



**General Certificate of Education
June 2011**

History 2041

Unit HIS3K

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

Unit HIS3K

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

General Comments

As with the first examination of this specification in 2010, the summer 2011 examination demonstrated many positive qualities on the part of candidates. These were very evident in the range and quality of relevant factual detail, and the necessary examination skills such as the ability to combine knowledge with analysis whilst sustaining an answer which is directly focused on the question. The skill of supporting and sustaining a balanced judgement was evident in the many high scoring scripts. Although candidates are under considerable time pressure, they usually wrote at impressive length. There were very few examples of rubric offences. A pleasing aspect of the examination was that many candidates showed evidence of considerable reading around the subject.

Some of the faults commented upon in last year's examination were still present in this examination. One concerns the relationship of Russia with the other Republics of the USSR and confusion of these Republics with the satellite Eastern European states of Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. It is worth repeating what was in last year's report: 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. Countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia should not be equated, for example, with the Ukraine. 'Nationalities' refers to non-Russian groups within the USSR, not the inhabitants of the satellite states. In contrast to 2010, and pleasingly so, this year's candidates were much clearer in their understanding of, and definition of, 'dissidence'.

Candidates are not expected to use historiography, but they are expected to understand 'interpretations': that is, be aware that there are many questions, such as why the USSR broke up in 1991, which can be subject to debate. Candidates are not expected to name historians. If they do show an awareness of a particular historian's views, this will of course be credited, so long as the information is used constructively and not just as 'name dropping.'

What candidates should be very wary of are so-called 'schools' of historical interpretation, whether they are 'structuralist', 'intentionalist' or whatever. These terms can be meaningless and constricting unless used very carefully. It is often not clear what 'revisionist' means. Candidates often refer to 'Soviet historians' views' when mentioning a writer like Volkogonov who, if anything, is a Russian post-Soviet historian. Candidates frequently talk about 'Western' historians as if they all speak with the same voice about Soviet history, which is clearly not the case. Whilst candidates do not lose marks for simplistic treatment of 'interpretations', neither do they gain credit unless these interpretations are used accurately and constructively.

Question 1

01 This was a popular question, and it was often answered well. Candidates knew a lot about the events of the Brezhnev regime and the level of both knowledge and understanding was impressive. What prevented some answers from getting into the highest level was when candidates displayed extensive knowledge, but did not specifically address the issue of stability, however that was to be defined. Candidates were usually

strongest on the political aspects, analysing the nature of Brezhnev's government, the stability of cadres, the conservative ethos and so on. Dissidence was usually treated well, and related to the issue of stability, although some candidates probably over-exaggerated its impact. Many candidates also wrote thoughtful sections on social developments during this period (although some candidates confused undoubted improvements in housing, education etc with 'high' living standards), and also the issue of the corrupt 'second economy', debating legitimately whether these factors added to, or detracted from, stability. Candidates clearly showed thoughtfulness and perspective (which was rewarded) when debating whether 'stability' was a great success for the regime, but achieved at the cost of storing up problems like nationalism in the Republics for the future.

Question 2

- 02** This question produced a more variable response. There were very good answers, which showed candidates with a clear command of the material, debating the nature of Gorbachev's motivation and his reforms, and analysing their impact. Weaker answers tended to be too generalised, making some sort of analysis of 'Gorbachev the reformer', but producing little concrete evidence of measures other than generalised assertions about perestroika and glasnost. Some answers were strong on the economy, but rather unbalanced in that they ignored, or treated very superficially, the political developments during this period. Candidates do need to keep the question firmly in their sights at all times. It was quite legitimate for candidates to refer to 'other factors' as part of the argument as to why the USSR broke up. However, sometimes candidates got carried away and focused most of their answer on a detailed examination of these 'other' factors, particularly the events which led to the breakaway of several Republics in the last few months of the Union. Whilst relevant, they spent too little time on Gorbachev and his reforms or lack of them, so although they got credit, these answers failed usually to get into the highest levels. Interestingly, candidates were very divided as to whether Gorbachev was or was not a 'radical' or 'successful' reformer, and this division of opinion does of course reflect the reality of historical debate.

Question 3

- 03** This question produced very variable responses. Sometimes it was tackled well. Often answers were unbalanced, for one of two reasons. One reason was that candidates sometimes focused rather too much on one period at the expense of others. For example, some candidates wrote a lot about Khrushchev's Virgin Lands experiment (sometimes forgetting his other agricultural policies), but said very little about the Stalinist or Brezhnev periods. Sometimes it was a different fault: candidates who over-concentrated on 'other weaknesses' of the Soviet economy. Whilst it was legitimate to create an overview of the economy in an attempt to put agriculture into a broader perspective, if this was done at the expense of relegating agriculture to a very small place in the answer, the candidate was not really answering the question effectively. Having said this, the experience of this question repeated what happened last year: these 'breadth' questions require different skills from the 'depth' questions and candidates need to be trained to meet the demands. It is certainly creditworthy for candidates to show a good perspective of the whole period; and then go on to ensure that they produce some evidence from each of the periods under consideration (in this case, clearly High Stalinism, Khrushchev and Brezhnev) – although not necessarily to the same extent – rather than get bogged down in one particular period. This is not an easy skill, particularly because most books to which candidates have access do not tend to tackle 'themes over time' in this way, which is why candidates do require careful preparation for this type 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.

UMS conversion calculator: www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion