AQA

AS-LEVEL
HISTORY

Component 7041/1E
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/1E

Russia in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment, 1682–1796
Component 1E: Peter the Great and Russia, 1682–1725

General Comments

It was pleasing to see how students had engaged with both the content and the assessment demands of the new component. All students followed the rubric and most were able to demonstrate some good understanding and knowledge of Peter the Great's reign. Only a very few were unable to provide any relevant comment.

Students were generally secure in attempting to answer the essay questions in Section B, as they seemed to be familiar with the expectations of writing focussed and balanced arguments. Many seemed to welcome having more time to develop and support their arguments in comparison with the legacy specification and answers were generally well structured. There was more variation in the success that students had in tackling the compulsory extract question.

Section A

Question 1

The majority of students considered the two extracts in turn. However, sometimes students made comparative comments in the body of their answers and it did seem that this technique helped students develop an evaluative conclusion which effectively addressed the requirement to determine which of the extracts was the more convincing.

The best answers had the following qualities:

i) An understanding of the interpretations in the two extracts

Students maintained a better focus on the question if they clearly identified what they understood the key interpretation to be in each extract at the beginning of their discussion. Students who did this, and had a good understanding of the historical context, were then able to pick out arguments and phrases from the extract that underpinned the key interpretation and were able to apply their own knowledge to support or refute these points.

However, the majority of students employed a line-by-line approach. This tended to lead to some specific weaknesses in answers. Firstly some students never really got to grips with the overall interpretation in the extracts. Instead they tended to discuss every single phrase, not always noticing contradictions and sometimes employing vast amounts of detailed factual knowledge to quite minor points. This was particularly true in Extract A where, for example, many students saw the point about Peter wanting to raise taxes and proceeded to describe all the new taxes Peter introduced but never developed this within the context of the overall interpretation that this did not prevent economic growth.

In addition, sometimes this approach meant that students got so bogged down in detail that they lost all focus on the interpretation altogether which prevented them from reaching higher levels as they were unable to address the comparative element of the question at all. Going into this much detail on every phrase also meant that sometimes students ran out of time by the second half of Extract B and so missed the major part of the interpretation in the Hughes extract. In these cases students tended to argue that Hughes was the more convincing because it was balanced. Whilst they may have gained some credit for this it prevented them from recognising the real argument.

Students should be encouraged to read the extracts as whole pieces and then try to summarise what the key interpretation is in each one. It is recognised that this is a high level skill but students will do better if they give time to this careful reading rather than to descriptive writing. Doing this will allow them to then to pick out the most relevant phrases/arguments and discuss these in the context of their own knowledge. This will ensure that their discussion are based on the interpretations, rather than less relevant material and enable them to properly address the question

(ii) An understanding of the historical context

Most students showed a very good understanding of the historical context and demonstrated detailed knowledge. As was explained above, the challenge is to recognise how and where to best deploy this. There were, of course, some much thinner answers, and this was particularly frustrating when students showed a good understanding of the interpretations, as the lack of support meant that they were unable to develop a meaningful argument about which interpretation was better. There were a few students who seemed to be under the impression that the extract question did not require any contextual knowledge and this obviously limited their marks.

(iii) Comparison between the two extracts

The comparative element of the question was sometimes the weakest element of an answer. Sometimes this was because students asserted that one extract was more convincing than the other in a basic conclusion that bore little relation to their previous discussions. Some justified their choice by the amount of factual content contained within the extract. Other students commented on the accuracy, validity or reliability of the extracts seeming to indicate some confusion about what is really meant by interpretations. All of these flaws were more common where the student had failed to properly identify what the interpretations were. Where the interpretations contained in each extract were clearly understood students were more able to draw on their analyses of each extract to provide a meaningful and substantiated judgement.

Section B

Question 02

This was the less popular of the two optional essay questions, but most students attempting to answer it had a good knowledge of westernisation so were able to respond to the question. However, some students were either not secure enough in their knowledge to confine themselves to the period before 1707 or ignored the dates in the question. This sometimes led to long discussion of policies such as the Table of Ranks which unfortunately could not be credited. Other weaker answers were only able to describe westernising policies and did not really examine their impact, or tended to be very general; centres are reminded that one of the key questions which

informs this specification is based on society. However, most answers were well focussed and even where there was some irrelevant material most students were able to include details about dress, beards, St Petersburg etc which was relevant. Balance tended to be provided by the impact on serfs (indirectly) or the military, both of which were acceptable and rewarded.

Question 03

This was a popular question and most students showed a detailed knowledge of Peter the Great's foreign policy after 1707. Sometimes this led to long descriptions of the Battles of Poltava, Pruth and Hango with limited focus on Russia as a European power by 1725. Generally students that took a narrative approach found it difficult to reconcile contradictory pieces of evidence and produce an overall convincing conclusion. Some students discussed whether it was Peter's foreign policy which led to Russia being a European power by 1725. This was credited where comments were meaningful, though it was sometimes hard for these students to demonstrate balance. The best answers demonstrated a deep contextual understanding by explaining, for example, the import of Poltava and Hango in relation to Russia's improved military and diplomatic position by 1725, recognising limitations in this progress, and balancing these to assess whether or not Russia was a European power by 1725.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.