

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE A2 7834

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3834

Report on the Units

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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2595

All the signs were that candidates found it a straightforward paper and were prepared for what came up. There were hardly any of the 'I have not done this question as we have not studied Wales/Europe etc.' answers this year. It was interesting to note that after many recommendations in past reports that candidates used the sources fully in their answers, the advice was heeded at last and few comments appeared at the end of answers with 'lack of source use'. That made a pleasant change. The downside was that candidates tended to forget the 'own knowledge' requirement instead, particularly in Questions Two and Three. There were other plus points however. The vast majority did as asked in both Questions Three and Four and just did the case required. It was also good to see so many really thinking about the 'cases' and picking up high AO2 marks as a result.

- 1 'Features' as always seems to cause some problems, with a few being unsure about what is being asked for. Most used the source effectively and realized there were two votes involved and also a degree of proportionality in the results. Own knowledge could be limited, but the better ones mentioned a range of features such as the fixed term, and turnouts (perhaps getting the hint from Source B?). As always thus who clearly differentiated between the use of the source and their own knowledge did best. Some centres from Wales (the answer books in two languages gives that away) went on at inordinate length which wasted time and marks as they only got 10 at best and probably lost more by not having enough time to make a serious job of Qu 4. However some of the details put forward were new to the examiners so at least they learned something.
- 2 This one surprised us a little as only a limited number really could write about much more than was offered in the source. On several occasions in the past candidates have demonstrated great knowledge and understanding about the 'turnout' issue and included it in questions where it was totally irrelevant. Now they were given the opportunity quite a lot wrote extensively about voting behaviour (the 'party dealignment' bit seems to have been the trigger there), and ignored turnout altogether Quite a few got into L4 by taking the points offered in the Source and developing them in a detailed and interesting way. Few seemed to write about alienation, lack of registration, wasted vote and the electoral system/wasted vote element (Source C could have helped here) As always using a non specified source counts as own knowledge. However the number who made no use of the source at all was, unusually, tiny. It was the lack of own knowledge that kept many from the really high marks.
- 3 On the whole this was well done and there were plenty of good answers. Good numbers of candidates looked at the 'democracy' aspect in some depth and as a result got some very high AO2 marks. It was also pleasing to see how few wasted time and effort on just the case 'for'. Some of the best ones looked at the flaws in the case 'for' which of course attracted plenty of marks as well. Demolishing the likely criticism of your case will get marks. Clearly this is a topic which is done well in most centres and candidates find interesting. The very best kept the focus on 'democracy' and not only developed the points made in the source, but produced two or three points of their own.
- 4 On the whole this was very well done. Inevitably we got a few of the gloom and doom merchants who found it necessary to warn us of the terrible fate that would befall the UK if it went down the coalition route, the inevitable outcome of electoral reform. The candidate who argued that the case for reform was in fact extremely weak as the recent Scottish election had produced not only a minority government but also one run by an 'extremist party bent on destroying Scottish prosperity and the United Kingdom' presented the examiner with an interesting bias issue... Remarkably few used Source A we noted. The majority used Source D well and developed plenty of points of their own and dealt with the issue with both relevance and sophistication.

2596 - Politics of the UK

General comments

Questions on pressure groups are generally popular with candidates and often produce high scoring answers. Such was the case on this paper. However, questions on rights and liberties tend to prove more of a challenge, especially if they probe beyond the basic knowledge of how to seek redress. In these circumstances, candidates tend to become largely reliant on the sources as was the case on this occasion. However, the nature of this paper is such that the sources provide no more than an initial stimulus. Candidates must use their own knowledge and awareness of the issues beyond the sources in order to access the higher mark bands.

For reasons alluded to above, questions two (discrimination) and particularly question three (Human Rights Act) proved to be the major discriminators on this paper with a wide range of marks scored.

Nearly all candidates attempted the full range of questions and the majority of papers showed an appropriate balance of shorter answers to question one and two with more time devoted to questions three and four. Nonetheless, candidates should be reminded that question one on this paper is possible to complete in about five to six minutes and score full marks. Understanding this, should enable candidates to spend more time on question four (about 22/23 minutes is recommended) where many more marks are available.

Finally, as confirmed in previous reports, examiners understand that time available for each question is very limited and examiners are correspondingly sympathetic to candidates. In turn, candidates must use time profitably rather than repeating points. Furthermore, essays are not required so introductions that re-state the question without making any progress are not encouraged. Get straight on to the questions!

Specific Questions

1 Pressure group definition / typology

A straightforward question where many candidates scored full marks. Examiners were looking for references to groups seeking influence but generally not seeking office and that cause groups tend to be selfless as opposed to the more self-interested sectional groups. Reasons for candidates not achieving full marks were commonly because they failed to offer any examples (as required by the question) or offered a confused mixing of the definitions.

Full answers with accurate spelling / punctuation / grammar scored 2 marks for assessment objective 3. Answers that were undeveloped or had significant inaccuracies in presentation, scored 0 or 1.

2 Sex, race and disability discrimination

This was a relatively new question but on an area that is clearly identified in the specifications. The question and the source provided candidates with potential material to use as a structure and clearly required three areas to be described. Where candidates described provision in two areas with good details, they were able to access the higher mark bands but top marks demanded at least some reference to all three aspects.

Examiners were expecting reporting in each area of legislation, of government action in education and / or public information, of good practice by government itself, etc. Examiners rewarded those who described positive discrimination in the selection of parliamentary candidates. All relevant examples were rewarded.

Marks in the lower bands were usually the result of;

- having little knowledge beyond the item mentioned in source B.
- describing ways by which citizens might seek redress of any grievance rather than those asked for in the question.
- describing initiatives to discrimination related to address age, religion, sexual orientation or other forms which did not directly constitute the focus of the question.

3 Merits / Demerits of the Human Rights Act

As indicated in the introduction, this proved to be a troublesome question for many candidates, but a good discriminator for examiners. Mention of Europe has a tendency to trigger a discussion of sovereignty or an argument concerning EU intrusion into UK affairs. These matters were not the focus of this question.

The status of the European Convention on Human Rights in regards to the EU was widely misunderstood; the Convention emerged from the Council of Europe in 1950; the EU is formally not a party to the Convention (although member nations are expected to sign up to the Convention) and has no formal role in the administration of the Convention. Source B made it clear that the Human Rights Act of 1998 (25 years after the UK joined EEC) was an Act of the UK parliament whereas many saw it as a Brussels imposed directive which undermined UK sovereignty. Following this with a discussion of loss of sovereignty meant that candidates were not addressing the question and so scored modestly.

Whilst Source B made it clear that the Convention was largely incorporated into UK law from 1998, some candidates speculated as to whether or not the incorporation might occur at some point in the future. Others candidates wrongly believed that the Human Rights Act gave UK citizens the ability to take cases to Strasbourg for the first time. A number of candidates wrongly reported that the HRA was entrenching rights in the UK. Frequent reference was inaccurately made to proposals to detain suspected terrorists for up to 90 days having been prevented by the Human Rights Act rather than by a parliamentary vote.

Further information about the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice appeared in the examiner report for June 2006.

4 Pressure groups having too much influence.

The question was widely answered well. Best answers provided examples and evidence to support points being made and offered a balanced assessment. For this question, examiners were looking for around three substantial arguments on either side of the question, developed with evidence. This should be possible to write in about 22/23 minutes.

Candidates who scored less well tended to present one or more of the following;
An unbalanced answer i.e. suggesting that groups indeed have too much influence but said nothing to the contrary.

Answers did not focus on the question e.g. simply reported the methods used by groups. Opinionated assertions without evidence to support e.g. 'I think Governments don't listen to the people.'

Principal Examiner's Report

2597: Government of the UK

General Comments

This was the first summer exam of the new assessment regime and the results were encouraging: large numbers of candidates were able to write focused, balanced, detailed and accurate answers to the questions set. As in January, no more candidates than usual seemed to misinterpret the rubric than in previous years and the vast majority appreciated the need to write more in answer to part (b) than part (a) of the questions.

Most candidates were able to pick up a significant number of marks in answer to part (a) of each question and it was noticeable that many candidates attempted to include examples in support of their points. However, candidates should appreciate that their opinions are not a substitute for argument or evidence.

As in January, some centres had clearly prepared their students very well for the exam, with large numbers gaining more than 100/120.

Advising candidates

In January, this report provided advice to candidates to help them maximise their marks and this is repeated below.

The examiners are looking for:

- **focus:** have you answered the question set?
- **range:** have you included a number of different points?
- **balance:** in part (b) have you discussed both sides of the question?
- **depth and detail:** have you explained your point fully and included examples?

So:

- Identify exactly what the question is asking you to do and do it: get to the point straight away and stick to it
- Don't write an introduction or a conclusion - they are not necessary and waste time and words. This is especially true of introductions which set out what you are going to say before you say it and conclusions that summarise what you have just said.
- Write short, sharp, paragraphs - 50 to 75 words is ideal - in short, sharp, sentences
- For part (a), just do exactly what the question asks for and no more, and for part (b), try to make six points in six paragraphs
- When a part (b) question asks you to 'Discuss the view that ...' you must look at both sides of the question
- Spend 20 minutes on each question: 6 minutes on part (a), writing about 100 words and 14 minutes on part (b), writing about 300 words. If it helps, imagine an open, double page of the answer booklet and try and fill the first ½ page answering part (a) and the remaining 1½ pages answering part (b)

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Main principles of the British constitution/Britain is better off with an unwritten constitution**

 - (a) A very popular question, however, a significant number of candidates wrote about the sources of the constitution, rather than its principles and it was difficult in most cases for examiners to award any marks at all for such answers.
 - (b) The arguments for and against Britain's unwritten constitution are well-rehearsed and therefore what distinguished candidates was the number, quality and range of their arguments. And the balance of the answer. Weaker candidates were usually able to discuss flexibility/rigidity but not much else. A number of candidates drew useful comparisons with the USA and other countries.

- 2 Commons scrutiny of the government/Commons is an ineffective check on the government.**

 - (a) Answers often contained a wealth of detail but lacked range. The role of various sorts of debate was frequently overlooked and while most candidates were able to describe PMQs, they seemed unaware that other ministers also had to face the House.
 - (b) Good answers were able to analyse the effectiveness of questions, debates and committees in a balanced way, identifying occasions where these had caused problems for governments. They were also able to comment on the impact of large majorities and the importance of party loyalty. A number of candidates were under the impression that the Commons had voted against the Iraq war but that the government had gone ahead nonetheless.

- 3 Main powers of the prime minister/there are too few limits on the power of the prime minister.**

 - (a) Another very popular question, but many answers lacked range. A number of candidates could not distinguish between powers, power and role.
 - (b) Good candidates answered the question and focused on whether there were too few limits. Or not. Weaker candidates wrote about the limits without relating them to the question or provided what may have been pre-prepared questions on presidential/prime ministerial government. In the latter case some sort of answer could usually be inferred, but candidates failed to reach Level 4 of the assessment matrix. Many candidates also overstated both the power of the prime minister to command obedience and the potency of the limits on his powers.

- 4 Role of the executive and the judiciary/judiciary is not truly independent of the executive.**

 - (a) Most answers were very good on the judiciary but very weak on the executive and virtually ignored its role in the implementation of policy. Some candidates also confused the executive with the legislature.
 - (b) Candidates attempting this question were often well-informed, however, those who focused exclusively on the appointments process did not reach the higher mark bands. Understanding of the significance and implications of the *Constitutional Reform Act, 2005*, was limited in some cases, but good candidates were able to make relevant reference to the recent changes to the judiciary.

5 Sovereignty/EU membership has had a limited impact on British sovereignty.

- (a)** Another very popular question, but while most candidates gained at least half marks by being able to define sovereignty in terms of ultimate power, fewer were able to develop the idea much further.
- (b)** Often well done with references to opt-outs, QMV, veto matters and the ultimate possibility of pulling out of EU - and with far fewer emotional outpourings and opinionated polemics than in previous exam series. Less well appreciated was the fact that veto applies to a declining number of policy aspects or that EU seeks to work on basis of consensus. A significant number of candidates, perhaps having just completed the Politics of UK Paper, again devoted often large parts of their answers to an irrelevant discussion of the impact of the ECHR.

2694: US Government & Politics

General comments

There were some scripts of a very high standard. These candidates were able to construct essays with a tight focus which provided a balanced answer to the question set with the use of contemporary examples. In many respects, these simple qualities provide the basis for exam success on this paper.

Some centres had heeded the advice from previous reports and made use of the available published materials so that students were well prepared for this exam. These candidates were able to write at length on the questions set. Students from others centres seemed less au fait with the paper and US politics generally. Please note given the time constraint lengthy introductions and conclusions are not needed or advised. On occasion then, there did seem to be a general reluctance or inability to focus on the question set. This does go back to basic essay technique and the old paradigms about “using the word in the question” etc. to maintain focus should be drilled into the students. They do say practice makes perfect and there would seem to be a case for plenty of mock essays as preparation for this exam.

There does seem to be a perennial problem of discussing contemporary US government and politics. In the past, this might have been understandable and excusable. Today with the internet and other resources, there really is no real excuse. Centres would be advised to take out a departmental subscription to the Economist or to the New York Times tracker service so that candidates may be able to refer to current developments in US politics. This is particularly evident with regard to questions on elections and the Supreme Court as is discussed below.

Centres might note that the provisional title for the new specification is **contemporary** US government and politics. It is the intention of this principal examiner to endeavour to set questions which invite discussion of contemporary affairs as much as possible. Some students seemed rather too reliant on revision guides.

The spelling of some standard words continues to amaze. Whilst it can be almost taken as a given that candidates cannot spell; there/their/ they're, received and lose, correctly and separation (even when these are given in the title of the question!), it does seem that the US dimension can take these errors to another level. Naturally Hillary, Condoleeza and amendment top the most common mistakes in this regard but others such as; Borat Obama, Amazonia, Myers, the senet and a personal favourite, rouge electors, did reveal the lack of reading amongst the students.

Comments on the individual questions

1 Weaknesses of the Electoral College

A standard question which has handled very well by those who had prepared for it. The word “discuss” in the title was significant as it invited a comment on the strengths though those who focused solely on weaknesses were not penalised. Many recognised the performance of the EC in 2000 but discussion of 2004 was less to the fore.

2 Party decline

This question proved to be more of a discriminator than some of the others. Some failed to recognise the thrust of the question and wanted to discuss similarities between the parties. Good candidates were able to link importance to the functions of parties. Discussion of party renewal was not always evident or well developed. Reference to the 2006 mid terms and developments such as Pelosi’s “six for 2006” and subsequent initiatives in Congress such as the funding of the Iraq War, invited pertinent discussion of recent developments.

3 Pressure group effectiveness

This was a popular question on a standard topic. As a consequence of this, students were expected to provide discussion of a range of relevant factors with a degree of sophistication. Poorer candidates were frequently unable to go beyond the importance of money and membership. Similarly, centres would do well to consider groups beyond the NRA and the NAACP. Centres should encourage students to attempt to rank factors in order of importance rather than merely writing a list in order to gain access to higher level AO2 marks.

4 Separated or shared powers

Many candidates were able to access AO1 marks through detailed discussion of the checks and balances detailed in the constitution. This was enhanced by the provision of contemporary examples such as Bush’s problems over the appointment of Miers. Discussion of separation as opposed to the idea of shared powers however posed more of a problem to many candidates.

5 Congressional rejection of legislation

A popular question that was generally handled well by those who attempted it. Knowledge of the legislative process allowed students to access the higher levels of the AO1 marks and it was pleasing to see references to post mid term elections developments. Analysis and evaluation however was sometimes lost in the narrative describing the legislative process. There were some who confused this question with the amendment process for the constitution.

6 The importance of the president’s cabinet

This was generally handled well by those who attempted it. Better candidates were able to access a range of AO1 and AO2 marks through reference to the role played today by the EOP. More on the Bush cabinet and the appointment of loyalists (contrary to the frequently cited counter argument) would have been welcome.

7 The Supreme Court's protection of rights and liberties

This was a popular question which posed a few problems. Knowledge of cases was frequently sketchy and tended to discuss a few liberties but disregarded others. IN several instances, there was a tendency for students to want to discuss other issues relating to the Supreme Court such as can the exercise of judicial review be justified in a democracy.

Please note that Brown v. Board of Education and Roe v. Wade are over 50 and 40 years old respectively.

8 Factors influencing voting behaviour

Many candidates were able to reveal an in depth knowledge of the most recent developments in US voting behaviour with statistical evidence from 2004 to back up their arguments. What was frequently lacking however was an evaluation of the relative importance of factors. Difficult I know but general trends such as dealignment and the rise of short term factors and issue voting did not receive a great deal of emphasis. Surprisingly amongst the scripts I read, there was not one reference to the "3Fs" (faith, flag and family) or the "3Gs" (guns gays and God) which were said to be significant factors in 2004.

Please note that Kennedy v. Nixon TV debate and Goldwater "daisy" advertisement are over 50 years old.

2695 Political Ideas and Concepts

General Comments

The quality of response varied considerably with often a strong centre effect displayed. Many centres had prepared their candidates very effectively, utilising the appropriate style and range of theorists required. Other centres need to improve on their preparation of students, especially in which course books to use and in practicing writing theory style essays. The weakest answers were more akin to a General Studies style approach displaying no obvious study of key political ideas and concepts. Centres would be well advised to ensure they have available to their students copies of relevant text books including the Heywood series, Harrison and Boyd, and Goodwin (full details are available on the OCR Politics website). The better answers tended to use definitions, examples and theorists taken from the above text books. Centres should also encourage students to use the ideas of specific theorists and/ or differing ideological perspectives. What is especially pleasing is the range of newer theorists featuring in a number of answers. Some candidates are using specific factual evidence as a means to analyse and evaluate the issues raised in their answers. This is fine as long as the answers do not become an imitation of the synoptic 2699 approach where candidates are expected to apply theory to modern politics. Such illustration should be kept to short sharp examples and must not replace the focus on ideas and concepts. With only 30 minutes to write each answer it is important that they remain focused, provide evidence of a good understanding of a range of theorists and be evaluative.

With approximately 125 candidates entered for the summer module the range of quality varied considerably. At the top answers were sophisticated in their understanding of the appropriate theory and were able to analyse a range of differing perspectives on the different question areas. Discriminating at the A/B boundary was the quality of analysis relating to the specific question set and the range of theories / interpretations used. Some candidates however appear to have learnt a great number of potted summaries of different theorists and were determined to use them at every appropriate opportunity. Whilst this is fine it often leads to a descriptive approach rather than actual analysis or evaluation. The weakest candidates displayed little effective comprehension of the relevant theory and often struggled to go beyond very superficial descriptions of the subject matter. It is not surprising that in a module focused upon abstract political ideas and concepts that the key discriminator for the E/U boundary is that of understanding. Centres have however improved the preparation of the large majority of their candidates with a significant proportion of candidates writing what almost amounted to centre prepared answers to various questions. This can cause problems when the focus of the question set is not necessarily what the candidates have been prepared for.

Comments on individual questions

1 **Discuss the claim that the virtues of democracy outweigh its vices.**

A popular question, and when answered well produced a balanced argument focusing on the general arguments for and against democracy. Better candidates were able to illustrate these arguments with a range of theorists and also evaluate why some virtues or vices were only applicable to certain forms of democracy. There was much good use of elitist theory relating to the vices of democracy and of liberal and developmental/participatory theory on its virtues. Some of the very best answers actually focused upon the concept of virtues relating this to the ideas of Rousseau and Mill on how democratic participation develops the virtuous nature of citizenship with society.

2 **Discuss the differing perspectives on the need for authority.**

As with many questions on this area, too many students are only prepared to answer the topic of power versus authority. Sadly too many answers were only partially relevant through displaying an understanding of what is meant by authority. There were better answers that went beyond the Weber typology to look at organic and natural duty theories on why authority is important. Credit was also given to those answers that compared these conservative views with left wing and libertarian views on the potential damage done by too much centralised authority.

3 **Evaluate the claim that ideology has ended.**

Unfortunately many centres had prepared their candidates to only answer standard questions on liberal, conservative and socialist ideologies and even when a question on this area failed to materialise were determined to put down their knowledge anyway. Centres should be aware of the changes to the specification that include new ideologies such as post-modernism. Those who had been prepared well displayed very good appreciation of the debate involving theorists dating back to Hegel and Marx, and also including Bell, Burnham, Fukuyama and Lyotard. There were also good counter arguments from theorists such as Huntingdon as well as understanding of the potential emergence of newer ideologies.

4 **Compare and contrast legal with moral rights.**

This proved not to be a popular question despite the terms appearing on the specification. Of those that attempted it most were able to identify the meaning of each form of rights, highlighting obvious distinctions over their nature of recognition and protection within society. Better answers were more sophisticated in recognising that the origins of legal rights often could be found in attempts to codify moral rights. Here better candidates used the ideas of classical liberal theorists such as Locke and Jefferson as well as utilitarians such as Bentham and Berlin's concept of negative and positive rights.

5 **Analyse the limits to political obligation.**

As with Q2, many candidates ignored the word limit and wrote only on the various justifications for political obligation. Whilst credit can be given for the implicit relevance of this it still prevented many answers from securing higher marks. Some candidates did identify the limits with justifications for civil disobedience which once again could receive partial credit. Better answers contrasted the contractual limits to obligation as seen in the writings of Locke and Rawls with the effective lack of limits in natural duty theory as espoused by Plato and Hobbes (from a social contract perspective). There were also appropriate reference to Marxist and anarchist concepts rejecting political obligation in capitalist society in the case of the former, and all societies for the latter.

6 Discuss the claim that national sovereignty is increasingly outdated.

As with previous questions on sovereignty, candidates struggle to comprehend the meaning of the term. Inevitably many answers turn into an 'EU Rant'. Unfortunately many answers only displayed AS Level knowledge in highlighting an often one-sided argument concerning the supposed loss of UK sovereignty. Whilst elements of this could be made relevant to the question it required a broader understanding of external aspects of sovereignty relating to issues such as globalisation, federalism, devolution and supranationalism. There were some very good answers that understood the debate over national sovereignty and were able to link this to very good conceptual understanding of relevant issues.

7 Compare and contrast the differing theories on the role of the state.

Whereas most candidates did understand the concept of the different roles of the state, unfortunately a significant number confused the concept of role with characteristics. Candidates should be able to discriminate between terms and need to be careful when doing so in the exam room. Many answers had good knowledge ranging from classical and modern liberal theories through to collectivist and totalitarian concepts. However many candidates only described each model thus only making implicit points of comparison – this inevitably would mean lower AO2 marks. Also some answers were almost exclusively focused upon economic aspects of the state, ignoring other important roles relating to areas such as security and law and order.

8 Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of majority rule.

Many answers to this question had only a very limited understanding of the concept of majority rule and related it almost entirely to the arguments for and against majoritarian electoral systems such as FPTP. Better answers were able to highlight concerns dating back to Plato and Aristotle, through to de Tocqueville and Mill, as well as highlight advantages relating to its role in modern democracy. Good answers also evaluated the problems relating to minority rights and opinion and ways in which this could be protected under majoritarian systems.

2696

As with previous year the performance varied considerably. The best answers were very well researched utilising a wide range of relevant sources and displaying sophisticated levels of analysis. Better essays often tended to have a fairly tight focus with a contemporary theme and clear criteria for measuring the key issues relating to the question set. There were a lot of essays on Cameron although these did tend to pose some problems as students grappled with the notion of ideological change.

Weaker answers tended to have a more generalised theme making it difficult to achieve effective analysis. This frequently encouraged generalised and or superficial assertions. Many lacked coherence and understanding of the subject matter and little specific evidence. Students are encouraged to go beyond standard essay questions and standard text books. Thus “Why are pressure groups successful?” whilst open ended enough to be appropriate, would invite a sharper analysis if “under the Blair government” were added to the title. Examiners are always eager to read original work and a focus on recent developments (which is more likely if this is included in the title) would help ensure this.

Centres have a key role in advising students about the suitability of titles. These can be submitted to the principal examiner (MPS@bradfordgrammar.com) for consideration if required. Candidates are reminded that the title should be a question, not a statement, so as to invite analysis and evaluation. Thus “The religious right in the USA” is not appropriate. Questions should not be too broad for the 2,500 word limit. It is better to focus on a narrow aspect of some contemporary developments such as the Roberts Court, rather than the impact of the Supreme Court since 1954. Similarly two part questions might be difficult to manage and too historical or speculative a focus should also be avoided. Support should be offered throughout the research and writing of the essay and students should not be left entirely to their own devices from the start to the finish of the unit.

It is surprising that a key discriminating factor was frequently a reluctance to answer the question that the student had actually set themselves. This seems to most obvious on good legitimate questions on the House of Lords which almost inevitably seem to lead an irrelevant discussion of the history of Lords' reform since 1909.

It is difficult to believe that some centres marked their essays before submission and some followed the old rubric. Perhaps they will get things right in time for the demise of this module with the advent of the new specification. Pleasingly most centres are now au fait with the requirements of the unit and over recent years the general quality of the essays has improved. Very few essays went over the word limit. Centres are reminded that AO1 marks are deducted if this occurs.

Report to centres 2698

Once again, the number of very poor entries for this paper was vanishingly small. The vast majority of candidates gave every sign they took the exam seriously, and had prepared well. This was very encouraging. In addition, many centres had taken back the suggestion at INSET that we were looking for a more rounded awareness of politics for this paper, and there were many good references to political systems and events outside the UK and US. We think the synoptic study of politics for A2 requires an intelligent readership of newspapers, something of an awareness of events elsewhere over the two years, and a readiness to apply this when appropriate. There were some good references to Chavez in Venezuela, electoral systems in Europe, the recent French presidential election and so on. However, it is important that such references are not gratuitous; and centres might caution candidates to make sure that such observations have a relevant bearing on the theme they are exploring. For example, I am not entirely sure how useful a development of the French system (in which there is both president and prime minister) helps when trying to draw contrasts and similarities between prime ministerial and presidential forms of government. Candidates will be well rewarded for a synoptic awareness of political trends and developments, but only if comments made illuminate the issues at question.

Candidates should also read questions carefully, and try to spot the operative words. Good marks for analysis are available for work on what we might mean by 'too great a role' (question 5) for example.

A further suggestion to make is to recommend that candidates think for a moment or two before beginning an answer, to reflect on what exactly is being asked, what key words or ideas there might be to define, and so on. Many of the subtleties of the questions are left unexplored by otherwise intelligent candidates who rush into a *prima facie* answer.

Question 1

Contrast the importance of judicial appointments in different political systems.

Here the operative word was 'importance'. Candidates who did well were those who developed the significance of appointments to courts, and went beyond descriptive accounts of the appointment processes. Examiners were looking for *some* account of how appointments are made, however; many candidates showed either a lack of clarity in their understanding of the UK system, or were a little out of date – the new system following the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005 has been operative since 2006. Accurate references to the importance of appointments to the ECJ and ECHR were well rewarded.

Question 2

Analyse the factors which determine the effectiveness of different interest groups.

This was a popular question, and by and large well done. There was a tendency among weaker candidates to deploy off-the-shelf answers to questions from past papers, and many focussed on the tactics used by groups. Of course, this could be part of the answer here, but a more complete answer required, perhaps, an awareness of the context in which groups worked (Are some political systems more open to interest group activity?) or the assets each group can deploy (membership, or other resources). A more comprehensive grasp of interest groups helps – the usual culprits tend to come round with frequency – Fathers4justice, the Countryside Alliance, the NRA, the NAACP. For some candidates, these groups are the only ones in the world.

Question 3

Evaluate the claim that the number of parties in a political system is largely determined by the electoral system used.

This was a popular question, and frequently well done. Weaker candidates used the question to discuss the differences between electoral systems – merits and demerits of PR, and the possibilities (and dangers) of coalition governments. Better candidates explored the features of electoral systems beyond the ballots used, such as registration, or controls on election finance. They went on to discuss other factors which might play a part in determining the number of parties in the party system – such as the role of regionalism or separatism, or the prevalence/decline of ideology in countries. The recent elections of the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament provided some illustrative detail here.

Question 4

Discuss the view that prime ministerial and presidential forms of government are essentially similar.

This was one of the questions that attracted weaker candidates. Most of these laid out the role of prime minister and that of the president, with some comparison of powers. It was rare to find a script beginning with a definition of terms. In particular, some work could usefully have been done on distinguishing 'prime ministerial government' from 'cabinet government' and identifying the trends in British politics under Blair and Thatcher. There is a contention (Foley) that the Prime Minister can wield such power that he becomes a president of sorts. It was expected that candidates might work on the role of the cabinet in constraining him – the long lame duck period for Blair was hardly mentioned, surprisingly, sadly, though it provides the best modern reminder of prime ministerial mortality. As I indicated earlier, some references to other systems and the power of individuals in them was not helpful. If the point of the question is to seek out how far Prime Ministerial and presidential forms have become similar, what purpose is served by an account of the French hybrid system?

Question 5

Analyse the view that money and media play too great a role in modern electoral politics.

This question also attracted weaker candidates, probably because of the mention it makes of the media. Many of the weaker answers were unspecific and generalised, strayed too far from the notion of electoral politics, or focussed too long on the image of political candidates. An unnervingly large number read (and repeated) the question as: 'too *greater* role in politics'; the same candidates usually failed to make the distinction between 'a great role' and 'too great a role'. When does an influence become too much?

There were some outstanding answers, which did develop this idea, and suggested that when money has become the determining factor in the selection of candidates for office (Elizabeth Dole, John McCain) or when the media make or break candidacies etc etc then the influence has become too important. Some of these answers mentioned Blair's 'feral beasts' speech, which he made a few days before the exam. These were rewarded well – it was just the sort of awareness that we look for on the Synoptic paper.

Question 6

Discuss the effectiveness of constitutional checks and balances in different political systems.

The better candidates answering this question went beyond an obvious comparison of constitutional checks, and looked at the *effectiveness* of such checks. There may be a formidable array of checks in the US constitution, but are they effective? If Senate ratification of treaties can be bypassed by executive agreements, if Senate confirmation of appointments can be bypassed by making recess appointments (John Bolton), if Congressional war making is a thing of the past, then how effective can the checks be? Analysis of the UK's system in this respect was not strong, and there was an over-reliance upon *political* checks (rebellions in the House of Commons) or *procedural* (PMQs, committees) as opposed to *constitutional* ones. Perhaps this is to be expected, but it is a distinction which the candidates themselves could have pointed out. I suspect that candidates will find more to write about if this question is asked again, with Gordon Brown's constitutional reform proposals (July 2007).

Question 7

Contrast the effectiveness of legislatures in representing their electors.

The better answers to this question made use of models of representation, (trustee/mandate etc) or explored different senses in which legislatures could be representative of electors (i.e. in what ways are they reflective of population make-up, in what ways do they act to deliver constituency benefit). Weaker answers did not get much beyond the proportion of ethnic minorities/women etc in Parliament/Congress, and even these did not really explore the reasons why those proportions applied. Such answers tended to be more descriptive than truly analytic, and were marked accordingly.

Question 8

Discuss the view that rights and liberties are best defended when entrenched in a bill of rights or constitution.

The bulk of answers to this question explored the defence of rights in the US, with lots of references to the Supreme Court. In these, there were some unconvincing references to the way rights are defended under the British system, with relatively few developing the impact of the ECHR. The most thoughtful answers saw that bills of rights can make a formal statement of intent, but without an independent judiciary, or vigilant citizens, media, they are no more effective than traditions upheld in common law. Uncritical answers simply assumed entrenchment is the best defence, and that the UK's flexible and easily amendable statutes are open to abuse. This may be so, but answers could be more nuanced than they were. There were opportunities here to display knowledge of rights and liberties in a post 9/11 world, the debate around fundamental rights in the EU reform treaty, and Cameron's call for a British Bill of Rights, but the weaker candidates played safe.

2699: Ideas and Concepts

General Comments

Candidates performed largely in accordance with recent years, albeit with often a strong centre effect. Most however were able to answer two questions with some degree of understanding based upon knowledge of democratic theory and contemporary politics. The quality of answers varied greatly with those achieving better marks adopting an appropriate synoptic style, integrating effectively knowledge of political theory alongside evaluation of contemporary British and EU politics. Centres are reminded that in order to achieve the highest marks it is essential that candidates adopt this appropriate synoptic style. A good guide when preparing students is to use the phrase, 'in theory and in practice'. Weaker answers tended to either focus on answering questions from either purely a political theory perspective or relying solely upon knowledge acquired from their AS Units. A large number of candidates were unfortunately unable to deploy any specific contemporary examples to illustrate their arguments, instead adopting often only generalised evidence. Some centres encouraged their candidates to use evidence beyond the UK, either to other EU countries or other modern regimes. This can be beneficial to a number of questions although it is not essential to securing the top marks. The best answers however, do tend to provide specific factual illustrative evidence drawn from a range of modern democratic states.

A good proportion of candidates were able to integrate into their answers the work of a wide range of political theorists, utilising their knowledge of unit 2695. Candidates unfortunately had a tendency towards listing potted summaries of the ideas of a number of theorists without any attempt to evaluate these. Still a significant number of candidates were relying upon 17th, 18th and 19th century political thinkers (Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Rousseau, Mill and Marx) and describing them as advocates of various forms of modern democracy. Whilst each of the above are highly influential in framing modern political ideas it is somewhat spurious to refer to Hobbes and Burke as advocates of modern democracy. It was good to see the use of a wider range of theorists with in particular, Rawls, Beetham, Dahl and Fukuyama all receiving widespread usage. Another worrying trend is the failure of candidates to answer the question set – this was particularly true with question 5 where there was much use of AS material on the effectiveness, methods and typology of pressure groups without any real relation to their role in providing participation in the political process.

Question Specific Comments

1 Examine the claim that in practice there is more to democracy than elections

Some candidates struggled to get beyond a simplistic explanation of elections or an outline of the problems of FPTP. The question required consideration of other institutional and cultural aspects of democracy as well as potential alternative procedural devices to achieve democratic consent such as the use of referendums. Some good answers also highlighted how elections were not relevant to direct democracy where all citizens participated in the law making process and executive positions were filled by sortition. There was also some good use of political theory through the ideas of amongst many Rousseau (a critic of representative democracy and thus limiting the role of the citizenship to election), and Schumpeter (competitive elite theory advocating democracy in purely electoral terms).

2 Assess the claim that people's democracies are more democratic than liberal democracies.

This question, whilst being the least popular on the paper, caused a number who attempted it to receive little credit. A significant proportion had a very limited or totally incorrect understanding of the concept of people's democracy, confusing it with participatory democracy. The term appears on the specification and whilst it has never come up as a question previously, candidates who do the question should at least have an understanding of the concept. What was required was a comparison of the democratic credential of the system devised by Marx and Engels, and later applied by Lenin and Mao amongst others, with the credentials of liberal democracy. Some quite rightly highlighted the democratic deficit in liberal democracy and contrasted it with the case for economic and political equality under the people's model. Further knowledge on democratic centralism, vanguard parties and the Marxian notion of species being (linked to Rousseau's General Will) were also relevant.

3 Assess to what extent the Third Way owes more to conservatism than socialism.

This proved to be a popular question amongst many centres and whereas many candidates were able to highlight specific aspects of New Labour policies, less actually linked it specifically to conservatism and socialism. Some candidates attempted to argue that the Third Way was merely a sanitised version of Thatcherism which allowed some implicit links to conservative ideas to be highlighted. Weaker candidates used the opportunity to give their personal judgement on the relative success of New Labour in office. The best candidates had a sophisticated understanding of both democratic socialist and conservative principles and applied these to themes within Third Way ideology as espoused by Anthony Giddens and the actual policies of New Labour in power. Reward was also given for those that went even further to question whether in fact the Third Way could only be correctly explained by examining its liberal as well as conservative and socialist heritage.

4 Examine the claim that that power is too centralised in modern governments.

Some candidates who attempted this question had a good working knowledge of the meaning of power, although then went on to discuss the location of this power in the state as a whole as opposed to modern government. Some quite rightly associated the power of modern governments with questions over executive dominance and a lack of formal separation of powers in the UK. Others tried to argue that power had become even more centralised through the increased influence of the EU in UK legislative decision making. Perhaps a better argument was to examine if decision making within the EU as a whole is too centralised (e.g. the role of Commission). Some sought to balance their arguments by arguing that in fact devolution and increased back bench rebellions provided a check to centralised power in UK government.

5 Assess the extent to which pressure groups are increasingly the main source of political participation for citizens.

This was a very popular question, but one that was often done badly. Many candidates had retained much of their AS Level knowledge on pressure groups and no matter what the question required wanted to explain about the differences between pressure groups, what methods they used and their relative success. Many failed beyond a concluding comment to actually address the question in any meaningful way. Some better answers did actually outline other potential forms of participation (elections, party membership and referendums were the most obvious) and go on to highlight limitations in these forms. The very best related the role of pressure groups to pluralist theory (Dahl and Lindholm etc.) on the need for sectional associations to fill the vacuum in participation outside the electoral cycle, as well as theories about the overall decline of civic participation (e.g. Galbraith and Puttnam).

6 Discuss the view that there has been an erosion of civil liberties in modern democracies.

The weaker answers to this question adopted very much a General Studies style approach to the dangers of the advent of a 'big brother' society without any attempt to display an understanding of what is meant by civil liberties, or a balance to their arguments. Some candidates did however have an excellent knowledge of limits imposed through anti-terrorism legislation post 9/11 and attempts to curb crime and anti-social behaviour. This was often balanced with recent steps taken in the UK and other modern democracies to protect civil liberties as seen with the UK 1998 Human Rights Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Some did attempt to look at how dictatorial regimes repressed civil liberties, however this was largely irrelevant, except in a comparative manner as the question did require focus upon modern democracies.

7 Assess which model of representation in practice best describes the role of elected representatives.

A very popular question and one that largely candidates were able to display understanding of the models – most popular being trustee, delegate and mandate (a considerable number ignored the resemblance model). Where many candidates failed to gain credit was for the aspect of the question that required them to consider in practice which is most used. Whilst some only adopted a unit 2695 approach of describing the models the better answers used a series of relevant examples of how the models related to UK MPs and some even introducing evidence from other representative assemblies. These often produced top grade marks as being very synoptic in style.

8 Discuss the view that in practice liberal democracies are more liberal than democratic.

Whilst this was a popular question relatively few candidates struggled to go beyond a broad description of what aspects of liberal democracy could be considered liberal and others democratic. Often answers struggled to effectively distinguish between the two concepts or appreciate the paradox that is seen at the heart of liberal democracy. Some very good answers were able to argue that the legacy of protective style democracy as advocated by Locke etc. actually limited the extent of democracy in modern liberal democracy in order to protect individual rights from an over powerful state based on majoritarian principles. Further representative democracy using the trustee concept actually serves to protect the masses against themselves by limiting their input into the political process so as to leave the real decision making to professional politicians (elite theory) and avoid decision making by the lowest common denominator.

**Advanced GCE (Subject) (Aggregation Code(s))
January 2007 Assessment Series**

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2595	Raw	100	76	68	60	52	44	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2596	Raw	100	66	58	50	42	35	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2597	Raw	100	90	80	70	60	51	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2694	Raw	90	73	65	57	50	43	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2695	Raw	90	70	62	54	47	40	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2698	Raw	120	94	84	74	64	55	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2699	Raw	120	86	77	68	59	50	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3834	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7834	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3834	26.7	45.0	64.0	79.3	90.0	100	1129
7834	29.8	55.2	77.0	91.4	97.6	100	873

2002 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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