



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel
In GCE History (8HI0/1E)
Advanced Subsidiary

Paper 1: Breadth study with interpretations

Option 1E: Russia, 1917–91: from Lenin to
Yeltsin

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PE report 8HI0 1E

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in this, Advanced Subsidiary Level, paper 1E.

The paper is divided into three sections. Section A comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting the second order concepts of cause and/or consequence. Section B offers a further choice of essays, targeting any of the second order concepts of cause, consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference, and significance. Section C contains a compulsory question which is based on two given extracts. It assesses analysis and evaluation of historical interpretations in context (AO3). Candidates in the main appeared to organise their time effectively, although there were some cases of candidates not completing one of the three responses within the time allocated. This was most evident on Section C, as would be expected. Whilst the impact of this cannot be fully mitigated against, and the best advice is thus to plan time accordingly in the first place, the responses that appeared to experience such timing issues yet overcame them to some degree were those who offered more direct responses. To wit, those who wrote abbreviated question 5 responses that focused sharply on arguing and analysing the given views, rather offering extensive explanations and quotes, were more likely to still produce a reasonably effective response, than those failing to reach any comparative analysis and evaluation.

In sections A and B most candidates were well prepared to write, or to attempt, an analytical response. Stronger answers clearly understood the importance of identifying the appropriate second order concept that was being targeted by the question. A minority of candidates, often otherwise knowledgeable, wanted to focus on causes and engage in a main factor/other factors approach, even where this did not necessarily address the demands of the conceptual focus. Candidates in the main were able to apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner suited to the different demands of questions in these two sections in terms of the greater depth of knowledge required where section A questions targeted a shorter-period, as compared to the more careful selection generally required for the section B questions covering broader timespan.

Candidates do need to formulate their planning so that there is an argument and a counter argument within their answer; some candidates lacked sufficient treatment of these. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-pointed strands which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these strands progress through the levels. Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

In Section C, the strongest answers demonstrated a clear focus on the need to discuss different arguments given within the two extracts, clearly recognising these as historical interpretations. Such responses tended to offer comparative analysis of the merits of the different views, exploring the validity of the arguments offered by the two historians

in the light of the evidence, both from the within the extracts, and candidates' own contextual knowledge. Such responses tended to avoid attempts to examine the extracts in a manner more suited to AO2, assertions of the inferiority of an extract on the basis of it offering less factual evidence, or a drift away from the specific demands of the question to the wider taught topic.

Question 1

Question 1 was the less popular choice with candidates in Section A of the paper. The vast majority of candidates were able to engage with the conceptual demands of the question sufficiently, and apply appropriate knowledge in order to allow them to access levels three and four. What distinguished within these tended to be down to two issues, which were often related. Firstly, the range and quality of knowledge candidates were able to offer, particularly on the given issue of the role played by the secret police. Other issues which featured in a number of responses were economic policy, in particular the introduction of the NEP, the role played by the Red Army, and use of the media by the Bolsheviks. A significant minority range in their offering of issues other than the secret police. Whilst most were able to demonstrate some understanding of these, stronger responses tended to be those who were in a position to give and apply a range of evidence to explore and assess the impact this actually had. The second issue was how well candidates connected what they knew about the secret police and other factors to the analytical demands of the question, going beyond explaining and detailing what the secret police did, to clearly examine exactly how this related to the survival of the regime in the given years. Some candidates also confused the secret police with later terror under Stalin. The strongest offered convincing attempts to ascertain the way in which such reasons contributed and their relative importance, e.g. exploring specific examples such as the role played by the secret police in suppressing the Kronstadt and Tambov rebellions, or examining the different way in which the factors worked, e.g. arguing the secret police helped survival by suppressing and thus dissuading those against the regime, whereas pragmatic concessions helped gain acquiescence amongst a broader cohort of the population.

Question 2

Question 2 was the more popular of the two within Section A. The vast majority of candidates attempting this question seemingly found it accessible and straightforward, and thus it was generally well answered. Most candidates were able to offer a reasoned consideration of the given issue, Stalin's cult of personality, and were largely able to focus this towards the demands of the question, although in general responses were stronger on other factors, in particular terror. Stronger responses tended to offer specific examples of the cult in order to explore how this helped maintain Stalin's power, and to do so with examples from across the period, e.g. typically referencing the cult as being initially built upon that of Lenin, how it took on an identity more personal to Stalin from the 1930s, and relating this to the significance of developments in the Second World War. Less successful responses sometimes attempted analysis of the role played by the cult, but did so in a general or assertive manner. Some responses also lapsed into less focused accounts of how Stalin ruled during this period. Some of the strongest responses offered a sustained analysis of the role played by the cult of personality, exploring how this varied across the period, and/or examining the interaction between the cult and other factors.

Question 3

This question produced a range of responses, and the majority of candidates were able to reach the higher levels with a predominant focus on the second-order concept of similarity/difference, and sufficient relevant material. In terms of issues commonly covered, most candidates were able to offer contrasts such as highlighting Brezhnev's conservatism against the thaws seen under Khrushchev, or the return to a celebration of aspects of Stalin's rule under Brezhnev, as well as recognising broad similarities with examples of the suppression of examples of non-conformist culture, attempts to allow a degree of freedom of expression, or the difficulties all faced in enforcing a desired cultural approach. Some stronger responses made good use of particular examples such as Solzhenitsyn, the Sinyavsky-Daniel and the Bulldozer Exhibition. Art and literature tended to get more coverage than other cultural forms. Some responses referenced issues but struggled to relate them clearly to culture, e.g. descriptions of dissidents which were not clearly related to the question. The two main issues limiting the success of responses tended to be a loss of focus on the second-order demands of the question (comparison of similarity/difference), or a insufficient precision and detail. The strongest responses offered both, as part of a balanced analysis and evaluation of the question.

Question 4

This question produced a range of responses. Where candidates were able to offer sufficient valid material on the Soviet educational policy, they tended to be successful in focusing this towards the extent to which there was improvement. A minority of those answering this question lacked sufficient knowledge of the topic, or had some knowledge of developments in education, but lacked real range. There were many responses which did offer material which was both ranging and detailed, with commonly covered issues including efforts to increase literacy, compulsory education from the 1930s, and adult education. Candidates offering such points tended also to be able to highlight the limitations of these policies, predominantly related to resources and geographical and ideological constraints. Stronger answers were able to focus on whether or not these policies 'failed to improve' the lives of the Soviet people, and thus made good use of material offered to explore and assess the issue, although there were a minority who had good knowledge, but did not consistently develop and make use of this material.

Question 5

Most candidates were able to access the higher two levels, generally by recognising and explaining the arguments in the two extracts, and building on this with own knowledge. The strongest responses tended to offer a comparative analysis of the views, discussing and evaluating these in the light of contextual knowledge. Most candidates were able to identify the differences between Extract 1 and Extract 2, e.g. how Extract 1 offers an account of the economic difficulties faced, whereas Extract 2 emphasises Gorbachev's role in dealing with issues such as the rise of nationalism and the economic difficulties Extract 1 highlights. Many responses recognised that there was common ground in some aspects of the extracts, but the strongest were confident in considering the distinctions between their respective arguments. It was pleasing to see that few responses became side-tracked in an attempted analysis of the provenance of the extracts.

Where candidates were less successful, this tended to be (i) limited use of contextual knowledge, or offering valid contextual knowledge, but with limited linkage to the discussion of the views, or (ii) a tendency to describe and explain the extracts, rather than attempt to discuss and assess the arguments they offered. As small number of responses were incomplete.

Candidates' knowledge and understanding of issues was varied, but in the main good, e.g. with knowledge of the impact of Gorbachev's actions on nationalist activity amongst the satellite states and non-Russian republics, how perestroika exposed economic weaknesses, the role played by Yeltsin and the significance of the Chernobyl disaster. A discriminating factor in success was to some extent was the deployment and development of knowledge offered, i.e. the difference between responses which tended to use contextual knowledge to add to what an extract said, and, at the higher levels, responses which were more able to use this material to discuss the merits of given arguments, in relation to the precise focus of the question. With regards to judgement, it was pleasing to see a substantial number of candidates offer reasoned and considered assessments of the merits of both arguments, regardless of their ultimate decision. Overall, Question 5 produced a strong response from a good number of candidates.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A/B responses:

Features commonly found in responses which were successful within the higher levels:

- Candidates paying close attention to the date ranges in the question
- Sufficient consideration given to the issue in the question (e.g. main factor), as well as some other factors
- Explain their judgement fully – this need not be in an artificial or abstract way, but demonstrate their reasoning in relation to the concepts and topic they are writing about in order to justify their judgements
- Focus carefully on the second-order concept targeted in the question
- Give consideration to timing, to enable themselves to complete all three question with approximately the same time given over to each one
- An appropriate level, in terms of depth of detail and analysis, as required by the question – e.g. a realistic amount to enable a balanced and rounded answer on breadth questions

Common issues which hindered performance where when responses:

- Answers which pay little heed to the precise demands of the question, e.g. write about the topic without focusing on the question, or attempt to give an answer to a question that hasn't been asked – most frequently, this meant treating questions which targeted other second-order concepts as causation questions
- Where a response does not give sufficient consideration to the given issue/proposition in the question (e.g. looking at other causes, consequences, etc, with only limited reference to that given in the question)
- Answers which only gave a partial response, e.g. a very limited span of the date range, or covered the stated cause/consequence, with no real consideration of other issues
- Assertion of change, causation, sometimes with formulaic repetition of the words of the question, with limited explanation or analysis of how exactly this was a change, cause, of the issue within the question.
- Judgement is not reached, or not explained
- A lack of detail

Section C responses:

Features commonly found in responses which were successful within the higher levels:

- Candidates paying close attention to the precise demands of the question, as opposed to seemingly pre-prepared material covering the more general controversy as outlined in the specification
- Thorough use of the extracts; this need not mean using every point they raise, but a strong focus on these as views on the question

- A confident attempt to use the two extracts together, e.g. consideration of their differences, attempts to compare their arguments, or evaluate their relative merits
- Careful use of own knowledge, e.g. clearly selected to relate to the issues raised within the sources, confidently using this to examine the arguments made, and reason through these in relation to the given question; at times, this meant selection over sheer amount of knowledge
- Careful reading of the extracts, to ensure the meaning of individual statements and evidence within these were used in the context of the broader arguments made by the authors
- Attempts to see beyond the stark differences between sources, e.g. consideration of the extent to which they disagreed, or attempts to reconcile their arguments

Common issues which hindered performance:

- Limited use of the extracts, or an imbalance in this, e.g. extensive use of one, with limited consideration of the other
- Limited comparison or consideration of the differences between the given interpretations
- Using the extracts merely as sources of support
- Arguing one extract is superior to the other on the basis that it offers more factual evidence to back up the claims made, without genuinely analysing the arguments offered
- Heavy use of own knowledge, or even seemingly pre-prepared arguments, without real consideration of these related to the arguments in the sources
- Statements or evidence from the source being used in a manner contrary to that given in the sources, e.g. through misinterpretation of the meaning of the arguments, or lifting of detail without thought to the context of how it was applied within the extract
- A tendency to see the extracts as being polar opposites, again seemingly through expectation of this, without thought to where there may be degrees of difference, or even common ground