



# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel International  
Advanced Level In History (WHI02)

Paper 1C: Russia, 1917–91: From Lenin to  
Yeltsin

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## **Introduction**

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in summer examination series of the IAS Level Paper WHIO2 1C which covers the option: option Russia, 1917–91: From Lenin to Yeltsin. 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 are able to comprehend, select and summarise from the source material. Most are able to 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/2a 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. 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/2b, 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 time period 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 consequences of Khrushchev's liberalisation policy. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the development of freedoms in expression and speech and the limitations to this as inferred from the claim that the Party 'showed no intention of relaxing' controls completely. However, some candidates did not pay attention to the focus of the question on 'consequences' and instead of drawing inferences, merely describe the content. 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. Many candidates used their contextual knowledge of the Khrushchev's rejection of personality cults, his destalinisation policy and its impact as well as their knowledge of the 'thaws' and 'freezes' to explain inferences about the extent of reduction in controls. 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. 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 position of the author, Mikhail Gorbachev who, as a student in the 1950s and later the leader of the Soviet Union who introduced the policy of glasnost, in writing could offer a unique insight into the experience of liberalisation in the 1950s. 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 for the destruction of the 'kulaks' during the collectivisation of farming under Stalin. Many candidates made good use of the source to infer that the 'kulaks' were deliberately targeted as enemies of the state to enable the authorities to seize their produce and force the policy of collectivisation in the Ukraine.

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 Council that the 'kulaks' had been 'sabotaging the collection of grain' and challenging that with their own knowledge that the 'kulaks' were targeted because they were the most productive of farmers and that it was the Twenty Five Thousanders who had pushed them into concealing grain and other foodstuffs because they were being left with insufficient food to feed their families. 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 or did not focus on reasons for the destruction of the 'kulaks' and instead provided often very lengthy descriptions of collectivisation and its consequences without reference to the source at all.

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 it was written at the time etc. Many candidates made good use of the origin of the source and argued that while the Resolution could provide an excellent insight the ideological motives of the state authorities as well as the reasons that they provided for their actions, it did not address their real motives which included their hatred for a class that was simply more successful than other peasants. 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, the subjectivity of the Council's claim that the 'kulaks' were responsible for failures in the grain collection could be demonstrated by the tone and language used in the Resolution such as 'malicious sabotage' and 'counter-revolutionary'.

## **Question 2**

This was a popular essay question with just over a third of candidates selecting it. Performance upon it was variable. Most candidates were aware of the focus of the question on similarities and differences in education in the 1920s and 1930s, but candidates' ability to maintain this focus throughout the answer was varied. Most candidates were stronger in considering Stalin's policies toward education and were able to discuss his imposition of traditional teaching methods in schools, his focus on skills needed for the Five-year Plans, his expansion of higher education and his continued focus on literacy. However, candidates were often very uncertain on Lenin's policy, and this made it very difficult for candidates to carry out an effective comparison. The best candidates contrasted Stalin's policies with Lenin's experimental methods, the removal of examinations and child-centred learning spearheaded by Lunacharsky, and the difficulties in providing education for all children in the civil war and its aftermath and confirmed the similarity in Lenin's drive to improve literacy. Too many candidates had insufficient knowledge of the topic as a whole and therefore fell back on comparing a wider range of aspects of life in Soviet Russia under Lenin and Stalin, including their approach to the arts and policies towards women. These responses were not relevant to the question and did not score highly.

### **Question 3**

This was the most popular essay question on the paper and was generally well answered. Most candidates were able to address the question of whether Khrushchev's policies towards industry were a success but his agricultural policies were a failure. 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. These candidates considered both the successes and failures of industry and agriculture and used this as the basis for reaching a considered judgement. In assessing industry, candidates referred to the achievements of the Seven-year Plan, to the restructuring of the ministries and to the shift from heavy to light industry in order to increase production of consumer goods. Some candidates made good use of the impact of economic policy on the space race. In assessing policy towards agriculture, candidates considered the achievements of the virgin land scheme, issues of quality of soil and climate and the abolition of the MTS. Many candidates developed well supported judgements.

### **Question 4**

This was the least popular question and although there were a number of well-focused responses that achieved level 4, the majority of responses were limited in their achievement because they did not focus on the question. The best achieving responses were clear on Brezhnev's policy of stabilisation and were able to discuss whether it was the main cause of stagnation in government by a thorough consideration of the policy of stability of cadres, the nomenklatura system, the emergence of the gerontocracy and contrast this as the cause of stagnation with the development of corruption in government, the limitations on promoting lower ranking officials and the growing conservatism in the system. However, too many candidates did not pay sufficient attention to the question and wrote about stagnation in general and some with an exclusive emphasis on stagnation in the economy. This material was not rewardable unless specifically related to government. 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 the exact date range. Careful planning is the key to success here.

### **Paper Summary**

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

#### **Section A**

##### **Value of Source Question (1(a)/2(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)/2(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
- 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.

