

GCSE

History B

91452 20th Century Depth Studies
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

This is the first report for the 'strengthened' specification. In many respects, similar comments can be made as in previous years. On the whole, students seem to have coped well with the question paper. There were a few rubric errors caused by schools not realising that Section B had been divided into Sections B and C. There were the usual missing (or inaccurate) question numbers and a minority of students failed to set out their answers clearly. It must be emphasised though, that the vast majority produced answers that were well set out and usually easy to read. Many used paragraphs very sensibly. Most students finished answering their seven questions, and those who did not mostly wasted time providing unnecessary information.

Many responses demonstrated appropriate good spelling and specialist vocabulary. Many gained the maximum mark for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar on the utility and essay questions. Examiners were instructed to bear in mind that the students are writing in timed conditions, with little opportunity to go through and check what they had written.

In Section A the most popular topic was Topic 3 (The Roaring Twenties). Weimar Germany was much more popular than From Tsardom to Communism. In Section B the most popular topic was Topic 5 (Hitler's Germany), and in Section C almost all students had studied either Topic 7 (Race Relations in the USA) or Topic 8 (War in Vietnam). Topic 9 (The Challenge in Northern Ireland) gained students compared with previous years whereas Topic 10 (The Middle East) did not.

Some sections of extra content, which had been added to some topics, were examined in 2015 in line with the 'strengthening' agenda. Students seem to have been well-prepared for this, eg on Question 18 with the question on Vietnam, 1954–1960 and in Question 20 on the Good Friday Agreement. Students were also prepared for the changes in style of questions in Sections B and C. The 12 mark 'interpretation' questions were treated, for the most part, in exactly the same way as previously, when the questions provided quotations. The 8 mark explain question often produced more narrative than analytical responses, as well as irrelevant information.

Section A

It was clear that many students had been prepared well for the 4 mark question which examines inferences and not own knowledge, and a high proportion of responses gained full marks. However, many answers were far too long. Understandably, some students strayed into using own knowledge, whilst at the same time using words such as 'suggests' or 'infers'. Some students often made deductions and inferences from outside knowledge rather than the source content. Others paraphrased the content of the source first, and then moved on to make inferences which often produced answers that were far too long. All that is needed is one or two clear inferences. Longer answers cause timing problems later.

The 6 mark questions were intended to test the ability to provide explanations. This year these were not always well-answered. Many students appeared to have limited knowledge or understanding on the topics featured in these questions. Other responses gained full marks, with at least two developed explanations, backed up with specific factual content. Some answers were too descriptive in style, but such responses could gain up to 4 marks.

In the 10 mark utility questions, the best answers separated out the 'provenance' and the 'content' strands. Sometimes an excessive amount of time and space was spent in paraphrasing the content of the source and commenting on it. This seems to be a particular problem with visual sources and was often assessed at Level 1 or low Level 2. Many responses, however, organised

their answers by using aspects of the content of the source and using own knowledge to develop an argument. This was particularly the case in Question 09. However, the provenance of the source was frequently ignored, or led to just a brief comment on reliability, often taking the image at face value. Some responses provided a substantial amount of detailed knowledge without relating it to the question or the source, eg the Ford motor car industry in Question 09.

Topic 1 From Tsardom to Communism: Russia, 1914–1924

Question 01

Many students were able to see inferences easily and achieved full marks. Perhaps the choice of a source featuring a topic about which students' knowledge was less secure encouraged them to focus more on inferences.

Question 02

Many responses demonstrated a good level of knowledge about the Provisional Government, but some adopted a narrative approach, simply telling the story, including that of the October/November Revolution. Students who achieved Level 3 had organised their answers into distinct paragraphs, for example, the war, dual authority, land, the Soviets, etc, finishing each paragraph with a clear link to the question.

Question 03

Many responses spent too much time describing the source and then drawing simple deductions from it. Often these answers lacked detail or depth of understanding. However, better responses achieved Level 3 through their application of knowledge, explaining several reasons for the collapse of Tsarist rule. These often concentrated on Rasputin and Alexandra and the consequences of the Tsar's absence from the court. Some very good answers included other more wide-ranging arguments that were not suggested directly by the cartoon. On the whole, provenance was not well-developed – a few responses argued that the source reflected resentment amongst the aristocracy and former ministers of the Tsar and its widespread circulation indicated its influence on public opinion, including the spreading of rumours. Some answers lost a sense of chronology and went beyond the abdication of the Tsar.

Topic 2 Weimar Germany, 1919–1929**Question 04**

Many responses attempted inferences, but many strayed into contextual knowledge and tried to make inferences from that. Some student paraphrased the extract and did not understand its content well enough to make an inference.

Question 05

Answers were often weak on this topic. Little appeared to be known about the origins of the Nazi Party, and many students did not realise that one of the points that could be developed centred on the Munich Putsch. Some of those who did realise the relevance of this episode resorted to detailed narrative. Many answers were focused on the later 1920s and the Nazi Party. Good responses talked about the changed focus on the Nazi Party after Hitler took over and published the 25-Point Programme and then Hitler's realisation after the Munich Putsch that he had to work towards achieving power through the legal system.

Question 06

The source provided scope for much speculation however there was much detailed description of its content. Many students were able to write about the alleged decadence of 1920s Berlin. However, fewer were able to develop explanations based either on the content of the source or of other factors. Those that were able to do this wrote in detail about Germany in the later 1920s. Some responses included foreign policy achievements, which could be made relevant if linked to their effects on life in Weimar Germany. A minority of responses were seen that were excellent on provenance, understanding the purpose of Otto Dix, rather than just commenting on its bias.

Topic 3 The Roaring 20s: USA, 1918–1929**Question 07**

Many students were able to make simple (or even complex) inferences and gain full marks. However, many wrote about flappers and everything they knew about women in the 1920s.

Question 08

Some excellent answers were seen to this question, but many students did not seem adequately prepared for the topic. Many students wrote about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Some responses covered isolationism and then made incorrect connections with immigration restrictions. Many weaker responses assumed that Americans did not want immigrants who were taking their jobs at lower rates of pay and who added to the crime rates. However, some answers did understand the significance of cultural tensions, based on the preferences of WASPs. These were able to go on to explain the policies of the 1920s, either in general terms (Level 2) or with specific details (Level 3).

Question 09

Answers to this question were often promising. Many students did not realise the significance – or the purpose – of the advert. Many took the advert literally, described each aspect and tried to make deductions from each phrase of the wording, eg a comment on the cars being reliable, as indicated in the source. Many students moved on to the reasons for the boom and were able to gain Level 3 marks. Some were able to argue that the benefits of the boom were not spread equally across

society. However, very few developed an argument about the advert being designed to not only sell the car but also the American Dream.

Section B and C

The 8 mark questions tested exactly the same skills as the 6 mark questions from Section A. There was evidence that teachers had fully embraced the change from ‘describe’ to ‘explain’, with students well-prepared with an analytical answer rather than a descriptive approach. This was particularly noticeable in Question 16, where many students described the events, whereas others seized on the importance or significance of the situation.

The 12 mark questions showed that most students had been prepared well. Most realised the need for a balanced answer, even if sometimes the arguments and facts presented were very thin on the ground. The change to ‘interpretation’ seems to have gone smoothly. A good answer does require some refinement in writing skills. Some answers would have benefited from a clear plan because the answer meandered from ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ and back again. Many answers contained lots of description that was not directly related to the focus of the question. This was particularly noticeable in Questions 13 and 19. Some students approached these questions by writing ‘some historians say that...’ and followed this with ‘other historians disagree with this...’ This can be based on speculation about what views historians might or might not hold. What would have been preferable is the realisation that most historians try to give a balanced view, even if they differ in their emphasis. The alternative routes in the mark scheme, which invite considerations of the reasons for different interpretations, were rarely used.

It is important to emphasise that the overall standard of essay writing shows much detailed knowledge, understanding and the ability to organise an answer that, in terms of style, would not look out of place at A-level. These responses also often gained full SPaG marks.

Topic 4 Stalin’s Dictatorship: USSR, 1924–1941

Question 10

Some responses were of a very high quality with detailed knowledge of Trotsky and Stalin’s claims, the political manoeuvrings and the ideological differences. However, some answers were really trying to answer a different question – ie why Stalin won the power struggle.

Question 11

Answers to this question were variable. Some students responded without any real development in relation to the focus of the question. Some were rather generalised on the show trials and Stalin’s cult of personality. Some, however, managed to explain the significance of the purges with factual details, including the armed forces, and juxtaposed this against other relevant factors. Those who focused on collectivisation and the Five Year Plans lost focus.

Topic 5 Hitler’s Germany, 1929–1945

Question 12

The parameters of this question proved to be a problem for many students. Some answers were fairly general about the perceived deficiencies in the Weimar Republic and were not specific to 1929–1933. Others went beyond 1933 in their answer. The focus was intended to be on the failures of the Weimar Republic, including the constitution and its consequences, as well as specific failings following the Wall Street Crash, including the political issues of those years. However, some students were more preoccupied with describing the appeal of the Nazis and how they came to power. Hence many answers gained Level 2 rather than Level 3. Answers that included the Reichstag Fire and the Enabling Act could gain credit if they were made relevant to providing evidence of the failings of the Weimar Republic.

Question 13

This was a very accessible question where many students could quite successfully access mid to top Level 3 marks. However, many students remained in Level 2 because of a lack of specific knowledge or an inability to connect their knowledge to the question. Responses on women and German youth were guilty of this. Some students included the Final Solution and resistance groups post-1939, which were irrelevant. The role of the SS and Gestapo in enforcing a police state, and the role of propaganda in influencing people's attitudes, were rarely developed.

Topic 6 Depression and the New Deal: The USA, 1929–1941**Question 14**

The best responses contrasted Hoover's shortcomings with Roosevelt's attractions. Many students tried to include Hoover's achievements, but were often not sure how to relevantly include these as part of an argument. In many answers details on the Depression were vague. Many students went beyond the election and described the Fireside Chats or details of the aims of the New Deal.

Question 15

This question was sometimes answered well, but many students seemed to have little knowledge about the effects of the Second World War. Some thought that the USA gaining more trade with Europe, which helped industry and provided jobs, was all that was needed. Others could explain, in context, the effects of Cash and Carry and the Lend Lease. Some weaker responses attempted to describe the criticisms of the New Deal but could not relate this information to the focus of the question. Some students were able to provide complex judgements by using the mini-depression of 1937–1938 to argue that the New Deal was only going to have largely artificial success, whereas the war provided the actual remedy. Others used the same pivot to argue that the New Deal created the right conditions for the war to provide a long-term solution.

Topic 7 Race Relations in the USA, 1945–1968**Question 16**

Many answers were very precise and detailed on the facts, but not necessarily the explanation of the importance of the events. Others were very confused with details appearing in different sequences and the number of African-American children varying from 3 to 15. Some responses confused the court case of 1954 about Miss Brown and the events at Little Rock in 1957; the name

of the President or exactly which troops were sent. Many gained a mark within Level 2. Not many gained Level 3 marks, which required explanations of the importance, eg relating the events to the 1954 judgement, and seeing the significance of the Presidential involvement in future developments.

Question 17

Martin Luther King's achievements were often well-known, but students frequently wrote about the 1950s rather than the 1960s as asked by the question. Martin Luther King was often credited with leading initiatives which were not his, eg sit-ins and freedom rides. Some answers on Martin Luther King were descriptive; others lacked in detail. Students could have written about other factors, including the role of Presidents, the Supreme Court, organisations such as the NAACP, as well as the Civil Rights leaders. However, Malcolm X and others were vaguely mentioned, with only descriptions of the medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympics receiving any detailed treatment. It was pleasing to see that the film 'Selma' had been used effectively in some responses.

Topic 8 War in Vietnam, 1954–1975

Question 18

Responses to this question often went beyond 1960. The Gulf of Tonkin incident and the role of Kennedy and Johnson were featured frequently. Some students were confused about the situation before 1954 and immediately after the battle of Dien Bien Phu. However, many students wrote about communist fears and the Domino Theory. Some also included the relevant European context with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, as well as Mao triumphing in China in 1949.

Question 19

There were some excellent responses to this question, with detailed analysis of the impact of the Tet Offensive and then a juxtaposition with other factors as to why the USA withdrew from Vietnam. However, many students were unsure either of what Tet was or of its effect. Some students focused on the effect of the media, which could easily subsume all other factors. The best answers explained how predominant attitudes of the media changed over the course of the 1960s. Some focused on reactions in the USA, especially to news of horrific incidents, such as My Lai, and with news shown of the mounting opposition to the war. Many good students gained Level 3, often explaining the importance of the media and guerrilla warfare as two developed aspects. A sizeable proportion gained Level 4 with three or more developed aspects; this depended on their ability to explain the significance of Tet which allowed them to write a balanced answer.

Topic 9 Britain: The Challenge in Northern Ireland, 1960–1999

Question 20

Most students had some ideas about the Good Friday Agreement, with some giving precise details. Many of these good answers also related the facts to an analysis of the question, and were able to assess the significance for future policies on the decommissioning of weapons. Inevitably, weaker students were only aware of the paramilitary ceasefire.

Question 21

Most students were able to write about the Battle of the Bogside, Internment and Bloody Sunday. Some were able to write persuasively about O'Neill's failures to satisfy the Catholic majority with continuing inequalities. Some of these were very detailed, and gained Level 4 or high Level 3 marks. Unfortunately, some answers included information on the 1980s mainland bombings and hunger strikes.

Topic 10 The Middle East, 1956–1999

Question 22

This was reasonably well-answered, with Oil Wars, the role of Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). Weaker answers were confused by the chronology of events.

Question 23

The focus of this question was often not recognised. The Arab Summits and the Six Day War were often covered well, but the significance of the Suez Crisis was often described rather than explained.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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