

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H105


For first teaching in 2015

Y253/01 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper Y253 series overview

Y253 is one of five components for the revised AS Level examination for GCE History. The components present a borehole approach so that students can see change and developments, and make substantiated judgements over substantial lengths of time and see issues in a wider perspective

In Section A candidates are required to answer one essay question from a choice of two. The second question requires them to evaluate a given historical interpretation using their knowledge to evaluate its strengths and limitations.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In answering the essay question candidates discussed at least two issues in depth. • The supporting detail was both accurate and relevant to the question set, not just the topic. • Reach a supported judgement about the issue in the question. • Make a series of interim judgements about the issues discussed in relation to the question. • In answering the interpretation questions candidates were able to evaluate the strengths and limitations of that interpretation using contextual knowledge that was relevant to the issues raised by the quotation. • Referred to other interpretations and had good knowledge of the historical debate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showed a poor understanding of the major issues relevant to the essay. • Were unable to support their answer with relevant material. • Did not focus on the precise wording of the question. • Made unsupported comments about issues which were assertions. • Described the interpretation without analysing its strengths and weaknesses. • Failed to link their contextual knowledge to the specific issues raised in the quotation.

Section A overview

In Section A candidates are required to answer one question from a choice of two. Candidates are likely to spend up to an hour on this section. Candidates can score well by considering two or three issues in depth and reaching a supported judgement. However, it is important to make sure that the issues selected allow a justifiable judgement to be reached. The majority of candidates chose to answer Question 1, but Question 2 did elicit a moderate amount of responses.

Question 1

1* Assess the causes of the Berlin blockade of 1948–1949.

[30]

This was the more popular of the 2 essay questions and candidates mostly found this to be an accessible question. The best answers approached the question using a range of factors. Some candidates profitably adopted a long and short term causation approach and were able to demonstrate how long term ideological and strategic disputes played a role in worsening relations between Stalin and the West. In the short term most candidates were able to discuss the post-war disputes over Eastern Europe and the breakdown of relations during the London Conference of 1947. Most were also able to analyse the economic factors surrounding the merger of the Allied zones and its impact on East Germany, especially after a new currency was established and Marshall Aid was introduced. Weaker responses tended to adopt a narrative approach. Some candidates adopted a more historiographical approach, discussing the various schools of thought on the causes of the Cold War. The best of these responses was able to use contextual knowledge to support their argument, whereas a purely historiographical approach did not score highly. This approach can be seen in Exemplar 1.

Exemplar 1

The revisionist perspective can be attributed to re-evaluate the USA's ~~and~~ triggering of the Berlin Blockade; as their actions in Germany likely caused this with the various conferences relating to zones of occupation in Germany, the West currency used by all was the Reichsmark. However due to the Soviets overprinting their ~~marked~~ therefore, the allies introduced their own currency of the Deutschmark in their zone whilst the East German ~~currency~~ was implemented in the Soviet Zone, whilst this may appear as an aggression they were justified in creating their currency due to the USSR overprinting the Reichsmark and therefore decreasing its value. The German people had ~~also~~ introduced a bartering system using cigarettes in replacement of the money, therefore justifying the creation of a new currency. The USA ~~attributed~~ their aggression by forming Bizonia,

a ~~range~~ of the US and USA's zones of influence over Germany. This alongside the USSR's exclusion from the Second London conference determined a US policy which ~~any~~ appear aggressive, however as the ~~blockade~~ school ~~recall~~ this is not ~~entirely~~ ^{pre} ~~feasible~~ ~~policy~~ ~~proving~~ ~~the~~ ~~reason~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~Berlin~~ ~~Blockade~~

Exemplar 1 demonstrates a historiographical approach which uses contextual knowledge to support the argument.

Question 2

- 2* 'The USSR's aims in the Cold War in Europe remained the same throughout the period 1956–1984.'
How far do you agree? [30]

This was the least popular of the essay questions and in general terms candidates tended to restrict themselves to Level 3 by suggesting that they disagreed with the premise in the question but without balancing this out with an alternative view. The better answers argued that the Soviet aims changed at certain key periods and this can be seen in the Exemplar 2.

Most candidates suggested that the aims of the USSR did not stay the same. Better responses discussed the arms race, and its de-escalation, Soviet expansionism and a desire to challenge the power of the USA, as well as examining the impact of the death of Stalin in 1953. Fewer candidates analysed the commitment of the Soviet Union to preserve its power in Eastern Europe, although most were able to discuss responses to events in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Exemplar 2

Firstly, the USSR's control in the Cold War in Europe remained the same throughout the period 1956-1984 shown by its brutal imposition and maintenance of the communist ideology ^{through military intervention}. For example, in 1956 there was an uprising in Hungary due to an ~~feeling of~~ anti-Soviet feeling, feelings of discontentment with lack of democracy, no freedom of speech, and repression and low living standards. The leader Imre Nagy ~~was~~ of Hungary leaving the Warsaw Pact and becoming a neutral non-aligned country and ~~that is~~ after meetings with Romanian and Bulgarian leaders the USSR leaders took the decision to invade Hungary and brutally suppress all opposition with the red army leading to many deaths, 3,000 Hungarians killed. They installed a pro-Soviet leader loyal to ~~the~~ ^{the} communist regime, Kadar. This demonstrated that the USSR's chief aim was to prevent any deviation from communism and they would maintain the Warsaw Pact at all costs. Furthermore, the same thing happened in 1968 in Czechoslovakia. The people were celebrating in the Prague Spring, of Dubcek's reforms.

This demonstrates a candidate answering the question by showing how Soviet aims changed in key time periods.

Section B overview

In this section candidates are required to answer a question dealing with an historical interpretation. Candidates are required to use their knowledge of the given topic to evaluate this. Candidates score highly when they consider the strengths and limitations of the interpretation using detailed and relevant knowledge of the historical context and are able to refer to the wider historical debate. Generalised knowledge will not be credited highly in this question.

Question 3

- 3 Read the interpretation and then answer the question that follows:

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Evaluate the strengths and limitations of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations that you have studied. **[20]**

This was generally well-answered with some good responses seen. The best answers focused on key words in the interpretation including the words “nothing” and “planned”. The Exemplar 3 shows a tightly controlled analysis and evaluation focusing on keywords such as “unplanned” in the interpretation. Most were able to discuss the strengths and limitations of the given view. In looking at the strengths, the best responses examined the rapid nature of the collapse of communist control at the end of the period, with some good knowledge of popular protest which was demonstrated to be spontaneous rather than planned. Additionally many candidates pointed to the unexpected consequences of Gorbachev’s reforms as being “unplanned”. In analysing the limitations most candidates were able to discuss Reagan’s policies which sought to destabilise the Soviet regime as well as examining how Gorbachev’s reforms were certainly planned, even if the consequences were not always clearly thought through. Few candidates mentioned Kohl and the reunification of Germany which may have been a profitable pathway for this part of the answer.

Exemplar 3

The strengths of this interpretation are that ^{a lot of} ~~what the~~ ~~fall of communism~~ ~~in~~ what happened from 1984-1995 was not planned. This interpretation is valid because the demise of the USSR was not planned. The legitimacy of the USSR crumbled due to ^{important} economic problems in the USSR and the eastern Europe countries e.g. growth output for industrial growth was 12% and agricultural was 0.8%. The lack of consumer goods and shortages of basic foods led to the dissatisfaction ~~at~~ of the USSR's ~~structure~~

Exemplar 3 demonstrates a candidate using keywords to evaluate the interpretation. The candidate produces a tightly controlled analysis and evaluation using contextual knowledge

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