
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/1G
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/1G

Challenge and transformation: Britain, c1851–1964

Component 1G: Victorian and Edwardian Britain, c1851–1914

General Comments

In examining political, social and economic issues this paper presented students with the breadth of historical challenge that the new component 1 is designed to test. Teachers should be aware that a purely political focus will not be sufficient to prepare students for this component.

The extract-based question (01) was a new challenge and attracted a wide range of responses. For some students technique was an issue and a more evaluative approach to the interpretations provided was needed. The essay questions (02 and 03) presented a more familiar style of challenge, but limitation in knowledge and understanding was frequently an issue. The chronological context exemplified by the questions in this paper is typical of what students can expect in breadth components.

Section A

Question 01

Examiners were looking for three key elements in student answers:

i) An understanding of the interpretations in the two extracts

The best students successfully identified the overall interpretation of each extract and analysed the various strands within each interpretation using relevant knowledge. They were able to bring out and explain areas of difference within the interpretations. Weaker answers often simply described or paraphrased the two extracts.

(ii) An understanding of the historical context

Stronger students offered a cogent analysis, supporting and challenging both extracts by drawing on good knowledge and understanding. Such students were able to manipulate evidence to address the specific demands of the question. Weaker students characteristically demonstrated little precision or wider understanding of the need to offer a convincing interpretive and balanced approach to the question.

(iii) Comparison between the two extracts

The most able were able to assess the merits of the two interpretations, drawing on effective and relevant analysis to provide a meaningful and substantiated judgement. This was often in a strong, extended conclusion. Weaker answers were characterised by assertion with little supporting contextual knowledge.

Many responses to this question tended to identify effectively the main arguments in each extract and apply some relevant contextual knowledge. However, often the range and depth of contextual

knowledge was rather limited, and students did not analyse the arguments in the extracts precisely. For example, students often successfully identified the main focus of Extract A as the negative impact the Liberals' commitment to Home Rule had on their electoral chances, and supplied some contextual knowledge related to this. Likewise they might identify that a similar point was made in Extract B, but that this extract went on to identify Conservative strengths as well. In such answers contextual knowledge of Conservative strengths tended to be rather superficial and lacked precision.

Students achieving higher level responses to this question were able to apply their contextual knowledge accurately not just to the main argument offered in each extract, but also to more precisely selected quotes. Therefore, when analysing Extract A, stronger students often identified the reference to 'in-fighting and searching for unity' and were able to apply contextual knowledge about the 1890s and early 1900s regarding the Liberal leadership struggle following Gladstone's retirement, and divisions over the Boer War. With regard to Extract B, stronger students were able to apply more precise contextual knowledge, particularly around the issue of Conservative party organisation and their appeal to a wide range of social classes. Higher level students tended to explain their overall judgement in a more developed way, going beyond the rather obvious point that Extract B is more convincing because it covers a wider range of points.

Less able students often demonstrated some understanding of the extracts, but this did not go much beyond summarising the content, and the contextual knowledge that was supplied was very thin and/or inaccurate. There were some students who wasted time and space by analysing the provenance and tone of the extracts, which is not relevant to this question.

Section B

Question 02

This was the more popular of the two optional essay questions and proved to be an effective question in discriminating between students across the full range of levels on the mark scheme. A lot of students included content about the extension of the franchise in this period, which was credited as long as the connection was explicitly made between the Reform Acts and the governments' greater focus on social reform which came as a result. If the student merely assessed the political reforms in isolation, then this was not always directly relevant to the question.

Most students understood the question and were able to deploy some relevant knowledge. For many students this tended to be in the form of identifying a range of social reforms introduced by the governments of this period, therefore suggesting that they did have an interest in social reform, although the depth and accuracy of content on these reforms had limitations. In balance, this was often combined with identified limitations of the reforms, such as the fact that several acts were permissive, as evidence that the governments' interest in social reform was limited. Limited judgement was often based on the content and impact of the acts themselves. There were some attempts within responses to analyse the motivations of the political leaders of the time, but this did not often go beyond rather superficial assessment, for instance that maybe Gladstone and Disraeli only gave the appearance of interest in social reform due to their personal political rivalry.

At the higher levels, students were able to broaden the analysis to focus on the motivations of the governments in more detail. Some effective contextual understanding was therefore demonstrated, perhaps arguing that, in the context of what had come before, the governments of 1867–1886 were more active in the field of social reform and that this laid the foundations for the more wide-ranging

social reforms of the first decades of the 20th century. Alternatively, students agreeing with the statement in the question identified and explained Gladstone's ongoing commitment to laissez-faire principles, as well as his preoccupation with Ireland. Such students often continued the same line of analysis arguing that Disraeli showed little commitment to social reform after the initial burst from 1874 to 1876, which itself could be characterised as a rather opportunistic response to the perceived failings of Gladstone's first ministry.

The weakest responses were characterised by a very limited range and depth of relevant and accurate knowledge. At this level, there tended to be some awareness of the question but insufficient factual knowledge in support.

Question 03

There were fewer responses to this question compared to 02, and those students who answered it often struggled to provide a range and depth of relevant content. There were some stronger answers which understood the context of free trade and protection within the wider changes occurring in the economy of this period. These better responses often identified the more modern production practices in Germany and the USA as a significant additional factor along with the decline in entrepreneurial spirit amongst third generation British industrialists and businessmen.

Less convincing responses identified some of the above factors, but the explanations lacked depth and sometimes accuracy. Some answers drifted into a discussion about whether there really were 'economic problems' facing Britain in this period. Such points lacked direct relevance to the question. Another factor which was included by several students was unemployment, but this was often explained not as a cause of economic problems but rather as a consequence, and therefore this also lacked direct relevance. The weakest responses often demonstrated a very limited understanding of the key term 'Free Trade' and offered very little in the way of explanation or knowledge beyond rather vague and generalised comment.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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