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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel

In GCE History (8HI0/1E)

Paper 1: Breadth study with interpretations

Option 1E: Russia, 1917-91: from Lenin to
Yeltsin

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8H10 1E

Introduction

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in this first post-Covid AS Level Paper 1 Option 1E: Russia, 1917-91: from Lenin to Yeltsin. The paper is divided into three sections. Section A comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting the second order concepts of cause and/or consequence. Section B offers a further choice of essays, targeting any of the second order concepts of cause, consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference, and significance. Section C contains a compulsory question which is based on two given extracts. It assesses analysis and evaluation of historical interpretations in context (AO3).

Candidates in the main appeared to organise their time effectively, although there were some cases of candidates not completing one of the three responses within the time allocated. Examiners did note a number of scripts that posed some problems with the legibility of handwriting. Examiners can only give credit for what they can read. Of the three sections of Paper 1, candidates are generally more familiar with the essay sections, and in sections A and B most candidates were well prepared to write, or to attempt, an analytical response. Stronger answers clearly understood the importance of identifying the appropriate second order concept that was being targeted by the question.

A minority of candidates, often otherwise knowledgeable, wanted to focus on causes and engage in a main factor/other factors approach, even where this did not necessarily address the demands of the conceptual focus. Candidates in the main were able to apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner suited to the different demands of questions in these two sections, in terms of the greater depth of knowledge required where Section A questions targeted a shorter period, as compared to the more careful selection generally required for the Section B questions covering a broader timespan.

Candidates do need to formulate their planning so that there is an argument and a counter argument within their answer; some candidates lacked sufficient treatment of these. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-pointed strands which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these strands progress through the levels.

Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

In Section C, the strongest answers demonstrated a clear focus on the need to discuss different arguments given within the two extracts, clearly recognising these as historical interpretations. Such responses tended to offer comparative analysis of the merits of the different views, exploring the validity of the arguments offered by the two historians in the light of the evidence, both from within the extracts, and candidates' own contextual knowledge. Such responses tended to avoid attempts to examine the extracts in a manner more suited to AO2, assertions of the inferiority of an extract on the basis of it offering less factual evidence, or a drift away from the specific demands of the question to the wider taught topic.

Q1

On Question 1, stronger responses targeted the reasons for the establishment of Communist Party control over the Soviet Union in the years 1917-28 and included an analysis of the

relationships between the key issues and the concept (causation) involved in the question. Sufficient knowledge was used to develop the stated factor (Bolshevik propaganda) and a range of other factors (e.g. the role played by Bolshevik pragmatism and concessions such as the NEP, the Red Army and the use of terror and coercion). Judgements made about the relative importance of Bolshevik propaganda were reasoned and based on clear criteria. High scoring answers were also clearly organised and effectively communicated.

Weaker responses tended to be generalised and, at best, offered a fairly simple, limited analysis of the reasons for the establishment of Communist Party control over the Soviet Union in the years 1917-28. Low scoring answers also often lacked focus on causation or were essentially a narrative of the period under discussion. Where some analysis using relevant knowledge was evident, it was not developed very far or offered only one narrow aspect of the question (e.g. Bolshevik use of terror and coercion). Furthermore, such responses were often fairly brief, lacked coherence and structure, and made unsubstantiated or weakly supported judgements.

Q2

On Question 2, stronger responses targeted the reasons for Stalin's power in the years 1928-53 and included an analysis of the relationships between the key issues and the concept (causation) involved in the question. Sufficient knowledge was used to develop the stated factor (Stalin's policies of economic modernisation) and a range of other factors (e.g. Stalinist terror, control over the media, arts and culture, and Stalin's cult of personality). Judgements made about the relative importance of Stalin's policies of economic modernisation were reasoned and based on clear criteria. High scoring answers were also clearly organised and effectively communicated.

Weaker responses tended to be generalised and, at best, offered a fairly simple, limited analysis of the reasons for Stalin's power in the years 1928-53. Low scoring answers also often lacked focus on causation or were essentially a narrative of the period under discussion. Where some analysis using relevant knowledge was evident, it was not developed very far or offered only one narrow aspect of the question (e.g. one aspect of the stated factor such as specific Five Year Plans). Furthermore, such responses were often fairly brief, lacked coherence and structure, and made unsubstantiated or weakly supported judgements.

Q3

On Question 3, stronger responses targeted how accurate it is to say that the status of Soviet women changed little in the years 1917-85 and included an analysis of the relationships between the key issues and the concept (change/continuity) involved in the question. Sufficient knowledge was used to develop the argument (e.g. Lenin's attempts to improve women's status had little real effect, continuing political underrepresentation, the persistence of the 'double burden', increased female participation in higher education and the status of rural women improved under Khrushchev and Brezhnev due to extended social provision). Judgements made about change/continuity regarding the status of Soviet women were reasoned and based on clear criteria. High scoring answers were also clearly organised and effectively communicated.

Weaker responses tended to be generalised and, at best, offered a fairly simple, limited analysis of how accurate it is to say that the status of Soviet women changed little in the years 1917-85. Low scoring answers also often lacked focus on change/continuity or were essentially a narrative of the period under discussion. Where some analysis using relevant knowledge was evident, it was not developed very far or offered only one narrow aspect of the question (e.g. Lenin's

attempts to improve women's status). Furthermore, such responses were often fairly brief, lacked coherence and structure, and made unsubstantiated or weakly supported judgements.

Q4

On Question 4, stronger responses targeted the significance of the role of the secret police in sustaining the Soviet regime in the years 1953-85 and included an analysis of the relationships between the key issues and the concept (significance) involved in the question. Sufficient knowledge was used to develop the argument (e.g. KGB's security role enhanced by Article 70 of the 1960 Soviet criminal code, role of the secret police in limiting the influence of key critical groups such as intellectuals, nationalists and refuseniks, declining state police terror after Stalin, containment provided by Soviet propaganda, state control of the arts/culture and expanding social security provision). Judgements made about the significance of the role of the secret police in sustaining the Soviet regime in the years 1953-85 were reasoned and based on clear criteria. High scoring answers were also clearly organised and effectively communicated.

Weaker responses tended to be generalised and, at best, offered a fairly simple, limited analysis of the significance of the role of the secret police in sustaining the Soviet regime in the years 1953-85. Low scoring answers also often lacked focus on significance or were essentially a narrative account of the secret police during the period under discussion. Where some analysis using relevant knowledge was evident, it was not developed very far or offered only one narrow aspect of the question (e.g. secret police activity under Khrushchev or Brezhnev). Furthermore, such responses were often fairly brief, lacked coherence and structure, and made unsubstantiated or weakly supported judgements.

Q5

On Question 5, stronger responses were clearly focused on the extracts, and possessed the confidence and understanding to develop an extract-based analysis of the view that the collapse of the Soviet Union came about because of Gorbachev's mistakes. Higher scoring answers offered some comparative analysis of the two extracts, and used own knowledge effectively to examine the merits/validity of the views presented (e.g. Gorbachev's miscalculations regarding perestroika and glasnost, economic decline, a corrupt communist ruling class and the mobilising power of popular nationalism in the republics). Stronger responses were also focused on the precise question (the collapse of the Soviet Union came about because of Gorbachev's mistakes) rather than the general controversy and put forward a reasoned judgement on the given issue, referencing the views in the extracts.

Weaker answers tended to show some understanding of the extracts and attempted to focus on Gorbachev's mistakes but were likely to under-use Extract 2 (Beissinger). Such responses sometimes demonstrated limited development by relying on a basic 'Gorbachev was to blame' approach. At the lower levels, basic points were selected from the extracts for illustration and comparisons made between the two extracts were fairly rudimentary. Weaker candidates sometimes also relied almost exclusively on the extracts as sources of information about the issue in the question. Others made limited use of the two extracts and attempted to answer the question relying largely on their own knowledge. Moreover, in lower scoring responses, the candidate's own knowledge tended to be illustrative (e.g. just tacked on to points from the extracts) or drifted from the main focus of the question. Furthermore, these answers were often fairly brief, lacked coherence and structure, and made unsubstantiated or weakly supported judgements.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A/B responses:

Features commonly found in responses which were successful within the higher levels were:

- Candidates paying close attention to the date ranges in the question
- Sufficient consideration given to the issue in the question (e.g. main factor), as well as some other factors
- Explain their judgement fully – this need not be in an artificial or abstract way, but demonstrate their reasoning in relation to the concepts and topic they are writing about in order to justify their judgements
- A careful focus on the second-order concept targeted in the question
- Give consideration to timing, to enable themselves to complete all three questions with approximately the same time given over to each one
- An appropriate level, in terms of depth of detail and analysis, as required by the question – e.g. a realistic amount to enable a balanced and rounded answer on breadth questions.

Common issues which hindered performance:

- Pay little heed to the precise demands of the question, e.g. write about the topic without focusing on the question, or attempt to give an answer to a question that hasn't been asked – most frequently, this meant treating questions which targeted other second-order concepts as causation questions
- Answer a question without giving sufficient consideration to the given issue in the question (e.g. looking at other causes or consequences, with only limited reference to that given in the question)
- Answers which only gave a partial response, e.g. a very limited span of the date range, or covered the stated cause/consequence, with no real consideration of other issues
- Assertion of change, causation, sometimes with formulaic repetition of the words of the question, with limited explanation or analysis of how exactly this was a change, cause, of the issue within the question.
- Judgement is not reached, or not explained
- A lack of detail.

Section C responses:

Features commonly found in responses which were successful within the higher levels:

- Candidates paying close attention to the precise demands of the question, as opposed to seemingly pre-prepared material covering the more general controversy as outlined in the specification

- Thorough use of the extracts; this need not mean using every point they raise, but a strong focus on these as views on the question
- A confident attempt to use the two extracts together, e.g. consideration of their differences, attempts to compare their arguments, or evaluate their relative merits
- Careful use of own knowledge, e.g. clearly selected to relate to the issues raised within the sources, confidently using this to examine the arguments made, and reason through these in relation to the given question; at times, this meant selection over sheer amount of knowledge
- Careful reading of the extracts, to ensure the meaning of individual statements and evidence within these were used in the context of the broader arguments made by the authors
- Attempts to see beyond the stark differences between sources, e.g. consideration of the extent to which they disagreed or attempts to reconcile their arguments.

Common issues which hindered performance:

- Limited use of the extracts, or an imbalance in this, e.g. extensive use of one, with limited consideration of the other
- Limited comparison or consideration of the differences between the given interpretations
- Using the extracts merely as sources of support
- Arguing one extract is superior to the other on the basis that it offers more factual evidence to back up the claims made, without genuinely analysing the arguments offered
- Heavy use of own knowledge, or even seemingly pre-prepared arguments, without real consideration of these related to the arguments in the sources
- Statements or evidence from the source being used in a manner contrary to that given in the sources, e.g. through misinterpretation of the meaning of the arguments, or lifting of detail without thought to the context of how it was applied within the extract
- A tendency to see the extracts as being polar opposites, again seemingly through expectation of this, without thought to where there may be degrees of difference, or even common ground.