AQA

General Certificate of Education

Government and Politics 1151/2151

GOV3C Politics and Power

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

Government and Politics

GOV3C – Politics and Power

General

This was the first time this paper was offered. Although some of the topics were present in the old GOV8 specification, the demands on candidates are different. Previously they were required to attempt two questions on a single topic over a two-hour period. In GOV3C, they are asked to answer four questions from two topics in one and a half hours. Obviously, the marking had to reflect this change. For example, the (b) questions, while asking for open-ended discursive treatment, cannot be expected to elicit answers comparable to those produced in GOV8 in terms of length or detail.

With a cohort of only twelve candidates, conclusions about performance in this paper cannot easily be generalised. Despite the small cohort, all four topics were attempted and the range of marks was reasonably well spread.

Question 1 – Power in modern society

In part (a), candidates generally understood legitimate power as being based on the consent of the ruled. There were valid examples given of states where the legitimacy of government was questionable. There could have been more theoretical discussion on the bases for legitimacy, such as election, tradition and religion.

In part (b), candidates generally recognised the focus of the question as being on the complex issue of where power in society lies. Most opened with a definition of the concept of power. Some introduced a theoretical perspective, making reference to various forms of pluralist, elitist and Marxist analysis.

Most candidates attempted to identify forms of power held by those not in formal political office, such as pressure groups, party donors, charismatic figures, the media, business, transnational corporations, global economic actors, central banks, and NGOs and international organisations. Some useful examples were given.

Some candidates saw the question largely in term of constitutional limitations on government, with much discussion of the concept of the separation of powers and the roles of judiciaries and assemblies. This was acceptable and was in the marking scheme.

Question 2 – Executive power

In part (a), candidates generally demonstrated an understanding of a collective system of decision-making, and recognised this as a feature of cabinet government. However, few actually tried to present the arguments **for** such a system. The tendency was to discuss aspects of cabinet government, such as collective responsibility. Some compared the US presidential cabinet with that of the UK.

In part (b), most candidates recognised that their analyses should centre on the power of political leaders and its flexible, or elastic, nature. They aimed to assess the extent to which holders of an office may have employed their resources differently. In doing so, the main

examples were of British prime ministers. Virtually all considered Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown. However, some more advanced treatments were able to offer a wider range of examples, going back to earlier ages.

The better candidates were able to detail and evaluate the sources of power provided by the leadership position. Some referred to factors such as the constitution, support from colleagues, control of the elected assembly and the power of patronage. There was also reference to the personality of the leaders. Some noted evolutionary features in the office, such as the increasing use of special advisers and access to the changing media. The key discriminator here was the ability to note extent to which different leaders made use of these sources of power.

Question 3 – Political culture

Not many candidates attempted this question and some that did floundered. However, in part (a), there were also some good treatments of the question, covering the key factors, such as the family, the peer group, TV, radio, the press, religion, and the education system. Some argued that the relative importance of these is ever changing.

In part (b), candidates were asked to consider the utility of the concept of political culture as a tool of political analysis. As with part (a), there were some rather weak answers which did not seem to be addressing the question at all. However, a few of the better ones were able to note causal links between beliefs and attitudes within society and a wide variety of political processes, policies and institutions. They were also able to discuss various types of political culture. Social factors relating to political culture such as sexism, racism, religion, xenophobia, geography, ideology, deference, homogeneity and consensus also formed part of the analysis.

Question 4 – Britain and Europe

This was not a popular topic, but, amongst those candidates choosing it, there were some well-informed answers.

In part (a), candidates generally recognised this term as one associated with the structure and working of the EU. They were also able to rehearse the sovereignty debate generated by membership. They could note that critics of such associations tend to describe the effect of membership as a 'loss of sovereignty'. The concept of supranationality was also brought in to the discussion.

Part (b) focused on Britain's evolving relationship with the EU. Candidates recognised the centrality of this question, and some noted the use of the term 'awkward partner' and the concept of Euro-scepticism in considering the UK position.

Candidates noted some of the key features in the evolution of the EU and the UK position with respect to them. These included the UK decision to remain outside both the ECSC in 1951 and the European Community in 1957, the failed UK applications and the referendum on continued membership. Other factors include the UK rebate, monetary union, 'opt-outs' from the Eurozone and the Social Chapter and the progressive expansion of Qualified Majority Voting.

In addition, candidates considered the positions of various UK governments and political leaders and popular views towards UK membership. Some noted the ability of the press to influence debate.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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