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# A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2S The Making of Modern Britain, 1951 - 2007  
Report on the Examination

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## General Observations

The paper discriminated well. Marks were distributed across the full range with very few students unable to answer three questions. As with last year, time management remains an issue for a minority of students. It is perhaps worth reminding students that they should avoid wasting time writing out the question or repeating directly what is written in the attribution for each source in question 01. Neither is it necessary to write a general introduction to question 01.

Of the three essay questions, 02 was the most 'popular' followed closely by 03. Although 04 was chosen by the least number of students, some of the answers to this question were highly conceptual and detailed, suggesting that the issue of multiculturalism in modern Britain was of key significance to many.

### 01

The question was designed to be as accessible as possible, allowing students to explore a wide range of social and cultural change in the 1960s. The fascination of the so-called 'Swinging Sixties' is popular and enduring; a period of our modern history when all the rules were changing and anything seemed possible.

There was no requirement in the marking of the question that students differentiate specifically between social change and cultural change, though those students who did this effectively were rewarded.

The sources represented a cross-section of views of people who experienced the 60s: Patrick McNair Wilson, who agonised that change was going too far, too fast; the jaundiced John Lennon, who thought the 60s had all been little more than 'hype'; and yet others like Sara Maitland who believed the 60s had been a transformative and positive decade of change.

The best answers grasped these broad concepts and were able to support and challenge the views expressed in the sources through an in-depth application of their own knowledge.

The effective evaluation of provenance remains challenging for students: their starting point should be to consider a range of positive aspects of the sources as evidence for a historian, followed by a consideration of their potential limitations – students often forget to think about providing a balanced view.

I wrote last year that 'tone is still often misunderstood and misapplied'. That comment remains valid, however, there was plenty that could have been said about this year's sources: McNair-Wilson adopted a hectoring voice against the spread of liberal values; Lennon seemed highly cynical and disillusioned, whereas Maitland, though she showed some awareness of problems persisting, was positively nostalgic about feminism coming of age in the 60s.

### Source A

In evaluating the provenance of this source, many students made the uncritical assumption that a speech in the House of Commons had to be 'honest' ('truthful') and, therefore, 'valuable'. This is a generally valid point. Stronger answers, however, were more nuanced and explored both McNair-Wilson's likely political bias and his socially conservative leanings, linking his speech, for example, to the 'moral panic' expressed by 60s anti-permissive activists such as Mary Whitehouse.

Others made the valid point that his speech was valuable because it was delivered at the end of the decade and referenced a range of controversial (to many) 60s liberal reforming legislation, which were likely to have contributed to McNair-Wilson's belief that a line had to be drawn.

Some students focused primarily on the specific issue under discussion – the drive to legalise cannabis – and were appropriately rewarded for their knowledge linked to this debate.

Weaker answers argued that the speech represented a purely personal opinion, whereas stronger answers understood that McNair-Wilson represented the views of many who felt that the extent and rapidity of social and cultural change in the 60s was a danger to social order.

### **Source B**

Weaker answers simply took Lennon's words at face value and went little further than talking about fashion trends or that reforming legislation was limited. Better answers explored social and cultural change and continuity in greater depth, with the strongest answers linking content with provenance, focusing on Lennon's role as a popular icon at the centre of 60s cultural change and his own disillusionment with 'celebrity'. Some went further in trying to explain his discontentment, citing his relatively left-wing views and his 'peace and love' agenda (Bed-ins for Peace, 1969) directed at the Vietnam War.

### **Source C**

Weaker answers did not get much beyond the first line, taking the reference to 'you've never had it so good' as a cue to write all they knew about 50s affluence with a vague nod to the 60s. Better answers were broader in their range, focusing in on the growth of a 'dynamic' youth culture, continuing 'injustices' (particularly targeting racial injustice) and the extent of 60s female liberation, which was the heart of the source.

The reference to Maitland as an Oxford graduate was used simplistically by many students to argue that this naturally made her a very valuable source of information (she was, by assumption, 'clever'), whereas the more perceptive and well informed knew that the 1970 National Women's Liberation Conference took place at Ruskin College, Oxford and made the reasonable point that Maitland would have been a likely attendee.

## **02**

Political development from 1951 to 1964 is obviously an aspect of the specification extensively covered in Centres. However, many students had clearly been drilled in learning the reasons for Conservative dominance in the period but were often rather sketchy in their knowledge of internal Labour divisions and weaknesses. As a consequence, many essays lacked depth of balance.

No hard and fast rules were laid down about the extent of balance expected but those students with a good grasp of the fundamental issues dividing the Labour Party in these years generally scored more highly.

Many students, for example, had only a basic awareness of the Bevanite/Gaitskellite split and the issue of prescription charges (pre-1955) but were able to offer every last detail of the personal characteristics of Churchill (largely irrelevant), Eden and Macmillan and their weight of facts about the impact of affluence and consumerism was sufficient to sink a ship.

Nevertheless, the best answers were well reasoned and effectively delivered, weighing up Conservative strengths against Labour weaknesses over the whole period. Many concluded that the Conservatives had been the beneficiaries of ‘good times’ in the 50s and early 60s and of Labour tearing itself very publicly apart. By 1963, however, the tables had been largely turned, with the Conservatives looking outdated, inept and divided and Labour increasingly appearing united under the fresh and invigorating leadership of Wilson.

### **03**

Margaret Thatcher remains a marmite figure in British politics, loved or hated with very little in between. Interestingly, therefore, the large majority of answers argued that her conduct of foreign policy was largely very successful, with few fundamentally challenging her reputation for statesmanship.

There are, of course, good grounds for this view but many students were unable to see beyond the Falklands victory and her relationship with Reagan and Gorbachev to support their argument.

Students often showed confusion and misunderstanding about Thatcher’s relationship with Europe, arguing she was either mainly Europhile or Europhobe. The reality needed to be more nuanced. Many students also had a weak grasp of chronology, for example misdating her Bruges speech, placing it in or prior to 1987.

A number of students mistakenly assumed that ‘Northern Ireland’ was a matter of foreign policy and, therefore, drifted a long way from the focus of the question. Credit was given to those who applied their knowledge of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the question, but many simply wrote about IRA atrocities and hunger strikes.

Despite the confusions exhibited about Europe and Northern Ireland, the question proved generally accessible and led to many thoughtful and well-informed answers.

### **04**

Answers to this question tended to lie at both ends of the quality spectrum: either very strong or disappointingly generic. Some students seemed to opt for this question because they were struggling to find a second essay they could do, hence these responses tended to deteriorate into generalised surveys of race and immigration, sometimes stretching as far back as the 60s, or bland and sometimes very irrelevant answers on Britain from 1997 to 2007.

Some students also did not fully understand what was meant by multiculturalism and meandered off on various other tangents, such as writing about women’s rights or the LGBTQ movement.

However, many essays were highly informed, passionate and competent. Such answers showed a great depth of engagement with the concept of multiculturalism and demonstrated a real connection with, and understanding of, the importance of cultural integration.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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