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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2017

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In History(WHIO3) Paper 1D

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Principal Examiner Report WHI03 D

WHI03 is a new International Advanced level examination and this is the second examination series for it. WHI03 1D is divided into two sections. Section A comprises a compulsory source based question and assesses source analysis and evaluation skills(AO2). Section B consists of two essay questions of which the student is expected to answer one of them. They will assess the knowledge and understanding of the period in breadth (AO1). Questions, in this section, will be set so that they connect two or more of the key topics in the specification and will target a range of concepts which might include cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity.

The time available for the paper did allow students the opportunity to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. However, this was not the case with all and it would be advisable for candidates to spend a short while getting their thoughts in order before writing their answers. This would be relevant to both sections of the paper.

In general, it was section A that seemed to present the greater challenge to the students as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. Difficulties were encountered in moving beyond surface comprehension of the sources and evaluation which was little more than either stereotypical judgements or, at best, questionable assumptions drawn from the sources. This was particularly the case when dealing with the provenance of the sources. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made.

Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater focus and engagement with the stated issues in the questions. Many responses showed good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed and linked the key topics being considered. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative they were in a minority.

Comments on Individual questions.

Question 1.

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources and were able to draw out inferences from them which related to the reasons for Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential election. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived. The very best interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements which weighed up the strengths or otherwise of the material in relation to the investigation under consideration. The latter point is important as the focus of responses needs to be directly on the area of investigation asked in the question.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. In these types of responses contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. However, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with almost no or exceptionally limited references to the sources. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly. Moreover in a significant number of cases knowledge displayed didn't relate to the presidential election but more to Obama winning the earlier Democratic nomination. In other instances, where utility was addressed through the provenance it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions. This often took the form of comments such as all journalists are trustworthy (Shipman) or as he is a professor we can trust what he says (James).

Question 2

This was slightly the more popular of the two questions. The question considered the success that southern Democrats had on preventing the advancement of civil rights in the years 1865-77 and 1933-45. Stronger responses clearly addressed the successful influence they exerted over both periods. Key areas such as the period of Presidential Reconstruction and the New Deal were explored and discussed using valid criteria to judge success. This was then counterbalanced by discussion of the advances that still took place despite the opposition of southern Democrats, thereby challenging their overall success.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to outline clearly the influence that southern Democrats faced and so struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional

responses only engaged with one of the two periods given in the question and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Question 3

This question was also popular and asked students to look at the influence that individual campaigners had in advancing civil rights across two different time periods. As expected knowledge was stronger for the period 1954-68 where the influence of those such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and others such as Rosa Parks were often successfully discussed. For the earlier period of 1883-c1900 the best answers often considered campaigners such as Booker Washington or Ida Wells to highlight the growing influence. The best answers then considered and weighed up the relative importance of other factors in advancing the cause of civil rights. Popular amongst these were the influence of Supreme Court judgements and specific presidents such as Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to understand what was meant by campaigners and so just focused on any individual. This made it harder to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses only engaged with one of the two periods, mainly 1954-68, given in the question and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Students are offered the following advice for the future:

Section A

- Students need to draw from the sources inferences that are relevant to the enquiry in the question. These inferences should be developed through the use of contextual knowledge which is relevant to the enquiry in the question.
- Students need to move beyond stereotypical judgements or assumptions that are questionable and unsupported when engaging with the provenance of the source.
- Students need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry.
- Students should consider the stance or purpose of the author of the source and be aware how this might be affected by the values and concerns of the society at the time it was produced.
- Sources should be interrogated with distinctions being made between such things as claims and opinions.
- Students must avoid engaging with the enquiry simply from their knowledge. The answer needs to be focused on how the sources help the historian and knowledge used to discuss the inferences or points arising from the sources.

Section B

- Students need to read the question carefully so as to fully understand the time periods being considered and the full range of issues that they are being asked to consider.
- Students would benefit from taking some time to plan their answers. As the examination is quite generous in its time allocation this would still allow plenty of time to write the answers.
- Students should consider what criteria might be used to shape or reinforce the judgements being made.
- Students need to avoid description and develop analytical responses which make clear and supported judgements relevant to the question.
- Students should try to establish links between the arguments being made and, if relevant, weigh up the relative importance of them.

