
A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2S The Making of Modern Britain, 1951-2007
Report on the Examination

7042/2S
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General

The total entry increased from 3386 in 2017 to 3453 in 2018. The paper performed on a par with last year, with very similar percentages of students obtaining grade A (29.13 compared to 29.72 in 2017) and a pass grade (98.01 compared to 98.84 in 2017). Question 02 was the least popular essay choice; 04 was the most popular.

Question 01

Students seem to have become more proficient in coping with the demands of this question. Given that it is not a comparative question, the vast majority of students appropriately chose to analyse each source in turn. Many adopted a relatively formulaic methodology, discussing value related to provenance, tone and content in turn and finishing by offering an overall judgement. Although such an approach is perhaps rather mechanical, it does offer a clear route to the higher levels, enabling students to demonstrate both their understanding of the skills of source evaluation and of the historical context.

The attribution for each source is central for evaluating provenance. The best answers avoided simplistic, learned stock phrases or words such as 'biased' and offered greater nuance. For example, Philip Gould was an important individual in planning New Labour's electoral success, but there is rather more to be said about the provenance of this source than merely that he was 'biased' in favour of New Labour or Tony Blair. The relative value of political diaries and autobiographies as historical sources needs some attention in order to break away from one-dimensional approaches and generalist 'can't be trusted' approaches.

Tone is the least well understood and probably the least significant of these three components. A close analysis of grammar and vocabulary within each source is unnecessary but, where appropriate, students might effectively reflect on the overall impression given by the language used. Source A, for example, was a classic piece of polemical writing – a strong verbal attack, or rant, against John Major's Euro-enthusiasm. A student who clearly recognised this would have been appropriately rewarded. However, students must always relate 'tone' to 'value'.

Own knowledge can be used to exemplify provenance and tone as well as the content of the source. Some students knew a great deal about the context of the 1997 election but were not very selective, or sufficiently thoughtful, about how they applied their knowledge. When analysing the content of each source, perhaps the worst approach is to comment sentence by sentence. Better is to identify the key argument(s) within the source and evaluate the value of this information for a historian studying the issue identified in the question. Own knowledge can be used either to corroborate or to challenge the content to reach a balanced, substantiated judgement. Strong answers, for example, challenged Major's assertion that the stories about 'sleaze' were exaggerated and how he downplayed the strengths of Labour and Blair and the European dimension.

Another approach to avoid is to evaluate the sources by commenting on omission. Weaker answers tend to attempt to reach a judgement on the value of a source by what it does not say or does not include. It is, of course, appropriate to comment that a source may be one-sided, or has a narrow focus, but to offer a long list of what is 'missing' (omitted) is unhelpful. Students should evaluate what is included in the source – the list of what is not included could be infinite!

Question 02

Coping with an increasingly militant and confident trade union movement, which was growing significantly in its membership, was a critical issue throughout Wilson's administration. However, many students who answered this question knew little about Labour policies in relation to the unions beyond 'In Place of Strife'. Students seemed to know the bones – though not in great depth – of general economic developments in the sixties but few were able effectively to connect the economic stresses of the period with trade union actions and demands. Similarly, very few students could name any key union figures of the period.

Students seem not very confident with this aspect of the specification and many who attempted this question offered very generalist answers indeed. Students also showed chronological confusion by making irrelevant references to Heath's industrial policies, or Callaghan's 'Winter of Discontent', and even the 1984-85 miners' strike. For too many the default position when discussing trade unions is to attribute all problems to Scargill, the miners and selfish wage demands.

Trade union history, linked to broader economic developments, is perhaps an area of the specification requiring greater depth of study.

Question 03

Feminism and the growing demands for egalitarian reform in many areas of society are key themes of the latter decades of the twentieth century. It was disappointing, therefore, to find that this particular aspect of social history seemed only loosely understood by many students who attempted the question. Many answers were very generalist and could almost have been applied to any decade of the second half of the century.

Nevertheless, some students performed very well, showing impressive in-depth knowledge and understanding. Second wave feminism was well explored by these students. Legislative stepping-stones towards greater legal protections (pay, discriminatory work practices, financial rights) were well balanced against the limitations of the laws when implemented and continuing social inertia. The question allowed students the scope to develop concepts of change and continuity within the confines of this depth theme.

Perhaps the most interesting lines of discussion were the varying interpretations of Margaret Thatcher's role regarding feminism. Some thought her very promotion to party leader and, in 1979, her election as prime minister, indicated a victory for the feminist movement. Others were more critical and downplayed her part, acknowledging that she was a woman but not a 'sister'.

Many students argued that feminist achievement was evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Others that the burning of brassieres, the growing feminist literary output and the sustained criticism of, and protests against, the objectification of women, such as the demeaning televised beauty pageants, meant that there could be no turning back of the clock – even by a female prime minister disinclined to challenge sex and gender discrimination. For these students, the gradual advances in legal protection, together with a vocal, highly visual and distinctive feminist movement – if often divided and at odds within itself - indicated a revolutionary social change had been achieved by 1979.

Question 04

This was easily the most popular question, attempted by the vast proportion of students, who seemed much more confident in their knowledge of Tony Blair's foreign policy and the invasion of Iraq compared with trade union history and feminism. Clearly, the question was designed to be challenged and many students found it reasonably straightforward to find positives in Blair's conduct of foreign policy. Nevertheless, some students took the opportunity to engage in 'Blair bashing' and could find little positive to say about him. Just as Margaret Thatcher, it seems that Blair excites extremes of interpretation.

Two persistent weaknesses emerged in weaker answers to this question. First, was chronological imprecision. It was appropriate to judge Blair's interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the context of his doctrine of liberal interventionism – in the context of his 1999 Chicago speech - but a number of students drifted away from the question focus on 2001 to 2007 by writing long sections devoted to Kosovo and Sierra Leone.

Secondly, a large number of answers adopted a descriptive approach keen to write all they knew about Iraq, which, in many respects, was a great deal indeed.

Both of these weaknesses have long been common to historical study at A-level but this should not detract us from continuing to press the importance of chronological precision – a basic expectation of a depth unit – and of the broad merits of analytical writing and judgement.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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