



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

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.

There is a growing tendency for entire schools and colleges of students to tackle the same two topics on the paper – even where they appear to be missing the knowledge required to answer one or more of the four questions across the two chosen topics. For example, in this examination series, whole schools and colleges of students that appeared to have little or no understanding of the term 'joined-up government' (Q03) nonetheless tackled Topic 2, rather than going for their 'Plan B': suggesting, perhaps, that they did not have a 'Plan B'. Schools and colleges should be aware that there are no optional Topics on the Specification. Students should have studied all four Topics in preparation for the examination and should be warned against entering the examination room having only revised two of the four Topics to be examined.

TOPIC 1 – Ethnicity and Gender

Question 1

Most students were able to distinguish effectively between the two terms and many were able to develop their answers by making reference both to the UK experience and that in other countries (most commonly, France and the USA). At the lower-levels of response, an inability to offer clear definitions made the task of distinguishing between the two terms significantly harder. Some students confused the two terms (reversing them). Some described each term discretely, without explicitly identifying differences between them. A significant minority of students defined assimilation as the presence of isolated ghettos (ie describing what happens in the absence of assimilation or effective integration).

Question 2

The question was generally well-answered. Students at all levels of response recognised that many of the original aims of the early liberal feminists had been achieved, with many referring to the legal equality offered by various named Acts of Parliament and greater equality in the public sphere. Most were able to recognise that despite such measures, significant inequalities remain, often making reference to wage differentials and glass ceilings. At the higher-levels of response, students challenged the statement by focusing on the issues that remained for some feminists (the private sphere, patriarchy, pornography, rape etc). Though many responses at the lower-levels of response were inevitably chronological and overly descriptive (plain historical narrative in some cases), it was encouraging to see so many students engaging with the question analytically. Some argued that as legal equality had been largely achieved, feminism was no longer politically relevant (that it was up to women to use their new rights). Others maintained that 'the personal/private is political' and that the aims of radical feminists and others were still very relevant. Many students commented on the extent to which the rise of other issues and social movements and the lack of a single feminist creed (in the wake of legal gains) had resulted in a loss of relevance. Surprisingly few students looked beyond the UK to consider the extent to which feminism of all forms is still relevant elsewhere. Those that did often referred to the practice of female circumcision and the issue of marital rape and forced marriages, with the latter two points often linking the discussion back to the UK. The most impressive responses were able to combine theory (eg Wollstonecraft, Taylor, Friedan, Millet, Greer, Dworkin) with practice.

TOPIC 2 - The Environment

Question 3

This question was, on the whole, poorly answered. Though the phrase appears in the Specification content, surprisingly few students appeared to have any real understanding of what it meant. The result was a significant number of responses scoring very low marks indeed. As outlined in the general comments above, it was difficult to see why those who clearly had no understanding of the term decided to tackle Topic 2, rather than go down another route. Many students defined joined-up government as a broad agreement between two or more parties (ie as 'consensus'). Many wrote at length about the Coalition. Some saw joined-up government as agreements between nations at an international level. Very few identified the theme of interdepartmental co-ordination as being central to the question, though it was pleasing to see one or two entire centres of students doing just that and securing good marks in consequence.

Question 4

Responses at the lower-levels of response tended to write at length about the various international initiatives without assessing the success or failure of such schemes or the desirability of 'local action'. Students at all levels of response routinely took 'local action' as being analogous to 'national action', rather than also referring to 'individual actions'. At the higher-levels of response students were able to incorporate 'light' and 'dark green' theory into their answers illustrating the positions that different thinkers (eg Næss, Lovelock, Bookchin) would take on the best way forward. Such students often recognised that whilst some initiatives had failed in terms of meeting targets (or major countries failing to sign-up), they had succeeded in raising the profile of certain key issues and thereby prompted 'local action'. In this context, students often 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

At the lower-levels of response, students often struggled to define 'private education' or confused private schools with free schools or academies. However, most students were able to identify a number of criticisms of private education (limited access, absence of equality of opportunity/outcome, a threat to social cohesion, elitism etc). At the higher-levels of response, students linked such criticisms to one or more ideological traditions (most commonly socialism and liberalism). Some students wasted a considerable amount of time outlining the ideological case in favour of private education.

Question 6

Responses to this question were somewhat uneven. Some students focused almost entirely on the 1988 Act, whilst others wrote entirely on the theme of the 2010 General Election manifesto and the policies of the Coalition since 2010. Some wrote more about the 1944 Act than anything 'since the 1980s'. At the lower-levels of response, answers were often overly descriptive and narrative in style. Higher-level responses were characterised by greater engagement with the question (ie the relative influence of factors motivating education policy). There was a preponderance of generic responses: well-rehearsed paragraphs on a particular policy with a concluding remark tagged on to the end (eg 'so this was clearly an ideological policy'), without any of the discussion that might have led to such a conclusion. Many characterised the 1988 Act as being entirely motivated by ideology. Others took the view that it was all about appealing to the electorate at a time when education was seen to be 'failing'. Only those at the higher-levels of response came close to recognising that most of the major reforms have been driven by a combination of the two (ie shades of grey as opposed to black/white) – or that policy might instead have been motivated simply by the

desire to make the changes necessary to improve the provision of education. On a positive note, many students were clearly aware of the Coalition's education policies and Michael Gove's public statements on education, even where some of the material would only have been available to them in the weeks running up to the examination.

TOPIC 4 – The Economy

Question 7

The vast majority of students were able to provide accurate definitions of each term, supported by examples of both an historic (eg end of the 1970s) and contemporary nature. Most students were also able to demonstrate, by use of examples, the way in which governments have indeed struggled to reconcile these two apparently contradictory goals. At the lower-levels of response, however, the more specific question of 'why' governments have struggled to deliver low inflation alongside low unemployment was often not addressed explicitly. Some students argued that the failure could be explained by the decision of governments to follow different economic models, Keynesian and monetarist – one which prioritised reducing unemployment over controlling inflation, the other setting low inflation as the target and accepting unemployment as a necessary by-product. Only those at the higher-levels of response focused more explicitly on the 'why' question. Those who did often deployed economic theory (eg the Phillips Curve), discussing the consequences demand-led and supply-side approaches – as well as identifying different types of inflation. The very best responses moved beyond economic theory to consider the broader political factors (eg public opinion) and/or global factors (eg economic externalities) that might make it difficult for governments to deliver both goals simultaneously.

Question 8

Very few students took the time to offer a precise definition of what truly free-market economics might entail. Doing so would obviously have taken students in a rather different direction than many of them ended up going. At the lower-levels of response, students charted the move from post-war consensus and Keynesian mixed economy through to the supposed post-Thatcherite neo-liberal consensus. Such responses were often fairly well-argued with examples drawn from across the period (eg Winter of Discontent, examples of privatisation, reform of Labour's Clause 4, references to the Third Way etc). Only at the higher-levels of response, however, did students really get to grips with the 'now' part of the question. Where they did, levels of analysis and evaluation were often deeply impressive. Students were able to unpick New Labour's approach to the economy, demonstrating that whilst the Party had clearly shifted in its outlook, it had clearly not adopted a truly free-market model. Such students often recognised that all three major parties remain committed to the welfare state and significant levels of government intervention (eg direct and indirect taxation, sizeable spending programmes, incentives for certain forms of behaviour and disincentives for others). Many seized on the part-nationalisation of a number of banks in the wake of the global economic credit crisis as evidence of Labour's underlying adherence to an essentially Keynesian approach to economic management. Labour's desire to provide a fiscal stimulus in the face of recession (to 'spend their way out of recession') was seen in a similar light.

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