



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

Government and Politics

GOVP2

(Specification 2150)

Unit 2: Governing Modern Britain

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

Unit 2 (GOVP2): Governing Modern Britain

General

There were no significant problems of time management with the paper. One particularly notable feature was the small number of responses to the multi-level governance questions. These were a considerable number of scripts with misspelling of political terms, including the term 'parliament', even where the terms appeared in the exam paper itself.

TOPIC 1 – THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION

A popular topic. Very few poor responses and some outstanding ones.

Question 1

Generally done well. Many candidates deployed relevant knowledge of the USA. A significant number of weaker candidates focused on 'uncodified' without comparative reference to 'codified'.

Question 2

Most candidates tried to establish some balance between the advantages and disadvantages of flexible constitutions. Discussion generally considered parliamentary sovereignty and the ease of passing legislation in the UK. Again comparisons with the USA were frequent, with stronger candidates explaining the role of the US Supreme Court in protecting rights. Some perceptive candidates looked beyond Parliament, arguing that citizens are protected because government must be mindful of public opinion/media for electoral reasons. Some good examples were given.

Weaker candidates spent much time describing the UK constitution but failed to address the question directly. There was some lack of detail – few mentioned HRA or ECHR. Some candidates took the question to focus on the passage of any unpopular legislation (eg in areas such as health and education).

Question 3

Generally a competently answered question although there were some suggestions of 'stock' responses on the role of judges. Some answered the question with a critique on judicial neutrality. The introduction of the Supreme Court was mentioned, but too often as a passing reference. Many students focused on the issue of super-injunctions, often with reference to the footballer, Ryan Giggs. A significant number of weaker candidates appeared ill-prepared for the question. Having coped with questions 1 and 2, they produced slight responses based on assumption and opinion. There was widespread confusion between the upholding of EU law and the embedding of the ECHR into UK law. In many cases there was a lack of examples.

Stronger candidates looked at changes post-2005 and the growth of judicial review and the impact of the HRA. These recognised the role of the judiciary in ensuring that government complied with the law but noted that ultimately parliamentary sovereignty remained intact. Some candidates attempted to argue against the statement, occasionally persuasively.

TOPIC 2 - PARLIAMENT

Question 4

A substantial number of responses identified the term 'life peer' correctly, with some appropriate examples (such as Alan Sugar and Peter Mandelson). There was however widespread confusion amongst weaker candidates. Many took the term to mean no more than peers for life (ie could not be removed) rather than that the peerage could not be passed on. Some had no real understanding of the difference between hereditary peers and life peers; often the two terms were used interchangeably. A considerable number appeared to think that life peers had only existed since the Blair reforms.

Question 5

Most candidates recognised the potential for conflict between the two Houses. However, a large number of candidates ignored the 'partly' elected aspect of the question (a discriminator). Because of the invitation to speculate, candidates came up with some thoughtful points. Most, possibly led by the extract, focused on conflicting mandates and weakened scrutiny. Stronger candidates discussed the Parliament Acts 1911/1949 and the implications a partly elected second chamber might have for the passing of legislation. There was also reference to the Salisbury Convention. Some strong candidates focused on the significance of PR being used to elect Lords and the possibility that the House might be considered more legitimate than the Commons. Such candidates explored the possibility of legislative deadlock. There was some use of examples from other countries, notably the USA.

Question 6

Most candidates could discuss the concept of party discipline. However, few offered a comprehensive identification and analysis of a full range of parliamentary functions.

There was a particular concentration on the constituency role, with the argument that parties prevented MPs serving their electorate. Some produced examples of local MPs ignoring the whips to defend their constituency (John McDonnell and his opposition to a third runway at Heathrow). In comparison, the issue of scrutiny, through committees and Question Time, was sometimes ignored or only fleetingly touched upon. The legislative process was similarly ignored or undeveloped. Some candidates, perhaps influenced by the extract, focused exclusively on the House of Lords. Conversely, in other cases, the House of Lords was ignored, despite the wording of the question.

Most answers made reference to some of the main methods used to enforce party discipline. However, this was often the sum total of the discussion amongst weaker candidates. This usually ended up as an answer on 'the power of the whips', with surprisingly little about backbench rebellions. Not all candidates recognised that party control extended to the Opposition. There was some confusion of the Commons with the Cabinet and the convention of collective responsibility.

A minority of candidates challenged the proposition in the question, arguing for the need for a government to control Parliament.

TOPIC THREE – THE CORE EXECUTIVE

A very popular topic, possibly because of question 8.

Question 7

This question produced a particularly weak set of responses. Very few candidates really knew what the Cabinet Office was. Those who did know tackled it well, but others floundered, often discussing the Cabinet itself or the room where the Cabinet meets. This is surprising, since the Cabinet Office is specifically mentioned in the specification.

Question 8

Candidates were generally well prepared for this question. The use of advisers or a kitchen cabinet by Blair was often cited. Some looked at the way the media concentrated on the party leaders rather than policy issues. Others commented on the prime ministerial debates in the 2010 general election campaign. Another frequent theme was the practice of prime ministers distancing themselves from Parliament and talking directly to the public via television. The stronger responses gave examples and supportive evidence.

A number of weaker responses identified examples of ‘presidential’ prime ministers, but did not go beyond this to address the ‘explain’ part of the question. The question called for two reasons, and this was sometimes very difficult to discern in the weaker responses. Some candidates offered only a stock response on PM power, often simply reproducing sections of text from the extract.

Question 9

Most candidates understood the question, and many made good use of both the characteristics of the civil service and theories of minister/civil servant relationships. Several mentioned Theakeston’s models of the relationship, but sometimes this was not well developed. A few candidates introduced the convention of individual ministerial responsibility, noting that ultimately it is the minister who is responsible. What was often lacking were examples to bring accounts to life. There was some understanding of the role of special advisers in sidelining some civil servants.

Weaker candidates made little attempt at theory beyond the very basic position – civil servants advise, ministers decide. Some saw special advisers as a means of strengthening the civil service rather than an attempt to curb its influence. There were also attempts to turn the question into a debate about PM power. Others offered a very general discussion about the role of cabinet ministers. Occasionally there appeared to be misunderstandings about the precise nature of the civil servant role.

TOPIC FOUR – MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

This was an unpopular topic with very few responses. Therefore, it is very difficult to make generalised comments.

Question 10

Of the answers seen here many were somewhat tautological, merely stating that an elected representative was one who wins an election. Better candidates offered a list of locations where elected representatives operate, such as the European Parliament, local government and the devolved assemblies. The limited number of better candidates considered differing

interpretations of the term ‘representation’ and made reference to the concept of representative democracy.

Question 11

Many candidates showed a basic understanding of the West Lothian Question and the better ones explored the funding arrangements (Barnett Formula). Some challenged the need for an English Parliament, given the number of English MPs already at Westminster. Some saw the question in cultural terms, arguing that the Scottish Parliament had instilled a sense of national identity in Scotland and an English Parliament might have the same effect.

Question 12

Two extremes were seen in the answers to this question. Some were extremely good, coming from candidates who understood the inter-relationship between the various EU institutions, and could detail the roles played by the Commission. On the other hand, there were candidates who demonstrated little or no knowledge of the EU or its institutions, and produced slight responses of generalised and often inaccurate comment. The weak answers formed the majority with few responses of high quality.

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