



**General Certificate of Education  
January 2012**

**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 see some good answers to this examination paper which reflected clear knowledge and understanding and some careful preparation. One general point which is relevant to all questions is that students should be encouraged to be sometimes be more selective in their arguments and supporting evidence. Whilst it is understandable that students wish to use all their knowledge, their arguments would sometimes be better focussed and demonstrate greater awareness of the demands of the question with more careful selection.

#### Question 1

- 01** Most students were able to identify similarities and differences between the two sources. However, the tendency of some students to summarise each source, sometimes at length, before making any comparative points continues. It is disconcerting to see some answers of 3 pages plus which include only very limited sections addressing the question directly. Some students wanted to write extended arguments about the changes Peter brought in when the question specifically asked for a comparison of the views about the reasons Russia was weak at the beginning of Peter's reign. In these cases students should be encouraged to spend some time thinking about the relevant comparative points rather than writing more, but in an unfocussed way.
- 02** Students were generally able to argue that Peter was able to improve Russia's position in Europe supporting this with evidence about his success in the Great Northern War; this tended to concentrate on the Battle of Poltava and its consequences. Some students also commented on the development of the navy, the battle of Cape Hango and Russian control of the Baltic. It was also pleasing to see some students able to discuss the latter years of the Great Northern War, the events leading up to the Treaty of Nystadt and diplomacy, but for too many students their knowledge of Peter's foreign policy is limited to the Battles of Narva and Poltava which does limit their assessment. Some students also struggled with the need to assess change, giving examples of early failures such as the 1<sup>st</sup> Azov campaign as evidence that Russia's position in Europe did not improve, when examples such as this could have been used to greater effect to illustrate improvement if compared to later success. There were also a number of otherwise good answers which failed to have any balance; students were often not able to pick up on the points made in Source C: the nature of the dynastic marriages and the failure of Russia to be perceived as worthwhile ally for France. Some students were also confused by the fact that other European powers began to see Russia as a threat and interpreted this as a failure. However, the most common mistake made by students was to turn their answer into a general "How successful was Peter the Great?" essay including all manner of domestic reforms. Credit was given if these could be convincingly linked to Russia's changing position in Europe, but in many cases this material was largely irrelevant and students would have been better served by concentrating on the focus of the question.

### **Question 2**

This was probably slightly less popular than Question 3, but those students who chose to answer it generally demonstrated a good level of knowledge and understanding.

- 03** Students were largely able to give a range of reasons as to why the Senate was introduced. Sometimes students were a little general; most understood that it was introduced to help govern the country when Peter was away but not all students seemed aware that its introduction in 1711 was due to the Pruth campaign. There was also some confusion about the pre-Petrine governmental structure; many students assumed that the Senate replaced the Prikazy. However, there were a great many good answers which linked the introduction of the Senate to the demands of war (Peter's absence; the need for money) and/or to Peter's authority, for example commenting on the Streltsy rebellion which had earlier occurred in Peter's absence.
- 04** These answers were generally of a good standard. Students were usually able to refer to a range of governmental reform (for example, the Senate; Colleges; local government), and sometimes effectively bring in other reforms (such as the Table of Ranks and education) to assess whether or not Peter the Great's reforms made government more effective. Weaker answers tended to be hamstrung by a lack of knowledge, sometimes limited to the Senate only, or were only able to make very general assertions with no support.

### **Question 3**

- 05** This question was generally answered well. Most answers were well focused and students were able to refer to a range of reasons as to why St. Petersburg was unpopular. Weaker answers tended to concentrate on why Peter wanted to build St. Petersburg rather than its unpopularity.
- 06** There was a great deal of variation in the quality of answers to this question. Some students interpreted the westernisation of Russia as success in foreign policy; in these cases there was often very limited relevant material though credit was given if students referred to western reform in the army or navy. As in Question 2, there were too many students who wanted to assess the success of all Peter's reform rather than concentrating on the demands of the question: whether Peter succeeded in westernising Russia. However, there were also many good answers where students selected their evidence carefully in order to produce a balanced argument.

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