



AS LEVEL HISTORY

7041/2S Building a new Britain, 1951-1979
Report on the Examination

7041
June 2022

Version: 1.0

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General Observations

The paper generated a full range of marks – from 2 to 50 – suggesting that the entry represented not only a very broad range of ability but also that the questions were broadly accessible, allowing students to access the highest levels. There were no rubric infringements.

The highest achieving students were very well coached in the skills required for the paper and were very well informed. Unfortunately, almost half of the entry scored 20 marks or less. Clearly, some students had not prepared thoroughly but a key problem seemed not just that students ‘did not know enough’ but that they were unable to apply what they knew. In addition, many students had a poor grasp of chronology.

Answers to the sources question have adopted a fairly formulaic style, following the outline set out in the indicative mark scheme; this is largely appropriate and effective for most students. The approaches to essay writing are more varied but the ‘for’ and ‘against’ format followed by a conclusion has generally increased in quality from year to year. Perhaps greater attention might be focused on opening paragraphs, encouraging students to set out the general context of the question and especially, the direction of their argument.

Question 01

The ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland is a challenging topic for many students. Nevertheless, it is a key part of the specification. Weaker students were confused by basic terminology (unionist, loyalist, nationalist, republican) and their understanding of issues and events was clouded significantly by these basic misunderstandings.

Another common failing seemed to be attributing absolute guilt for the ‘troubles’ to one section of the community alone: it was all the IRA’s fault or the unionists. Guiding students to avoid black and white interpretations of history is challenging but as crucial in today’s world as it ever was.

The best answers offered a clear context for the ‘troubles’, generally focusing on the civil rights movement of the late 1960s in Ireland. Students who were able to reference the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) were well rewarded. Similarly, those who were able to explore more fully the ‘discrimination’ stated in Source A by discussing inequalities in electoral representation (gerrymandering), policing (the RUC), employment and housing were equally well rewarded.

Credit was also given to students who were able to apply their knowledge of events of the early 1970s (internment, Bloody Sunday, the Sunningdale agreement), usually in the context of Ian Paisley’s reference to ‘law and order’ in Source B, as being the solution to the ‘troubles’.

Provenance remains a hard skill for many students to apply. There was a lot of ‘stock’ evaluation usually related to ‘bias’ (newspapers and politicians are invariably biased), or ‘memory’ (people invariably mis-remember everything that happened in the past), or ‘truth’ (speeches in the House of Commons invariably tell the truth).

Tone also remains a difficult concept to handle and perhaps students need reminding that not all sources allow for an evaluation of tone.

Source A

Students coped well with the content and arguments within the source and many were able to develop McLaughlin's references to discrimination, a united Ireland, sectarian attacks and hostile policing of Catholics by the army, as well as his obviously partisan loyalties.

Source B

Students generally found this source more challenging and weaker ones found it difficult to go beyond criticism of Paisley's emotive language. Most understood that Paisley was as partisan as McLaughlin but were unaware that some unionists did want to make concessions, as mentioned by Paisley. Those students who understood this were well rewarded. Some referenced the Ulster Unionist leader O'Neill who wanted to build bridges between the two communities and who considered introducing 'one man, one vote'.

The question requires a comparative analysis but many students either ignored or only touched on the requirement to consider which source was 'more valuable'. Students need to be encouraged to develop this aspect of their answer.

Question 02

This was the more popular of the two essay questions but not overwhelmingly so. Most students who did this question were able to balance their answer, though many stopped at 'affluence' versus 'stop-go'. However, the best answers went further, identifying a good range of indicators supporting and challenging the view that the British economy was strong in the years 1957 to 1964.

Good answers recognised that stop-go was a problem because it generally did not help export industries and led to balance of payments crises; weaker answers merely described the process.

Balanced answers showed a good understanding that the British economy in this period continued to grow and that many benefited from rising living standards but that there were also worrying underlying problems.

Question 03

Answers to this question tended to be less well informed than to 02. Many students drifted into writing about the 1950s (Suez) and the 1960s (Vietnam), which were only credited if a meaningful connection to the 1970s was attempted.

Those students who focused exclusively on the 1970s tended to be more knowledgeable about the earlier part of the decade (Heath, EEC, Yom Kippur and China) than the Labour governments under Wilson and Callaghan.

Interestingly, most students concluded that, though strained, the 'special relationship' held up quite well in the decade.

Conclusions

There were few unexpected or unusual approaches by students and generally students do attempt to adopt an analytical approach to their answers. However, there is a tendency for students to drift to a descriptive approach in their essays where they see a question they think they know well. This was most obvious with students writing all they knew about the age of affluence in 02. While the preponderance of weaker answers was disappointing, 38 students out of an entry of 151 scored 30 or above and 10 scored above 40. The best answers were a pleasure to read and mark.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.