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GCE Government and Politics 6GP03 3A

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Introduction

General Comments

Perhaps reflecting on the fact that a considerable percentage of the candidates sitting this paper were re-sitting, whilst others were taking it for the first time, there was a very wide range of abilities displayed in the responses to the respective questions. Some candidates appeared to be well prepared, particularly for the long essay questions and were able to supply relevant detail, examples, analysis and theoretical knowledge.

A major problem though, particularly on the shorter questions, was for many candidates to not specifically address the question being asked. Many supplied information that related to the subject area, but this information could not be rewarded as it related to areas not being asked for. This type of response could only access a limited number of marks and is an area that many candidates and centres could address on future papers.

The questions relating to Environmental Policy were the least popular, perhaps reflecting the fact that this section is new to the specification, and that centres are not fully certain of the requirements for this particular section.

Question 1

This was not a particularly popular question, but as there were a number of tax policies that candidates could consider, there were a wide range of possible answers.

For Level 3 answers, candidates needed to consider a range of similarities and differences with a suitable level of detail and analysis. Most covered income tax, national insurance, so-called stealth taxes, inheritance tax and VAT. There were sufficient similarities and differences on all these for a comprehensive and detailed answer to be given.

Candidates achieving level 2 answers provided less detail and analysis and a smaller range of tax policies, and would often consider taxes such as green taxes or council tax where there was less scope for evaluation. However, many were aware of the actual tax policies of the two main parties.

A considerable number of responses struggled to engage with the question. Some considered general economic policy, public spending or even the tax policies of the Liberal Democrats. Others simply described tax policies but failed to offer any analysis as to where the similarities and differences occurred, whilst some simply gave a one-sided answer. A common problem was to consider the tax policies of the two parties in the 1980s, rather than the contemporary period.

Question 2

This was the most popular question, again with a wide range of possible answers.

For Level 3 answers, candidates needed to consider a range of advantages and disadvantages with a suitable level of detail and analysis. The most popular responses were the fact that a better educated workforce would allow the UK to compete more effectively in international markets, and that greater access to higher education would offer greater equality of opportunity, increase social mobility and reduce poverty. The disadvantages were the costs involved, the quality of the degrees offered and the fact that there may not be enough suitable jobs for all the future graduates.

Level 2 answers gave less detail and analysis and often gave partially correct reasons which were not fully thought through. Many claimed that increasing the numbers of candidates in higher education would be too expensive, but not mentioning that student loans are largely paying for the expansion, or that there would be no one left to carry out the manual jobs if everyone was a graduate - though the government target is for only 50% of candidates to access higher education (HE) courses.

Surprisingly, there were a small number who appeared unfamiliar with the whole topic and offered very weak answers. Others confused Higher Education with Further Education and mentioned problems with EMA and with A-Level courses.

Question 3

Answers to this question covered the full range of possibilities from the very poor to the excellent. A common problem was for answers to explain at great length the history, organisation, purpose and achievements of the NHS and to say very little that actually addressed the question.

Better answers considered a number of ways in which charges had been introduced - prescriptions, expensive drugs, dentistry and opticians - but were less certain on why this was the case. These answers were often convoluted or lacking in analysis and detail. Many answers seemed more concerned with how marketisation had been introduced within the NHS over the last three decades, but failed to relate this to the specifics of the question being asked.

Level 3 answers were able to describe both how the principle was under threat, and also offer explanations as to why. These included the ageing UK population, the increased range of expensive treatments, the desire to introduce marketisation into healthcare provision, and the increased bureaucracy and expense of running the NHS. These gave comprehensive detail and analysis on a number of issues that the healthcare system faces.

Question 4

This was a fairly popular and generally well answered question. Most candidates were able to engage with a range of advantages and disadvantages concerning the use of prison and longer sentences.

Advantages included the idea of deterrence, harsh punishment, isolation from society, the chance to rehabilitate offenders and the fact that victims appear to have gained justice whilst the wider population is generally supportive of this approach. Disadvantages included the high level of expense, the fact that prisons are 'universities of crime', the high re-offending rate, the lack of rehabilitation - especially for short-term prisoners - and the fact that those serving community sentences are less likely to re-offend.

The main discriminator was when candidates were able to offer a greater level of detail, knowledge and analysis of each argument being considered, and those that did so were able to access Level 3 marks.

Unfortunately, a small number of candidates confused 'custodial sentences' with 'community service' and were thus able to gain very few marks, as the arguments given tended to be the exact opposite of the conventional wisdom.

Question 5

The least popular, but a reasonably well answered question, though the majority of answers tended to give fairly generalised statements about the level of environmental commitment within the Conservative Party. These answers tended to highlight the better known statements and activities of David Cameron - his visit to the Arctic, the change to the party logo, opposition to a third runway at Heathrow and support for reducing carbon emissions. Many candidates questioned the depth of the commitment and claimed that the Conservatives remain the party of business and economic growth.

A small number of candidates produced high level responses by offering considerably more detail and knowledge of party policies, internal opposition to these policies and the criticisms that have been made of these policies, for instance by the Green Party.

Question 6

Answers to this question covered a wide range of abilities.

Responses which scored lower tended to dwell on the causes of the economic crisis, on whether Labour was to blame for the crisis or on mistakes Labour made whilst the economy was booming.

Those that engaged more fully with the question tended to concentrate on the relative merits of supporting the banking system, quantitative easing, increasing public spending, lowering the level of VAT, introducing the car scrappage scheme and the establishment of such a high level of debt.

Candidates entering the higher range of marks did so through expressing these debates in terms of party policy and discussing the proposed alternatives of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Equally, many were able to locate the various issues within the theoretical framework of the Keynesianism versus neo-liberalism debate, and were able to offer a high level of analysis and interpretation.

Question 7

This was a reasonably well answered and popular question. However, there was a tendency for many candidates to offer a long and detailed list of policies that had eroded civil liberties and traditional freedoms, particularly through enhanced state surveillance, but which didn't completely explain that these had been introduced to protect citizens from crime and terrorism and thus could be seen as protecting basic traditional freedoms. The lack of balance and evaluation meant that these answers could not enter Level 3. Equally, some candidates saw this as a straightforward 'have civil liberties been eroded or not' question and offered a range of arguments based around this issue.

Better answers considered whether law and order policies had or had not eroded traditional freedoms and with the appropriate level of analysis and knowledge required could obtain Level 3 marks.

In general, there were few poor responses as candidates appeared very well versed in the large number of policies that have been identified as eroding traditional freedoms in recent years.

Question 8

Of the three long questions, this was the least popular, and the one that produced the smallest number of high level responses. Most candidates answered the question reasonably well, but without really getting to grips with the full requirements of the question. There was a tendency amongst a number of responses to be highly critical of the Labour governments' record on the environment, without offering any counter-examples of policy success or implementation.

Other responses recognised that the Kyoto targets had been met and that a range of policies such as home insulation, wind-farms, greater use of public transport, more recycling and less dependence on landfill have all been attempted with some degree of success.

Grade boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw boundary mark	90	64	56	48	41	34	27	20	0
Uniform boundary mark	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	

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