

Study **all** the sources.

'Public health reforms gradually improved the entire country's health between 1800 and 1914.' How far do you agree with this interpretation? Use the sources and your knowledge of British public health to explain your answer. Remember to identify the sources you use. [16]

I agree with the interpretation to an extent. There was a change in attitude towards public health during the 19th century that resulted in a number of Acts being passed by the government with the aim of improving living and working conditions across the country. For example, the Public Health Act 1875 made it compulsory for all councils to enforce the provisions of the Act, such as covering sewers and providing a clean water supply. This was an improvement on the Public Health Act 1848, which was not compulsory and therefore not widely enforced. This shows that public health reforms gradually improved the entire country's health because the Act was an improvement on 1848 and it was enforced nationally.

The improvement in public health was continued in the early part of the 20th century by 'New Liberalism'. Liberal reforms, such as the provision of free school meals, National Insurance and old age pensions were all enforced nationally, and as such improved public health across the country. Old age pensions, for example, provided the poorest elderly people in Britain with an income, whereas before they had none. Source E shows the disagreement between followers of 'Old Liberalism' and 'New Liberalism' by condemning the Old Age Pensions Act as 'socialism'. This demonstrates how the reforms improved the entire country because socialism is concerned with equality for all.

However, many of the sources show that there were vast differences in the extent to which public health reforms affected different parts of the country. For example, Joseph Bazalgette's sewer system was a great help in improving public health in London by ensuring that drinking water stayed clean, thereby avoiding continued cholera outbreaks. Source A indicates that Bazalgette's work was considered of great importance in London. Nevertheless, Bazalgette's changes only affected that city and it took much longer for other parts of the country to develop more effective sewer systems. It is unlikely that a memorial to Bazalgette would be seen in any other part of the country.

Another example of the inaccuracy of the interpretation is the discrepancy in the conditions shown in Sources B and C. Source B shows Port Sunlight, a model village built by William Lever for his workers. A number of model villages were built by philanthropist business owners during the late 19th century to provide decent housing for their workers. The fact that these were private enterprises and not related to government improvement schemes explains why Source C shows conditions so vastly different from Source B. Government Acts, such as the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act 1875, had failed to improve public health in many parts of the country due to their voluntary nature.

Overall, I disagree with the interpretation. Public health reforms were not enforced consistently throughout the country. In areas where private individuals took the initiative, such as William Lever in Port Sunlight and Titus Salt in Saltaire, great strides could be made in improving public health. However, in areas controlled by local government, public health improvements occurred much more slowly. Even in Birmingham, where Joseph Chamberlain made great efforts to improve the water supply and housing, his efforts were hampered by local authorities and conditions in most parts of the city were still poor, as shown in Source D. Therefore, public health reforms improved people's health in some parts of the country, but not all, and certainly not all at the same time.