



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

Government and Politics

GOV4C

(Specification 2150)

Unit 4C: Perspectives on Modern Politics

Report on the Examination

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Unit 4 (GOV4C): Perspectives on Modern Politics

General

Only 80 candidates entered the examination. The small entry makes it difficult to report meaningfully. However, comments below on the individual questions might usefully be reported to centres.

TOPIC 1 – PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

Question 1

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates could identify and explain various forms that political participation can take. Most identified formal methods such as voting, joining political parties, standing for election etc, as well as informal ones such as protests, marches and the like. Some candidates also drew attention to the emergence of websites, blogs etc as vehicles of participation and to individual acts of participation such as ethical shopping and boycotts. With analysis the general approach was to point to the decline of many formal methods and to explain possible reasons for this.

Question 2

This question was generally answered well. There was a good deal of discussion about the differences between direct and representative democracy and the impracticality of the former in large modern states. There was also a number of theoretical and conceptual approaches used to analyse representative democracy including elite theory, Marxist analysis, and trustee, mandate and resemblance models. Most candidates used British experience to illustrate their answers although some also drew upon the USA and other foreign political systems. The main weakness was to reinvent the question as asking about the extent to which the UK political system was representative and democratic which tended to produce answers that were slightly off focus.

TOPIC 2 - GLOBALISATION

Centres had clearly prepared candidates well for questions in this part of the specification.

Question 3

Most candidates were able to offer competent explanations of the concept of neo-colonialism, although a few wrote over-long answers which sometimes encroached into the subject of question 4.

Question 4

This question was also generally well answered. Many responses gave good accounts of globalisation, and of the role of institutions such as the IMG, the World Bank and World Trade Organisation. The main weakness perhaps was to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of globalisation, rather than the specific question. Those who did focus on the question asked often used the banking crisis as an example, arguing that the pre-crisis economic boom was invariably claimed by politicians, notably Brown, as of their making, whilst the subsequent crash was often attributed to globalisation.

TOPIC 3 – CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Question 5

This question caused relatively few problems and was generally well done. Many candidates gave a clear exposition of the conservative case against political change, often pointing out that, strictly speaking, Conservatives believed in gradual change. Many used policy examples to support their argument.

Question 6

Question 6, in contrast, posed problems for many candidates. The main problem was that, while the question required discussion of whether government reforms are often more concerned with style and presentation than principle, many candidates preferred to write instead about pre-revised topics such as policy failure, policy continuity or real versus apparent change, without any attempt to address 'style and presentation'. Very few answers discussed 'placebo policies', the emphasis by recent governments on targets as surrogates for real reforms, and the work of spin doctors – often in close cooperation with the media – in presenting 'reforms' in a positive light.

A further general comment relates to the dated nature of many of the 'reforms' and policy examples used. Some wrote in depth about the Russian revolution; others mentioned the French revolution, the English civil war, and even Magna Carta as reforms. While historical material is obviously valuable to provide context in a topic such as 'Change and Continuity', it should be noted that the title of the paper, 'Perspectives in Modern Politics' primarily requires a focus on the 'modern', and while the precise boundaries of the modern period can be a matter of some legitimate debate, it is difficult to give much credit to answers that draw mainly on reforms in periods that are clearly historical.

TOPIC 4 – TERRITORIAL POLITICS

Question 7

There were some well-informed responses to this question. Most candidates could offer a reasonable explanation of the concept 'sub-national government' and offer examples such as the devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Others also exemplified local government. Most of the examples were drawn from the UK, although there were some good responses that drew from the USA and offered useful contrasts between unitary and federal political systems.

Question 8

Question 8 was answered rather less convincingly. Whilst many candidates were aware of the historical, cultural and political factors that underlay the differences in the devolution settlements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, far less detail was forthcoming about the details of the settlements themselves. This was particularly true of Northern Ireland where there was considerable confusion about the powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Whilst some answers did refer to power-sharing there was usually little information about how this was achieved in practice. Almost no candidates offered any information about other aspects of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement such as the electoral system used for Assembly elections, or the formation of the North-South Ministerial Council.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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