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GCE Government & Politics (6GP01/01)

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General comments

The first sitting of the exam for the new specification illustrated many relevant areas upon which to improve candidate performance. Firstly in terms of how candidates deal with political content and secondly in terms of process, in particular how candidates approach each question, their exam techniques and prior preparation.

The questions on pressure groups arose as the most popular, but at the same time this was an area where underperformance and lack of attention to detail cost many candidates dearly. The question on political parties now showing an emphasis on ideas and policies saw a more focused approach and candidates performed relatively well, though as noted here there are still areas to develop.

In terms of examination technique all (a) questions require knowledge and understanding (AO1), this is in the main factual detail but, this has to be correct and focused. It was often the case that candidates skirted around the question and could not be direct and precise; this meant that the information presented was politically and factually correct but fell outside the remit of the question and thus failed to gain marks. Part (b) questions have in their focus both AO1 and AO2 (with three marks available at AO2). In the main candidates handled the (b) questions adequately but often lacked depth and supportive examples to reach the higher mark levels. All (c) questions on this first examination paper called for a balanced response, where both sides of a contested topic require addressing. It was rare that candidates did not appreciate this balance but often the level of analysis and evaluation (AO2) lagged behind. AO3 marks reflected the ability to construct and convey this argument in a coherent, logical and structured manner. This final area cuts across both political content and encompasses generic communication skills.

Question 1

(a) It was uncommon but not rare for candidates to confuse electoral systems and score zero. What was far more common however was for candidates to spend unprofitable time describing the location and the logic behind the introduction of Proportional Representation as opposed to the operation of AMS. This lack of mechanical rigor undermined the fabric of many responses.

(b) This again required focus and attention to detail. Underperformance here was often the result of either a lack of key knowledge or widening the question to areas which again could gain no reward. Success here needed knowledge of outcomes with specific reference to party representation. For some this was only the minor parties in Scotland and Wales, for others it was only the major parties. A combination of both major and minor parties was required in order to reach the higher mark levels.

(c) The two proceeding sub questions were focused on one system of proportional representation (PR). This was a more general PR question with the focus on elections to the House of Commons.

It is true that the case for and against first past the post revolves to some degree around PR but it is not a symmetrical overlap. Quite often candidates lapsed into a rote response about first past the post and in the process lost marks because of focus and clarity. However, on the positive side it was quite common for candidates to be in lower mark levels on parts (a) and (b) and then

to raise their mark on this (c) section of the question. It was common to see candidates who were less confident and articulate concerning AMS then appearing more developed and engaged with the application of PR to the House of Commons.

Question 2

(a) This response did not elicit the required answer for a huge number of candidates. The key reason was a clear lack of knowledge surrounding adversary politics as defined in the mark scheme. Many mistakenly constructed the concept around marginal, minor and single differences between the major political parties instead of the fundamental and deep divergence which was required. Many candidates often used a single issue of policy disagreement (which existed in the context of consensus politics) as constituting the example required by the question. This was not relevant or appropriate.

(b) All political parties are to an extent loose alliances. Divisions could be said to be the norm not the exception. As such the question here offers a broad scope. Responses could be developed from the ideological groups within the Conservative Party or responses could discuss the divisions on the attitude to their current policies. The former, in these times of changing policy, on the surface may appear to be the easier route. A good many candidates identified the One-Nation element and the Thatcherite heritage within the party. Problems did arise with certain candidates who failed to appreciate the term 'current' used in the question and tended to provide a historical as opposed to a contemporary insight for the party. Here it is vital for centres to be updated on policy changes, and given the availability of the internet and other media routes this is not a problematical or onerous quest.

(c) Time and events made the response to this question both unusual, yet very interesting given the current political environment. A flexible and pragmatic approach was adopted in marking and this is reflected in the mark scheme. Mistakes still permeate this area. Many candidates still have the view that the Conservatives directly oppose the Labour Party with regard to the EU and wish for the UK to withdraw, true it is an area of disagreement but, the Conservative stance on the area is not clearly known by many candidates. Candidates could improve their performance if they could more accurately cite examples where policy differed and what this would mean in terms of outcomes: for reference some of these areas are noted in the mark scheme.

Question 3

(a) This was in the main handled well by candidates who could classify the two types and give examples. Mistakes arose where the labels where incorrectly applied. It was good to see that terrorist groups such as the IRA no longer featured prominently in the example category. Problems arose where some groups can be said to have dual membership in both categories but the candidate was always given the benefit of the doubt in this area if this arose.

(b) The major problem Assistant Examiners noted here was that a significant minority of candidates ignored the last three words of the question and failed to apply the methods as they impacted upon government. Hence many tactics were correctly identified as being applicable and employed by pressure groups, but they were not linked to how they influenced the government. Lobbying was

one good example of this. Many candidates identified how this took place at Westminster and MPs were lobbied. What they failed to bring out was how this may influence the government, for left in isolation it is simply having an influence on the legislature or possibly an opposition MP. A huge number of candidates took this as a route to describe insider and outsider groups as levers to influence government. It was possible to use this route but it is to an extent flawed. Not all insider groups automatically influence government (though it is admitted they have easier avenues to do so) and not all outsider groups have no influence whatsoever on government. Status in being an insider or outsider was an outcome issue and the impetus for the question was the practical methods; this at times was sometimes lost by those using this approach.

(c) It was on this part of the question that all Assistant Examiners commented upon in their reports. In essence their concern was that candidates ignored the key term 'pluralist' and merely gave an account of pressure groups promoting democracy. The most common outcome was candidates being rewarded in Level 1, only rarely being able to progress into Level 2. As such they felt it was an effective discriminator. What gained marks for some who simply talked about democracy was some implicit reference to the concept of pluralist democracy. It is imperative that centres revise and deliver the concepts of pluralism and elitism as depicted on the specification and add this to an understanding of pluralist democracy. This has exposed a clear gap in preparation by centres and has been a key factor in candidates not achieving their full potential.

Question 4

(a) What perhaps prevented many candidates reaching higher marks here was the incorrect assumption that this applied to representative democracy in the UK. As a consequence and as noted earlier on (a) questions, politically correct information was supplied but could not be credited, areas such as the number of MPs, the election cycle in the UK etc. Mistakes also arose where candidates described direct democracy but these were relatively few in number.

(b) Candidates often knew the two major factors here, declining electoral turnout and declining political party membership. Details was generally lacking on the latter element. The damage to legitimacy of the political system arising through declining turnout was seldom developed and explained. Likewise the damage to the body politics of an ever smaller number of political motivated citizens in organised political parties was not fully appreciated.

(c) This is an area which has been ushered in with the new specification and Assistant Examiners commented that on the whole the approach and the content was encouraging. It contains speculative content as to how democracy might be advanced and strengthened. Weaker candidates tended to identify possible improvements routes such as compulsory voting, reducing the voting age, more referendums etc. then failed to consider the negative implications of these moves. However despite the above negative elements, many felt that this was the best (c) question completed by candidates. This is evidence that centres have readily come to terms with this new content and furthermore that it has enlivened candidates in the process.

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Statistics

Unit 1 (6GP01) People and Politics

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Boundary mark	80	42	36	30	25	20
Uniform Boundary mark	100	80	70	60	50	40