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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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

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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 1D which covers the option: option South Africa, 1948–2014. 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 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 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 Desmond Tutu's role in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There were some well-focused responses that drew out inferences about the challenges involved in Tutu's role and in his determination to remain impartial.

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. In answering this question, too many candidates developed their contextual knowledge about the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and said little about Tutu's role in it. These responses struggled to access level 3 for bullet 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 at all 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 an article published decades after the sitting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, giving it the benefit of being able to reflect upon Tutu's role and noting that the article was reasonably balanced, referring to both the successes and limitations of the Commission. It is important that candidates go beyond the stereotypical claims of a source being 'primary'. 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 use of economic sanctions on South Africa in the 1980s. Most candidates were able to infer that the British government opposed the use of sanctions as unfairly harming black South Africans. Some of the more developed responses were also able to infer the supportive attitude of the Commonwealth countries and the change in view in the American government.

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. 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 their on the question and that limited 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 because it was written at the time etc. Many candidates made good use of the origin of the source and argued that as the leader of the British government, Margaret Thatcher was in an excellent position to represent Britain's views on sanctions at that time, whilst challenging with their knowledge that this represented the views of the country in view of the numbers attending the 70th birthday party for Nelson Mandela at Wembley in 1988 and the audience who watched the broadcast 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 objective or subjective views in the source, it is important that they refer to them specifically in their answer to support their evaluation.

Question 2

This was a popular essay question with about a third of candidates selecting it. In general, it was answered well. Most candidates were able to address the question about the extent to which the key features of the system of apartheid changed in the years 1948-89. Many candidates referred to the system of grand apartheid, the enforcement of bans on the opposition and the gradual dismantling under Botha's reforms as well as his attempts to prevent change through his 'total strategy'. Some candidates did not focus on the demands of the question and wrote descriptively about events that occurred during the period such as the Soweto uprising or the Rivonia Trial. While these events had relevance, they needed to be targeted to the question in order to enable the candidate to formulate judgements.

The best answers were able to establish criteria for assessing both change and continuity. Some candidates had good knowledge that they used effectively to support their response. However, there were some candidates whose knowledge was limited and imprecise.

Question 3

There were very few answers to this question. Generally, candidates had some knowledge of differential healthcare and were able to relate it to child mortality. Most candidates contrasted this cause with others such as poverty and disease, although surprisingly few considered the impact of HIV/AIDS from the 1980s. Some candidates strayed beyond the dates set in the question and discussed child mortality in the new republic. This material could not be rewarded as it was out of period, and overall, it did undermine the judgements that candidates were making. 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.

Question 4

This question was answered by more than half of the candidates and produced some very well focused and supported responses. Most candidates were able to address the question of the whether the Soweto uprising was the most significant protest against apartheid within South Africa in the years 1960-94 and contrasted it with the significance of the Sharpeville protest. Fewer than might have been expected contrasted it with the UDF campaigns of the 1980s and early 1990s. 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 dates and wrote at considerable length campaigns in the 1950s or about protests taking place outside South Africa. This material could not be rewarded as it was out of period or out of question focus, and overall, it did undermine the judgements that candidates were making. 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 wording of the question. 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))

- 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.

