one country'. When they were able to link the various reasons, such as Stalin's desire to discredit Trotsky, the concern of many to focus on building up the USSR, and concerns about NEP, they often reached Level 4, particularly when backing up the arguments with sufficient knowledge.
- (b) This question was often answered well. Although many candidates did not attempt to define Stalinism as a concept, they were able to explain the various facets, such as the emphasis upon propaganda, the command economy, the role of the Party and Terror, the role of education and other factors. Good answers were balanced, because they addressed the issue of how all-pervasive Stalinism actually was, although sometimes weaker answers were marred by assertions, for example about what people actually thought, without considering available evidence. Many answers showed a good awareness of different interpretations, although it is not expected that candidates know specific historians or particular 'schools of thought'. Many impressive candidates gained Levels 4 or 5 because they combined extensive knowledge with analysis and informed, sustained judgement as the question required.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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