

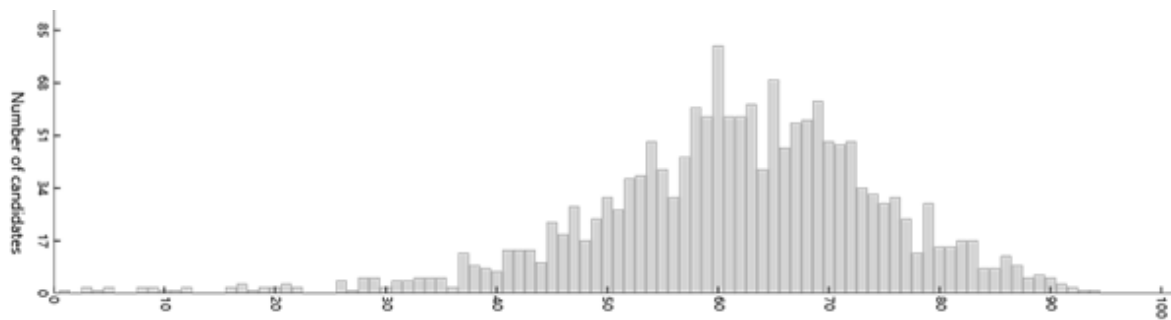


## Summary report of the 2020 ATAR course examination: Modern History

| Year | Number who sat | Number of absentees |
|------|----------------|---------------------|
| 2020 | 1731           | 31                  |
| 2019 | 1828           | 125                 |
| 2018 | 2004           | 28                  |
| 2017 | 2178           | 23                  |

The number of candidates sitting and the number attempting each section of the examination can differ as a result of non-attempts across sections of the examination.

### Examination score distribution–Written



### Summary

Attempted by 1731 candidates                      Mean 61.10%                      Max 94.00%                      Min 0.00%  
Overall, the examination was well received by stakeholders and in general, candidates continue to demonstrate a sound understanding of the two syllabus strands of *Historical Knowledge and Understanding* covered in Units 3 and 4. The general standard of responses reflects well on the way the Modern History syllabus is being taught across the state.

Russia and the Soviet Union 1914–1945 and The changing European world since 1945 remain by far the most popular electives studied in Units 3 and 4 respectively.

Section means were:

|                                       |                 |           |          |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|----------|
| Section One: Source Analysis–Unit 3   | Mean 67.30%     |           |          |
| Attempted by 1726 candidates          | Mean 16.83(/25) | Max 25.00 | Min 0.00 |
| Section Two: Essay–Unit 3             | Mean 60.01%     |           |          |
| Attempted by 1707 candidates          | Mean 15.00(/25) | Max 25.00 | Min 0.00 |
| Section Three: Source Analysis–Unit 4 | Mean 60.54%     |           |          |
| Attempted by 1718 candidates          | Mean 15.13(/25) | Max 25.00 | Min 0.00 |
| Section Four: Essay–Unit 4            | Mean 56.55%     |           |          |
| Attempted by 1685 candidates          | Mean 14.14(/25) | Max 25.00 | Min 0.00 |

### General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and completed most of the paper. However, the traditionally lower mean for the Unit 4 Source Analysis (60.54% in comparison to the 67.3% mean for Unit 3), and the 56.55% mean for the Unit 4 Essay section indicates that time management across all four sections of the paper remains a significant issue for many candidates.

In the Source Analysis sections, the marks allocation changes were dealt with by candidates and were well-received by most stakeholders. Nevertheless, it seems pertinent to advise candidates that things do change from year to year, and they need to look carefully at the wording and marks allocations for each question, rather than simply assume they are unchanged from previous years.

Essay questions in both Units 3 and 4 were deemed to be accessible and equitable. Markers made the point that although essays were 'straightforward' and accessible to all candidates, the lack of 'big picture' essays allowing candidates to write holistically about their period of study was a limiting factor, even for stronger candidates.

#### *Advice for candidates*

- Read the question carefully, especially for Questions 1 and 11, to ensure you answer all components.
- Ensure time management is a focus. If you run out of time in the last section, it will adversely affect your overall mark.
- When writing in additional pages, state on which pages your answers are continued and label these additions with the question number.
- The order and weighting of questions in the source analyses is not set in stone. This year there were changes to the allocation of marks for the questions on historical context, perspective and purpose.

#### *Advice for teachers*

- Give your students essay writing practice under timed conditions with a focus on formulating sustained arguments throughout an extended piece of writing.
- Remind students that the order and allocation of marks for the source analysis questions is not immutable and can vary slightly year on year. The question types, however, will remain the same while the examination is in its current format.

#### ***Comments on specific sections and questions***

The source analysis sections seem to show further improvement from previous years in addressing perspective (Question 1 part (d)), continuing a pattern that was observed last year. Additionally, the changed wording for this question part provided greater scope for discussion of usefulness. However, Question 11 parts (b) and (d) seemed to be less strong than last year, with many candidates addressing message rather than purpose for part (b) and engaging with contestability in a very cursory or theoretical fashion for part (d). The different approaches needed for Question 1 part (e) and Question 11 part (e) were also identified by many markers as continuing to be problematic, with many candidates seemingly struggling to organise a response that addressed the question, and instead, resorting to listing what each source showed about the selected theme.

The issue of candidates not completing all sections of the paper in full continues, as has been noted in previous years, with markers commenting on the sometimes very short Unit 4 essays. There also seemed to be many candidates who used a separate page to finish off an answer which only required one line, which could have fitted in the blank spaces underneath the lines on the same page. It might be that there is a belief that anything not written on the lines will not be scanned/marked, and so candidates are being advised to continue their answer on a supplementary page regardless of how little of that page is needed. It is important to state that the whole page is scanned and writing under the lines will be read and marked.

### **Section One: Source analysis—Unit 3 (25 Marks)**

Attempted by 1726 candidates                      Mean 16.83(/25)      Max 25.00      Min 0.00

The mean for this section was again high this year, indicating both a strong understanding of the source material and requirements of the specific questions. Perhaps a little too much time was spent on this section by many candidates.

For Question 1 part (a) across all three electives, there seemed to be many candidates who struggled to articulate a similarity in message, with many instead identifying a similarity in the topic. Candidates pointing out that both sources are discussing the Five-Year plans, or the Great Leap Forward alone is not sufficient when comparing messages: it is important to articulate what the source is actually saying about these topics.

The changed wording for part (b) was dealt with well, with fewer responses following a very formulaic 'a strength of Source 1 is ... a weakness of Source 1 is ...' It enabled candidates to explore more fully to what extent a source was useful, and in what way, without necessarily having to use 'strength' and 'weakness' as organisers. It also seemed to lead to fewer candidates resorting to a simplistic exploration of usefulness: that the source is strong because it shows x, but limited because it does not show y or z, although there were still instances of this kind of approach. However, there remains a range of concerns with how some candidates approach this question, such as with a simplistic focus on the type of source (either primary or secondary), or its creator (such as the source is not useful simply because it is from Stalin/Mao) without an exploration of how those factors impact on its usefulness. Additionally, an overall evaluation of the usefulness of each source was not always provided in depth.

The perspective question was dealt with relatively well, with candidates continuing the trend of focusing on 'accounting for' the perspective as well as initially identifying the perspective of the source. The fifth mark was allocated for additional insight in accounting for the perspective of either source (not both) so candidates had in essence two opportunities to get the extra mark based on the quality of their insight.

For part (e), the multiple elements (not just economic changes, but their significance, and then how well the sources give an insight into that significance) proved challenging for candidates to address all parts using a logical structure while working to a time limit. Many candidates simply summarised what each source shows, or commented on the accuracy of each source individually, rather than considering them as a set. Some candidates focused too much on what is omitted from the sources. However, stronger answers were clearly able to identify the nature of economic change represented in the sources, how that change was significant, and the way in which this significance was captured by the sources, and there did seem to be a greater number of these than in previous years.

### **Section Two: Essay—Unit 3 (25 Marks)**

Attempted by 1707 candidates                      Mean 15.00(/25)      Max 25.00      Min 0.00

Overall, there was a balanced distribution of essay responses in the Russia elective compared to the other two electives, where candidates overwhelmingly responded to two of the three options. Coverage of all aspects of the syllabus needs to be applied to all electives, so that essay topics in each elective can be accessed by those candidates choosing a particular elective.

It was noted that there was an increasing tendency of candidates to frequently cite or quote their textbook for straightforward facts (Corin & Fiehn and Mason being very popular), which did not necessarily add any weight to their response. Quotes or citing of authors is more appropriate for historical analysis or debate, but candidates are perhaps being coached to include such citations in large numbers in order to make their essays appear more

impressive. It might be worth emphasising that a 'less is more' approach might work better. A few judicious quotes used in key places is encouraged in order to enhance their impact.

### **Section Three: Source analysis—Unit 4 (25 Marks)**

Attempted by 1718 candidates                      Mean 15.13(/25)      Max 25.00      Min 0.00

In Question 11 part (b), the issue of candidates tending to compare/contrast topic or message rather than purpose remained. While candidates would often clearly articulate a purpose of each, they found it more difficult to maintain this when comparing and contrasting, or they simply restated the purpose that was identified originally. Encouraging candidates to focus on the likely audience as well as the position of the author will hopefully yield improved responses, and ones that go beyond the purpose simply being to highlight the message. Given that this largely reflects comments made last year, it does represent an area on which to focus. For part (c), the variety of approaches taken in 'explaining' the message indicates that there is some uncertainty as to exactly what 'explain' can mean. While there is some flexibility, teachers are encouraged to use the *Years 11 and 12 Glossary of key words used in the formulation of questions* to see what the term 'explain' covers, and therefore how candidates might respond to this part of the question.

For the Europe and Australia electives in particular, many candidates found identifying counter-arguments for Sources 3 and 4 quite challenging. Several candidates discussed omissions from the sources, rather than identifying competing views of the topic, as a way of discussing contestability. Furthermore, there seemed to be a greater number of candidates who articulated why a source could be contestable but did not reference a counter-argument to demonstrate how it could be contested. In addition, as in previous years, some candidates referred to historical events from either much earlier or much later than the events referenced in the sources to contest the argument presented. For example, in referring to the relationship between Reagan and Gorbachev at the time of signing the *Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (INF), many candidates referred to Reagan's approach in the early 1980s to contest the argument presented, rather than questioning the nature of the relationship at that time. As stated last year, candidates need to ensure that, in providing a counter-argument, it is one on the same topic/event that is presented in the source/s.

For part (e), many candidates are now recognising how to structure their answer to this question with the need to identify changing international relations, but more importantly to articulate their importance in some way. However, there is still a tendency for many to discuss instead the accuracy of the sources, or merely recapitulate what is in the sources. The approach candidates adopted for this question largely mirrored that adopted for Question 1 part (e), despite the question asking for something quite different.

### **Section Four: Essay—Unit 4 (25 Marks)**

Attempted by 1685 candidates                      Mean 14.14(/25)      Max 25.00      Min 0.00

Candidate performance in this section continues to show a reduction in the number of attempts and a lower overall mean compared with the Unit 3 essay section. Many Unit 4 essays were significantly shorter, suggesting time-management issues.

The changing European world since 1945 was by far the most popular elective, but the treatment of the Cold War in a global context and the connection to events in Cuba continues to be problematic, given that the syllabus focus is on Europe.