

A-level **History**

7042/1L The quest for political stability: Germany, 1871–1991
Report on the Examination

June 2017

Version: 1.0

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General Comments

It was good to find that in this, the first year of examinations in a new A-level specification, there were many students who came to the examination well-prepared and able to write with confidence and enthusiasm about the period they had been studying.

Some solid knowledge of the influence of elites was exhibited in response to the compulsory 01 question. In the responses to questions 02 and 03, there was evidence that students could think effectively across a broad period of History, selecting relevant examples to support a case and providing substantiated individual judgement. With question 04, inviting consideration of economic development post-war Germany also elicited some thoughtful and perceptive answers.

Overall students generally coped well with the examination. There was evidence that students had taken time to plan and structure their answers and there was some careful reading of the extracts in Q01. Not surprisingly, some were more confident than others in assembling their answers to the compulsory extract evaluation question. Most, however, adopted a focused and balanced approach when writing their Section B essays and the very best showed judgement and upheld an argument, linking well to the question throughout, whilst providing some conceptual awareness. There were, of course, some, whose knowledge of material or understanding of developments, were inadequate for the tasks set. Those who, despite some effective revision, still under-performed may have failed to take on board some of the new A level requirements and it is largely to help such students that the following comments are offered.

It needs to be remembered that Component 1 is a breadth study and that candidates have to be able to deploy second order concepts such as an appreciation of chronology and continuity and change in their analysis of a time period which can be up to 20 years or more. As such knowledge needs to be deployed carefully.

Section A

Question 01

The most obvious differentiator between student answers to this question lay in the ability to identify and address the overall argument raised by each extract. Far too many adopted a line-by-line approach, which neither showed any overall understanding, nor kept the answer focused on the question demands. For the benefit of those preparing candidates for a future examination, it might be worth reiterating the importance of first considering the topic to be addressed (which follows the 'in relation to...' in the question – in this case, the influence of right-wing elites in Germany, in the years 1919 to 1945) and then assimilating the whole extract before starting to write. Candidates should be reminded that the key argument of an extract does not necessarily appear in the first line.

On this year's paper Extract A conveyed the view that the elites effectively maintained their influence, particularly following Hitler's rise to power while Extract B took the reverse view that elites lacked influence. Extract C was slightly different in that it saw the elites were under threat before 1933, but were re-established after. Given these different interpretations, with their very contradictory arguments, it was surprising how many candidates found all the extracts 'convincing'. Whilst there needed to be a balanced evaluation, those who took their full import on board provided much more nuanced judgement, demonstrating comprehension of, and sensible reflection on, the passages concerned.

There were, of course, sub-arguments within each extract which the more able addressed. However, it was not necessary to comment on every statement, and those who did so often finished up providing lots of scarcely relevant information on peripheral details, not always linked to the key topic of 'right-wing influence'. These extracts are quite sophisticated and too many students were too quick to apply knowledge that was simply inappropriate or chronologically incorrect. In Extract B for example, many students when reading about Hitler's 'clash with Army leaders' simply described the Night of the Long Knives in 1934 as the example even though the extract states the 'clash' occurring after 1936. Extract C was perhaps the least well understood in terms of arguments. For example, when it stated that there was 'no question of a revolutionary transformation of German society between 1933 to 1945' many students simply said there was and developed long passages about the Volksgemeinschaft, whilst more considered responses understood the relationship between the big business elites and the Nazis.

A final point for '01'. Many students were quite narrow in their responses and kept their analysis of the extracts mainly around the Nazi period. The time frame for the question was 1919 to 1945, and all the extracts made references that were applicable to this time frame. Stronger responses made full use of this time frame.

Section B

Question 02

Bismarck is a popular choice for students and most were able to use their knowledge of political developments in Germany to respond well to the question posed. Most focused their responses on key developments to do with the National Liberal's, Kulturkampf, the ZP, tariffs and socialism. All this material was relevant but the key here was how it tied in with the question focus of the influence, or not, of political parties and the best answers were always linking back to this. Some students were keen to display everything they knew about key developments but then end up writing too much on events that were not actually moving the answer on. Analysis on the Kulturkampf was a particular culprit. Students need to remember this is a breadth study and that when developing material to answer the question they do it so that it has enough detail to explain the point being made but does not then simply become descriptive and which little reward is given. Many essays did the basics well of focus, reasonable range with some detail and balance. In order to move higher in the levels students need to show greater depth of analysis in terms of how the material they use truly understands the question. The highest rewarded answers had a conceptual element which meant they were able to relate their analysis in terms of continuity or change over time; to see trends or to relate their analysis to a deeper understanding of the nature of Germany, its politics and people. For example in this period political parties did not expect to actually be parties of government and acted more as pressure groups for their own concerns.

Question 03

Many students were able to show off impressive knowledge in answering this question. Most were able to develop balanced assessment to show how Reichstag opposition did, and did not, have influence between 1890 and 1918. The key to this question was an understanding of change over time and many students were able to see how Reichstag opposition became more influential over time, particularly in the latter stages of World War One. Some students took a literal Chancellor by Chancellor approach, assessing each one in turn in terms of their relationship with the Reichstag. Though valid it was a little mechanical and the best responses were able to take a chronological approach indicating key concepts like the constitution, or events like Zabern or the growth of the

SPD by 1912, and use those to indicate Reichstag opposition being influential or not. Once again the stress is put on the fact that Component One is a breadth study. Students need to be able to support their arguments but need to get the balance of that support right. For example some students would describe in great detail all the events surround the Zabern Affair in 1913, or provide a half a page about the upbringing of Kaiser Wilhelm II, when such detail is not helping to move the response on. The best answers explicitly set out a view in their opening paragraph and developed this throughout their answer. Equally, good responses combined breadth and range with a keen historical awareness and balance. As with question 02, 04 appreciation of chronology and the ability to select and deploy accurate and precise supporting detail in support of arguments were key factors that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays. Having a conceptual awareness would lift even more. In this case maybe referencing the nature of German's at the time to being respectful of authority, especially the Kaiser, and how such deference made opposition more difficult.

Question 04

This questioned focused on the legacy of World War Two influencing economic growth in the 1950's and 60's. The development of the economy in Germany and how it changes over time is a key question within the specification. For those students who did this, many were able to write in impressive detail about the destruction caused by the war, the impact of allied occupation the policies of Adenauer and Erhard and so on. The most difficult element here was getting the right balance. Some students struggled and moved off from developing the legacy of the war after some general comments about destruction caused and rebuilding. Often students would then mention an idea like the Marshall Plan, failing to understand this was a legacy of the war. There was a tendency for some students to describe everything they knew even if this was not really helping to develop their answer. The problems of denazification was a key culprit here. This is where planning comes in and the need for students to clearly link back to the focus throughout their response. As with question 02, 03 appreciation of chronology and the ability to select and deploy accurate and precise supporting detail in support of arguments were key factors that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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