



General Certificate of Education

Government and Politics 2151

**GOV4B Political Issues: Ideologies in
Action**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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Government and Politics

GOV4B – Political Issues: Ideologies in Action

General

Topics 1 (*'Ethnicity and Gender'*) and 2 (*'The Environment'*) were the most popular. Fewer candidates tackled Topics 3 (*'Education'*) and 4 (*'The Economy'*).

The paper elicited a full range of responses, though very few scripts were consistently in Level 1 or at the top end of Level 4. Most candidates appeared to have little difficulty coping with the format of the paper. There were no rubric infringements.

Some candidates struggled to divide the time available between the various topics and questions effectively. In some cases, candidates who scored Level 4 marks across one topic slipped into low Level 3 on their second topic. As has been the experience on the AS papers, candidates often spent too long answering the shorter 10-mark questions (Questions 01, 03, 05 and 07) in comparison to the 30-mark questions (Question 02, 04, 06 and 08). However, most candidates were able to target their knowledge effectively and there were relatively few instances of candidates including material in one question that would have been better rewarded if used when answering another.

The majority of candidates appeared to have at least a reasonable grasp of the subject matter, though candidates must ensure that they direct their answers towards the precise terms of the questions posed. For example, some of those answering Question 02 spent far too long outlining the positions of UK political parties on the issue of feminism, where the question demanded a rather more theoretical response. Conversely, those answering Question 04 often wrote in general or theoretical terms where the question posed clearly required a focus on UK party policy. Problems of precision/focus were also apparent on the 10-mark questions, where candidates often failed to provide a clear and accurate definition of the term or terms that formed the basis of the questions set.

Topic 1 – Ethnicity and Gender

Question 01

At the higher levels of response, candidates were able to provide a clear definition of the term 'institutional racism' and offer developed explanation of some of the ways in which such racism can manifest itself and how the state has sought to limit it. The best answers demonstrated an awareness that such racism was often inherent – found in culture, practices and policies – as opposed to being explicit. Many candidates referred to the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the findings of the Macpherson Inquiry that came in its wake. There were useful references to the presence of a 'canteen culture' in the police force and other institutions, and to inequalities in employment/promotion ('glass ceilings') and the use of stop-and-search powers. Many candidates referred to legislative efforts to curb institutional racism.

At the lower levels of response, candidates often failed to distinguish between 'racism' and 'institutional racism'. Many weaker responses focused on segregation in the USA and apartheid in South Africa without really linking such discussion to the terms of the question posed.

Question 02

At the lower levels of response, candidates often focused on the policies of UK political parties towards women without really relating the discussion either to feminism or to the precise terms of the question posed (ie left/right). Higher level responses generally took one of two forms. Some candidates identified the main characteristics of 'left wing' and 'right wing' thought and then measured feminism against these criteria. Others looked at the various strands of feminism (often in terms of their chronological development) and considered whether each strand or 'wave' could be easily put into a 'left wing' or 'right wing' box.

Most candidates explicitly recognised that categorising feminism was made difficult by the fact that feminism was not homogeneous. Many were able to identify various strands of feminist thought (eg first, second and third wave, liberal, Marxist/social[ist], radical). Many also considered post-feminism and the rise of sectional forms such as black, eco-feminism and lesbian-feminism. Many candidates were able to demonstrate an impressive knowledge of the leading feminist writers in support of the arguments advanced (eg Mary Wollstonecraft, J S Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone). The use of subject-specific vocabulary was also impressive (eg patriarchy, nuclear family, glass ceiling, etc).

Topic 2 – The Environment**Question 03**

Most candidates were able to distinguish between these two forms of 'green thinking', most commonly by contrasting the anthropocentric approach taken by environmentalists with the more ecocentric and holistic approach taken by ecologists. Candidates at most levels of response were able to give examples of each approach in action as a way of developing their explanations. For example, some contrasted the environmentalists' political efforts to encourage consumers to move towards more eco-friendly cars with the less industrialised, communal form of existence favoured by some ecologists.

At the higher levels of response, candidates further developed their discussion by introducing terms such as 'light green' and 'dark green' (or 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology). Many candidates made reference to the work of Arne Næss and to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis.

Question 04

In order to answer this question effectively candidates clearly needed to have a fairly secure understanding of the positions that mainstream UK parties have taken on environmental issues. At the lower levels of response, this awareness of party policy was lacking and candidates answered in more general terms, referring to environmental disasters such as Katrina and the BP Horizon leak and explaining how events such as these – alongside growing fears of global warming – had resulted in support for agreements such as those signed at Rio and Kyoto and the more recent discussions at Copenhagen. Whilst this general material was useful in helping to explain why mainstream UK parties may have 'come to embrace environmentalism', it did not really address the question posed (ie, 'the extent to which ...').

At the higher levels of response, candidates demonstrated a clearer focus on party policy. Whilst some answers remained rather generalised (eg stating that all UK parties favoured greater use of renewable energy sources) some were very impressive indeed. A significant number of candidates had clearly studied the 2010 party manifestos in some depth and were able to repeat great swathes of material almost verbatim. The best answers were those that combined such material with developed discussion of whether such commitments meant that the parties had truly embraced environmentalism – or whether they were simply paying

lip-service to the issue in order to garner votes. Some candidates revisited some of the material introduced in Question 03 by drawing a distinction between parties embracing environmentalism (ie anthropocentrism) and embracing ecologism (ie ecocentrism).

Topic 3 – Education

Question 05

A surprisingly large number of candidates attempted to answer this question without defining the term ‘traditional teaching methods’. Many simply took it as ‘traditional schooling’ and wrote at length about the desire to move back to the tripartite system established under the Butler Education Act (1944).

Higher level responses were characterised both by their understanding of the differences between traditional methods (eg more didactic, chalk-and-talk, authoritarian, teacher-centred) and more progressive forms (eg less didactic, more student-centred, less authoritarian), and by their ability to relate such understanding back to the terms of the question.

Many candidates argued on philosophical lines, suggesting that conservatives tend to favour the traditional (‘tried and tested methods’) over the novel. At the higher levels of response, some candidates referred to the right-wing desire to instil essential knowledge and skills, cultural values and societal norms in students as a means of enabling them to take their place in society. Other candidates focused on more practical motivations for wanting to return to traditional methods, eg the supposed failure of progressive methods and a ‘lost generation’. In this context some candidates made mention of the William Tyndale School scandal (1975), James Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech (1976) and the ‘Great Debate’ in education that followed.

Question 06

The vast majority of candidates were able to provide an overview of the main educational reforms of recent years, though precisely what constituted ‘recent years’ varied wildly between candidates. Whilst many restricted their discussion to the period between the 1970s and 2010, some went back to the 1870s and others focused entirely on the period between 1997 and 2010. Those who took in the move to comprehensive education were generally able to establish the proper context for more recent reforms without falling into a lengthy historical narrative.

At the lower levels of response, candidates often failed to address the issue of whether reforms were driven more by pragmatism than by ideology. In addition, those that did attempt to assess which was the greater motivation often came to conclusions which were difficult to substantiate, eg that the Baker Education Act (1988) was entirely driven by pragmatism and that New Labour’s reforms were entirely ideological. Higher level responses were characterised by their ability to see elements of pragmatism and ideology underpinning each phase of education reform, eg Thatcher’s desire to bring market forces to play in the sphere of state education (more ideological) versus her acceptance that there could be no return to the tripartite system (more pragmatic). Similarly, New Labour’s acceptance of the marketisation of state education (more pragmatic) versus their introduction of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and other programmes designed to bring greater social justice (more ideological). Some candidates cleverly pointed out that as pragmatism is the defining characteristic of traditional conservatism, Conservative governments are being ideological even where they appear to be pursuing the pragmatic course.

Topic 4 – The Economy

Question 07

At the lowest level of response, some candidates simply wrote about the benefits of taxation in general without any real attempt to address the terms of the question. However, most candidates were able to identify the fundamental difference between progressive and regressive forms of taxation, ie that the former fall more heavily on those with higher incomes and would therefore be favoured by those on the left as they offer the prospect of greater equality. The majority of candidates framed such discussion in terms of the desire to see a redistribution of wealth as a means of achieving social justice. Whilst some responses maintained that regressive forms of taxation were set at a higher rate for those on lower incomes, most appeared to understand that these are in fact flat-rate taxes which take a greater proportion of the disposable income available to such groups.

At the higher levels of response, candidates frequently argued that progressive taxation was a fairer way to raise the revenue needed to pay for the public services that those on the left favoured, whilst many also noted that very high levels of income tax on higher earners such as those seen in the 1970s could result in falling revenues as a result of tax avoidance and the flight of bankers and other high earners out of the UK (a 'brain drain').

Many candidates made references to changes in the income tax personal allowance under the Conservative-LibDem coalition as well as the increase in VAT from 17.5% to 20% from January 2011. Some were aware that whilst the Chancellor George Osborne sought to portray his Budget as broadly progressive, those on the left felt that it would take more from the poorest sections of society.

Question 08

A significant minority of candidates focused on an overly narrow historical time-frame (1997-2010) with some focusing almost entirely on the differences between the parties in the wake of the economic downturn (2007-2010) or, in a handful of cases, in the wake of the 2010 General Election. Higher level responses tended to see the bigger picture, taking in the post-war Keynesian consensus, the rise of neo-liberalism and monetarism in the late 1970s and the obvious divide apparent between the Conservative and Labour parties at the time of the 1983 General Election. Most candidates recognised that whilst New Labour had accepted many of the tenets of Thatcherite economic policy (a new 'Thatcherite consensus'), Blair's 'Third Way' also saw the state intervening with the aim of ensuring greater social justice – not least with changes to the benefits system and with the innovation of tax credits.

Most candidates were aware that the economic crisis that emerged towards the end of New Labour's period in power had resulted in clearer dividing lines emerging between the two main parties, with the Labour Party returning to a more Keynesian model and the Conservatives offering immediate and deep cuts in public expenditure as a means of reducing the deficit and restoring market confidence. Many also recognised that the way in which the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats were able to reach an accommodation on economic policy in the wake of the hung (or 'balanced') parliament suggested that the policy differences between some of the main UK parties were clearly not irreconcilable.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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