

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

HISTORY A

**OCR Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE
in History A**

H105

For first teaching in 2015

Y249/01 Summer 2025 series

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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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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.

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Paper Y249/01 series overview

Y249 is one of five non-British Period Study units for Paper 2 for the AS Level examination for GCE History. This unit tests a period of study of about 50 years through a traditional essay and an essay based on evaluating an interpretation.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first two questions, in Section A, are traditional essay questions and the candidate is required to answer one of them. The third question, in Section B, is the compulsory interpretation question.

To do well on Section A, candidates needed to address the issue in the question, using detailed supporting knowledge. To reach the higher Levels candidates will need to assess the issues they discuss and reach a supported judgement at least in the conclusion.

To do well on Section B, candidates needed to focus on evaluating the strengths and limitations of the given interpretation.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- discussed at least two issues in depth in the essay question - gave supporting detail that was both accurate and relevant to the question set, not just the topic - reached a supported judgement about the issues in the question - made a series of interim judgement about the issues discussed in relation to the question - considered the strengths and limitations of the given interpretation in the interpretation question - referred to at least one other interpretation - gave supporting detail that was both accurate and relevant to the issues in the interpretation.	- produced a judgement in the essay question that was not supported and was, therefore, assertion or a judgement that did not follow logically from the response - were unable to use their knowledge to address the issue in the question - showed a lack of understanding of the major issues in relation to the question - were unable to support their response with relevant or accurate material - did not focus on the precise wording of the question - made unsupported comments about issues in the interpretation question which were no more than assertions.

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Section A overview

Two essays are set, each from a different key topic. The questions set require candidates to analyse causes and consequences of major historical issues. In this paper candidates had the choice of answering a question on the Russian economy between 1894 and 1914 or a question on Bolshevik control of Russia between 1918 and 1924. Both questions were chosen by the candidates in roughly equal measure.

To do well on the essay question, candidates needed to address the issue in the question, using detailed supporting knowledge. To reach the higher Levels, candidates needed to assess the issues they discussed and provide a supported judgement, at least in the conclusion.

Question 1*

- 1* To what extent did the Russian economy improve in the period from 1894 to the outbreak of war in 1914? [30]

There were two aspects to this question on which candidates needed to focus. Firstly, the topic of the question was the 'Russian economy between 1894 and 1914' and the key issue was whether the economy 'improved' in that period.

The more accomplished responses were those that showed an understanding of both aspects of the question. Most candidates did focus on the economy, although some candidates tried to use the thematic approach and drifted to discussing political and social issues which were not relevant to the question. Some candidates did not have a clear understanding of the distinction between economic and social issues and, therefore, analysed some social issues, such as education, which were not relevant to the question. Most candidates did focus their answers on the period 1894 to 1914 but there were a significant number that did not provide knowledge and analysis that covered the whole period.

Most candidates showed an understanding that this question concerned the economic policies of Witte in the 1890s and Stolypin between 1906 and 1911. The more accomplished responses showed more detailed knowledge and understanding of both Witte and Stolypin reforms, particularly the key difference that Witte tended to focus on industrial policy and Stolypin on agricultural policy. Many candidates used the opportunity to describe what they knew about these two men's policies rather than using their knowledge to address the question of whether the economy improved.

The responses that attained the higher Levels were those which presented arguments for policies that did 'improve' and those that didn't. For example, Witte's 'Great Spurt' and Stolypin's 'Wager on the strong' both had elements of success. Some candidates provided some good knowledge of the policies and then added some analysis which did not fully analyse the key issue.

Question 2*

- 2*** 'The use of terror was the most important reason for the Bolsheviks increasing their control of Russia during the period from 1918 to Lenin's death in 1924.'

How far do you agree?

[30]

The purpose of this essay question was for candidates to analyse and evaluate reasons why the Bolsheviks were able to increase their control of Russia between 1918 and 1924. The candidates were given the suggestion that 'the use of terror' was the most important reason. Most candidates tried to explain the role of terror and then analysed this given factor with analysis related to other factors. Most candidates were able to provide knowledge of the 'use of 'terror' but some responses were generalised and did not refer to some key knowledge such as the Cheka and the Red Terror and the Kronstadt and Tambov rebellions.

Most candidates were able to provide other reasons for the Bolsheviks increasing their control such as Lenin's Decrees, the New Economic Policy, and particularly the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War. However, there were a significant number of candidates that did not fully analyse the role of the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War as a reason for the Bolsheviks increasing their control of Russia.

Assessment for learning



Always read the question carefully. Identify the key words and phrases and it is advisable to use those words throughout a response and this should help to keep an answer focused on the specific demands of the question

Exemplar 1

While less significant than propaganda and terror, state control of the economy was also important in increasing Bolshevik control, as it allowed them to implement their ideology and ~~display this as a cause~~ achieve economic prosperity, cementing Russia's position as a world power under their new government. Evidence to support this is War Communism was implemented during the Civil War as a response to food shortages. ~~the~~ Money was eradicated and replaced with a 4:3:2:1 rationing system, in which Red Army soldiers received the most food. Furthermore, after the Civil War the Bolsheviks introduced the NEP, which allowed some elements of private businesses and capitalism in order to stabilise the fragile economy. This shows how Lenin and the Bolsheviks were pragmatic in their economic policy, and ~~not~~ sometimes reverted away from their commitments to Communism in order to work in the nation's best interests. This meant that they were able to hold control of government organs and simultaneously achieve genuine support, by proving that their approach was effective ~~in~~ in strengthening Russia. The use of ~~this~~ rationing during the Civil War also reduced opposition, as ~~the~~ extra rations provided an

incentive for peasants to support the Bolsheviks by joining the Red Army. Therefore, economic control was highly significant in the Bolshevik increasing Bolshevik power as the strategies they implemented prevented economic collapse and revealed, both nationally and internationally, that they were capable of governing and could be ~~trusted~~ ^{trusted} with greater control. However, some may argue that ~~for~~ the Bolsheviks actually undermined their legitimacy ~~by~~ by straying away from their core principles in the NEP, which created NEPmen, ~~the~~ business owners who profited from Russia's unstable economic situation. Both policies also sought to resolve the underlying issues of starvation and famine, especially amongst the peasantry. Therefore, propaganda was evidently more important than economic policies in increasing Bolshevik control, as they were able to utilise this to excuse their ideological inconsistencies. ~~and establish a~~ ^{this meant that the} large, indoctrinated support base ^{they had established} who didn't realise the ineffectiveness of economic policies, and continued to support the Bolsheviks despite their suffering as a result of neglect by the government.

Exemplar 1 is a good attempt to explain how the economy was used by the Bolsheviks to increase their control of Russia and links the economic factor to the Civil War. This response attained Level 4

Section B overview

In this section candidates were asked to consider a short interpretation that stated, 'Russia was moving away from revolution on the eve of the First World War'.

All candidates attempted this question and most responses focused on evaluating the strengths and limitations of the given interpretation.

To do well candidates needed to evaluate the strengths and limitations of the given interpretation while making references to other interpretations. Other interpretations that are considered as part of evaluation and analysis do not need to be attributed to specific named historians, but they must be recognisable historical interpretations, rather than the candidate's own viewpoint.

Question 3

3 Read the interpretation and answer the question that follows.

© S. A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*, pp. 78-79, Oxford University Press, 2017. Item removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this interpretation, making reference to other interpretations you have studied.

[20]

The purpose of this question was for candidates to address the main aspect of the interpretation which was the extent to which Russia was politically stable before the First World War and whether a revolution was likely.

Most candidates tried to provide knowledge and analysis of the strengths and limitations of the interpretation. The more accomplished responses focused their knowledge and analysis on the years just prior to 1914. In terms of the strengths, candidates referred to impact of Stolypin's coup, the continuing significance of the Fundamental Laws, the improved situation in the countryside and the ability of the Okhrana to suppress opponents of the Tsarist Regime. When analysing the limitations, some candidates used the Lena Goldfields strike of 1912 as evidence of unrest. Very few candidates cited the opposition of such groups as the Populists who assassinated Stolypin in 1911. Unfortunately, there were several candidates who did not fully appreciate the timescale of this interpretation and instead of focusing on the years 'on the eve of the First World War', their analysis focused on the years during the First World War, or they went back to the 1905 Revolution. In both cases, the candidates provided irrelevant knowledge and analysis and, therefore, such responses tended to be given Level 3 because the responses were a 'partial' analysis of the question.

Only a few candidates considered other interpretations in their evaluation. Few candidates demonstrated an understanding that in the period just before the First World War Russia may have been stable in the countryside but not in the cities.

Misconception



Many candidates did not show that they understood that Stolypin was assassinated in 1911.

Exemplar 2

		Despite the evidence that Russia was moving away from revolution on the eve of World War I, supporting Smith's interpretation, it does also have multiple weaknesses. Although 'concessions' in 1905, namely the Duma's creation, had not weakened the Tsar's position, this could be in part due to Stolypin's electoral reforms. After the second Duma's dissolution, Stolypin altered the voting system so that the votes of peasants meant less than those of middle classes and businessmen. This made the Duma more right wing and thus (on paper) less critical. This challenges, and weakens, Smith's interpretation because it reveals that a
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large Proportion of Society may
 have been opposed to the
 Tsar, and may have still been
 revolutionary minded, but there would
 just be no public record.
 Furthermore an Okhrana (Secret
 Police) report in January 1914
 warned that people were
 becoming increasingly angry due
 to food shortages and poor living
 conditions. It also warned that
 hunger riots could start and some
 people are 'revolutionary minded'.
 This directly challenges Smith's
 assertion that it ~~was~~ is "not
 convincing" to speak of a revolutionary
 situation. In addition food shortages
 and poor living conditions, culminating
 in the 1914 general strike,
 suggest that the government would
 not fix Russia's problems
 but had just caused them,
 likely meaning that people were
 still revolutionary on the eve
 of World War I, weakening
 the interpretation further.

Exemplar 2 is a good example to explain and support the limitations of the interpretation. The response attained Level 4.

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