



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Government and Politics

GOVP2

(Specification 2150)

Unit 2: Governing Modern Britain

Report on the Examination

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Unit 2 (GOVP2): Governing Modern Britain

General

In general, students appeared to find the paper accessible. Very few had time management problems and most completed the required number of items. There were also very few examples of rubric infringement. Students appeared well schooled in the format, structure and timing of the examination. Most were able to correctly balance their responses to the 5, 10 and 25 mark questions. Spelling and use of political vocabulary were generally good.

There was a clear pattern to the question selection. Predictably, Topic 4 (Multi-level Governance) was unpopular. Topic 1 (the British Constitution) was attempted by many students but was not as popular as in past examination sessions. Most popular was Topic 2 (Parliament) followed by Topic 3 (The Core Executive). It was common for all students from a particular school or college to attempt the same two topics. There were also cases where students from the same schools or colleges reproduced the same inaccurate statements and examples.

TOPIC 1 – THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION

Question 1

It was surprising to find some of the weakest students with no knowledge of constitutional conventions. A fairly common weakness was to address the question by describing a convention (usually individual responsibility) without any attempt to explain the essence of a convention. There were also students who failed to recognise conventions as part of the constitution. Some students drifted onto a general discussion of the nature of an uncodified constitution. However, the strongest students offered a clear definition and a number of examples.

Question 2

The responses to this question were generally accurate with respect to the changes. However, weaker students were not always clear on the impact made. One repeated weakness was a tendency to ascribe the powers offered to the judges in the Human Rights Act to the Constitutional Reform Act. Stronger students were able to discuss the principle of the separation of powers and assess the significance of the change in these terms. They were also able to discuss the concurrent reform of procedures for judicial appointment and the change in the position of the Lord Chancellor.

Question 3

This question was generally competently answered. Many students focused on the uncodified, and therefore flexible, nature of the constitution. Answers varied as to the significance they placed on this. Some argued that it increased the protection of rights and others that it reduced them. Both interpretations were acceptable if well argued and supported. Stronger students raised issues such as parliamentary sovereignty, the separation (or fusion) of powers and entrenchment. A substantial number of students wrote competent answers, but without mentioning the Human Rights Act. This weakened the analysis. A large number focused the discussion on the codified v uncodified debate, which was relevant but limited. It often seemed that students were addressing a rather different question. The stronger students were able to give examples of ways in which human rights

were, or were not, protected. They also considered the word 'effective', which was a discriminator. These students were also able to illustrate their analysis with examples.

TOPIC 2 - PARLIAMENT

Question 4

Again there were some students who, surprisingly, appeared quite unaware of the position of Speaker. Most identified the role as chairing debates and keeping order in the Commons. Many were able to name the current holder of the office and some mentioned his predecessor and the controversial nature of his departure. Neutrality was also generally recognised as a key feature of the role. Better students were able to add additional information, such as how Speaker is elected and the procedure concerning the Speaker's constituency at general elections.

Question 5

Most responses here were able to identify at least one motive for obeying the party whip. The most common referred to the furtherance of a political career. Weaker responses were not always clear on a second reason. Frequently the phrase 'kicked out' was used with respect to party discipline and this suggested weakness in terms of political vocabulary. Some students spent an unnecessary amount of time describing in detail the role of the whips. Examples were given by stronger students to illustrate the idea that MPs do not always obey the whip; George Galloway was frequently cited.

Question 6

A sound understanding of the role of the House of Lords was demonstrated by most students, although there was sometimes the tendency to focus on the unrepresentative nature of the composition. This was relevant but by no means the complete answer. Strong students were able to offer a comprehensive range of the functions of the upper house. Many chose to make a case for its retention. Students were able to show they understood the changing nature of the House of Lords, and the constitutional limitations. However many responses ignored or barely touched upon the issue of abolition, and certainly very few addressed the issue of the possible consequences of this.

TOPIC THREE – THE CORE EXECUTIVE

Question 7

The majority of students concentrated only on senior civil servants at Whitehall, with little reference to those working in agencies. Sound understanding was shown in most responses, with the core characteristics accurately explained. Most well-prepared students were able to point to the three characteristics of anonymity, permanence and neutrality. There were occasional errors, sometimes the inclusion of all public employees in the definition. The strongest students were able to refer to the different positions civil servants can hold and their various roles. Several students demonstrated contemporary knowledge, such as the retirement of Gus O'Donnell.

Question 8

This question, whilst accurately tackled by a number of students, also produced a number of weak responses. A considerable number of the latter considered the effect of individual responsibility on MP's rather than ministers. They also interpreted the convention somewhat intuitively such as 'acting responsibly' (eg. representing their constituents, telling the truth etc). Another weakness was to interpret the resignation aspect of the convention in terms of the personal behaviour of ministers, with examples reflecting this rather than departmental failing. However the stronger answers often had very good up to date examples (Theresa May) and were able to show that ministerial responsibility didn't always happen as it was supposed to. Very few really got to the essence of the question, which was the centrality of the convention to the operation of government.

Question 9

The key to the question was the distinction between theory and practice in the debate of the role of the Prime Minister. There was some evidence in the weaker responses that students were answering a different question to that on the paper. However there was generally a sound understanding of the different 'powers' of the PM. The restrictions on these powers received less emphatic treatment. Strong students were able to do this and were able to illustrate with examples of different incumbents, demonstrating how the 'practice' could vary with the personality concerned.

TOPIC FOUR – MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

Question 10

Most students demonstrated that they understood the term devolution. Many students did little more than define this rather than developing a more thorough description of 'devolved government'.

Question 11

There was a basic understanding of the West Lothian question, but students did appear to find it difficult to identify two definable problems. There was often some drift from the issue which was essentially on the issue of representation. Some used the question to argue for an English parliament.

Question 12

For most a rather poorly answered question. The term democratic deficit was not always well explained. Some students were not able to identify the different EU institutions or distinguish between the different roles, powers and functions. There were some exceptions showing that the question was accessible to those with the appropriate knowledge.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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