



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

Government and Politics

GOVP1

(Specification 2150)

Unit 1: People, Politics and Participation

Report on the Examination

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Unit 1 (GOVP1): People, Politics and Participation

General

The paper elicited a reasonable range of responses across the four topic areas, although there was a degree of bunching around the middle of the mark-range. Few candidates produced scripts that were consistently securing Level 4 marks. This was a product - at least in part - of a growing tendency to reproduce pre-packaged, generic responses as opposed to addressing the precise terms of the question posed.

Topic 3 (Political Parties) remains the least popular option with just 13% of candidates attempting it. Topic 1 (Participation and Voting Behaviour) was by far the most popular, with around 75% of candidates tackling questions 1, 2 and 3.

TOPIC 1 - PARTICIPATION AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Question 1

This question was generally well answered although there was often a lack of precision when defining the term: many candidates referred to 'people' rather than the electorate; surprisingly few referred to registered voters. Answers at the higher levels of response generally discussed the ebb and flow of turnout at UK general elections. Many also made references to the low turnout in the AV referendum. Lower level responses often discussed participation in more general terms or became sidetracked on factors contributing to low levels of turnout and/or participation (see also question 2).

Question 2

This question was asking candidates to explain why many commentators have spoken of a participation crisis - as opposed to why people are not participating. Many candidates answered the latter question (a variant of which appeared on an earlier GOVP1 paper). Those who did address the question posed generally wrote about turnout in a variety of elections and referendums and the decline in party membership. Some went on to challenge the material provided in the extract by referring to recent direct action and other pressure group activity.

Question 3

The vast majority of candidates picked up on the word 'rational' and assessed the worth of the rational choice model of voting behaviour before introducing other voting models. The few candidates who did not make explicit reference to the rational choice model were generally able to demonstrate an appreciation of what 'rational voting' might be and assess voting behaviour accordingly. Top level answers offered some extraordinarily subtle analysis. For example, many explored the extent to which that which might ordinarily be considered to fall outside of the rational choice model (eg issues of class alignment or partisan alignment) might in fact be rational.

TOPIC 2 - ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Question 4

The vast majority of answers defined wasted votes only in the context of those ballots cast for a losing candidate: few considered wasted 'surpluses'. At the higher levels of response candidates drew evidence from the extract and from their own knowledge as a means of developing their explanation. Many made use of statistical evidence and some were aware that wasted votes were not just a problem for the Liberal Democrats and smaller parties.

Question 5

At the lower levels of response candidates simply offered criticisms of First Past the Post (FPTP) without really explaining why the issues identified might result in some parties being disadvantaged. Conversely, a few candidates described the problems faced by some smaller parties without ever explaining how FPTP might have caused them. Higher level responses generally focused on the difficulties faced by parties with evenly spread support. Some candidates were also aware that parties with concentrated support in some areas are also disadvantaged in those areas where their support is not sufficiently strong for them to win seats in proportion to votes secured (eg the Conservatives in Scotland). Although the question referred to FPTP disadvantaging 'some parties' most candidates interpreted this phrase in an overly narrow fashion, focusing largely or entirely on the Liberal Democrats.

Question 6

This question required candidates to consider whether referendums strengthen democracy in the context of UK referendums held since 1997. Lower level responses entirely ignored the time-frame identified and produced generic responses outlining the arguments for and against referendums. Such answers were often devoid of examples and lacking a UK focus. Those candidates who did seek to address the terms of the question often made as much reference to direct democracy in Switzerland as they did to UK referendums. Moreover, where candidates did make mention of UK referendums they often confined their discussion to the UK-wide referendum held in 1975, perhaps also touching on the AV referendum that had taken place three weeks before the examination. This failure to address the terms of the question posed accounts for this question having the lowest average score of the four 25-markers - where it might easily have had the highest.

TOPIC 3 - POLITICAL PARTIES

Question 7

Although few candidates tackled Topic 3 the quality of responses on this topic was better than in earlier examination series. Question 7 was generally well done. Most candidates were able to define the term accurately and lift material from the extract as a means of developing their explanation. At the higher levels of response candidates generally offered detail from their own knowledge regarding the roles and functions of conference in both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. Many gave examples of events that had happened, been decided, debated or announced at recent party conferences.

Question 8

Many candidates demonstrated uneven knowledge in tackling this question. Whereas many were able to detail the process by which the Labour Party elects its leader (often providing impressive detail on the election of Ed Miliband) far fewer were able to offer secure knowledge or analysis of the system in place in the Conservative Party. At the higher levels of analysis candidates were able to provide an overview of both systems and identify similarities and differences between them. Some candidates also made mention of situations where party leaders were chosen without election in the absence of a rival candidate (eg the 'coronations' of Howard and Brown).

Question 9

At the higher level of response candidates often provided a brief overview of the ideological traditions of the two main parties before addressing the precise terms of the question posed. Most candidates were able to consider a range of policy areas (including the economy) and arrive at a direct answer to the question. At the lower levels of response, candidates generally agreed with the statement. At the higher levels of response candidates generally introduced greater subtlety to their discussion. Some considered the extent to which the Thatcherite consensus had fractured in the wake of the banking crisis and the 2010 General

Election. Others challenged the question, arguing that even in economic policy the differences between the two parties were more of tone than of substance (or ideology).

TOPIC 4 - PRESSURE GROUPS AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Question 10

Although candidates achieved a higher than average score on this question than on any of the other three 5-markers, significant numbers still failed to secure top marks as a result of their failing to address the term identified. At the lower levels of response candidates simply took 'cause groups' as analogous to 'outsider groups' or 'direct action' and proceeded to explain one of these latter terms. At the higher levels of response candidates commonly introduced the sectional-cause group typology and focused on the different types of groups that might be considered cause groups. This often involved a brief outline of the various sub-categories within the cause group typology (attitude, sectional, political). All candidates bar those at level 1 were able to select and deploy relevant examples.

Question 11

At the lower levels of response candidates tended to focus on the use of violence and illegality (or civil disobedience) that often accompany direct action. Some lower level responses confused marches and strikes with direct action and many argued that such legitimate protests were anti-democratic. Others regarded terrorism as a form of direct action pressure group activity. At the higher levels of response candidates tended to view the UK as a representative democracy and therefore viewed direct action as getting in the way of the formal democratic processes and procedures in place. Surprisingly few candidates made reference to the extent to which direct action forces the government to 'fire-fight', thereby undermining 'joined-up government'.

Question 12

At the lower levels of response candidates often offered pre-packaged answers on the reasons for pressure group success and/or failure without really getting to grips with the terms of the question posed. Some of those who did pick up on the reference to Westminster linked it to the Question 10 term (direct action) and turned the essay into a discussion of the relative merits of insider groups and outsider groups. Despite the scope of questions on some earlier GOVP1 papers, many candidates still appeared unable to use terms such as 'lobbying' and 'access points' with any degree of confidence or authority.

At the higher levels of response candidates questioned the focus on the 'Westminster Parliament'. This led to a more developed analysis of the importance of various access points both at Westminster (eg the core executive or Whitehall v Parliament) and beyond (eg devolved institutions or the EU).

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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