



**General Certificate of Education
June 2012**

History 2041

Unit HIS3K

Report on the Examination

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

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges 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 schools/colleges 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

The 2012 examination produced, as in previous years, a pleasingly high standard of responses overall, with students often displaying a good combination of knowledge and analytical ability. The amount that students managed to write under pressure was often very impressive, but more to the point, answers were usually relevant and were a credit to the hard work which many students had clearly put into the course as a whole and in preparing specifically for the examination. The depth of detailed knowledge showed that many students had read a good deal of relevant material, and were aware of relevant interpretations. As always, students who achieved the best marks were those who not only displayed the qualities mentioned, but were also able to make reasonably balanced and well-supported judgements, demonstrating a good focus on the question throughout their answers. Attempts to show ‘balance’ were less successful when students simply went through all the arguments on one side of an issue, and then through the other side of the argument, almost as if there were no connection. If this approach is not done carefully, and the student does not attempt an overall informed judgement, however qualified, such answers run the danger of simply appearing to contradict themselves. Students are expected to show an awareness of different interpretations where applicable, but it does not mean that they have to accept them all at face value. It is also true that examiners are not looking for historiography, which is not the same as ‘interpretations’. Where students make informed references, they will be credited. Less impressive are attempts, which are rarely meaningful, to categorise certain types of ‘interpretation’ as belonging to a particular school of thought, whether it be ‘structuralist’, ‘intentionalist’, ‘Western’, ‘revisionist’ and so on. This approach often leads to an impression, for example, that all ‘Western’ historians have a particular view on a particular issue, which of course is not the case; whilst even ‘Soviet historians’ do not always parrot the same interpretation of every event. These comments were made in last year’s report, but the rather simplistic approach to ‘interpretations’ is still evident in many answers and detracts from the overall quality of some responses.

Question 1

01 This was by far and away the most popular question on the examination paper, was attempted by most students, and produced the best responses overall. Certainly there was a higher proportion of top level answers to this question than to the other questions. This may have been partly due to the fact that the question covers the first part of the syllabus and partly the fact that students simply enjoyed the question and found it very accessible. Particularly impressive was the depth and range of knowledge of many students. It was possible for students to focus just on Stalin’s leadership to produce a very good answer. Some students did this, but the majority analysed Stalin’s wartime performance, and then balanced this against ‘other factors’ responsible for the Soviet victory, particularly ‘German errors’, but also factors such as the resilience of the Soviet people, the significance of Allied aid, and so on. Answers which received appropriate credit but were less effective overall were those that did some brief analysis of Stalin’s role, but took most of the answer to concentrate on these ‘other’ factors, particularly the role of Hitler and the issues surrounding Nazi military and political strategies. In so doing students only partially answered the question. There were plenty of issues to debate, and most students did so effectively: for example, the debate about Stalin’s leadership in the initial stages of the German attack; the role of important agencies such as Stavka and

GKO in the wartime leadership; the effectiveness of Stalin as a commander and the degree to which he learned to trust experts and become a more effective war leader; Stalin's management of the war economy; the effectiveness of Soviet propaganda; the degree to which Soviet resilience was the result of fear or patriotism; and so on. The level of debate was often impressive. Some areas were relatively neglected, such as Stalin's treatment of 'suspect' nationalities. Some interpretations tend to be over-simplistic. For example, the movement of industry to the less-exposed Eastern areas of the USSR was impressive in its scale, but not quite as 'easy' a process or as effective as students seem to imagine. The economic effectiveness of gulag convict labour is a matter of debate, but was almost certainly not as profitable as many students believe.

Question 2

- 02** This question produced a more variable response than answers to Question 1, although there were still many impressive, knowledgeable responses. Weaker answers were those which were very unbalanced, usually because students wrote at length about the Khrushchev period, and relatively little about the Brezhnev era. Some students forgot the emphasis of the question on growth, and tended to go through the various economic policies in some detail, which was of course relevant, but did not try to analyse the actual impact upon growth. Other answers which tended to be unbalanced were those which focused heavily on agriculture, especially in the Khrushchev era, and neglected industry. To achieve a high-scoring answer, it was not necessary to spend an equal amount of time on writing about both eras, but both did need to be addressed to some extent. The best answers, as always, tended to be those that not only could examine the detail in depth, but were also able to take an overview: that is, how did the economy in 1982 compare to the economy in 1954 or 1956? As already indicated, students were usually more secure on Khrushchev than Brezhnev. They knew a lot about the successes and failures of the Virgin Lands experiment. Knowledge of the Seven and Five-Years Plans was quite good, although there was less material on the details of industrial growth or trade. Better answers did debate the extent to which growth was sustained, rose or fell in Khrushchev's time. Students were also able to discuss the impact of Khrushchev's structural changes on the economy. Students were often vaguer on the detail of Brezhnev's policies. They usually knew about his attempts to improve agriculture, for example by increasing investment, and were able to discuss the impact. There was less about industry and 'Developed Socialism', although students did usually recognise that the overall problem was related to the fact that some of the fundamental flaws in the Stalinist economic model remained; and they were able to discuss issues such as the impact of the 'Black economy' on growth. Relatively few students discussed other issues such as the influence of the military-industrial complex on growth, environmental issues, variations between economic performance in the Republics, and so on.

Question 3

- 03** This question was the least popular in terms of take-up, although it was often tackled well. As a 'breadth' question, it posed particular challenges, as in previous examinations, since the key to a good answer is usually the ability to show a good perspective of the whole period. It cannot be expected that students display the same depth of knowledge on all the features of the period, as might be the case in other questions. However, for a high-scoring answer, students do need to ensure that they produce some evidence from each of the periods under consideration (in this case, from Khrushchev through to Gorbachev), although not necessarily to the same extent. As commented on in previous reports, students do require careful preparation for this type of question, because coverage of broad themes is not a feature of many books. Most students did address some of the key themes: such as the conservative nature of the established Stalinist system, which discouraged innovation and led to internal resistance to change from a Party-dominated

bureaucracy. Students were able to debate the obstructionism to Khrushchev's attempted reforms and emphasised that in any case, Khrushchev was attempting to 'modify' the 'system', not overturn it. Students were very secure on aspects of the Brezhnev period, explaining the influence of the Stability of Cadres and the Nomenklatura, attitudes towards dissent and the Republics, and so on. There was some good debate about Gorbachev, and the degree to which he really wanted change, and what sort of change. Unfortunately many students focused so much on either Khrushchev or Brezhnev that they left too little time to debate Gorbachev, Yeltsin *et al.* Thoughtful answers discussed what 'political stagnation' actually meant in the Soviet context (e.g. the decline in ideological commitment in the Party by 1982), and how this affected relationships both in Russia and between the Republics; and also what sort of 'change' was feared. It was a thought-provoking question, and did show that many students have a good overall understanding of the issues, although some found it difficult to structure their answers effectively in the time allowed.

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