



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced

A Level in History (WHI02/1C)

Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source Evaluation

Option 1C: Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to  
Yeltsin

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## **Examiner Report: WHIO2 1C Russia, 1917-91: From Lenin to Yeltsin**

### **Introduction**

It was pleasing this January to see a number of well-informed and well-written responses from candidates on IAS Paper WHIO2 1C which covers the 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.

While the January entry is smaller than the summer entry, performance had much common with previous series. Candidates continue to find Section A more challenging than Section B. It has been raised in every Exam Report, but some candidates are still not clear on what is meant by 'value' and 'weight' in the context of source analysis and evaluation. Candidates do need to be aware that in addressing question 1a) 'value' means that they need to focus on the strengths of the source, in the light of their contextual knowledge, which give it value and that there are no marks available in the mark scheme for consideration of limitations. Too many candidates insist on looking at the 'extent of value' rather than 'reasons for value' as asked in the question. It is in question 1b) that candidates need to address extent. Here they need to consider both the strengths and limitations of the source, in the light of their contextual knowledge, and then use this as the basis to attribute weight to the source. For some candidates, performance in Section A is limited by the absence of the relevant detailed knowledge base required to add contextual material to support/challenge points derived from the sources. Most candidates did use their time effectively this January and, although some 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 allowed all abilities to be catered for. Furthermore, in Section B, many responses had an analytical focus, and few responses were wholly descriptive essays that were devoid of analysis. For the most part, essay responses were soundly structured. The most common weakness in Section B essays was the lack of a sharp focus on the precise terms of the question and/or the second order concept that was targeted. This meant that some candidates wrote at length on topics that were only peripherally related to the question, or which did not cover the whole time period.

It remains important to note that Section A topics are drawn from highlighted topics on the specification whereas 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 1a)**

Most candidates understood the question and were able to comprehend the source and comment on what it revealed about Gorbachev's policy to reduce controls on the lives of the people in Soviet Russia. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about freedom of speech

made possible by Gorbachev's reforms. The best answers developed the inferences with well-selected context to establish their validity, with many using their knowledge of glasnost and Gorbachev's greater willingness to explain the reasoning behind decisions to the public. However, a significant number of candidates did not include any contextual knowledge in their response and did little more than describe the content of the source and, in some cases, simply copied out phrases from the source. This latter technique could not achieve more than level 1 in bullet point 1. If they had gone just a little further and provided some explanation of what was being said in the source, they could have accessed marks in level 2. Some candidates did not appear to be familiar with Gorbachev's rule and wrote at some length about restrictions under Stalin or Khrushchev, but this was not focused on the question set. Candidates would also 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 were able to use the attributes of the source effectively to develop their ideas about the value of the source from Gorbachev himself and the importance that could be attached to it as a speech made to the Conference of the Communist Party by the very man who was to introducing reforms to the government and would have a very clear idea of his own intentions. In this way, candidates were able to access the lower marks in level 3. It is important that candidates do go beyond merely stating what is in the caption. A significant number of responses asserted that the source was valuable because it was produced by Gorbachev but did not follow this up with an explanation as to why that was so. Those candidates who discussed the limitations could not be rewarded for that part of their answer as it is not the focus of 1a responses. It is very important that candidates avoid doing this. In some cases, more than half of the answer addressed limitations. This meant that candidates were spending valuable time on answers that could not achieve any marks.

### **Question 1b)**

Most candidates understood the source material and were able to select from it to consider the status of women in Russia under Stalin. Many candidates were able to draw some inferences, for example, that improved status was an aim for the Communists but not a reality for many women. Many were also able to expand on the source material by developing contextual knowledge of the impact of the Five-Year Plans on women's employment opportunities and the contradictions in the Great Retreat. Many candidates made good use of the provenance of the source to discuss how far a report in a regional newspaper could be applied to the whole of the Soviet Union, and to consider the value on a report that was clearly critical of the Party in an era of strict censorship. In this way, candidates were able to attribute weight to the source. It is important that candidates read the source before beginning their answer. A significant number of candidates provided a stereotypical evaluation, claiming that the source would be biased in favour of the Party because of the state control of the media and that it could not therefore be trusted, yet the contents belied such a conclusion, indicating that candidates may well have written this part of the response before reading the source content. However, there were a significant number of candidates who did little more than describe the content of the source, and in some cases merely copied out phrases. This latter technique could not achieve better than level 1. Some candidate's knowledge was very limited, indicating that they had not yet studied this topic.

## **Question 2**

This was the most popular essay question. Many candidates produced very effective answers, considering the success and failures of War Communism and the New Economic Policy in order to reach a judgement. These candidates considered the economic failures of War Communism, including the plummeting production on the farms as peasants resisted state control and requisitioning squads, and the economic successes of the NEP including increased industrial and agricultural production, as both farmers and businesses were incentivised by the opportunity to make profits. In doing this they were able to agree with the proposition in the question. Many well-argued responses then examined the political successes of War Communism in achieving victory in the civil war and implementing a communist system, but its political failure, particularly in losing the support of the sailors at Kronstadt, and in reintroducing capitalism. Most candidates had good knowledge and achieved in levels 3 and 4.

## **Question 3**

About a third of the candidates answered this question. There were a small number of very well focused responses that achieved in level 4. These responses were tightly focused on the wording of the question and were able to discuss the significance of 'de-Stalinisation' and contrast with the importance given to other reforms of government, including decentralisation, the expansion of the party to include more peasants and workers and the introduction of fixed terms for senior Communists. However, most candidates achieved in levels 2 and 3. The main reason for this was the failure to focus on the explicit wording of the question 'Khrushchev's reform of government'. Many candidates just focused on 'reform' and consequently wrote at length about the successes and failures of Khrushchev's agricultural and industrial policies. These had limited relevance. Other candidates wrote about Stalin's regime with little reference to Khrushchev's regime at all. Candidates are reminded that it is beneficial for them to plan their answers briefly before writing. This not only ensures focus on the question but also helps candidates to pick the question best suited to them.

## **Question 4**

This was the least popular question on the paper with 13 responses. There were some very good answers that achieved level 4. Here candidates had a clear understanding of the focus of the question and were able to consider the harsh policies pursued by Khrushchev and the more variable treatment of religion under Brezhnev and hence to reach a supported judgement in the light of the question. However, some candidates' achievement was much more limited. Some candidates did not read the question carefully and wrote about Stalin's treatment of religion which was not covered in the date range of the question. Others had very little to say, producing little more than a paragraph in response. Again, candidates would have benefited from careful planning, ensuring that they understood the focus of the question and its parameters, in order to make the best choice of essay.

## **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
- 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 deficiencies 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
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- Knowledge should be integrated with the source evidence, to discuss the inferences drawn and their validity in the light of the contextual understanding 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
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to assess reliability by considering what has been perhaps deliberately omitted from the source. However, simply stating that a source is limited because it does not cover certain events or developments does not establish weight since no source can be comprehensive.

## **Section B**

### **Essay questions**

- Candidates must provide more factual details as evidence. 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
- Pay careful attention to the date range in the question. Plan the answer with a focus on this range and avoid lengthy exploration of events outside of the time period set
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically and the arguments more integrated.

