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AS

# History

7041/1H Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855-1917  
Report on the Examination

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7041/1H  
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## General

Much of the work seen in this summer's examination session reflected sound learning and preparation. Most students knew exactly what was required in both the extract and essay answers and strove to apply their knowledge accordingly. Of course, some did so with greater ease than others and, whilst the 'support for extract v. criticism of extract' and 'points in favour v. points against' approach has something to commend it in producing a balance of views, those who relied on an overly mechanical structure often failed to engage with the material and demonstrate any personal argument. The best answers, on the other hand, showed sustained and convincing judgements. It was, indeed, heartening to find a substantial number of students whose responses showed that they had thought carefully about the events and issues they had studied and, above all, could view developments across the 1855-1917 period in 'breadth'.

Both Sections A and B were marked according to the respective generic levels mark schemes which offer a range of 5 levels of attainment, carefully graded to assess a combination of understanding and knowledge. Adjustments to the marks within these levels were made according to how well the student's work matched the level requirements. There was little difference seen in the quality of the responses to the different areas of the specification content, and, to this extent, the questions proved effective at differentiating between students, with a roughly equal number of strong and weak answers being found in response to every question.

## Question 1

Most students understood the extracts and were able to provide some comment on them. However, there was a marked difference in the degree to which students paid heed to the focus of the question - 'support for opposition'. Some (although probably a minority) considered the 'broad interpretation' of each extract, and then going on to look at the sub-arguments in each, whereas others doggedly pursued a line-by-line approach. The latter only worked when close attention was paid to the question and the relevant parts of lines examined. For example, some began their evaluation of Extract A by considering the extent to which Alexander II 'recognised' the failure of his reforms (line 1) and then moved on to discuss the extent to which the reforms demonstrated 'change' (line 2). Such students dealt with only parts of sentences - missing crucial links that were relevant to 'support for opposition', such as the 'failure to satisfy liberal demands' and the way the reforms 'emboldened' some to demand a 'wider' and 'faster pace of reform'.

The more thoughtful students appreciated that Extract A offered varying explanations as to why support for opposition might increase in the 1870s, whilst Extract B provided support for the view that support for opposition was very limited, despite the 'mass dissatisfaction' with Alexander II's policies. Generally, the best focused their answers on the emergence of differing types of opposition in the specified decade, considering supporters (and what attracted them to opposition) and, in particular, assessing peasant reactions to movements such as Populism, a form of opposition referenced in both extracts.

Students are expected to show their contextual 'own knowledge' in this answer and the more successful incorporated well-selected information into their evaluation of the extracts, to both support and challenge the interpretations raised. The less thoughtful tended to offer additional information as an 'add-on'. Long lists of Alexander II's reforms, for example, were of little worth unless used to illustrate a relevant point in relation to the question.

Another key demand of the question was a comparison between the two interpretations to indicate the more convincing. Most students attempted this but some adopted a very literal approach suggesting A was more convincing because it said a lot about support for opposition whereas B was unconvincing because it dismissed the whole idea. Certainly an argument could be made for A since the 1870s were an era during which much opposition took root, but a relevant explanation (rather than assertion) and one that demonstrated contextual awareness was required. Those who favoured B generally provided more reasoned explanations, although even some of these fell back on rather bland statements, such as 'Extract B is the more convincing because I know it is true'.

## Question 2

Many students were well-informed on the contribution of Witte to the development of the Russian economy, with many even able to provide impressive statistics which really went well beyond the requirements of this breadth paper. Knowledge of Stolypin's reforms was less impressive, however, and there were some who ignored agriculture altogether. Other problems included the students who began their answers with Reutern (1862-78), or sometimes Vyshnegradsky (1887-92) and proceeded to 'go through' the work of the various finance ministers, oblivious to the 1894 starting date of the question. Similarly, at the other end of the date range, there were those who never really looked at 1914 and the state of the Russian economy just after the outbreak of war.

Overall, there were many good answers and the very best considered infrastructure, banking, factory organisation and the extent of agricultural change - assessing, and often criticising, the degree to which the Russian economy was 'well-developed', as well evaluating the strength of Russia's impressive industrial development. The weakest, however, were often limited in range (or appreciation of question dates), saw the economy as no more than industry, or even railways, and tended to be uncritical, agreeing entirely with the quotation.

## Question 3

Students approached this question in a variety of ways. Many began by looking at the economic and political impact of the First World War on Russia. They then linked this to the February Revolution and, in turn, to the appeal of the Bolsheviks vis-à-vis the war-committed Provisional Government. This worked well provided the student subsequently assessed the impact of war in relation to the Bolsheviks' 'path' since 1903, and also thought through developments to the second revolution of 1917. By reflecting back, students were able to consider how far the war changed the fortunes of the Bolsheviks, and, by projecting forward, how far 'other factors' were responsible. Most students arguing this way identified the war as a 'key factor' because it both brought an end to Tsardom and deepened grievances which the Bolsheviks could play on, to their advantage.

Some adopted a more chronological approach, beginning with the formation of the Bolsheviks in 1903 and following their 'path to power'. This approach could also produce convincing answers, provided the whole period was addressed and the First World War assessed within this. In the most successful answers, the emphasis was firmly on the position of the Bolsheviks in relation to events and not, as was the case in weaker answers, an account of events per se. Sadly, some answers rapidly lost focus and turned into an explanation of why the autocracy collapsed, ending in March 1917 and scarcely mentioning the Bolsheviks, save for the occasional assertion that these events 'helped them' achieve power.

The best answers overall were aware of the limitations to Bolshevik support before 1914, and perhaps before March 1917. They assessed the 'key factor' in the Bolsheviks' path to power and it was perfectly legitimate to argue that the overthrow of the Tsar, rather than the war itself was the key factor, and offered varying explanations for the Bolshevik seizure of power in October/November. Such factors often included Lenin's leadership, Trotsky's expertise, Marxist ideology and Provisional Government weaknesses, as well as the factor of the continuing impact of war. Weaker answers either ignored the period 1903-1914 or gave a descriptive account of developments, including the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 revolution, with little attention to the question. As always, the better the focus and range, the more successful the answer tended to be.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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