
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/1H
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/1H

Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855–1964

Component 1H: Autocracy, Reform and Revolution: Russia, 1855–1917

General Comments

There was a positive response from most students, who often showed a good level of knowledge in their answers. In most cases they applied themselves well to the issues presented in the questions, both in terms of analysing extracts and writing essay-type answers. The quality of analysis varied, but was often impressive. Some students found it more difficult than others to come to terms with the demands thrown up by this new specification and new style of examination. However, the great majority of students appeared to cope well with the time pressures of the examination, since they invariably finished the paper, even when writing at length. A minority of students were much less secure in their knowledge, or failed to use their knowledge effectively to write answers of sustained relevance. In Section B, many students showed good essay writing skills, clearly thinking about their answers, structuring them well and most importantly, analysing the issues with supporting evidence. As always, the best answers displayed well supported judgements, made either towards the end of the answer or evident throughout the main body of the answer.

It is also important to emphasise the difference between this specification and previous ones. The specification contains content which clearly has a social, economic and cultural dimension in addition to more 'traditional' emphases, such as political ones. For example, in this question paper, Question 02 had a distinctly social focus. Question 03 included a significant ideological focus. These elements are in the outline of the specification, but the response suggested that in some cases, students were not prepared for this, because sometimes quite knowledgeable students found it difficult to apply their knowledge to the actual question set. The importance of the key questions outlined in the specification must also be emphasised. All concepts must be tested at some point, and examination questions take account of this.

Section A

Question 01

This compulsory section dealt particularly with AO3: analysing and evaluating, in an historical context, different ways in which aspects of the past have been interpreted.

Most students considered each extract in turn, before making a comparison of them in terms of how convincing they were in explaining the weakening of Tsarist authority in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many fewer students adopted the approach of making the comparisons throughout their whole answer. Of course, either approach was equally valid.

There were three key elements to successful evaluation of the two extracts, in addition to the obvious requirement to comprehend what each was saying. Most students did show this comprehension well, which confirmed the importance of reading each extract carefully.

i) An understanding of the interpretations in the two extracts

In order to demonstrate their understanding of the interpretations effectively, it was necessary for students to apply their historical knowledge of the topics. On the whole this was done well. Most students showed good knowledge of the events surrounding the 1905 Revolution and the events leading up to it during the preceding years. There were occasional errors. For example, some students confused the SD and the SR parties referred to in Extract A. However, most students were able to elaborate on the issues referred to in the extracts, such as the outbreaks of nationalism in the Russian Empire, the role of the Russian army, the impact of social and economic developments which occurred under industrialisation and the reactions of the authorities. In the weakest answers, the students did not use their knowledge to reinforce the views in the extracts, but tended to summarise or even regurgitate the two extracts, or take the content at face value, rather than analyse them in the true sense of the word. Some other answers showed a tendency to include too much material, which although it might be accurate, was not particularly relevant to the issues. In contrast, the best answers focused on the key aspects of the interpretations and explained them well, applying knowledge appropriately. In so doing, students effectively compared the two broadly contrasting interpretations without getting bogged down in the significance of every word in the extracts.

Although there were variations in understanding, there did not appear to be a significant difference between the two extracts in terms of students' ability to understand and interpret them.

(ii) An understanding of the historical context

Although it was not a requirement to devote the same amount of time to each extract, the best answers did of course show knowledge relevant to what was being discussed in each extract in order to comment on the interpretations. Weaker answers were sometimes too generalised. Some tried to go too far beyond the events of 1905–1906. Some spent too much time on description or narrative, especially of the events of Bloody Sunday. Some answers went too far back into the mid-nineteenth century, getting bogged down in events such as the emancipation of the serfs. Better answers avoided these dangers, and showed good knowledge, for example in distinguishing between the response of workers and peasants to the unfolding events. The best answers maintained their focus on the 'weakening of Tsarist authority', which was the nub of the question.

(iii) Comparison between the two extracts

Whereas a good level of knowledge was common, the weakest element in many answers was the ability to make an effective comparison between the two extracts. It was not enough to assert that one extract provided a more convincing interpretation than the other, or simply compare factual content in the extracts. The ability to judge the actual interpretations is a particular skill, since it requires applied analysis. It appeared from some weaker responses that this is a skill which many students need to work on in order to make the sort of well substantiated judgement which will enable them to produce answers of the highest quality in this section of the examination.

Section B

Question 02

This question related to the section in the specification ‘Trying to preserve autocracy 1855–1894’. The sixth bullet point is ‘Economic and social development,’ which includes references to ‘social divisions’. The question addresses AO1 by exploring in particular similarity and change.

Of the two optional choices in Section B, this question was far more popular than Question 03. It was very evident that most students had very good knowledge of the reigns of Alexander II and Alexander III, especially the former. They clearly knew the details of their various policies. This was particularly true of emancipation, about which most students could provide accurate and extensive information. There were many very good answers, but also many much weaker ones. The differential was rarely down to the degree of knowledge shown but to students' ability to apply their knowledge to the precise question.

Too many students wrote about the motives for the tsars' policies. That was not the question. Too many wrote in detail about the opposition to the tsars which developed during this period. This was not the focus of the question. Too many wrote about the economy: this could be made relevant to the question, but sometimes students wrote about the motives of Witte and others in carrying out economic reform, rather than considering the social impact. The question was specifically about the development of society during this period, and in writing about this, a good answer would consider the extent to which this could be considered a ‘transformation’. Some students did this well, but too many did not apply their knowledge in the best way. There was an exception to this. Most students knew a lot about the impact of emancipation, and did explain its impact for good or ill on the peasantry and on the nobility, and also considered the more general impact over time on aspects such as landholding and the beginnings of industrialisation. Many students also wrote well about the social impact of the industrialisation which occurred later in the century, especially its impact on living and working conditions. However, knowledge was often applied less effectively to other aspects. Students wrote about the changes made in education, in the law, in censorship, in the policing, and so on. But too often it was a description of the measures taken with no real evaluation of their impact. Or, if there was an attempt at evaluation, it tended to be very generalised or assertive, for example with simplistic assertions about education suddenly becoming universally available to every Russian, or every Russian suddenly getting equal treatment before the law.

Too often it was a classic case of students having quite a lot of knowledge but not applying it to the actual question set. As a result, some knowledgeable students wrote answers which had very good elements but were sometimes imbalanced overall. This prevented them from reaching the higher levels of which they were probably capable of attaining.

Question 03

This question related to the section in the specification, ‘The collapse of autocracy 1894–1917’. The fourth bullet point is ‘Opposition: ideas and ideologies, liberalism, socialism, Marxism, individual and radical groups’. The question addresses AO1, in particular the concepts of cause, consequence and significance.

Relatively few students attempted this question, and unfortunately there were very few good answers. Those who answered usually gave the impression that they were not prepared for the question, although it related to a specific part of the specification, or they simply did not understand

the question. Answers tended to ignore the time scale set out in the question, the 1890s to 1917. Students usually knew something about Lenin, but tended to write about a very narrow period in his life, during 1917 itself and the lead-up to the October Revolution. Sometimes there were brief references to events such as the Menshevik/Bolshevik split, but rarely much indication that students understood much of significance about Marxist ideology, how this impacted on Lenin, and indeed what might be meant by the 'growing influence of Marxism'. When there were references, they were sometimes factually incorrect. Most students who attempted this question found it difficult to select and deploy precise supporting detail in support of the arguments that should have been the focus of this question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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