



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI02)

Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source
Evaluation

Option 1A: India, 1857–1948: The Raj to
Partition

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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 could comprehend, select and summarise from the source material. Most could 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 aims of the Indian National Congress in the years 1885-1914. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the aims, including the unification of all the disparate parts, the development of an Indian nation and cooperation with the Raj. Too many candidates, however, merely described the content and remained in level 2 for bullet point 1.

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 divisions among Hindus and Muslims, loyalty to the Crown, the role of the INC as a forum for discussion and the desire to develop India as a single nation to develop inferences about the aims of the INC. These responses accessed level 3 for both bullet points 1 and 2 of the mark scheme. Contextual knowledge used only to confirm or expand on the source material accessed level 2. Some candidates provided knowledge that was out of period – considering Gandhi's campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s. 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 source written and presented by the founder of the INC as a person who should have been very clear on the aims of the organisation. 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 attitudes to the construction of railways in India in the years 1857-1914. Candidates made good use of the source to infer that while the British took a positive view of railway building based on the economic benefits it brought to them, the Indians had a more negative view based on the cost and the need for other investment, particularly on irrigation systems.

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 merely expanded on the content of the source with a range of free-standing knowledge that had some relevance to

the enquiry, 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 that the focus on railway building meant necessary works like irrigation were neglected and challenging it with their own knowledge that significant work was undertaken in irrigation by Curzon in addition to railway building, as well as considering the benefits that were brought to some Indian businesses having access to railways to move goods. 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. Candidates also need to make sure they remain focused on the task. Too many were distracted by the reference to irrigation in the source and produced a response that was largely focused on irrigation and so lost sight of what they were actually supposed to be doing.

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 writer of the source and argued that on the one hand, as a civil servant, member of the Bengal Legislative Council and president of the INC, Dutt would have a clear insight into the development of the railways and access to information that might not be in general circulation. They also referred to his likely contacts in the Indian and British communities. Contrasting these strengths, many referred to the clearly anti-British tone of the source and the claims made about the neglect of irrigation. 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, Dutt's claims that railway building led to the neglect of irrigation and the implication that focus on railways led to the neglect of agricultural needs could be tested by the acknowledgement by the Famine Commission of the importance of railways in dealing with the 1899 famine.

Question 2

This was a popular essay question. Most candidates were able to address the question as to whether the Morley-Minto reforms were more significant than the 1919 Government of India Act in progress towards self-government in India. 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 increased number of Indians on the Viceroy's Council and the provision of separate electorates for Muslims under the Morley-Minto reforms and contrasted them with progress in the terms of the Government of India Act, such as the establishment of dyarchy, the appointment of three Indian councillors to advise the Viceroy, the enlargement of provincial and legislative councils and enlargement of the franchise - all regarded as significant steps to self-rule. Candidates considered the

shortcomings of both reforms in reaching a judgement. One common error was for candidates to introduce another factor and argue that it was more important. These candidates had lost control of the focus of the question and struggled to reach a valid judgement on the question set. 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 most popular essay question on the paper. Most candidates who selected it were able to address the question of whether the main consequence of the Rowlatt Acts was an increase in the use of repression in the years 1919-29. Candidates considered the terms of the Rowlatt Acts and argued that repression was a key consequence as demonstrated in the curfews, crawling order, the Amritsar massacre and the imprisonment of protestors in the 1920-22 non-cooperation campaign. Many contrasted this with consequences such as the rise in nationalism, the development of Gandhi's non-cooperation tactics and the unity between Hindu's and Muslims in the face of oppression. Most candidates referred to the 1919 Government of India Act, although few understood that it was disrupted by the Rowlatt Acts rather than a consequence of them. Very few candidates referred to the short life of the Rowlatt Acts in developing a judgement. 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. Some did not look at the date range and focused on events outside of it. 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 the least popular essay question on the paper and generally was well answered. Most candidates were able to focus on Jinnah's attitudes to independence and consider elements of change and continuity. Many considered the continuity in his desire for an independent India, his dislike of Gandhi's methods of campaigning and his suspicion of an India ruled by a Hindu majority. In contrast, they noted the change in his attitude from separate electorates to a separate Pakistan. Many candidates achieved in level 4 by successfully establishing and applying valid criteria to reach a judgement.

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.

