General Certificate of Education

Government and Politics 2150

GOVP1   People, Politics and Participation

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – January series

Government and Politics

GOVP1 – People, Politics and Participation

General

Questions 1 and 4 were by far the most popular, though many candidates also tackled Q2. Far fewer candidates attempted Q3. The paper elicited a full range of responses, though it was pleasing to see so few that were consistently in Level 1 across all questions and sub-questions. Most candidates appeared to have little difficulty coping with the format of the new GOVP1 paper; there were only a handful of rubric infringements across the entire entry.

Dividing the time available between the various sub-questions was clearly an issue for some of those sitting this examination for the first time. Many candidates spent far too long answering the shorter part (a) 5 mark and part (b) 10 mark questions; the result being that their 25-mark part (c) responses often lacked depth and development.

Most candidates appeared to have at least a reasonable grasp of the subject matter and many we able to select and apply their knowledge in order to meet the precise demands of the questions posed. However, two general points are worthy of note:

Firstly, there were a significant number of centres whose entire entry attempted the same two questions, from the choice of four available. This fact and the limited breadth of some candidate's answers would appear to suggest that they had either not studied all four sections of the Unit content – as required by the Specification - or that coverage had been decidedly uneven. It should be noted that the very best responses came from those candidates whose understanding came from a knowledge of all four sections of the Unit content and who were able to make the necessary connections.

Secondly, there were a significant number of 'pre-packaged' responses, where candidates were simply reproducing answers they had drafted in advance of the examination. In some cases, entire centres of candidates produced part (c) responses which were identical in terms of analytical structure and factual examples. Several centres also appear to have instructed their candidates to use sub-headings such as 'introduction', 'for', 'against', 'evaluation' and 'conclusion' when answering these longer 25 mark questions. Answers are always marked on their merit. However, it should be noted that such generic responses often lack the precise focus required to access the higher levels on AO2 and AO3. In addition, the use of sub-headings and note-form should not be encouraged. Candidates should write in continuous prose.

Question 1

(a) Most candidates were able to explain the term 'constituency'. Many candidates were able to give examples of parliamentary constituencies that were local to them. Many were aware of the differences in size (area and population) between constituencies and a few even mentioned the work of the Boundary Commissions. Far fewer responses drew a distinction between single-member and multi-member constituencies.

(b) Many candidates produced long and detailed responses addressing the reasons why turnout has fallen, though many failed to link this discussion to the time-frame in question, ie 'since 1997'. Higher level responses made mention of the part supposedly played by 'hapathy' in 2001

or the issue of Iraq in 2005; though the link between the latter and turnout was often poorly explained. Some candidates chose to spend time exploring reasons why turnout might rise at the next general election. Such analysis, though often quite detailed, was largely irrelevant in this instance.

(c) Higher level responses addressed the importance of the campaign before putting it into its proper context alongside other factors influencing voting behaviour. Such candidates often made excellent use of examples to illustrate their points as well as making more sophisticated analytical points, eg the enhanced role of the media in more marginal contests and in by-elections.

Lower level responses were often generic in style; describing those factors affecting voting behaviour (e.g. class, gender, age, issues) or detailing different models of voting behaviour (e.g. rational choice model) without any real attempt – even in passing - to engage with the part played by the campaign.

A significant number of responses failed to offer any examples of past elections beyond generalised comments relating to Obama's 2008 US presidential election campaign. Valid comparisons are always creditworthy but candidates should be reminded that this paper has a UK focus and non-UK examples should be used only where they serve to shed light on the study of UK institutions and processes.

Question 2

(a) Most candidates identified FPTP as the system used in UK general elections. Many correctly identified it as a 'simple plurality' system. Some offered further development by looking at how the system works in practice – either in a single constituency level or at a national level. A significant number of responses were overly long. In many cases this resulted from the fact that candidates became bogged down in the kind of analysis and evaluation that should have been held back for the part 'c' question.

(b) The majority of candidates appeared to have grasped the basics of how the AMS system works. Many were also aware of the likely consequences of its use in UK general elections, ie the likelihood of 'hung' parliaments, coalition governments, the rise of smaller parties and the emergence of two 'classes' of representatives (constituency and top-up). However, most candidates were reluctant to offer evidence in support of any of these points, either from the experience in Scotland or Wales or from their knowledge of the system in operation elsewhere. Candidates who were aware of the use of AMS in Germany often had a more considered view of the prospect of coalition government. Weaker responses simply assumed that coalitions were, universally, 'a bad thing'.

(c) Responses to this question were much as one might have anticipated. Many candidates offered a well rehearsed overview of the arguments 'for' and 'against' FPTP without making any real attempt to adapt or re-order their knowledge in such a way as to make it more focused on the precise demands of the question set. Some candidates turned the question entirely on its head; arguing why FPTP should be 'replaced' (as opposed to 'retained'). The most impressive responses were those which chose to critically assess a number of arguments that are commonly advanced in favour of retaining FPTP.

Question 3

(a) Question 3 was by far the least popular choice on the Paper and it clearly caused some problems for those candidates who weren't entirely comfortable with the focus of the question, but didn't have a 'plan B' (see 'general' comments above). Most candidates who tackled the

question were able to offer a definition for the term 'ideology', though few explained the term effectively. This was surprising given that the term is clearly so central to the study of this part of the GOVP1 Specification.

(b) Most candidates demonstrated an awareness of the way in which Tony Blair had transformed the Labour Party (re-branding it New Labour, reforming Clause 4, etc). In comparison, few were aware of the ways in which the Conservative Party could be said to have changed in recent years. Whilst a knowledge of Thatcherism was deployed to good effect by of those writing at the higher levels or response, candidates needed to demonstrate an awareness of what has happened to Conservative Party policy since 1990; particularly as the question focuses on the period since the mid-1990s. Many candidates appeared more comfortable talking about changes in 'style' and 'image' than issues of 'policy'. However, at the higher levels of response there were some perceptive observations regarding the way in which the current economic crisis had seen (or might see) the two main UK parties 'revert to type'.

(c) This was by far the worst answered question on the Paper. Though many candidates took up the invitation to address issues of participation and representation through a discussion of internal party democracy, few had the knowledge necessary to make this approach work. Whilst it would have been equally valid for candidates to focus on the roles performed by parties (eg participation, representation, political recruitment, electioneering, policy formation etc.) only a handful chose to take this approach. At the lower level or response, some candidates took 'members' to mean 'Members of Parliament' and drifted into a discussion of party discipline in the Commons. Others tried, unsuccessfully, to turn the question into a debate about the need for greater use of referendums. Candidates should be aware that GOVP1 questions on political parties will always focus on material drawn from the 'Political Parties' section of the Specification content.

Question 4

(a) Most candidates were able to offer a definition of the term 'outsider groups'. At the lower levels answers tended to focus more on 'insider groups' or on 'direct action' – taking a lead from the title of the extract. Higher level responses identified Wyn Grant's 'insider/outsider' typology as a way of classifying pressure groups according to their status as opposed to their aims (sectional/cause). Such candidate sometimes offered further development by explaining why some groups might be forced (outsider by necessity) or choose (ideological outsider) to remain outside of the political loop.

(b) Many candidates chose to focus on the reasons why 'pressure group activity' has been on the increase in recent years as opposed to the reasons for the growth in direct action. At the lower levels of response there was also confusion over precisely what sorts of activities constitute direct action; with some candidates including everything from letter writing and mass marches to IRA bombing campaigns. Even those candidates that did manage to provide a clear focus on direct action often became bogged down in lengthy passages describing the antics of groups such as Fathers4Justice, Greenpeace or Plane Stupid, without really relating such knowledge to the precise terms of the question posed. Though many candidates picked up on the reference to the part played by 'new technology' in the extract, few demonstrated any knowledge of the ways in which such technology had proven crucial to the growth of such activities.

(c) This was by far the most effectively answered of the four part (c) questions. Whilst some lower level responses drifted into the kind of descriptive narrative seen in many part (b) answers (see above), most candidates were able to impose a clear analytical structure on their discussion. Many candidates addressed the importance of group aims, resources, status and methods in determining a group's chances of success. Higher level responses demonstrated an

awareness not only of the way in which these factors relate to one another, but also of the importance of the broader social, economic and political context.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.