



General Certificate of Education

History 1041

Specification

Unit HIS1H

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Unit HIS1H

Unit 1H: Tsarist Russia, 1855–1917

General Comments

This examination attracted an even larger number of candidates than last June, and has become one of the most popular Unit 1 choices for centres. While such a large candidature means there are inevitable extremes in performance, the overall performance of candidates was very encouraging. The majority were knowledgeable and well prepared, and managed their time effectively. There were few unfinished answers and most candidates were able to balance their time well between the four responses required. The introduction of a new numbering system on the paper posed no discernible problems for candidates and there were very few rubric errors.

Most candidates were able to approach the first sub (formerly part a) questions effectively, identifying and explaining factors clearly. An increasing proportion of candidates have been coached into adopting a formula for these answers, by including clear indicators that they are writing about a second or third factor and that they are about to offer a link between factors. While there is nothing wrong with this approach, some of the weaker candidates did simply repeat reasons or include irrelevant contextual description within this framework which could not be credited. The best answers addressed the question concisely and precisely and provided analysis and overview to gain higher marks, for example by prioritising or linking reasons.

Second part (formerly part b) answers were a clear discriminator between candidates. All three were on topics or themes which are central to the specification and with which candidates were clearly very familiar. Disappointingly, some weaker candidates ignored the focus of the particular question set and instead provided a general answer on the topic at large. While all relevant material was credited, these candidates lost marks because they did not have the balance demanded by the question set and they could not provide relevant assessment. The best answers used the words from the question repeatedly as a focus for assessment and analysis. They included a range of relevant material, with clear and precise support for a structured argument. Many candidates demonstrated an impressive depth of factual knowledge and some included precise reference to named historians. When used appropriately these references can support a balanced assessment, but candidates must avoid vague statements about what some historians believe.

Question one was overwhelmingly the most popular among candidates. Answers were then fairly evenly divided between questions two and three.

Question 1

01 Most candidates answered this question very well, by explaining a range of factors. Most were able to explain the reasons for reform by referring to a range of military, economic and social factors highlighted by defeat in the Crimean War. Some tied in other factors like Alexander II's upbringing by indicating convincingly that this context made him sensitive to the issues highlighted by defeat. Successful answers made material relevant to this question, but a few of the weakest candidates simply did not use the question carefully enough. They focused on reasons for reform tangential to defeat in the Crimean War and made no attempt to link them to it. For example, they described the evils of serfdom without explaining how abolishing it might prevent future defeats. These answers could

only be credited at lower levels. However, the best answers not only explained reasons clearly but also made good links between them to secure the highest levels.

- 02** This was a very popular question and the topic of the extent and nature of reform has appeared repeatedly on past papers. Consequently, candidates were able to offer a good range of relevant material and took several different but equally valid approaches to the question. Some focused on the limitations of the reforms themselves, examining in depth the extent to which they solved problems and thereby met the hopes of reformers. Others focused more on the reformers themselves and what they were hoping for, arguing that their demands were unrealistic in the context of Alexander II's reforms. Some distinguished well between groups of reformers and radicals in a focused argument. Any of these approaches was valid. The best answers repeatedly addressed the question: how far were the hopes of reformers fulfilled? In this way, they kept their material focused and their argument tight, offering the analysis and judgement needed for the highest levels. Weaker candidates were not so disciplined and sometimes struggled to marshal their material into a structured answer. These weak answers became descriptive or unfocused which was a shame, because in some cases candidates had clearly worked hard to memorise a lot of information.

Question 2

- 03** This question really divided candidates into those who knew the answer and those who did not. This lack of knowledge from some candidates was surprising, in that the Social Democrats are mentioned specifically on the specification. Many candidates were able to explain clearly reasons like differences over membership, leadership of the revolution, timing of the revolution, cooperation with reformers or differences in personality between key figures like Lenin and Martov. Others explained the context, in which the formation of new groups was not uncommon. Some offered an impressive depth of knowledge on Marxist philosophy, which was certainly not essential even for the highest levels. In general, candidates should be advised that if they cannot answer the twelve mark sub-question, they should not attempt the question at all because a minority of candidates did actually write nothing.
- 04** Again, this topic has featured repeatedly on past papers and is central to the specification so candidates were generally familiar with the material and key issues. Strong answers included a good range of relevant material on overcoming opposition, such as political reform, economic change and the use of repression. The best answers also addressed the whole nine year period and made some assessment of the level of success across it, distinguishing between the turmoil of 1905, the apparent calm from around 1908 and the increase in agitation around 1912. Some answers, though, were less successful. Some weaker candidates focused exclusively on one area such as the Dumas and became confused about the events, offering a narrow narrative with errors. Others focused only on the 1905 Revolution and then made bald and sweeping assertions about the success of Nicholas II without offering evidence. A few offered irrelevant material beyond 1914, and these tended to be those who had performed badly or written nothing for Question 03.

Question 3

- 05** Most candidates understood the question and were able to offer some reasons, but in some cases the range of reasons was quite narrow or lacked development. Weaker answers tended to describe the context of April 1917 without successfully linking it to Lenin issuing the April Theses. Better answers focused more specifically on the Bolsheviks and Lenin's leadership.

- 06** The overthrow of the Provisional Government in October/ November 1917 is a favourite topic for candidates and most answers were knowledgeable and well argued. Most candidates were able to explain various interpretations of why the Provisional Government was overthrown, drawing attention to its weakness, the problems it faced and the growing strengths of the Bolsheviks. Many answers were very good indeed, with convincing argument throughout and frequent weighing of the relative importance of the issues. However, some weaker candidates wrote too generally, without focus on this question. The weakest answers only addressed the key issue of weak leadership in the conclusion, if at all. Some tried to make assertions about Kerensky's personality with no clear evidence and it was certainly not necessary to offer character profiles of Kerensky or Lvov, although some candidates did do that. Stronger candidates were able to make a convincing case for weak leadership, tying in issues like competition with the Soviet or the delays in introducing substantial reform.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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