



General Certificate of Education
Advanced Level Examination
June 2010

General Studies (Specification B)

GENB3

Unit 3 Power

Insert

SOURCE MATERIAL

These texts are to be read in conjunction with unit GENB3.

The questions arise from the texts.

Use the texts, your own knowledge and examples to answer **both** questions in Section A, and **either** Question 3 **or** Question 4 from Section B.

Text A

THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The Lords currently has around 750 Members, and there are four different types: life Peers, Law Lords, bishops and elected hereditary Peers. Unlike MPs, the public do not elect the Lords. The majority are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister or of the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Life Peers

Appointed for their lifetime only, these Lords' titles are not passed on to their children. The Queen formally appoints life Peers on the advice and recommendation of the Prime Minister.

Law Lords

The Law Lords are salaried, full-time judges who carry out the judicial work of the House of Lords. Selection is made by a selection commission whose choice is forwarded to the Lord Chancellor.

Candidates usually come from serving judges of the Court of Appeal in England and Wales, the Court of Session in Scotland, and the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland.

Archbishops and bishops

A limited number of 24 Church of England senior bishops together with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York sit in the House, passing their membership on to the next most senior bishop when they retire. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York traditionally get life peerages on retirement.

Elected hereditary Peers

The right of hereditary Peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords was ended in 1999 by the House of Lords Act but 92 Members were elected internally to remain until the next stage of the Lords reform process.

ROLE AND FUNCTION

The House of Lords is the second chamber of the United Kingdom Parliament. It complements the work of the House of Commons; together they hold government to account.

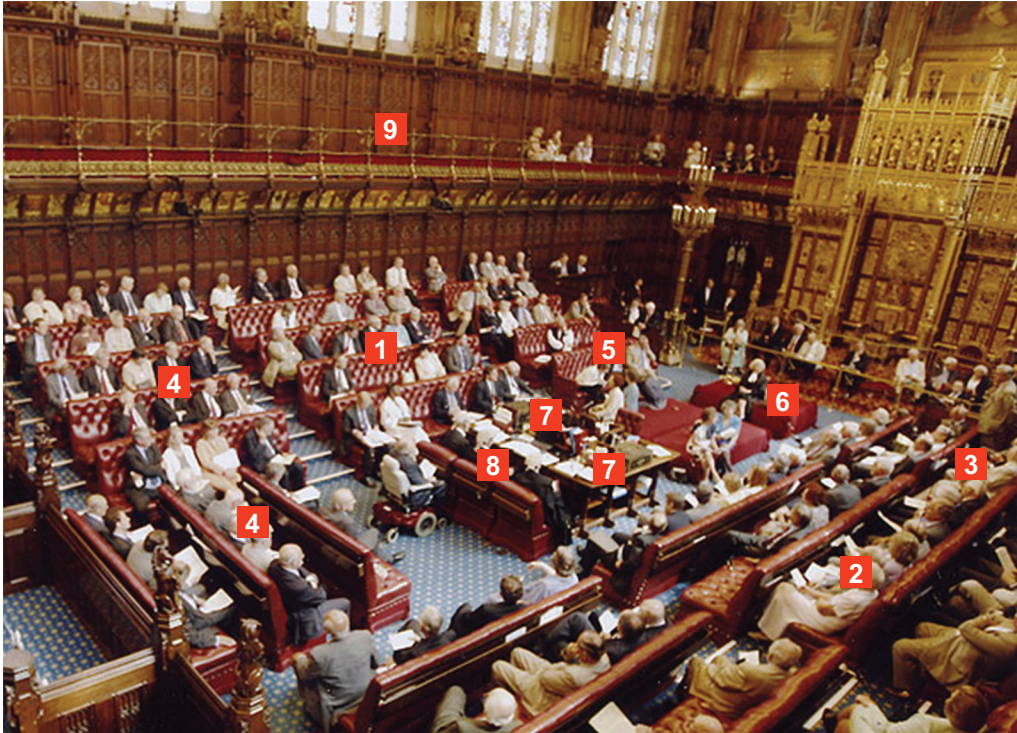
The core functions of the House of Lords are to:

- make laws
- keep a check on government activities
- act as a forum of independent expertise
- carry out judicial work – it is the highest court in the UK.

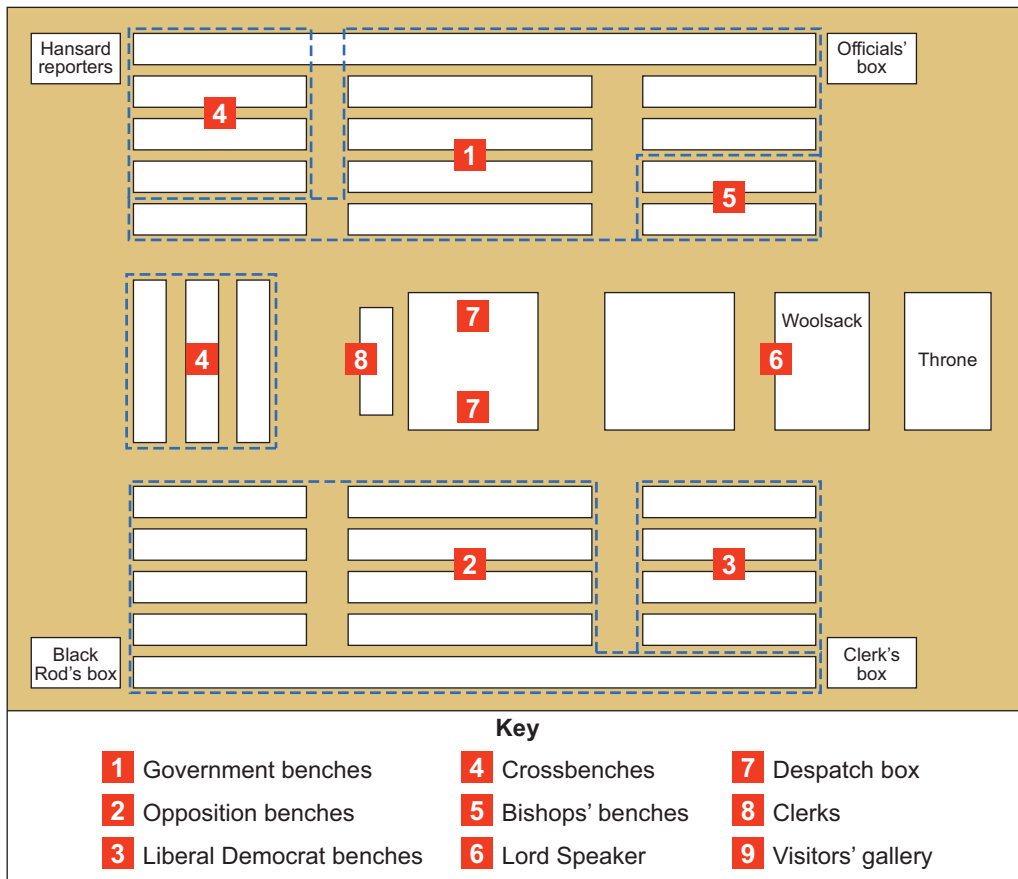
Source: © Parliamentary copyright House of Lords, 2008

Text A continued

HOUSE OF LORDS CHAMBER



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Text B

Immoral advances

Many controversies over scientific advances are based on ethical concerns. In the past, the main areas of contention have included nuclear weapons, eugenics (selective breeding) and experiments on animals, but in recent years the list of “immoral” research areas has grown exponentially. In particular, reproductive biology and medicine have become ripe for moral outrage: think about cloning, designer babies, stem-cell research, human-animal hybrids, and so on.

To many scientists, moral objections to their work are not valid: science, by definition, is morally neutral, so any moral judgement on it simply reflects scientific illiteracy.

“Designer” babies are a case in point. IVF combined with genetic testing makes it possible to screen the cells of an embryo for specific gene variants before it is implanted into the womb. This pre-implantation genetic diagnosis is primarily used to filter out embryos with genes for heritable diseases, but in future it could be used to choose babies with desired traits, such as tallness or a particular eye colour, and perhaps even physical prowess, intelligence and aspects of personality. To take it to the extreme, parents of the future may want to add new genes to the embryo to rig nature’s genetic lottery.

Many people view this as scientists and parents wishing to play God. Lewis Wolpert, a developmental biologist at University College London, disagrees. “Instead of worrying about embryos, we should be worrying about children,” he says.

Wolpert believes that knowledge is the best guide to thinking about the desirability of scientific or technological progress. So while he doesn’t oppose “designer” babies on ethical grounds, he doesn’t think there should be a genetic free-for-all either, because his own expertise has persuaded him this is an area where scientists should tread carefully. “You might think you know what you’re doing when you put in new genes, but it’s very tricky, and you’re likely to produce abnormalities,” he says. “I think it’s a safety issue, not an ethical issue.”

However, there is a serious obstacle to the rational approach: our emotions, and especially disgust, the most morally loaded of emotions. The power of this can be seen in the changing attitudes of the British public to the creation of human-animal hybrids, according to Fiona Fox, director of the Science Media Centre at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in London. This research involves removing DNA from an animal egg, substituting human DNA and then allowing the embryo to develop for 14 days before harvesting stem cells for research into diseases such as Parkinson’s and diabetes. Two years ago, public consultations revealed widespread moral unease about such work. So, in December 2006, the British government issued a draft bill that would make it illegal.

However, the scientists involved believed this was a bad decision that would close a promising area of research, and decided to challenge the issue head-on. For two years scientists repeatedly briefed journalists and explained to the public what this research involved and why they wanted to do it. Gradually public perceptions of the research changed from repugnance based on ill-informed notions to an understanding of the life-saving aims of the work. Earlier this year the bill was changed to allow the creation of human-animal hybrids and now looks set to pass into law. Opinion polls say the public now accepts this research.

Source: based on an article by freelance journalist DAN JONES, 9th January 2009

Turn over for the next text

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Text C**Corruption Allegations in House of Lords**

The Sunday Times reported that two members of the House of Lords had admitted influencing legislation on behalf of clients. Their alleged comments were made to undercover reporters. The newspaper approached the four peers to ask them to help a fictitious Hong Kong businessman who was worried that the Business Rate and Supplements Bill would impose extra taxes on his business. The businessman was supposedly setting up 30 retail outlets across Britain. The newspaper reported that:

- One peer allegedly offered to conduct a "behind the scenes" campaign on behalf of the fictitious businessman to persuade ministers and officials. A £120 000 fee was discussed. The peer allegedly said: "I will work within the rules, but the rules are meant to be bent sometimes."
- A former energy minister allegedly said he had once helped a worried energy client. He told the undercover reporters: "I can work with you over it ... meeting people, talking to people to facilitate the amendment and making sure the thing is granted."
- A former defence minister allegedly offered, in return for an annual fee of £30 000, to contact John Healey, the local government minister and to identify people who could amend the legislation.
- A former government whip allegedly offered to help for a fee of up to £24 000 a year. "Depending on who is on the Commons committee, if I had a chat I could see if I could get them to table an amendment in committee," he said.

The leader of the Lords said she would look into the matter and she expected the cross-party Committee on Lords' Interests to conduct an investigation. She told BBC1's Andrew Marr Show: "These people were entrapped. If it is true, it is a very grim picture, but we do have to look into the details carefully. I am concerned that everybody's side of the story should be heard."

The House of Lords code of conduct states that peers "must never accept any financial inducement as an incentive or reward for exercising parliamentary influence". Sir Christopher Kelly, the chairman of the Westminster sleaze watchdog the Committee on Standards in Public Life, said: "The allegations made are serious."

If found guilty, the peers could be censured on the floor of the Lords and be stripped of the Labour whip. An act of parliament would have to be passed to strip them of their peerages.

Source: based on an article by NICHOLAS WATT, chief political correspondent, *The Guardian*,
Monday 26 January 2009
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Text D

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