
A-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 1L The quest for political stability: Germany, 1871–1991
Report on the Examination

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General

It was good to find that in this, the second year of examinations in a new A-level specification, there were many students who came to the examination well-prepared and able to write with confidence and enthusiasm about the period they had been studying.

Some good awareness of arguments, and contextual 'own knowledge' to explain them, was exhibited in response to the compulsory 01 question. In the responses to the essay questions there was evidence that students could think effectively across a broad period of history, selecting relevant examples to support a case and providing substantiated individual judgement.

Overall, students coped well with 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 Q01. Not surprisingly, some were more confident than others in assembling their answers to the compulsory extract evaluation question. Most, however, adopted a focused and balanced approach when writing their Section B essays and the very strongest showed judgement and upheld an argument, linking well to the question throughout, whilst providing some conceptual awareness. There were, of course, some whose knowledge of material or understanding of developments were inadequate for the tasks set. Those who, despite some effective revision, still under-performed may have failed to take on board some of the A-level requirements and it is largely to help such students that the following comments are offered.

It needs to be remembered that Component 1 is a breadth study and that candidates have to be able to deploy second-order concepts such as an appreciation of chronology and continuity and change in their analysis of a time period which can be 20 years or more. As such, knowledge needs to be deployed carefully.

Question 01

One of the key issues with last year's exam and question 01 was a failure by students to explicitly identify an overall argument within each extract in relation to the question focus. As such it was good to see that, in most cases, students have now learnt to do this.

The focus of the 01 question was the establishment of a stable democracy in West Germany. Extract A conveyed the view that Adenauer was important while Extract B placed more emphasis on the constitution. Extract C highlighted the role of economic growth. There was some good contextual knowledge to help explain these extracts and it was good to see that the support used was generally enough to explain a point without becoming an unnecessarily long development.

There are, of course, sub-arguments within each extract and the ability to identify these and evaluate them, in relation to the focus, became a key discriminator on this paper. Weaker students tended to develop incidental information, or misquote, so that any analysis was simply not convincing. Another issue was use of 'own knowledge' beyond the natural remit of this question. The focus was the establishment of stable democracy and the extracts covered a period, in terms of content, from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Analysis on events in the 1970s and 80s was simply stretching the idea of 'establishment' too far. Students need to be more selective about how they apply their own knowledge around the focus of the question and the extract content itself.

Question 02

This question focused on aristocratic elites and their dominance. Many students were able to develop a balanced range of ideas on developments like their ability to influence the leadership, eg tariffs, the constitution and their dominance in the army. Weaker responses conflated aristocrats with the business elites, or simply wrote about whether Bismarck or Kaiser Wilhelm II dominated during their rule. Stronger responses were able to consider ideas of militarism and respect for authority. All this material was relevant, but the key here was how it tied in with the question focus of aristocratic dominance, and the best answers were always linking back to this. Some students were keen to display everything they knew but then ended up writing too much on events that were not actually moving the answer on. Students need to remember that this is a breadth study, so that when developing material to answer the question, they need to ensure that it has enough detail to explain the point being made but does not then simply become descriptive, for which little reward is given.

Many essays did the basics well: focus, reasonable range with some detail and balance. In order to move higher in the levels, students need to show greater depth of analysis in terms of how the material they use truly relates to the question. The highest rewarded answers had a conceptual element, which meant they were able to relate their analysis in terms of continuity or change over time; to see trends or to relate their analysis to a deeper understanding of the nature of Germany, its politics and people. For example, although the aristocratic elites had huge influence over this time, the emergence of forces like socialism were challenging this.

Question 03

This question focused on economic growth by 1929 compared with 1900 and which was stronger. The development of the economy in Germany and how it changes over time is a key question within the specification. Many students were able to write using good support for and against economic strength for both dates indicated. Getting the balance right was essential for this question and the students had to consider two different periods and strengths and weaknesses within those periods. Weaker responses concentrated more on the economy by 1929 and were not really able to move on from descriptions of 'events' like the impact of World War One and Versailles or hyperinflation, rather than consider actual economic developments like the cartelisation of German industry. Equally, balance was mostly in the form of some general descriptions about agricultural decline. This is where planning comes in and the need for students to clearly link back to the focus throughout their response. As with all Component 1 essays, an appreciation of chronology and the ability to select and deploy appropriate 'own knowledge' in support of arguments are key factors that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays.

Question 04

Many students were able to show off impressive knowledge in answering this question. Most were able to develop a balanced assessment to show how the threat of Communist opposition did, and did not, threaten governments. The key to this question was an understanding of change over time and many students were able to describe how the Communist threat was more prevalent in the early Weimar period but was virtually non-existent by 1939.

Most students took a chronological approach, and though the responses were a little mechanical, they mostly had a reasonable range of ideas with some balance. Some students did not differentiate between Communist and left-wing generally, so were rewarded less. Others were

very keen to move away from the focus of Communist threat and discuss the threat from the right, which though valid, had to be done well so as not to become unfocused. Once again, the stress is put on the fact that Component 1 is a breadth study. Students need to be able to support their arguments but need to get the balance of that support right. For example, some students would describe in great detail all the events surrounding the Spartacists in 1919 when such detail is not helping to move the response on. The best answers explicitly set out a view in their opening paragraph and developed this throughout their answer, whilst linking back to the focus.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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