

GCE

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE A2 7834

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3834

Report on the Units

January 2008

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications PO Box 5050 Annesley NOTTINGHAM NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622 Facsimile: 01223 552610

E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

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2595: Elections, Electoral Systems and Voting Behaviour in the UK

General Comments

A pleasantly uncomplicated session. Centres and candidates seemed happy with the papers. The sources were sensibly used and clearly grasped and no question was found to be in any way really challenging or misleading. There were fewer marks near 100% than usual, but this was compensated by far fewer below 40%. Trying to find a good range around the E grade for the award stage proved difficult, which is a good sign. There also seemed to be far fewer scripts that we struggled over when it came to legibility, which is also pleasing. Another good sign was the growing number of candidates who used recent and relevant examples to back up their points. This always gets highly rewarded and often the appropriate use of an example can make a lot of difference to the AO1 marks if an examiner is not entirely sure whether the point being made is fully grasped. Few candidates seemed to have a major 'time' problem, most finished all four questions. The only exception to this seemed to come from some centres where they all did their answers in the 'wrong' order, starting with Qu 4. A fair number of those cut short their answers to Qu 1 and 2, which proved expensive. We often get asked at INSET if we mind candidates starting with Qu 4. The answer is 'no', but I always add that I have never seen a candidate who has done the paper in the 'wrong' order get 100%. Sources on the whole were well used, but it was pointed out by examiners that they saw too little 'own' knowledge, particularly in Qu 4. Try and get the balance right. We will go to L3 in AO1 for excellent use of the sources in Qu 4, but there has to be clear additional knowledge to get to L4.

Question One

This caused few problems. The word 'features' seemed to be understood better and we got a good range of 'own knowledge'. Many were aware of the SNP minority/executive situation. However those who thought it might be a good time to brandish their knowledge about Wendy Alexander's funding problems did not pick up any marks. Some candidates do get very proud of their hard learned information and cannot resist the temptation to use it if it seems vaguely relevant. Some candidates got their systems confused, but most have got their heads around the AMS. We are not expecting much more than four sentences on this one and certainly no debate on the merits of the system.

Question Two

A lot of competent answers to this question, with valid comments on bandwagons and boomerangs as well as suggestions about the possible causes of tactical voting. There were some excellent ones on how parties adapted the focus of their campaigns in the light of polls during campaigns (perhaps getting a hint or two from Source C?). Sources not specified in the question count as 'own knowledge'. Some got a little distracted on an elaborate discussion about the accuracy and methodology of polling which lacked much relevance to this question. One centre had a real focus on a discussion as to whether polls should be banned or not. Obviously this had relevance in places and picked up AO1 marks, but there are no AO2 marks going in Qu 2 so a lot of time and effort was wasted on an elaborate case 'for and against'. Save that debating for Qu 3 and 4. There was some good evidence brought in by many, based on 2005, but references to 1992 were also valid and rewarded. Those who pointed out that it may have been adverse polls which led Gordon Brown to putting off an election in the autumn of 2007 naturally picked up marks for that.

Question 3

Perhaps the least well done overall. While there were good use of the source and a great deal of 'own knowledge' about campaigns like 1992 and 1997, there was a tendency not to actually answer the question and to have little comment on 2001 and 2005. What we were looking for

was a discussion on whether the campaign played a part in electoral victory or not. Those who grasped this issue did well. We got some who argued strongly that it was vital, while others argued that it was not. Both did well provided their points were backed up and at least some awareness of the opposing view was indicated. Some felt that elections are won or lost on a party's record, while others made intelligent use of Source D. There was a large range of good answers, with some excellent candidates making good use of their knowledge of models of voting behaviour to down play the importance of the campaign. There were lots of references to the Prescott punch, but almost invariably the relevance was not explained. A few commented on the cleverness with which the situation was managed and 'spun'. They did well. There was an unusual reluctance to tackle this question directly and quite a lot rambled round the issue and only really came to something approaching an answer in the last couple of lines which tended to harm the AO2 total.

Question 4

There was an interesting centre effect here. Many candidates did very well indeed, making good use of the sources but adding plenty of their own knowledge based on what was a good understanding of the events and build up to the 2005 election. However there were many essays where the answer was based entirely on the Sources B, C and D (and ignoring the hint about the election system favoring Labour in Source A). Careful combing could not reveal a glimmer of anything outside the sources which inevitably kept down the AO1 marks. Even those who made superb use of the sources could not get out of L3 on the AO1 marks. There were some excellent answers which started on the premise that it was the Conservatives that lost it rather than Labour winning it. Others stressed the critical and continuing support of the media for Labour and its attitude towards the Lib Dems and the Conservatives. Various models of voting behaviour were brought in and discussed. There were many very interesting answers from many different angles. The key to success lay in knowing a bit more than the sources had to offer and willingness to debate and argue.

2596: Politics of the UK

General comments

This paper produced the inevitable range of answers although as tends to be the case in the January session fewer scripts were particularly weak. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that many candidates are taking the paper for the second time. Nearly all candidates attempted all the questions and the majority of papers showed an appropriate balance of shorter answers to the early questions with more time devoted to questions 3 and 4.

The instruction to use continuous prose was followed and standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar were improved upon previous examination sessions.

As has been reported in the past, questions three and four proved to be the best discriminators with more variety in terms of range and depth of knowledge as well the ability to evaluate in a balanced manner. As ever, best answers were focused directly on the question from the start.

Questions

- Q1. A straightforward question that presented few problems. Almost all candidates had some knowledge of civil rights and the vast majority of answers scored at level 4. In part (i), answers that failed to reach level 4 commonly either referred to rights already mentioned in the source (despite the instruction in the question) or they quoted only one right. In part (ii) some candidates did not identify limits to the rights they mentioned in part (i), again despite the instruction in the question. Others were under the impression that foreign citizens visiting the UK possess no rights or that same sex marriage is impossible in the UK. The use of examples helped to increase the scores.
- Q2. Examiners were looking for a range of sources of funds for the UK's major political parties. Candidates might usefully be reminded as to the nature of the command word in questions; 'Describe' does not require analysis whereas 'Discuss' certainly does. The second question on this paper never awards marks for Assessment Objective 2 (Analysis / Evaluation), so in this case, candidates who identified a range of relevant sources (perhaps 4/5 would be possible in the time available) and provided some development of this information, certainly scored in the highest levels.

Answers that scored more modestly tended to identify only a limited range of sources. Furthermore, those who offered lengthy analysis of the means by which parties are funded, those who considered the merits of recent attempts to legislate in the area of party finances and those who reported the arguments for and against state funding of parties, tended to score more moderately, especially as their answers often had limited knowledge of the range of sources of funds.

Some candidates confused the legislative requirement to report donations in excess of defined sums with the idea that donations are subject to specific limits.

Disappointingly, whilst many answers showed knowledge of Bernie Ecclestone's donation to New Labour in the mid-'90s, relatively few showed awareness of any other donors, especially from more recent times. There were surprisingly few references to David Abraham in spite of all the media attention over the previous months.

Q3. Candidates on the whole found this question the most challenging test on the paper. Whilst answers commonly showed awareness of the Human Rights Act, many candidates were unable to identify any other government initiative to extend citizen's rights over the last 10 years.

As has been the situation in the past, anything which relates to Europe tends to produce confusion in candidates who wrongly believe that the European Convention on Human Rights was forced upon the UK against its wishes by the European Union and as such this confirms that sovereignty has been lost.

Another confusion over the Human Rights Act is the erroneous belief that it created a new right for UK citizens to access the Strasbourg court for the first time.

Candidates who argued that rights have not been extended since 1997 but instead have been greatly restricted, gained some marks under AO2. However, in the absence of knowledge of how rights have been extended, these answers typically scored no more than level 2 for AO1 and in the absence of balance, they also scored modestly in AO2.

Q4. Candidates commonly found this question to be very accessible and appeared well-prepared for the topic. Most answers were able to identify a number of functions for UK political parties and differentiation was achieved on the basis of the range offered. Higher scoring answers developed their knowledge of functions (often with examples) and then offered a reasoned, balanced judgement as to how well parties have been performing. These answers recognised that in some areas, parties might be considered to be performing well whilst in others they could be judged to be failing.

Lower scoring answers lacked knowledge of more than one or two functions. Another problem was in the inability to appropriately develop the knowledge of the quoted function or that the answer was lacking in balanced analysis.

There was evidence of opinionated answers where candidates clearly have a dim view of all parties and politicians and some offered sweeping generalisations to damn everything to do with parties and their leaders. They offered little or no evidence in support.

2597: Government of the UK

General Comments

Recent changes to the specification allowed the examiners to set two new questions on this paper, but candidates generally coped well. As usual there were a wide range of responses from the lengthy, thorough and sophisticated to those that weren't.

Some candidates struggled to complete all three questions to the same standard and a noticeable number did not answer both parts of some questions. It might only be an impression, but candidates sitting this paper after only one term's teaching seemed to suffer most from these lapses.

A curious feature of some scripts was the inability of candidates to answer a part (a) question - what is meant by ... statute law, the backbenches, the opposition, judicial review - when it was clear from the answer to part (b) that the candidate knew exactly what they were writing about.

Conversely, some candidates attempted questions on the civil service and judicial review without any obvious knowledge or understanding of the topics.

More generally, candidates continue to have difficulty making some basic distinctions, for example, between MPs, ministers and civil servants, so that government departments are run by MPs and ministers sit on the backbenches. And, motes and beams aside, the battle for accurate use of the apostrophe - candidates writing MP's when they mean MPs - seems all but lost.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. 'Statute law' and 'convention'/importance of statute law as a source of the constitution.

Although sources of the constitution has been a frequent question in the past, this was the first time that this particular question had appeared on the paper and generally candidates coped with it well. In Part (b), the best candidates were able to explain why statute law might be regarded as the most important source of the constitution and then considered the competing claims of a range of other sources. Weaker candidates simply outlined as many sources of the constitution and they could remember and made little attempt to discuss their relative importance. Such responses scored well on AO1 but poorly on AO2.

2. 'The backbenches' and 'the opposition'/role of the opposition

This was another new question, and a topic which is clearly on the specification, but Part (a) caused unexpected difficulties for some candidates. A common mistake was to equate backbenchers solely with government rebels. Part (b) was usually done well, though only the best candidates were able to provide a range of arguments supported by contemporary examples.

3. Role of higher civil servants/influence on policy-making

Although this question has been asked before, many candidates were unable to outline accurately the role of a higher civil servant in Part (a). Large numbers of candidates also thought that higher civil servants worked only for the prime minister while others were confused about the respective roles of civil servants and ministers generally. This fundamental lack of understanding meant that examiners often found it hard to award many marks at all for Part (b).

4. Features of judicial review/importance of judicial review

In recent years, questions on the judiciary have become much more popular with candidates. Unfortunately their enthusiasm for the subject is not always matched by their knowledge of the topic. Some centres prepare their candidates thoroughly for questions in this area and consequently they do well, but too many candidates on this occasion ignored the question entirely and used it as an excuse to write all they knew about the judiciary. As a consequence answers to Part (a) were often just wrong and answers to Part (b) became a general discussion of the nature of judiciary rather than a reflection on the importance of judicial review.

5. Aims and purpose of the EU/Maastricht Treaty as the most important development in the EU since 1990.

The revised specification places less emphasis on knowledge of specific treaties than its predecessor did, and this question was designed to test candidates' broad understanding of major events in the recent history of the European Union. The best were able to outline the significance of the TEU and also to consider the importance of other developments since 1990. However, a large number of candidates clearly did not know what had been agreed at Maastricht - or simply lumped together everything they knew about the SEA, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon and attributed it to Maastricht - while others outlined what had been agreed in 1992-93 but made no reference to any other developments. Inevitably many candidates dragged in sometimes lengthy and always irrelevant references to the ECHR.

2694: US Government & Politics

The paper on the whole was well done. Many candidates were able to display an impressive degree of knowledge about the topic area and write effectively to the question. As is always the case, those students who were able to incorporate comment on contemporary developments in US politics and government were rewarded.

Centres would do well to instil in their students the prerequisite skill of answering the question in order to do write effective essays under exam conditions. On occasion, it was evident that students had prepared answers to questions from previous papers that they thought were fit for purpose when in fact the actual question required a different approach. It is the intention of this examiner to challenge students in this manner in the future. Questions hopefully will be accessible but not too predictable which will help in the process of discrimination.

1. Evaluate the importance of the "invisible primary" in the selection of presidential candidates.

This was probably the most popular question on the paper. Perhaps this is not surprising given its saliency. Good candidates were able to define the meaning of the term and then discuss developments and their significance. This latter task was not always done that well. Some students were not able to progress much beyond the need to raise money and support. Others though highlighted factors such as the need to establish organisation and media presence, to develop policy platforms and the impact of frontloading. Surprisingly there was scant discussion of the importance of Iowa and New Hampshire and the focus of the campaigns in these states at this time. Also the general elevation in importance of the invisible primary in 2007 would have garnered more comment I would have thought. It was pleasing to see comparisons with other stages of the electoral cycle such as the primaries themselves and conventions. References to Dean (04) and McCain (08) to illustrate the relative insignificance of the invisible primary were recognised. Weaker candidates confused the invisible primary with the actual primaries. Please note the correct spelling of the former Attorney General is Gonzales (as in v. Carhart). References to third parties was not really relevant here.

2. Assess the extent to which the two major parties in the united states have become more ideological.

A popular question that was not tackled all that well. Many students seemed to struggle right from the start as they lacked an effective understanding of the term, ideological. Many focused on policy positions and whilst we were happy to accept this to a degree, it did detract from the overall quality of answers. At the core of this question, one might have anticipated discussion of the developments since 1994 and the polarising impact of Bush and Rove's electoral strategy. This was not much in evidence. There was a lot of discussion of whether the two parties share similar policies which was relevant but the notion of "more ideological" was rarely considered. Good students did counter the claim by reference to "broad churches / catch-all parties" and Bush's compassionate conservatism and the policy platforms of those seeking the presidential nomination at the present time.

Students should use a capital letter for Democrat and Republican.

3. Discuss the claim that pressure groups have too much influence in congress.

Another popular question but I would point to the fact that there were words in the question that needed to be considered. Those were of course "in Congress". We took a loose constructionist approach to the marking in that we accepted that discussion of the democratic worth of interest groups was valid to a degree in assessing the merits of groups having influence but we did want a congressional focus for a considerable part of the essay. As is always the case, those who mentioned US interest groups were rewarded and I would encourage centres to ingratiate themselves with examiners in the future by seeking examples other than the NRA and NAACP. Reference to the latter group seems to trigger some sort of Pavlovian reaction in students so that they have to refer to Brown v Board of Education. This encapsulates one of the fundamental problems that we frequently encounter on this paper. Namely that that case illustrates a lack of focus as it relates to interest groups and the Supreme Court and so is not really relevant and secondly, as the case is 54 years old, it is hardly at the cutting edge of developments in US politics. So, as mentioned in the opening paragraph, students do need to focus on the key words in the question and, where possible, to use contemporary examples. In this instance, the Abramoff affair might have been an obvious point of reference.

Committee was frequently misspelt.

4. Discuss the effectiveness of congressional checks and balances on the president

This question was generally tackled quite effectively. Once again it was possible to discriminate amongst candidates on the following grounds: Many students were able to outline the checks though at times this list was not comprehensive. Evaluation of the effectiveness of these checks was not always considered. There was some confusion over the Congressional checks in the realm of foreign policy. Specifically students needed to question the constitutionality of the War Powers Act and recognise that both Bush senior and junior gained Congressional resolutions before both Gulf Wars.

It was quite acceptable for students with a good knowledge of Supreme Court appointments to use this both here and later in the paper. References to divided government and post 2006 developments in the USA were also a means of accessing marks for assessment objective two. As was some discussion of the theories of presidential power provided this was not at the expense of detailed discussion of the Congressional checks.

5. Examine the claim that the senate is usually regarded as more powerful and prestigious than the house of representatives

This is a question that many students were ready for and they were able to provide detailed discussion based upon three main lines of arguments. These were:

- a. That the Senate is more powerful and prestigious
- b. That the House also has exclusive powers and could be regarded as the more important chamber
- c. That the chambers are co-equal.

6. Evaluate the usefulness of the president's cabinet

Rather like the question above, many centres had prepared their students well on this topic and it was generally well done. References to the EXOP were a relevant way in which to outline the role of cabinet in the modern presidency. There were few references to the Bush second term cabinet which placed great emphasis on loyalty and similarly contemporary references were outweighed by discussion of the usual suspects of Reagan and Nixon. I would have expected greater emphasis on the individual worth of cabinet members as opposed to its collective relative insignificance.

7. Discuss the process by which supreme court judges are nominated and confirmed

This was an interesting question in that the onus was placed upon the candidate to provide the points for discussion as there was not so much a clear prompt in the question. Some students struggled in this regard. They were able to outline the selection procedure and provide examples of those who had been accepted and rejected. What was frequently missing though was an attempt to place the process in context.

From a teaching perspective, the significance of the word "discuss" (and similarly "assess" and "evaluate") needs to be taught to students. It was clear from the paper as a whole that most candidates are aware of the more discursive nature of this A2 paper and quickly adopted an 'arguments for/arguments against' approach to most questions. In this instance, candidates needed to assess things like the democratic nature of the process and the degree of politicisation; its effectiveness in rooting out poor candidates and confirming the good.

Discussion of general concepts relating to the independence of the judiciary was not very evident and references to the UK too were not to the fore when they would have provided a useful point of comparison. There were some impressive answers to this question which is a credit to centres and possibly reflects the popularity of this topic.

8. Assess the merits of the united states' federal system of government

This was the least popular question on the paper and it did seem to attract some poor answers when candidates failed to recognise its focus on federal state relations and discussed federal government in the context of the separation of powers. Others wanted to talk about changes over time. Some were able to recognise some of the merits of decentralisation but failed to place in this a US context with detailed examples to illustrate their arguments.

In conclusion I would say that the overall quality of the papers was quite impressive. Very few struggled to apportion time correctly between the three papers and many wrote well providing detailed argument and perceptive comment. As stated earlier, centres (and students!) can be credited for their work in this regard. I hope that within this report there are ideas and comment that will help classroom delivery of this paper in the future. It is worth commenting that the new specification does not herald a radical departure from what we have now and so no great pedagogic reforms will be necessary in this respect.

One last comment is my almost traditional rant against poor spelling. It is almost the case that when I see the correct spelling of certain words that I feel the need to rejoice as there seems to be a universal incorrect default setting for certain words. This is graphically illustrated by an amalgam of this year's worst (best) below.

Report on the Units taken in January 2008

In 2007, there are several people who will seek the nomination of the partys. The Irish contender O'Bama faces a contest against Hilary Clinton. For the republicans, Makain is competing against Mike Hick and Rudy Juiliani. Whoever wins may seek to ammend the constitution and the right to bare arms. They will however need to recieve a majority of votes in the Electoral Collige first. They will also attempt to influence the Supreem Court by making appointments although their has been no Icelandic nomination since the rejection of Bjork. Bush knows what its like to loose a Senete vote as Myers was rejected in committee though he was able to win support for the Golf War. Wether Regan would have done the same is open to question.

So after the AS exams can I urge centres not to start with the War of Independence and the American Revolution but with "I before E except after C......" etc.

2695: Political Ideas and Concepts

With a limited number of candidates entered for this module it was difficult to gain a full appreciation of the range of ability. Those centres that did enter candidates had prepared the large majority of their candidates well. Many started their answers with clear definitions of the relevant concept and also used an impressive range of theorists to illustrate answers (picking up good AO1 marks). Where some candidates failed to gain better marks was for AO2. Unfortunately a number failed to fully address the questions set and often only described details. It is important that candidates read the questions carefully and respond appropriately to command phrases such as compare and contrast.

Individual questions

1. Compare and contrast the different models of representation.

This was a popular question with a majority of answers able to identify the four main models of representation (trustee, mandate, resemblance and delegate). Some students did tend to focus (and in some cases exclusively) on the two main models trustee and delegate. Whilst overall there was a good understanding of the basis of each model a significant number highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each model instead of comparing their relative approaches. Candidates who failed to make appropriate comparisons tended to be limited in their AO2 marks.

2. Compare and contrast the different models of political power.

This also was a popular question and one that most were able to exhibit an understanding of at least some of the models. In particular Luke 3 faces of power (decision making, agenda setting and thought control) provided the basis of many comparisons, although the top answers did extend these models to a range of different perspectives (e.g. Bachrach and Baratz, Dahl and Chomsky). Some weaker answers did confuse models of power with Weber's ideal types of authority.

3. Discuss the view that citizens have a right to be unequal.

Candidates that answered this question mostly had a good appreciation of the different types of equality and were able to associate these with relevant ideological perspectives. Fewer unfortunately focused upon the idea of the right to be unequal as outlined in the question (some very good answers were however able to associate this with traditional liberal and conservative attitudes to foundational equality as well as arguments relating to limiting equality to opportunity). Once candidates who failed to address this explicitly were limited in their AO2 marks.

4. Evaluate the main criticisms of dictatorship.

A number of candidates were able to highlight a range of relevant arguments including lack of accountability, legitimacy and consent, problems of succession, and limited respect for individual rights and liberties. The best answers were able to associate these with the views of theorists ranging from Rousseau, Arendt, Paine and Locke. Some answers, whilst rightly questioning the validity of these criticisms, did so in a manner that merely repeated the standard arguments for and against dictatorship. This was particularly frustrating when candidates started their answers

by highlighting the benefits of dictatorship! Once again more care was required in answering the specific question set.

5. Compare and contrast classical with modern liberalism.

Those candidates that answered question mostly had a good understanding of the two strands of liberalism and also were able to make direct comparisons (e.g. attitudes towards positive and negative connotations of liberty, the role of the state and approaches to the economy). Some however tended to focus upon contrasts and thus failed to explain what makes each strand fundamentally liberal (e.g. attitudes towards human nature and the sanctity of individual rights). Better answers were able to reflect the resurrection of classical liberal trends in neo liberalism and also accurately identify a range of relevant theorists associated with both strands (e.g. Locke, Mill Hobhouse, and Berlin).

6. Discuss the arguments in favour of civil disobedience.

This question highlighted similar problems as seen in Q4. A number of answers wrote prepared for and against answers on civil disobedience without focusing upon the command to initially focus upon the arguments in favour (too many answers began with Hobbes' rejection of civil disobedience). Those that did highlight arguments in favour were able to utilise the theories of amongst others, Gandhi, Thoreau, Rawls and Martin Luther King. There was good discussion of the principles behind civil disobedience, although some tended to broaden the discussion to include arguments in favour of revolution.

7. Assess the view that sovereignty best defines the concept of the modern state.

Whilst this question was not the most popular, it was pleasing to see that those that did attempt it avoided the temptation to write the standard 'euro-rant'. There was good appreciation of the importance of sovereignty both in its internal and external forms, highlighting the potential undermining of national sovereignty through international and internal developments. The best answers did highlight potential other concepts in the definition of the modern state including the possession of a monopoly of coercive power and territorial jurisdiction.

8. Contrast intergovernmental with supranational systems of decision making.

There were no answers to this question although this area appears on the specification!

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE (Government and Politics) (3834/7834) January 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

U	nit	Maximum Mark	Α	В	С	D	E	U
2595	Raw	100	76	68	60	52	44	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2596	Raw	100	68	61	55	49	43	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2597	Raw	120	90	80	70	60	50	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2694	Raw	90	71	62	53	44	36	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2695	Raw	90	70	61	53	45	37	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	Α	В	С	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:

	Α	В	С	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3834	15.8	39.5	63.2	78.9	100	0	39
7834	33.3	66.7	100	100	100	0	6

45 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see: http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations) 1 Hills Road Cambridge CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

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Telephone: 01223 553998 Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

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Telephone: 01223 552552 Facsimile: 01223 552553

