



A-Level

History

7042/1J The British Empire, c1857-1967

Report on the examination

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Question 01

This question asked students to evaluate the historical interpretations of 3 historians in relation to British decolonisation in the years 1947 to 1967. This is a popular part of the specification, and students were able to deploy plenty of relevant contextual knowledge in their answers. Most students were able to pick up on the overall contrasting focus in each of the interpretations. Stronger responses interrogated the nuances within the arguments more clearly. Students were rewarded for using their own knowledge to both corroborate and to challenge what the historians were arguing. Students do need to evaluate the interpretations, and it is hard to do this to a high level if there is a consistent imbalance in the comments offered and the vast majority of the response only agrees with the extracts. However, there is no requirement for a laborious 'convincing/ not convincing' approach to every single extract. The quality of the comments is much more important than a formulaic response. It does also help if students reach a judgement about each extract. Very good answers considered the whole period in the question, and the holistic argument of the extract as well as its specific strands. Students were generally more successful where they attempted to argue that parts of the argument were or were not convincing, rather than lots of assessment that individual arguments are 'partially convincing'.

Extract A argued that Britain's decision to decolonise in the two decades after the Second World War was due to economic considerations. It argued that recovery in Western Europe left Britain isolated and insecure of its position. The historian explicitly referenced developments in Africa, Macmillan and the economic position in the 1960s, and so the arguments were about African decolonisation, but students were rewarded for using earlier examples of economically motivated decolonisation from Asia if these were deployed in a relevant way. There was some good knowledge shown of the failure of colonial development, and Britain's diminished economic position after World War II. As ever, students do need to learn specific examples of decolonisation which can be seen to have resulted from economic weakness, and this will be rewarded more highly than more generic statistics about post war economic weakness. In every question in these examinations, or extract, which requires students to give economic explanations for decision making in the empire, it is evident that most students do not know enough specific examples which link these two processes together in a concrete way.

There were a number of successful challenges to the interpretation which directly engaged with the arguments. Less successful challenges were based on misunderstanding of the details of the extract or challenged by omission (for example by redirecting towards nationalism as a cause for decolonisation).

Extract B argued that international relations were a key factor in decolonisation. It argued that Britain no longer had the global position to sustain the Empire, and that the US in the context of the Cold War often encouraged nationalists. Most students understood the overall focus of the extract but had more difficulty in explaining the nuances of the US's role in the decolonisation process. Most were able to pick up on references to the Suez Crisis and had good supporting knowledge to contextualise this argument. Students struggled for more

examples of US involvement in the British decolonisation process, or more examples of nationalist leaders who looked to the US, and many just repeated the reference to the Kwame Nkrumah which was in the extract. As with economic reasons, students do need to know specific examples of how these reasons for decolonisation play a role in individual colonies. There were some sophisticated and successful challenges to this extract which focused on the inevitability of British geopolitical weakness after the Second World War. Less successful challenges were, again, mostly by omission and focused on nationalism.

Extract C argued that nationalism was the key driver of decolonisation. It argued that urbanisation increased dissent and movements were more aggressive, which led to British violence in response and an undermining of colonial rule. Most students understood the overall argument about nationalism, and picked up on the argument that Britain was ‘driven out’ of the colonies, but did not necessarily understand the nuances of the strands of argument. The extract again was really about decolonisation in Africa, which most students did understand, and there were lots of examples used to support and challenge from Kenya, Nigeria etc. As ever with the third extract, many students were running out of time and the extract was less comprehensively dealt with. However, students did have more success challenging the arguments here than with Extract B.

Question 02

This was the most popular of the essay questions and had the highest overall average mark. Students were generally familiar with the subject content on Egypt and were able to deploy relevant material on economic concerns, as well as other reasons, to show balance. Covering the full date range of any question is important in this breadth study, and many student responses were overwhelmingly focused on the beginning of this period. Whilst Sudan is not included in the question, students were credited for using material on the Sudan. They were also not penalised for not including it, if they were able to extend to the end of the date range in other ways. Answers which scored highly kept a key focus on what British motivations were in Egypt and did not lapse into narrative. As ever, there was some muddling of events and of chronology, and some responses had imprecise supporting material. Whilst students need to show balance in their answers, they also need to display clarity of argument. In recent years, more and more students seem to try and balance every point they include, and within each paragraph, leading to a very complicated structure. Whilst all responses will be considered on merit, generally simple essay structures allow students to maintain a clear question focus throughout.

Question 03

This was the least popular of the essay questions but, where it was answered, it was often done well. Most students had some knowledge of the Partition of Bengal and its consequences, and many had knowledge of the various groups challenging British rule in this period. Better answers were able to assess how far actions taken by indigenous people presented a challenge by assessing the threat they posed, how easily they were suppressed and how widespread opposition was. Students needed detailed examples of groups and individuals to answer this question well, and some responses were very generic. There was also a lot of material included from outside the time period (for example on the Indian National Congress’ formation, or its later activities) and this was not credited. Again, as it is a

breadth study, responses need to cover the full date range in the question, and material covering the consequences of the Partition of Bengal only was considered to be a partial response. Students do seem to prefer writing about India in the period immediately after the Mutiny, and questions from this time period are often less popular and less well answered.

Question 04

This was a popular question, but many students found it difficult. The question asked them to assess change and continuity in this time-period, and the best responses were able to do this whilst maintaining question focus, deploying accurate material to support their arguments. The vast majority of responses to this question were one sided, as students considered a number of different changes which took place across this period, rather than also weighing up how the economic relationship with the Empire stayed the same. Completely one-sided responses cannot advance beyond the bottom of Level 3. Many students answered a slightly different question as to whether the relationship between Britain and the empire had been strengthened or weakened in this period, which perhaps they had practised in class, but all these developments really constituted 'change'. Students do seem to struggle with the concept of change and continuity when it forms the basis of an essay question, and therefore could perhaps practise more questions of this type as part of their revision. As ever with questions focused on economic relations with the Empire, students do need to know some specific and accurate trade statistics to answer the question, and to be able to explain the significance of these.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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