



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Government and Politics**

**GOV4B**

**(Specification 2150)**

**Unit 4B: Political Issues: Ideologies in Action**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **Unit 4 (GOV4B): Political Issues: Ideologies in Action**

### ***General***

The paper elicited a good range of responses across all four topic areas. There was a better spread of marks in comparison with last summer's GOV4B paper, with more scripts in the high 60s or 70s (out of 80) and more also in the 20s.

### **TOPIC 1 - ETHNICITY AND GENDER**

#### ***Question 1***

Though many candidates provided examples of political correctness 'in action' (or 'gone mad' - as many put it) far fewer were able to provide a clear or convincing definition of the term. Those who did tended to stress the part played by language in the politics of ethnicity and gender, noting that the focus on the kind of language that might be considered acceptable was part of the broader effort to provide for equality in the 'public sphere'. At the higher levels of response candidates often broadened the definition to include practices as well as language that might be considered offensive as well as recognising the inherent tension between the regulation of language and the freedom of speech.

#### ***Question 2***

Many candidates struggled to define the term 'affirmative action' with any degree of authority. Indeed, many chose simply to ignore it and focus instead on providing a more general overview of the various strategies employed to address racial inequalities.

Those who did address the term directly tended to reference the US experience, viewing affirmative action as positive discrimination. Candidates generally noted that such discrimination was technically illegal in most cases in the UK. Some candidates looked to distinguish between 'positive action' and 'positive discrimination', seeing both approaches as different 'takes' on affirmative action. This led to some productive discussion.

At the higher levels of response candidates tended to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of affirmative action before moving on to consider other government strategies.

### **TOPIC 2 - THE ENVIRONMENT**

#### ***Question 3***

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were able to distinguish between the two terms and many were able to provide examples of writers, activists or organisations (most often political parties or pressure groups) that could be said to hold 'light' or 'dark' green positions.

At the higher levels of response candidates often developed their answers by introducing the concepts of 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology or by drawing a parallels between 'light green' thinking and environmentalism, and 'dark green' thinking and ecologism.

#### ***Question 4***

Responses at the lower levels of response tended to detail the environmental policies of the main UK political parties without addressing the precise terms of the question posed. Higher levels of response tended to be characterised by an attempt to identify precisely what the 'core principles' of environmentalism might be before assessing the extent to which such principles might have been diluted as the movement has found a wider audience. In taking this approach many candidates demonstrated levels of analysis uncommon at this level.

Some candidates argued that environmentalism was inherently a less coherent and less ideological approach than ecologism, rendering the issue of ‘dilution’ essentially moot. Those taking this line of argument often went on to argue that those who view themselves as ecologists have not necessarily strayed from their core principles. Thus the increasing support for environmentalism is simply a reflection of large numbers of people adopting an approach which is essentially anthropocentric as opposed to ecocentric. Many candidates introduced Anthony Downs’ ‘issue attention cycle’ as a way of charting the way in which the environment has moved up and down the political agenda.

### **TOPIC 3 - EDUCATION**

#### ***Question 5***

Many candidates simply outlined the arguments for and against school league tables with no real attempt to focus either on the ‘ideological case’ or the case ‘in favour’. Those who did address the precise terms of the question posed more directly generally put the introduction of league tables into the context of a Thatcherite desire to marketise education: bringing competition into the public sector as a way of driving up standards; casting pupils and parents in the role of ‘consumers’ with ‘choice’. Some saw this as evidence of social Darwinism, with successful schools flourishing and failing schools closing. Others linked the introduction of league tables to the move towards a national curriculum with benchmarked testing.

#### ***Question 6***

This question prompted some very theoretical answers. Whilst consideration of the theoretical justifications for education was productive when it provided a way for those tackling the question to examine education policy, candidates should be reminded that the title of the paper (‘ideologies in action’) demands that they move beyond sociological theory.

Those at the higher levels of response generally began with a more general theoretical overview before considering the extent to which education policy in the UK could be said to be driven by one or other of the goals identified (or both). Many saw the tripartite system established under the 1944 Act as clear evidence of a policy aimed at preparing students for their future roles in the economy, whilst seeing the move towards comprehensive education as being driven by an egalitarian desire to educate for the sake of education. Whilst many felt that the marketisation of education since the 1980s was driven by the need to provide a qualified workforce, those at the higher levels of response tended to argue along more subtle lines: that academies part-funded by business could nonetheless broaden minds because they were being freed from central government or local authority control; or that the move towards vocational courses could be said to broaden minds because it presents students with greater choice post-16, rather than forcing them along a narrow academic treadmill or straight into employment.

### **TOPIC 4 - THE ECONOMY**

#### ***Question 7***

Whilst most candidates were able to give examples of what they saw as evidence of globalisation, few offered an authoritative definition of the term. Indeed, most appeared instead to be defining ‘free trade’ or ‘trans-national corporations’. Those that did offer a definition generally referred to a greater ‘interconnectedness’ or ‘interdependence’ between nations. Some went further by identifying different strands of globalisation (most commonly economic, political and cultural) and showing how developments in communications technology, transport and migration had ‘made the world a smaller place’.

### **Question 8**

The summer 2010 GOV4B question 8 focused on the economic policies of the main UK political parties and many of those who tackled Topic 4 this summer appeared, at times, to be answering that question, rather than the one posed here. Most candidates focused entirely on the question of whether the UK government ‘desired’ to exercise control over the UK economy, with little or no consideration given to the question of ‘ability’ to exercise control. This was, perhaps, surprising - given the question 7 focus on globalisation and difficulties faced by the UK government as it seeks to exercise a degree of control over the UK economy in the wake of the banking crisis. For many candidates the question appeared to offer an opportunity to reproduce well-rehearsed descriptions of the Keynesian post-war consensus, the rise of Thatcherism/neo-liberalism and the attempt to combine the two under New Labour’s ‘Third Way’. Whilst many candidates were able to secure reasonable marks with such an approach, those at the higher levels of response generally moved beyond ideological approaches to economic management (or ‘non-management’) to consider the extent to which global realities or the ‘invisible hand’ of the market limited any efforts to control.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>.

### **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

**UMS conversion calculator** [www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)