



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Government and Politics

GOVP1

(Specification 2150)

Unit 1: People, Politics and Participation

Report on the Examination

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Unit 1 (GOVP1): People, Politics and Participation

General

The paper elicited a reasonable range of responses across the four topic areas, though there was again a degree of bunching around the middle of the mark range at script level. This can be explained by the tendency, identified in earlier series, for students to reproduce pre-packaged, generic responses - as opposed to addressing the precise terms of the questions posed. Consequently, few students produced scripts that were consistently securing Level 4 marks across all six sub-questions attempted.

Topic 3 (Political Parties) was again the least popular option with just 21% of students attempting it. This was, nonetheless, a significant increase on previous examination series. Topic 1 (Participation and Voting Behaviour) was by far the most popular, with around 80% of students tackling questions 01, 02 and 03.

TOPIC 1 - PARTICIPATION AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Question 1

This question was generally well-answered. Most students were able to offer a clear definition of the term and many were able to develop their explanations by making reference to the rise of more issue-based voting and catch-all parties. For many, however, the term *partisan dealignment* was simply taken to mean class dealignment, resulting in definitions and explanations that were overly narrow in scope.

Question 2

Whilst students might have been expected to focus on the way in which the debates directly enhanced participation (ie for those in the audience or asking questions, for those watching at home on television, or for those involved in discussions or debates in the wake of the debates), most simply sought to link the use of televised debates to the rise in electoral turnout between the 2005 and 2010 General Elections. Little if any evidence was offered in support of this view. A number of students wrote lengthy and largely tangential responses detailing the nature of participation in the UK.

Question 3

At the lower levels of response many students simply sought to re-work material from Q02 relating to the advent of televised debates. Significant numbers of students reeled-off well-rehearsed, generic responses which did little to address the precise terms of the question posed. Higher-level responses were characterised by a clearer focus on the campaign, though surprisingly few students were able to make reference to recent elections (ie targeting the word 'now' in the question).

TOPIC 2 - ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Question 4

Many students simply described the role of an MP, rather than defining the term in question. Those that took a more direct approach were able to contrast representative democracy with direct democracy, often referencing Athenian democracy or Burke.

Question 5

Many of those students tackling this question wrote at great length. Those marking additional sheets and un-scannable scripts noted a preponderance of shorter, lower-scoring responses to Q06 – reflecting the fact that many had spent too long in answering Q05. Those writing at length in answer to Q05 generally did so because they failed to take note of the time-frame identified in the question ('since 1997') and/or the focus on 'democracy in the UK'. The narrower focus required here set this question apart from the more general questions on referendums and democracy that have appeared as 25-markers on earlier papers. Lengthy descriptions of the use of referendums in some US States or Switzerland – or detailed analysis of the 1975 UK referendum on the European Community – were rarely creditable here.

Question 6

This question was generally well-answered. Although many students focused almost entirely on First-Past-The-Post (despite the instruction to reference 'electoral systems' used in the UK), most students were able to maintain a clear analytical focus throughout their answer. Given the scope of the specification content for this topic, it is surprising that so many students still find it difficult to distinguish between UK electoral systems or recall those elections in which each system is used. Many students wasted valuable time discussing AV (or AV+) at length. Most at the lower-levels of response were able to repeat arguments for or against systems without really demonstrating any genuine understanding of those arguments advanced. Once again, the tendency to produce generic responses (as opposed to answering the question posed) meant that many students spent too much time detailing the use of electoral systems in other countries.

TOPIC 3 - POLITICAL PARTIES

Question 7

Although this topic remains the least popular of the four on the paper, this question saw the highest 5 mark question mean score in this series (at 2.99). Most students were able to offer a convincing definition of the term in question. Many were aware of the UK's changing party system. Some drew comparisons with the USA or even the supposed 'Japanisation' of the UK party system (ie the idea of a dominant party system) in the periods 1979–1997 and 1997–2010.

Question 8

The roles performed by political parties are fairly central to the specification content so it is, perhaps, surprising that those students opting to tackle this topic continue to struggle with questions focusing on this theme. Whilst those at the higher-levels of response were able to identify and explain two roles performed by UK parties (eg representation, electioneering, political recruitment etc), those at the lower-levels of response invariably ended drifting on to GOVP2 material (ie focusing on Parliament, the role of the Official Opposition etc). Though this material could easily have been made relevant to the question, it rarely was.

Question 9

Whilst some of the better responses made a reasonable attempt to consider the ideological and policy differences between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, few made any direct attempt to address intra-party differences and factions. As a result, there were few answers that came close to answering the question posed. At the lower-levels of response students tended to get side-tracked in a discussion of 'party politics in an age of coalition government'. For some, the fact that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were government together meant that the answer to the question was unequivocally 'yes'.

TOPIC 4 - PRESSURE GROUPS AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Question 10

There were some very impressive definitions, often developed with reference to earlier social movements (eg the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the green movement etc). However, the vast majority of students took the term 'social movement' to mean 'outsider pressure groups using direct action' and explained the latter, with the usual references to Fathers 4 Justice. Despite the material provided in the extract, very few students made reference to the loose-knit, decentralised, non-membership nature of such movements.

Question 11

Most students were able to identify two factors that might help to explain the rise of social movements; most commonly 'developments in technology' and 'media coverage'. However, as in answers to Q10, few students appeared secure in their understanding of the term social movements, making the task of selecting appropriate examples and supporting evidence something of a challenge for most. At the higher-levels of response, students generally used their own knowledge more effectively, referring to alienation with traditional institutions and processes, as well as the rise of issues which naturally lent themselves to looser forms of activity.

Question 12

Whilst students at all levels of response were able to see that the question was targeting the issue of 'what factors affect pressure group success', there was again a tendency towards well-rehearsed, generic responses. Only a minority of students made a concerted attempt to get to grips with the issue of what 'success' might mean, though some of those who did wrote with great analysis and focus. Very few students picked up on the phrase 'core aims' and those that did often simply repeated it without any real consideration of what it might mean for different, named groups.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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