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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced  
Level In History (WHI04)

Paper 1B The World in Crisis, 1879–1945

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## Introduction

### General Comments

With four consecutive series having been sat it is now possible to make some general comments on series-on-series developments. The 2023 series is the first series where there is an acknowledgement of a return to 2019 examination conditions but there is awareness that many candidates are still being prepared in challenging circumstances.

**Selection and deployment of knowledge** - As previously noted, candidates, in general, produce interesting responses that it is a pleasure to read and reward. The candidates were usually very well prepared in relation to knowledge of the specification and centres are to be commended for this. Candidates have good, detailed knowledge of the specification content and this is a facet that often stands out. Many responses were well-informed and well-written. Continuing from the January series, it was particularly noticeable in the WHI04 1B papers, that centres and candidates appear to have taken heed of the June 2022 Examiner Report with regard to the need for more discrimination in the selection and deployment of knowledge. In Section A, there was less use of 'stand alone' information and more contextual knowledge deployed to discuss the views in the Extracts. In Section B, there was clear indication of more focused and '*precisely selected*' (L5-BP2) knowledge.

Also, it is clear that the progression seen in January 2023 with regard to the use of the Extracts in responses is continuing. There is clear evidence in many WHI04 1B papers that the Extracts are now being dealt with as viewpoints to be discussed, with contextual knowledge used to further this discussion. For Q1, candidates do still often feel the need to develop a 'third' aspect of debate beyond the discussion being 'set up' by the Extracts. This is rarely necessary or relevant (although it may be pertinent) and often leads to responses that end up ignoring the Extracts or using them very thinly. The Extracts create the debate for discussion and own knowledge is best used validating the evidence in the Extracts and showing understanding of the basis on which the Interpretation has been founded by the author(s). Almost no candidates now write responses solely from their own knowledge and centres now understand more fully the AO3 to AO1 balance of rewardable content in Section A. It has been a real pleasure to see the progress made in the approach to Section A questions.

**Conceptual understanding and application of skills** - As stated in the June 2022 Examiner Report, despite good knowledge, candidates continue not always to be able to access high Level 3 marks and above due to a limited understanding of the conceptual focus of questions and the application of analytical skills.

In Section A, some candidates are still not using the Extracts as the basis of their response in Section A. These candidates no longer ignore the Extracts but use them as evidence for a traditional 'essay' response rather than building the argument around the Extracts. Many candidates are still not reaching a judgement on the given view to access the higher Levels. WHI04 1B candidates are now almost universally discussing the Extracts (AO3) but now need to develop further by seeing the Extracts as the viewpoints of historians or writers of history. More candidates were achieving high Level 4 and Level 5 marks. In Section B, lower-Level responses often lack focus on the wording of the question and/or the second-order concept being targeted. Awareness of the second-order concept(s) being targeted (cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference, significance) allows candidates to use criteria with discrimination and to come to judgements that are evaluated, e.g. the primacy of the given factor in relation to other factors, the extent to which there has been change.

There were fewer candidates who organised their responses, particularly for Section A, in the format of the indicative content in the mark scheme, which was a clear improvement from the previous June and January series. The organisation of the indicative content is not intended to be a scaffold for the organisation of responses. The indicative content is organised into distinct sections to aid the examiner in identifying the points made and the relevant contextual knowledge that might be used. Selecting key points of view without explanation and contextual knowledge deployed in a 'stand alone' manner are indicative of the lower Level descriptors and it is unlikely that such responses would be rewarded beyond Level 3. The higher-Level descriptors indicate a need for an integrated response.

In June 2022, it was noted that many introductions written for both Section A and B were written in a formulaic way both in terms of knowledge about the topic and in terms of references to criteria and the defining of terms. There was much less evidence of this in June 2023, with candidates being more direct in responding to the question asked and not wasting time by writing contextual knowledge that was not really relevant to the questions. There was also a decrease in candidates telling the examiner that the criteria being used and applied by them were 'valid'.

As in previous reports, it is worth noting that the responses are marked using a 'best-fit' process. Each bullet point strand within the generic mark scheme is considered to create an overall sense of Level and a mark applied within the Level. If a response has qualities which exemplify a variety of Levels or a strand is missing then this will be reflected by applying a 'best-fit' Level and mark. For responses which do not address an aspect of a particular strand, for example reaching a judgement in bullet point 3 for Q1, this will be reflected in the mark rewarded.

Very few candidates failed to attempt both Sections, and most were able to produce two balanced responses, so enabling them to show their ability across AO1 and AO3 skills.

General candidate performance on each Section and specific performance on individual questions for Paper 1B are considered below.

**Please note:** that it is recommended that centres look at a selection of Principal Examiner Reports from across the different options within WHI04 1A-1D and previous series to get an overall sense of examiner feedback, centre approaches and candidate achievement. It is also highly recommended that centres read the general Introduction and Section A and B introductions in the Principal Examiner Reports for June 2017. These generic introductions outline the assessment requirements for WHI04 and give an indication of the skills required.

Centres may wish to refer to the *Getting Started* guide that is to be found on the IAL History Pearson Edexcel website. It is also useful to take note of the indicative content in the mark schemes.

Further resources that may be of use are the *Applying Criteria* and *Developing Student's Understanding of Historical Interpretations* documents to be found on the Pearson Edexcel History GCE website along with the Principal Examiner Reports for Paper 1 of the Pearson Edexcel History GCE. The *Applying Criteria* document gives guidance with regard to the application of criteria for the different AOs tested at A level. The GCE Paper 1 Reports will be particularly useful for exemplification of AO3 interpretations skills (but please be

aware that there are slight differences within the general Level descriptors and that AO1 is assessed for IAL). Exemplification documents are also available on the Pearson Edexcel History IAL website.

## Section A

See above for general comments but it was very pleasing to see some excellent Interpretation responses. Some candidates are really evaluating the Extracts with regard to the convincing nature of the views, and this makes for some very interesting and thought-provoking responses.

It is worth reminding centres that although candidates are evaluating the extent to which the author's views in the Extracts are convincing, this is not a source evaluation exercise. There is no requirement in the specification for candidates to know any historiography surrounding the debate and candidates are not expected to know about the views of specific historians. In some responses, candidates evaluate the provenance of the Extracts. This is not required and can lead to time wasting in writing about the speculated origins of the books and the author's themselves, for example, making assumptions about nationality and bias. It is very helpful if centres clearly distinguish between AO2 source evaluation in Papers 2 and 3 and the AO3 evaluation of interpretations in Paper 4. One way to do this is to always refer to sources as Sources and interpretations as Extracts or referring to authors of the Extracts.

Q1. Question 1 required candidates to analyse and evaluate the two Extracts provided while deploying knowledge related to the issues raised in the Extracts to determine how far they agreed with the view that Serbia was the country most responsible for the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in August 1914. The author of Extract 1, J Keegan, put forward the view that Serbian relations with Austria-Hungary and Serbian connection to the Sarajevo assassination meant that the crisis of 1914 could not be settled by diplomacy, as other crises had been settled in the past. The author of Extract 2, F Fischer, suggested it was Germany and, particularly the role of the German political and military elite, that was responsible.

It was clear that most candidates had been well prepared for the Key Topic controversy and there was some excellent knowledge of the role of the different countries involved. Lower-level responses also often answered the question as a general question about factors leading to outbreak of war rather than of reading the question carefully and understanding that the focus of the question was on the responsibility of individual countries for the outbreak of the war.

For Extract 1, most candidates were able to discuss the long-term relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, the nature of Serbia's connection to the Sarajevo assassination and Austria-Hungary's decisions in relation to events. There was some excellent integrated contextual knowledge of the Austrian-Hungarian ultimatum and the background to the Sarajevo assassination. For Extract 2, there was clear evaluation of the alternative view that Germany was mainly responsible for taking advantage of the situation presented by the assassination, with reference to Germany's belief that it

needed to act in self-defence while it could, the role of the Kaiser and Germany's military leadership and the pivotal role of German politicians, such as Bethmann-Hollweg. Contextual knowledge of the nature of the European alliances and the situation in Europe in 1914 was integrated into responses well. Some candidates were able to select material from both Extract 1 and 2 to highlight the underlying importance of Austria-Hungary in the events and its willingness to challenge Serbia with the ultimatum. There was some excellent use of Fischer's reference to Germany not 'stumbling into war' and this shows that it is important for candidates to read and use the whole Extract in planning their answers.

## Section B

Question 2 was more popular than Question 3.

Q2. Candidates were required to determine whether Hitler's foreign policy, in the years 1933-41, was driven mainly by his aim to prevent the spread of communism. There was some excellent knowledge of the German contribution to the Spanish Civil War, the creation of the Axis alliances with Italy and Japan and the Nazi-Soviet Pact but some responses did just describe Hitler's foreign policy in the 1930s with little differentiation. Most candidates explored Hitler's anti-communist stance in relation to other factors such as his desire to overturn the Versailles Settlement, his belief in the reconstruction of a greater Germany, the need for '*lebensraum*' and the desire for security. Some candidates confused '*lebensraum*' with all acts of German expansionism.

The best responses in Level 4 and Level 5 explored the nuances of Hitler's relationship with the Soviet Union, with many suggesting that the Nazi-Soviet Pact was merely a holding policy on the part of Hitler, while others suggesting that it showed that his anti-communism was not the most important influence on his foreign policy. At this Level also, there was some good understanding Hitler's relationship with Mussolini and the complexity of his response to appeasement. There were a significant number of responses at Level 3, and some at Level 2, which displayed good knowledge of events but tended just to explain what happened or describe events. Most responses covered the time period going right up to 1941 and not just finishing with the invasion of Poland.

Q3. Candidates were required to reach a judgement on the significance of the impact of the Battle of Midway in the defeat of Japan in the war in the Pacific. Candidates had strong knowledge of the war in the Pacific and were able to refer to the Battle of Midway itself, Pearl Harbour, the Battles of the Leyte Gulf and the Coral Sea, Guadalcanal, the bombing of the Japanese mainland and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Most responses showed secure chronology but sometimes responses did not make it clear exactly when events they were referring to took place, particularly references to Pearl Harbour. There was not as much reference to the dropping of, and impact of, the atomic bombs as might have been expected. Some candidates referred to events in the European theatres of war but this could only be made relevant with direct reference to how it impacted on the war in Pacific itself.

The best responses at Level 4 and Level 5 explored the impact of the Battle of Midway in relation to the difference that it made to the war. Some created an argument around whether it was or was not significant while others determined significance in relation to other events and developments. There was some good knowledge about the impact of Midway, such as the material Japanese losses, the geographical and logistical gains made by the US, the development of intelligence capabilities by the US and the psychological impact on both sides. At Level 3 candidates tended to explain rather than evaluate the

significance. Low Level 3 and Level 2 responses tended to describe the war in the Pacific or the Battle of Midway itself in great detail.

## **Paper Summary**

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

### **Section A (AO3/AO1)**

- Candidates should aim to interpret both extracts by analysing the issues raised and showing an understanding of the arguments presented by both authors. It is important to show awareness that it is historian's points of view that are the basis of a discussion; referring to the author by name helps this understanding (where there is more than one author, candidates can write the first name with et al after it.)
- Interpretations do not need to be evaluated in the same way as Sources. It is the views in the Extracts themselves that create the basis of the discussion. All the Extracts are 'secondary sources' and this does not need to be explained.
- Candidates should use their own knowledge of the specification content to validate and discuss the interpretations being presented.
- Candidates should come to an overall judgement with regard to the view stated in the question; it is not sufficient just to summarise the views presented in the extracts.

### **Section B (AO1)**

- Candidates should provide more precise contextual knowledge as supporting evidence. Use knowledge to provide evidence to support a sustained evaluation in relation to the conceptual focus of the question. Secure chronological knowledge enables candidates to produce a logical and coherent answer.
- Read the wording of the questions carefully, particularly if the time period of the question is stated; responses that refer to the wrong time period deploy irrelevant and inaccurate knowledge that does not directly address or only implicitly addresses the question.
- Introductions do not need to reflect a large amount of contextual detail; use introductions to establish the foundations of the argument you are about to present and to show that you understand the focus of the question.
- Use conclusions to state the judgement reached clearly and to show the relative significance of or the inter-relationship between key issues discussed in the main body of the essay; leave the examiner in no doubt as to what your judgement is and why.

