



AS

**History**

7041/2S

Report on the Examination

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## General Observations

The entry for this paper has stabilised in recent years to between 100 and 150 students.

The rationale for entry at AS level continues to be mixed. The examination is used as an end of course qualification in its own right by some Year 12 and Year 13 students or, in some centres, as a ‘test’ paper for entry to the second year of the course. Some students/centres seem to use it as an end of year practice examination. This variability perhaps goes some way to explaining the great range of quality of responses seen.

Marks ranged right across the spectrum – from 2 to 50. However, the number of responses scoring 30 or above was lower than in 2023: 28% compared to 40% last year. Why this was so is not clear. The paper seemed no less accessible than in 2023 and high marks were achieved in all questions.

High achieving students generally knew more than their low scoring counterparts – something of a truism, of course - but what most distinguished strong from weak answers was the student’s ability not only to deploy their knowledge appropriately but also to maintain a precise, analytical focus on the question. The temptation to description – ‘just one more fact’ - is a habit hard to resist for many students.

## Question 01

The focus of the question was on leadership not policy, but an understanding of the latter was required to evaluate the qualities of Wilson as both party leader and Prime Minister in these years. Generally, students made little distinction between these two aspects. Where they did, they were well rewarded.

Stronger answers typically were better able to link their knowledge of policy and events to analyse Wilson’s strengths and weaknesses as highlighted in the sources. Weaker answers generally relied on description and often struggled to link their knowledge effectively to the source content.

Knowledge of the period was very variable. The strongest answers demonstrated a good range of social, political and economic understanding. However, some students knew little more than snippets of relevant information, while others showed a good depth of knowledge but on a narrow range, such as liberal reforming legislation.

## Source A

In terms of provenance, some students seemed never to have heard of Denis Healey but were able to speculate that as a cabinet minister he must be a ‘valuable’ source of information.

Stronger answers were able to comment effectively about the value and limitations of autobiographies as evidence and generally showed an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of hindsight. Many students, however, approached the source uncritically, assuming that autobiographies largely ‘tell the truth’.

Not all sources have a distinctive tone or language, but some students did grasp that this was a relatively unbalanced commentary, almost entirely critical in its judgement of Wilson, and was thus, as a very partisan source, of questionable value.

Healey criticised Wilson for his short-termism, his lack of principle and experience and his paranoia. Students were able to deploy a range of evidence to support and challenge these allegations, though most simply assumed that Healey was justified in his attack, and few questioned why he might be so vitriolic in his condemnation of Wilson.

It was not expected that students would know the details of Wilson's and Healey's personal relationship – Healey's animosity towards Wilson was well-understood among their contemporaries – but a few students did conclude that Healey's criticisms were not fully justified and might have originated from personal dislike and/or professional rivalry, thus diminishing the value of the source.

### **Source B**

Most students recognised that Donoghue's recollections were as unbalanced as Healey's and used his obvious hero-worship of Wilson to question the value of the source.

Many also recognised that Donoghue had not joined Wilson's personal staff until 1974, and that this might also reduce the source's value. Interestingly, however, few balanced this by picking up on the reference to Donoghue's early career as a politics lecturer, which would at least imply he had an informed view of Wilson's career from 1964 to 1970.

Students were able to find ample evidence of Wilson's achievements in power to support Donoghue's high opinion of Wilson, though his personal role in the raft of liberal reforming legislation passed by his government was often over-credited.

The strongest answers challenged Donoghue's somewhat rose-tinted view of Wilson, pointing out obvious policy failures like the DEA or In Place of Strife or by challenging his relaxed public persona as little more than a skilful performance for the TV cameras, and that the real Wilson was far less secure as a person and politician.

Final assessments of the relative value of the sources varied enormously but the best answers provided judgement throughout and understood the importance of maintaining a comparative focus.

## **02**

This was the most popular of the two essay questions. A number of students seemed seduced by the focus on 'affluence and consumerism', which is a popular aspect of the specification. For many, therefore, the question opened the floodgates for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fill the page with long lists of information (TVs, fridges, washing machines, Butlins, M1 et al), but, as outlined in the introduction to this report, this was not always well-applied.

The question required an analysis of the extent to which lives were transformed in the 50s: what changed, what changed fundamentally, and what stayed largely the same. The question offered great scope in terms of how it might be approached.

Weaker answers tended to lean towards assertion and generalisation – describing a host of changes related to affluence, consumerism and leisure - and did not explicitly develop discussion about the

extent to which life was transformed. Some provided balance by focusing most typically on how women's lives did or did not change or by exploring how far class boundaries evolved.

Good answers were more nuanced with a greater scope of discussion and balance. For example, living standards did improve considerably and the end of rationing was a symbolic turning point. Wages went up and unemployment went down. Housing stock was replenished, and mod cons were attainable by most. However, some fundamentals remained. Growing affluence barely dented social divisions. Housing stock for the poorest remained poor. Not every teenager was a teddy boy. Women were still largely second-class citizens. It was relatively rare to see cars in working class districts.

Credit was given to students who attempted to balance their answers by arguing that other factors contributed to transformation, not just affluence and consumerism. For example, some students raised the issue of immigration to argue that the treatment of minorities improved/worsened and were able to offer reasonable judgements about the extent to which this changed British society. Others argued that the decline of deference and the appearance of anti-establishment attitudes was also a credible explanation of change in British society.

Students had mixed success in trying to relate 'stop go' economics to the question and how this might have had an impact on affluence and consumerism, negatively or positively, some were able to present a cogent case, but many merely asserted, rather than demonstrated, a link.

Perhaps the least convincing attempt to balance the answer was made by students referencing the Suez crisis as a major reason why society was not transformed.

There was also evidence of students confusing time periods. Quite a few drifted into the 1960s to discuss Vietnam, mini-skirts, hippies and punks.

### 03

About one quarter of students chose this question. Answers were often polarised - very strong or very weak – probably reflecting the reason why it was chosen: either it was a well-understood topic, or it was the lesser of two evils.

Weak answers took refuge in bland generalisation and showed a lot of confusion between time periods, often drifting into discussions of the winter of discontent in 1978-9 or, being vaguely aware that Arthur Scargill was in some way involved, into the 1984-5 miners' strike.

Strong answers were encouragingly well-informed and nuanced and were precise in their knowledge, understanding that Heath inherited a raft of industrial relations problems from Labour but was unable to appease the unions. Indeed, he added to his difficulties by introducing an Industrial Relations Act, not too dissimilar to that proposed by Labour in the late 60s, that aggravated rather than calmed relations with the unions.

It seems to be harder for current students to feel empathy for the industrial disputes of these years. There seems an often-unwritten assumption that striking was per se 'bad', that strikers were invariably 'selfish' and their demands 'excessive'. It was also a very rare student who recognised the political or ideological goals of union leaders such as Scargill, recalcitrant to an extreme, and determined to challenge the legitimacy of Heath's government.

For those of us who lived through this period, ‘who governs Britain’ seemed very much the moot question of the time.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, for well-prepared students the paper provided accessibility and choice. Perhaps question 03 was slightly more challenging than 02 because of its political/industrial relations focus, but despite this some students scored heavily. Question 01 provided stark contrasts of view and provenance and offered even weaker students a way in to assessing value. There were no rubric infringements, and the great majority of students made a genuine attempt at answering two questions, though some may reflect that there is no substitute for precise and meticulous preparation. It is rare, indeed, to succeed on a wing and a prayer.

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

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