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Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in
History(WHI02) Paper 1A

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Introduction

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in the summer examination series of the IAS Level Paper WHIO2 1A which covers the option: option India, 1857-1948: The Raj to Partition. The paper is divided into two sections. Section A contains a compulsory two-part question for the option studied, each part based on one source. It assesses source 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.

Performance compared favourably to previous series with most coping well with Section A. Candidates demonstrated that they can comprehend, select and summarise from the source material. Most can make relevant comments using the provenance. However, some candidates are still not clear on what is meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. It is important to note that Question 1a focuses on value and no marks are awarded for examining the shortcomings of the source. Candidates are well advised to avoid wasting time on this. Referring to limitations in the source deviates from the question focus and make it difficult for candidates to reach a secure judgement. In this series, performance by some candidates in Section A was affected by the absence of the detailed knowledge base required to draw upon contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. In answering Question 1b, some candidates concentrated their use of contextual knowledge on what was missing from the source. This is a legitimate approach where there is reason to judge that there is a deliberate omission or an omission through ignorance, but it is not legitimate where a candidate refers to the omission of events that had not happened at the time of the production of the source. The best responses come from candidates who have concentrated on the focus of the question, for example 'significance', 'reasons', 'seriousness' etc. and draw inferences, explain and support this with contextual knowledge, A significant proportion of candidates evaluate the sources in a vacuum and draw inferences and support with context that is not related to the focus of the enquiry. Sharper focus will help candidates to make the most of their time and produce effective answers. Most candidates did use their time effectively and, although a few responses were quite brief, there was little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer questions both sections. The ability range was diverse, but the design of the paper catered for all abilities.

In Section B, in this series, most responses had an analytical focus and there were very few that were wholly descriptive essays which were devoid of analysis and, for the most part, responses were soundly structured. The most common weakness in Section B essays was a lack of knowledge and especially precise knowledge applied to the question. Some candidates did not focus on the time period set. It is important that candidates read the question carefully and note the parameters before planning and writing their answers. This avoids mistakes that undermine performance. It is also important to realise that Section A and Section B questions may be set from any part of any Key Topic, and, as a result, full coverage of the specification is enormously important.

The candidates' performance on individual questions is considered in the next section.

Question 1(a)

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about the nature of government in India after the Mutiny of 1857. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the removal of the authority of the East India Company and the development of India as a colony, as well as the implications in the source that it would be beneficial for India to be ruled directly by Britain. However, some candidates did not pay attention to the focus of the question 'nature of government' and instead wrote at length about the Sepoy Mutiny. These responses had limited focus on the task and achievement on the levels of the mark scheme was hampered.

The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity. Candidates would do well to remember that contextual knowledge does need to be used to explain and develop the inferences drawn from the source and not just to provide free-standing knowledge. Some candidates used their contextual knowledge of the 1858 Royal Proclamation, the development of India's government under a viceroy and the extent to which Indian people would be included in government. These responses accessed level 3 for both bullet points 1 and 2 of the mark scheme. Contextual knowledge used to confirm or expand on the source material can access level 2. Too many candidates, however, focused on the causes of the Sepoy Rebellion and consequently paid little attention to the question focus and therefore achieved little on bullet point 2 of the mark scheme. It is important that candidates do consider the relevance of the contextual knowledge that they use and target it appropriately. It was disappointing that some candidates had no context to offer, and this did have a depressing impact on the overall mark awarded.

Most candidates were also able to make good use of the provenance to explain the value of the source, citing the significance of the official nature of the Bill that would shortly be passed into law by the British Parliament, which offered a clear view of what the British intended for the government of India. It is important that candidates go beyond the stereotypical claims of a source being produced by someone who was 'there at the time' and therefore a 'primary source'. These comments do not in themselves provide any explanation of value and do not achieve out of level 1. In addition, those candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of part a) responses.

Question 1 (b)

Most candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to develop some inferences about the reasons why there were demands for the partition of India. Candidates made good use of the source to infer that India should be partitioned because of the great differences between Muslims and Hindus and that the deep-seated problems between Muslims and Hindus would not be solved simply by granting independence.

There were some effective answers that weighed up the strengths and limitations of the source and used this as a basis to reach a judgement about the weight that should be attached to the source for the enquiry. Although some candidates attached free-standing knowledge to the response, many did use secure knowledge, particularly to challenge the claims in the source and in some cases to carry out a thorough interrogation of the evidence. With this source, candidates were able to construct successful interrogations, for example, by considering the claims made by the author that Muslims and Hindus were too different to be able to work together and challenging it with their own knowledge that Hindus and Muslims had in fact worked side by side for hundreds of years and even recently in independence campaigns such as the 1920 non-cooperation campaign. The establishment of weight is very dependent upon candidates using their contextual knowledge to test the claims in the source. Candidates who only use knowledge to expand on the content of the source remain in level 2 for that bullet point. Some candidates did not use any contextual knowledge in their evaluation, and this limited their achievement.

In the most effective answers, candidates were able to use the provenance of the source in conjunction with the content of the source to develop criteria to judge the weight of the source as test this with claims in the source. A minority of candidates made some questionable assumptions about the source and presented them in a very stereotypical way, e.g., source is reliable value because he was there etc. Some candidates made good use of the date of the source and argued that Jinnah's arguments were becoming more powerful in the early stages of the Second World War and that the British would be more receptive to them. Candidates examined Jinnah's motivations and the influence that he would have as largely secular Muslim arguing for partition. Some candidates evaluated the source by considering its nature as a speech rallying the support of a large Muslim audience and considered the extent to which it could be considered propaganda. This was used effectively to consider what weight could be ascribed to the source. In level 4, bullet point 3 requires candidates to use criteria that are 'justified and applied' to evaluate the source. Where candidates identify bias or subjective views, it is important that they refer to them specifically in their answer to support their evaluation. In this response, Jinnah's claims that the Muslims were 'in a majority' in 'large parts of this country' could be tested by knowledge of the percentages of Muslims living in the specified areas and conclusions drawn about the validity of Jinnah's claims and hence the weight that could be attached to the source.

Question 2

This was a popular essay question. Most candidates were able to address the question as to whether the development of the Indian economy was more beneficial to the British than it was to the Indian people. Many candidates were well prepared and had an impressive range of evidence that they could call upon to formulate their response. Candidates referred to the value of railway construction to Britain in terms of the demand for British coal and steel to build the infrastructure and the benefits that were then developed in terms of the import and export trade, especially for cotton. Many contrasted this with the jobs that were generated for the Indian population and the benefits of developing Indian markets as well as the use that could be made of railways in time of famine. Candidates considered the development of irrigation systems and debated whether sufficient investment was made into irrigation compared to railway building. Some candidates strayed out of period, looking at events in the 1920s and 1930s and the 1943 famine and this material could not be credited. A few candidates took the opportunity to write a polemic referring to the Indian people as slaves and resources as stolen. This choice of language did undermine the argument and made it impossible for candidates to weigh up each side and reach a supported judgement.

The best answers were able to establish criteria for assessing the relative significance of the benefits accruing to each side and used this as the opportunity to reach a measured and supported judgement.

Question 3

This was the least popular essay question on the paper. Most candidates who selected it were able to address the question of whether the use of repression in India by the British declined in the years 1919-45. Candidates considered the issuing of the Rowlatt Acts and the Amritsar massacre as the apogee of British repression and many argued that it declined from that point onward with a greater focus on negotiation, for example through the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the Round Table conferences and Wavell's negotiations in the 1940s. Other candidates argued that the use of imprisonment throughout the period as a feature of repression was evidence that the persistence of repression. Most candidates were able to draw on a good range of precise knowledge and some very fine answers were written with many candidates achieving level 4 for well-focused responses that established valid criteria and argued their case effectively. In a number of responses, candidates did not pay sufficient attention to the demands of the question and simply wrote descriptions of various incidences of repression and independence campaigns. This type of approach made it difficult to reach judgements beyond assertion. It is important when selecting an essay that candidates make sure they know what the question is asking them to do and that they focus on its demands. Careful planning is the key to success here.

Question 4

This was a very popular question. Most candidates were able to focus on the significance of the Second World War as a more important cause of the decision to grant independence than Gandhi's campaigns. Many candidates considered the financial costs of the war and the problems that this would cause in maintaining the empire after the war, the Atlantic Charter and the pressure from the USA to grant independence and contrasted this with the impact of a range of Gandhi's campaigns in garnering Indian support and international attention. Many candidates achieved in level 4 by successfully establishing and applying valid criteria to judge the two factors to reach a judgement on 'more' significant. Some candidates did not maintain a clear focus on the specific wording of the question and instead treated it as a multi-factor debate and sometimes concluded that an alternative factor was most significant. This did limit achievement.

Paper Summary

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

Section A

Value of Source Question (1(a))

- Candidates must be more prepared to make valid inferences rather than to paraphrase the source
- 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.

Weight of Source Question (1(b))

- Candidates 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: Essay questions

- Candidates must revise thoroughly and ensure that they have good knowledge to draw upon in addressing the essay question. Candidates must provide more factual details in support of their arguments. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Take a few minutes to plan your answer before you begin to write your response
- Pick out three or four key themes and then provide an analysis of (for e.g.) the target significance mentioned in the question, setting its importance against other themes rather than providing a description of each
- Where you are asked to debate the relative significance of two factors, keep focused on them – there is no reward for coming up with an alternative
- Pay more careful attention to key phrases in the question when analysing and use them throughout the essay to prevent deviation from the central issues and concepts
- It is a good idea to address the factor in the question where given. This makes it easier to consider relative significance
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.

