



**General Certificate of Education  
June 2011**

**History 1041**

**Unit HIS2E**

***Report on the Examination***

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# Unit HIS2E

## Unit 2E: The Reign of Peter the Great of Russia, 1682–1725

### General Comments

It was pleasing to note a good standard in the answers to this year's examination. Candidates seem to generally understand what will be expected of them and centres should be congratulated for preparing their candidates so well. Particularly pleasing was the fact that candidates seemed far more secure in their knowledge and were able to give detailed support in their responses. Chronology was less of an issue than it has been in some past papers but there were still some silly errors from some candidates, such as placing the Battle of Narva before the Great Embassy. The more secure candidates are, both in their examples and chronology, the better able they are to make convincing arguments which reach the highest levels. Comments on specific questions follow.

### Question 1

- 01** Most candidates were able to pick out similarities and differences between the two sources. Some candidates still persist in summarising each of the sources at length and then concluding with a brief paragraph of comparison; they would be better advised to take a comparative approach throughout their answer. Candidates are becoming more competent at linking their own knowledge and understanding to the development of the comparison, although there are some who do still write a mini-essay which is not connected to the comparison and for which they receive little reward. It was also pleasing to see fewer general comments about provenance and candidates are more able to explain and link these to the content of the sources and to the comparison.
- 02** This question was generally well-answered. There were some candidates who limited their responses to the information in the sources with no development, and a very few who unfortunately failed to use the sources at all and were thus limited to Level 2 whatever the quality of their argument, but the vast majority of candidates reached at least Level 3. However, this question did sometimes show some candidates' lack of understanding of chronology, for example responses that argued that reforms such as the Table of Ranks or the Soul Tax helped Peter win the Battle of Poltava. Nevertheless, many candidates had very good knowledge of the Battle of Poltava and the reasons why Russia was successful, and were able to produce balanced arguments with good levels of support referring with specific examples to, for example, Peter's reforms (both pre- and post-Narva), Charles's actions and to the battle itself. The very best answers showed some sophisticated understanding, for example, linking together long-term lessons drawn from the Battle of Narva to the short-term events at Poltava, or arguing that one element was more important in a convincing fashion.

### Question 2

This was, by far, the more popular of the two optional questions.

- 03** Most candidates were able to identify a range of reasons why Peter the Great went on the Great Embassy in 1697. Some candidates were only able to refer to very general reasons and there were quite a few candidates who were not able to put the visit into the context of the Azov campaign and so assumed that the aim of the visit was an anti-Swedish alliance.

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There were a few candidates who described the events of the Great Embassy and sometimes reasons were only implicit. Other candidates wanted to turn the question into one which assessed the success of the Great Embassy; whilst they gained credit for any motives they identified, the question did not require any evaluation of success and candidates would have spent their time better developing these motives rather than looking at the consequences of the trip. However, there were a great many candidates who were able to explain in depth Peter's motives; modernisation, westernisation, personal curiosity, foreign policy, referring to Peter's overall aims, his background, the context of 1697. The very best of these made links or prioritised these reasons, although there were perhaps a surprising number of candidates who having explained in detail a range of reasons indicating good knowledge, then made no links/prioritisation and were therefore limited to Level 3. However, having said this, candidates should be reminded that stating the importance of one reason above others without support is of limited value.

- 04** Some candidates did find this question difficult, struggling to link Peter's westernisation reforms to divisions in society and sometimes conflating divisions with the unpopularity of, or opposition to, Peter. Where divisions were implicit, examiners gave credit but candidates must respond to the focus of the question asked to reach the higher levels. Others, whilst recognising the focus on divisions, were unable to support their points beyond a recognition that society was divided between those that supported reform and those that did not, or simply described westernisation and asserted that divisions were widened or narrowed. However, there were many candidates who did focus on divisions explicitly and made some good references to those between nobles and serfs, between Old Believers and reformers, between men and women, between different classes of nobles, serfs, state serfs and free peasants. Candidates referred to a wide range of westernisation policies: the Table of Ranks, cultural change, economic policies, religious reform etc to argue whether divisions in society were increased or not. The very best answers had a good range with support and showed judgement, perhaps recognising different impacts in different areas or amongst different groups.

### **Question 3**

This was the less popular of the two optional questions.

- 05** Candidates were generally able to provide a number of convincing reasons as to why there was limited opposition to religious reform. They were able to point to the lack of a Patriarch, the fact that belief and doctrine were not threatened, as well as Peter's position as an absolute Tsar and fear of him and his secret police. Weaker answers tended to describe Peter's religious reforms commenting only briefly on a lack of opposition. The best answers had a good range of reasons, together with clear explanations which prioritised or linked these.
- 06** Candidates who answered this question generally did so because they had a good knowledge of Peter's attempts to improve education. Most candidates were able to make reference to cipher schools, garrison schools and Academies. Some good points were made about the impact of the Great Embassy and the use of foreign teachers. Weaker responses were perhaps less secure on the role of the Church in education and sometimes confused about the role of ecclesiastical schools, but there were also some sophisticated answers that argued that reform of the Church lessened the potential conservative opposition to secular and western educational innovations. Weaker answers tended to be very general or were confused about the schools introduced, sometimes referring to the College system. Nevertheless, the vast majority of candidates who chose this question were able to show their knowledge to support clear arguments that responded to the demands of the question.

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