



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in History (WHI02)

Paper 2: Breadth Study with Source
Evaluation

Option 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: 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 could 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. In this series, performance by some candidates in Section A was affected either by the absence of a detailed contextual knowledge base or by the absence of contextual knowledge relevant to the enquiry, which is required 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 dates set in the question. 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 problems in the Soviet economy under Brezhnev. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the backward nature of the Soviet economy and the inefficiency of the workers. However, some candidates still consider the evidence at face value and merely describe the content. This approach limits achievement in the bullet points and impacts on the overall score.

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 failures of the Kosygin reforms, the high costs and impact of the military-industrial economy and the problems caused by excessive bureaucracy of the system to explain inferences about the problems in the economy. 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. Some candidates devoted too much time to describing the problems of Khrushchev's economy and lost focus on the task. 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 inside knowledge that Brezhnev would have had and the importance of the subject that made him broadcast the speech that was critical of the Soviet system on television. 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 way Russia was ruled under Lenin. Many candidates made good use of the source to infer that Russia was ruled in a dictatorial way with the soviets rendered powerless in the face of growing centralisation and policy enforced by violence. Some candidates did not read the caption and source material carefully and mistakenly wrote a response focused on Stalin's rule in Russia. It is important that candidates do make sure that they know the task set and read all the information given.

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 to explore issues raised 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 claim that Lenin ruled using fear and violence and supported this through knowledge of the role of the *cheka* during the civil war, and challenging the claim that there was no free speech by referring to Lenin's willingness to listen to different points of view, e.g. from Trotsky. 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 impacted on their overall 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 it was written at the time etc. Many candidates made good use of the origin of the source and argued that, while Serge was expelled from the Party by Stalin and later exiled therefore open to charges of exaggeration, he had been 'well placed to observe' and 'close contacts with various opposition groups' and would therefore have an insight in to the way Russia was ruled by Lenin. 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.

Question 2

There were a number of well-focused responses to this question. Most candidates were aware of the focus of the question as to whether government policies did not lead to improvements in the lives of women in the years 1918-28 and were able to maintain focus. Most candidates were able to consider a range of policies that targeted women, including greater access to divorce and abortion, encouragement to women to take up employment in factories and the provision of childcare to enable this. Some also referred to greater political opportunities with the establishment of the *Zhenotdel*. Most candidates were able to contrast these positive developments with reference to the impact of post card divorces that were overwhelmingly used by men, the reality of limited childcare provision, the low wages and limited employment opportunities for women and the 'double shift'. In this way candidates were able to weigh up the evidence and reach a judgement in relation to the question. In a number of cases, candidates did not pay sufficient attention to the date range in the question and wrote extensively about the lives of women under Stalin. This impacted on overall achievement. Similarly, some candidate's performance was limited by weak analysis as a result of applying 21st century values to the period and making claims about the importance of maternity leave for bonding with children or assess to abortion as evidence of women having control over their bodies.

Question 3

This was overwhelmingly the most popular essay question on the paper and produced many high scoring response. Most candidates were able to address the question of the difference approaches that Stalin and Khrushchev had to controlling the Soviet population. Most were able to draw on a good range of precise knowledge and some very fine answers were written with candidates achieving secure level 4 for carefully debated responses that established valid criteria and argued their case effectively. These candidates considered various methods of control, including the use of terror and the secret police, control of the arts, the development of personality cults, censorship, and control of religion. Some candidates also looked at control of workers and peasants through management of the economic system. Where focused on control, these responses could provide effective comparisons. However, some candidates got sidetracked into looking at successes and failures of economic policy and this did impact on their ability to develop criteria and reach judgements in relation to the question. The best responses often carried out tight comparisons of each identified feature considering the differences and similarities of the approach in relation to that particular feature and used this as a basis to reach a judgment. Other candidates looked at Stalin's and Khrushchev's control individually and then drew judgements about whether the approaches were very different. Either approach could achieve level 4 when clearly argued and supported. Weaker responses tended to have limited knowledge, confuse the approaches and write generally about aspects of each leader's rule without a clear focus on the question without focus on economic policy.

Question 4

This was the least popular question and although there were a number of well-focused responses that achieved level 4, some responses were limited in their achievement because they did not have sufficient knowledge to support their responses and enable them to make secure judgements. In particular, the lower scoring responses did not focus their answers on 'control of government' and instead wrote generally about the weaknesses of the rule of the last three Soviet leaders and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The best achieving responses were clearly focused on Andropov's and Chernenko's failure to take control of the 'old guard', Gorbachev's lack of control over party institutions such as the KGB, Yeltsin's challenge to Gorbachev and the attempted coup in 1991. This was then challenged with evidence that Gorbachev strengthened his control by promoting key supporters to the Politburo and limiting holding Party positions for more than ten years, as well as his election as President in 1990 which gave him extensive controls over government.

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
- 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.

