



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel

In GCE History (8HI0/2B)

Advanced Subsidiary

Paper 2: Depth study

Option 2B.1: Luther and the German
Reformation, c1515–55

Option 2B.2: The Dutch Revolt, c1563–1609

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AS paper 2B, which covers the options of the German Reformation (2B.1) and the Dutch Revolt (2B.2) again saw responses from across the ability range.

The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question each based around one source and assesses analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting five second-order concepts – cause, consequence, change/continuity, similarity/difference and significance.

In general, candidates again found Section A, the compulsory two-part source question, the more challenging largely because many were not clear what was meant by ‘value’ and ‘weight’ in the context of source analysis and evaluation (AO2). In question (a), some candidates still waste time by attempting to address how the source is not valuable to the enquiry which is not relevant to this question. In questions (a) and (b), candidates are reminded that making effective use of the source content is vital in accessing the higher levels of the mark scheme. Also the detailed knowledge that is required to add contextual material to support and/or challenge points derived from the sources is often of limited linkage to the source content or absent altogether. Finally, some candidates continue to make generic comments on the provenance of the sources though many, taking their nature, origin and purpose into consideration, were able to evaluate the use of the sources to the enquiry in each question.

Section B, the section in which candidates were given a choice of three essays in order to assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1), still tends to be done better. There were few wholly descriptive answers with most candidates attempting to engage analytically with the demands of the questions. The majority of answers were soundly structured and clearly expressed. They also made some effort to come to a judgement. Lack of detailed knowledge of the material continues to be an issue for some as is a tendency not to engage fully enough with the specific focus of the question. Also, there is still a significant number of answers which lack balance in their response to the questions – candidates are reminded that, at this level, there is a requirement that as well as developing the stated factor in essay questions, they also require some development of a counter-case.

Question 1 (a)

This question asked that candidates use the Papal Bull ‘*Decet Romanum Pontificem*’ to address the attitude of the papacy to Luther in 1521. Most candidates were able to identify from the source content that it was hostile, for example, referring to Luther as a ‘heretic’ and to his ideas as ‘wicked’ or as ‘errors’. Contextual knowledge was then added to the inferences drawn, perhaps to raise the matter of the content of Luther’s pamphlets of 1520 or his open and public disdain for the previous Bull, ‘*Exsurge Domine*.’ In evaluating the value of the source to the enquiry, many went on to note Leo X’s role

in Luther's controversy over the previous years and/or to the strength of the language used in the Bull.

Question 1 (b)

There were some good responses to this question. These were able to draw inferences from Charles' abdication speech with regard to his failure to defeat Lutheranism, with regard notably to his many obligations outside the Empire and the opposition of 'neighbouring rulers'. Such answers were often able to use their own knowledge to expand upon these inferences, by referencing the Charles' absence and inability to enforce the Edict of Worms during the crucial years of the 1520s. Some made valid comments on the weight that could be given to the source's evidence, taking into account Charles' age and infirmity, also the audience for his speech and the language used. Weaker responses tended to use the source as a prompt for knowledge-driven answers on Charles' response to Luther with scant attention to its content.

Question 2 (a)

There was one response to this question.

Question 2 (b)

There was one response to this question.

Question 3

There were a number of good responses to this question that were very well informed of the failings of the parish clergy in early sixteenth century Germany and the influence of humanist ideas in the spread of anti-clerical ideas. These typically referred to the corruptions, both personal and institutional, of the clergy and the inability of many to give their parishioners the spiritual guidance that was expected. Many knew also the works of Erasmus and Hutten, and of the extent of their influence, among the poor especially. A few candidates attempted to bring in other reasons for the growth of anti-clericalism, the economic demands of the Church in Germany for example, that were not linked effectively to the focus of the question. However, there were many L4 responses.

Question 4

This was overwhelmingly the most popular of the essay questions and it elicited responses from across the ability range. The best answers were able to discuss, in some detail, the manner in which Luther's challenge developed in the late 1510s and the significance of the Ninety-Five Theses in this period. As well as knowing the Theses in detail, stronger candidates were also to evaluate their role alongside other factors, the debates with Cajetan or Eck for example, or 1520 Reformation Treatises. Weaker responses tended describe the circumstances of the Ninety-Five Theses to the exclusion of anything else, and/or were unable to link them to Luther's challenge to the Church.

Question 5

There were no responses to this question.

Question 6

There was one response to this question.

Question 7

There were no responses to this question.

Question 8

There were no responses to this question.

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

Section A – Question (a)

- Candidates must be more prepared to make use of the content of the source, and make valid inferences from it rather than to paraphrase
- Focus inferences, contextual support and explanations on the focus of the enquiry
- Be prepared to back up inferences by adding additional contextual knowledge from beyond the source
- Move beyond stereotypical approaches to the nature/purpose and authorship of the source e.g. look at the specific stance and/or purpose of the writer.
- Avoid writing about the limitations of the source when assessing its value to the enquiry.

Section A – Question (b)

- Candidates must be more prepared to make use of the content of the source, and make valid inferences from it rather than to paraphrase
- They should be prepared to assess the weight of the source for an enquiry by being aware that the author is writing for a specific audience. Be aware of the values and concerns of that audience
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to use contextual knowledge to support/challenge statements and claims made in the source
- Consider omissions from the source material only where it is apparent that there is a deliberate decision to exclude something, or the ignorance of the author has led to omission
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- In coming to a judgement about the nature/purpose of the source, take account of the weight you may be able to give to the author's evidence in the light of his or her stance and/or purpose.

Section B

- Questions can be asked on any element of the Key Topics in the specification
- This is a Study in Depth so it is vital to have precise and detailed knowledge of the issues to score well – candidates are required to have both range and depth in their answer to access the higher levels
- Questions can be asked by targeting any of the five second order concepts – cause, consequence, continuity and change, similarity and difference, significance
- Pay full attention to the stated focus of the question – aim to explain this fully before considering alternatives to give the answer balance and enable you to come to a judgement
- Be sure to respect the time frame in a question – make sure that the material you use is both relevant and covers the chronology as fully as possible
- Try and show links between the issues raised in your answer, especially in coming to a judgement
- Use subject-specific terminology precisely and accurately.