
A-level History

7042/2H France in Revolution, 1774–1815
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

As the first year of this new specification it was pleasing to see a large number of students get to grips with both the compulsory question (Q01) and their choice of essay questions. As this is a depth paper, questions can be focused on a narrow section of the course as was seen this year. On the whole students did manage to address depth type questions, although at times confusion over chronology did limit the ability of students to do well. The comments which follow are indicative of some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly seen in students' answers in this session.

Section A

01

In contrast to the AS Level, there were two main elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance, tone and emphasis and an evaluation of content and argument (both requiring some application of own knowledge). Comparison is not a requirement at A-Level. The best responses took the sources one at a time and treated them completely separately, perhaps with a short conclusion weighing up the value of that source in relation to the question, before moving on to the next source. The better responses also tended to be those where the provenance of the source was addressed before evaluating the content as this tended to result in a more holistic understanding of the source, enabling the student to understand what was written in the light of who wrote it, why and when. An understanding of the emphasis of the source also tended to encourage students to focus on the major argument of the source, rather than taking a line by line approach which is to be discouraged.

A good number of students were able to identify the main arguments of the sources, for example, the fact that Source A is seeking to blame other factors rather than Napoleon for the failure of the campaign, whereas Source B is clearly focusing its blame on Napoleon. An understanding of the provenance of each of the three sources helped them to grasp why this might be the case, so for example, Napoleon preferred to focus on factors outside of his control, whereas, someone who had abandoned Napoleon, and had not taken part in the campaign in Russia, might have been happy to criticise Napoleon for a campaign in which they had had not taken part. Contextual knowledge was very important in order to evaluate both the provenance and the content of these sources. The temptation for some students was to write what they knew about the campaign, rather than ensuring that contextual knowledge was really relevant to the point being made in the source. For example Source A doesn't focus on the problems of food shortages and yet many students still chose to make that their focus, just writing about what they knew rather than dealing with the source before them. For this reason many students found B more straightforward as it gave them the opportunity to display their knowledge about Napoleon's tactic of living off the land and Russian scorched earth policy. Source C tended to be quite well done for provenance and content, although a lack of precise knowledge of chronology sometimes hindered students. For example, Source C clearly focuses on the retreat but a number of students didn't seem to recognise this, or thought it was winter for the whole campaign. However, for those who had revised the Russian campaign, this source was generally done well.

Most students were able to demonstrate 'some understanding' of provenance and content and some awareness of the historical content which is required for level three. However, there were some who focused too much on content at the expense of provenance or vice versa, and there were some whose lack of contextual knowledge kept them down. At the top end there was some very good understanding of the provenance and content in context, which resulted in very high

marks. However, it is important that contextual knowledge is clearly linked to the source and to the question. The answer must be driven by the sources.

Finally it was important for students to address the question. It was surprising how many students failed to refer to value despite that clearly being the focus of the question. A failure to make explicit judgement about the value of the source limited a student's ability to go beyond level three.

Section B

02

In many ways this was the most straightforward of the three optional questions and if students had revised the constitutional reforms they were able to do very well indeed and a good many succeeded in this. However, a number of students did not read the question carefully enough and wrote about reforms outside of the period in question and others spent too long writing about the Ancien Regime or other factors for reform rather than the National Assembly. It was clear that quite a few students were struggling to remember detail from the first year of the course, but that is something which is going to continue to be crucial to doing well in this exam, particularly on the depth paper where questions can have a narrow focus.

03

Again, where students had a secure knowledge of the chronology of 1793, and particularly the Vendee Uprising, they were able to do well. However, a lot of students did not have a strong understanding of the significance of the Vendee and given that this was the focus of the question, it was important to deal with this as fully as possible. Students did tend to have a better grasp of balancing factors, such as the federalist revolts or war, but, as for 02, there was some confusion regarding dates with students writing about events in 1792 and 1794 when the question required a focus on 1793. This highlights the need for thorough revision in order to ensure that students can address the question accurately.

04

This was a popular question to answer, possibly as it would have only been recently studied, and there was some fairly good contextual knowledge regarding personal ambition, although this was not always well linked to consolidation of power. Students found it more difficult to explain how revolutionary principles might have been important in Napoleon's consolidation of power and could be a little dismissive of this notion, or alternatively quite contradictory in their comments. Nonetheless there were some very good responses which were able to show that whilst personal ambition might have been more important in Napoleon's consolidation of power, revolutionary principles also played their part in this period of time.

Overall it is important for students to ensure that they address the factor in the question as fully as possible, as well as addressing balancing factors, and to ensure that they read the question carefully and to stay within the confines of the dates highlighted.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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