
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/1J
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/1J

The British Empire, c1857–1967

Component 1J: The High Water Mark of the British Empire, c1857–1914

General Comments

Most students had clearly engaged with the course and acquired some understanding and knowledge that they were able to deploy in response to the questions set. Some showed that they had thought quite deeply about the issues they had studied and, in response to all three questions, there were students who were ready to provide individualistic and thoughtful comments on imperialism (although some of these were more relevant than others). At best, students wrote with confidence and interest in the debates thrown up by the extracts and essay questions. Of course, there were some who muddled events and issues, or whose knowledge let them down. Nevertheless, there were very few who failed to complete the paper or proved unable to write anything of relevance.

Overall students coped well with the new format of the examination. There was evidence that students had taken time to plan and structure their answers and there was some careful reading of the extracts in Question 01. Not surprisingly, some were more confident than others in assembling their answers to the compulsory extract evaluation question and it is hoped that the comments which follow will provide some helpful guidance for future examinees. Most, however, adopted a focused and balanced approach when writing their Section B essay and the very best showed judgement and upheld an argument, linking well to the question throughout.

Section A

Question 1

The majority of students considered the two extracts in turn, making some comparative comment in the body of their answer and developing the comparison further in their conclusion. Those who adopted a more comparative approach throughout sometimes found it harder to address all the elements of the question, although they were equally rewarded when they did so.

Examiners were looking for three key elements in the answers:

i) **An understanding of the interpretations in the two extracts**

The best students here identified the overall interpretation of each extract and explained it with reference to their own knowledge. They then addressed other subsidiary views and arguments and evaluated these in a similar way. Clearly, this showed a high-level skill of reading with understanding. Some students produced reasonable answers by taking a line-by-line approach, although interrogating almost every sentence of the extract ran the risk of spending time on less relevant material that was not always 'an interpretation'. Furthermore, this style of answer made comparison between the two extracts more difficult, since students found themselves trying to compare, not between two broadly contrasting interpretations, but between a multiplicity of differing statements. The weakest students usually only addressed, one or two statements in each extract - or, in some cases, failed to understand an

interpretation; Extract B sometimes proved more problematic in this regard. Such students showed limited appreciation of what is meant by 'interpretation'.

(ii) An understanding of the historical context

The best students provided material both to support the interpretation being considered and to challenge it. There were some very good examples of the application of appropriate own knowledge (particularly in support) and many students provided precise examples, giving dates as well as details to show the relevance of the interpretation. Thinner answers were more generalist or one-sided while weaker ones sometimes ignored the focus of the question, which required linkage to 'British India from the Indian Mutiny to c1900'; lots of additional information about the mutiny itself was not relevant here.

(iii) Comparison between the two extracts

The comparative element of the question was often the weakest. Some students thought it sufficient to assert that one extract was 'better' than the other and a number justified their choice by the amount of factual content contained within the extract. The better responses were more aware of the need to judge the 'interpretations' themselves and drew on their analyses of each extract to provide a meaningful and substantiated judgement.

Section B

Question 02

Most students were able to use their knowledge of British involvement in Egypt and Sudan to respond to the question posed. They understood the term, 'expansionist' and addressed British motives, but some had more difficulty with 'defensive'. A few ignored this term altogether and wrote about the extent to which British aims were expansionist, balancing this theme against a variety of other factors; this was not what the question asked for. The defensive element was credited both when related to the defence of existing territories (eg action in Sudan to protect Britain's interests in Egypt) and to the defence of the wider Empire (eg action in Egypt to protect Suez and the route to India and the East). Another issue concerned coverage of the time span. Some students only wrote about the 1880s, some provided too much background pre-1875 and a significant number failed to look to 1898. Given that this is a breadth paper, it was important for students to appreciate Britain's fluctuating interests over time as well as identifying any continuity of approach. Those who linked change to British political direction, for example, showed some higher level skills. Finally, there was a need for greater precision in the work of some students. Appreciation of chronology and the use of dates and specific supporting detail helped to make arguments more convincing and enabled students to make convincing judgements, as required for answer to achieve the higher mark levels.

Question 03

Unfortunately some answers to this question took an overly narrow view and (ignoring the dates in the question) wrote mainly of the immediate consequences of the Boer War between 1899 and 1902. Whilst this was creditworthy, such responses ignored the need to see the broader implications of the war down to 1914. Better answers engaged not only with the degree to which the war strengthened (or conversely, weakened) Britain during the time of fighting and the final peace, but also in the longer-term, considering the National Efficiency debate and outcome, Britain's emergent pre-war alliances, military and naval reforms and diplomatic and tactical changes. Some well-argued answers also examined how the war affected attitudes to Empire – and whether such changing attitudes were a strength or not. Good responses combined breadth

and range with a keen historical awareness. As with Question 02, appreciation of chronology and the ability to select and deploy accurate and precise supporting detail in support of arguments were key factors that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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