



General Certificate of Education

History 2041

Specification

Unit HIS3K

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

Unit HIS3K

Unit 3K: Triumph and Collapse: Russia and the USSR, 1941–1991

General Comments

This was the first examination for this specification, and was new territory not just for the candidates but also for many of their teachers also. The overall results were promising, with evidence that the majority of candidates had come to terms well with the demands of the specification. They demonstrated often an impressive command of relevant factual detail, and also a range of requisite examination skills, particularly the ability to analyse information and use it to answer the particular question being addressed. As always in A Level examinations, the key to a high-scoring answer was the ability to answer the specific question set, the ability to analyse information and not just describe events, and the ability to make a balanced judgement. Candidates were often under time pressure, but nevertheless often wrote at impressive length. Standards of written communication varied considerably. There were very few examples of rubric offences.

Whilst the levels of knowledge and understanding were often impressive, a significant minority of candidates, whichever questions they attempted, were confused about a particular aspect of this specification: the relationship of Russia with the other component parts of the USSR and with the Eastern European states of Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. In terms of the specification, the non-Russian parts of the USSR, including the Baltic States absorbed by the USSR in 1940 and again in 1945, are referred to as the 'Republics', and their inhabitants as the 'Nationalities'. The Eastern European states mentioned above are usually referred to as the 'satellite states', or the USSR's European Allies. In theory at any rate, these states were independent, with their own sovereign governments, albeit very much within the Soviet sphere of influence. Yet many candidates use these terms interchangeably. This leads them often into broad assertions, for example about the developments leading to the break-up of the USSR in 1991, which are simply not true or confusing. Countries such as Hungary are often mentioned in the same breath as, for example, the Ukraine, which is simply confusing when candidates are writing about Soviet 'domestic' policy. 'Nationalities' is usually the term given to non-Russian groups within the USSR, not the inhabitants of the satellite states.

Similarly loose terminology is often also applied in the case of 'dissidence'. In terms of the syllabus, this term has a fairly specific meaning: the individuals or groups of people such as intellectuals, writers, religious minorities and so on, who came into prominence during Brezhnev's era and later, and who were people with specific aspirations or complaints about how they were treated within the USSR. As such they were relatively small minorities compared to the total size of the Soviet population. However, some candidates use the term loosely, for example when referring to any group or individual expressing any dissatisfaction with something going on inside the country, such as a response to a particular policy.

Question 1

01 This was a popular question. The quality of answers was very variable. Whilst it was perfectly acceptable for candidates to explain the damage suffered by the USSR during the 1941–1945 War as a prelude to discussing the degree of recovery after 1945, it was not relevant to spend the bulk of the answer either just outlining the events of the war itself, or analysing why the USSR defeated Germany. This is what a number of

candidates did. Good answers were those which concentrated primarily on the 1945–1953 period. Many candidates did this well by focusing on the economy, which clearly was crucial. Most candidates explained the differences in the performance of industry and agriculture; better answers explained the differences between different sectors of industry, for example staple industries, other capital goods, consumer goods, defence products and so on. It was strange that several answers completely ignored such a significant factor as the Fourth Five Year Plan, which exemplified both the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet economy. Another way of achieving a good mark was to analyse, in addition to the economy, other aspects of the Soviet experience: for example the impact of the war on demography, on living and working conditions, on the psychology of the population, on Stalin's methods of government, on cultural development, and so on. There were very many well-informed, balanced analyses of these factors; at the other extreme there were answers which were not relevant or which were very generalised.

Question 2

- 02** This was also a popular question, and often answered well. Good answers focused on the question: they analysed the components of 'Stalinism' and then examined the extent to which Khrushchev's policies or actions fitted in with this model or altered it in some way. Weakest answers were those that largely ignored the thrust of the question and answered a different question, by writing just about what was successful or unsuccessful about Khrushchev's time in power. Candidates were often knowledgeable about factors such as the drive to improve agriculture, the policy of improving the provision of consumer goods, the 'Thaw' in culture, the attempted reforms of the Party, changes in the police and attitudes towards state terror. What should be emphasised, as many candidates did, but not all, is that some of Khrushchev's policies which might be regarded as a modification of Stalinism, such as decentralisation of government departments and changes in the Party structure, were mostly blocked, modified or even discarded even before Khrushchev's fall from power. Clearly candidates are knowledgeable about the Khrushchev period, but they need to be certain that they address the specific question in front of them.

Question 3

- 03** This question often produced impressive amounts of knowledge. In fact, many candidates wrote too much and became bogged down in detail. The purpose of the 'breadth' question is to enable candidates to develop their arguments over a period of time. Whilst assertion should be avoided and arguments need a reasonable amount of substantiation, it is not expected that answers to these questions show the same depth of knowledge as expected for other questions. It is simply unreasonable to expect 'breadth' answers with extensive detail in the time available in examinations. Yet many candidates attempted to cover both the breadth and the detail, writing extremely long accounts. The result was often that they ran out of steam, for example writing extensively about the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, and showing exhaustion by the time they arrived at Gorbachev, who received very scanty treatment or was actually ignored. It was possible to get to the highest level in two ways: either by focusing on economic developments, which was the nub of the question; or combining this with an analysis of other factors such as the role of the Party or the development of separatist sentiments in the Republics as causes of the 1991 break-up. What could not get a good mark was an answer which glossed over the economic focus altogether and only analysed these 'other' factors. There were many good answers which did consider different interpretations, for example about the rationale behind Gorbachev's policies and their impact.

It is clear that these 'breadth' questions require very different skills from the 'depth' questions, and many candidates need better training for either category or both, in order to have the best chance of overall success. On a positive note, many candidates did do well when attempting *both* types of question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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