

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE A2 7834

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3834

Report on the Units

June 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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Chief Examiners Report

It was sad in one sense to see the end of the 'old' Curriculum 2000 three AS level units, but they had their failings and real improvements are coming in. Just to have two units which are similar in demand and technique will be a real step forward. However one of the concerns that all examiners reported, the lack of much real awareness of contemporary politics, will be something that centres need to note as there will be a much greater expectation of knowledge of current political events in the new AS. Sadly both of the new AS papers will be in the same session, so candidates will still have three hours of exams (possibly following on from another three hours in the morning) . Perhaps there is a case for some active pressure politics from centres to make this more humane? The willingness to argue and debate was there in most candidates, particularly on topics such as the EU and the media, but often there was not the required background knowledge there to make it into the 'reasoned' argument we are looking for. The other factor which needs addressing in some cases was the very 'historical' approach adopted by some centres, where candidates had a good knowledge of Thatcher, but knew little about Blair, and details on the 1983 election were clearly better known those of 1997 or 2005. It was good to see numbers continuing to grow and to see new centres at INSET for the revised specifications. We seemed to have slightly greater problems with literacy and legibility this year, so centres are reminded that quite a large number of marks are allocated to AO3 (and this will also be the case with the new specifications) where good English gains marks.

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

General

The ability of candidates to surprise never changes. We had got used in the past to a fair amount of hot air being generated on questions on the media but students had got so much better at rising above vague mentions of the Sun in 1992 (or was it 19997?) and Kinnock (or was it Major?) that we set Qu2 with confidence. Sadly we got the Sun with a vengeance and there were an awful lot of candidates who did not get out of L1 as they knew little more than the bit about 'turning out the lights'. The system can usually cope with one question (even though it is for 20 marks) being badly done generally but when there are two it gets difficult. For some reason candidates just did not want to answer the question set for Qu4. It had been set before in a slightly different form but for some reason candidates did not want to do what we asked for. When this paper was set about two years ago, we really thought they would find this one straightforward as it was all familiar material and questions. We were wrong.

1. they either knew a lot about the STV system or they did not. A surprising number simply did not do it. Experience has shown that there often is little knowledge out there on any system other than that used for UK General Elections, so we gave a fair amount of information and hints in the Source. On the whole they were ignored in spite of the question which said as always, 'using source A and your own knowledge....' Phrases like 'first preference' were there to help but were rarely spotted and the obvious proportionality of the system seemed to confuse many. As always we got quire a few lectures on the dangers of PR leading to 'coilition' governments.
2. this tended to be a major disaster area for many. All examiners reported long answers of minimal substance. We all lost count of the references to the Sun winning an election for someone, sometime. There was clearly as much confusion amongst candidates as there was amongst Sun readers in 1992 as to exactly what the headline was and what it meant. The number of candidates who added something of substance in addition to the points made in the Source was tiny.
3. Source C tended to be intelligently used but too few made use of Source A which may well have deprived them of L4 marks. Again we were surprised by many poor answers as we had set this question before. There was an overpowering need to write the case 'against' and all examiners reported that many candidates simply started with the case 'against' and relegated the case 'for' to a rushed final paragraph. Some argued that the case 'for' was not a strong one for which they got some credit, but to get into L4 there had to be a real focus on what we asked for and intelligent use of both sources. As always we got lectures on the evils of coalitions (in some cases this was the second time they air them.) The good ones developed a clear and systematic case, utilizing both sources and looking at not only the demerits of the current system, but the advantages of a new one. Some used their knowledge of the Scottish Parliament system very effectively here.
4. Some more surprises here. Lots wanted to write about the case against (proposition 13was aired yet again in a couple of centres). There were quite a lot of candidates who had written ineffectively at length in Qu2, then spent lots of time on the case 'against' in Qu3, started on the case 'against' here and then of course ran out of time before they could get around to doing what we asked which was referring to the case for 'greater use'. We got some very interesting discussions on the merits of using referendums for constitutional issues and of course the EU constitution and Lisbon featured prominently in the answers of the well informed. The very best tended to suggest that there was a very good theoretical case 'for' but what had happened in Ireland indicated that practicalities could be a deterrent.

2596: Politics of the UK

General comments

As has been indicated in previous reports, 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. On this occasion, candidates overwhelmingly found the questions to be on preferred aspects within the specifications. Questions one and two allowed many candidates to score highly in showing their knowledge. Questions three and four allowed candidates to score further marks for Assessment Objective one (knowledge) but marks for assessment Objective two were more wide-ranging turning these questions into the best discriminators.

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. A modest number of candidates devoted disproportionate time to Q1 (and perhaps also to question two) reducing the time available for the more valuable Q3 and Q4. Understanding this, should enable candidates to spend more time more profitably (about 22/23 minutes is recommended for question four).

Most candidates appeared to have heeded previous advice that they are not expected to write essays for Q3 / Q4. Quite rightly, they got straight on to the questions!

Specific Questions

Q1. Pressure group typology / examples

A straightforward question where many candidates scored full marks. Examiners were looking for modest development of the source material in defining insider/ outsider pressure groups. Reasons for candidates not achieving full marks were commonly because they failed to offer any examples (as required by the question) or offered only one example of each (rather than the two needed).

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.

Q2. Rights and Duties of UK citizen

This was a familiar question but on an area that is central in the specifications. Most candidates were able to identify a range of civil, social and political rights as well as a number of obligatory and expected duties. Occasionally candidates assumed that citizens have a right to a job or that exercising the right to remain silent will not have adverse consequences.

Marks in the lower bands were usually the result of;

- having an unbalanced answer of either rights or duties but not both;
- offering a modest number of rights / duties;
- not directly addressing the question by reporting initiatives on citizenship;
- offering lengthy, unneeded analysis of how adequately the rights are protect / abused.

A common misconception in many answers was that the Human Rights Act was forced upon the UK as a result of EU membership.

Organised, focused answers usually score L3 or L4 for Assessment Objective 3.

Q3. Redress against government department

This seemed to be an uncomplicated question and many candidates were able to describe a range of strategies available to citizens in dealing with unfair treatment from a government department. Many candidates were also able to evaluate the strategies in terms of costs, time involved, independence, likelihood of success or the status of any decision / award made. Nonetheless, this question was effective in terms of differentiation.

Where candidates score more modestly, it tended to be caused by;

- a limited range of strategies being identified;
- little development of what the strategy might involve (e.g. what steps might be undertaken by an MP);
- limited attempt to evaluate the strategy.

As has always been the case, where a question involves comment on the European Court of Human Rights or the European Court of Justice, candidates get very confused as to role and power of the two institutions. Indeed there was uncertain knowledge of the process of judicial review, often associated with criminal trials. Furthermore, there is often an exaggerated view of what individual MPs can achieve.

Q4. Pressure group methods and success.

Examiner saw many good thorough answers, using a range of evidence, often contemporary. As with question three, less successful answers tended to fall down on the AO2 elements and failed to genuinely assess the methods used or, if they assessed, then they did so in an unbalanced manner. Consequently, this question also was useful for differentiation. Best answers supported points being made with examples 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.

Points to note include;

Sometimes candidates ignored the focus of the question and offered an answer that was 'all I know about pressure group;

Candidates rarely show awareness of the pressure groups using the courts to pursue their goals (e.g. Greenpeace on nuclear energy);

There is often an exaggerated view of what individual MPs can achieve if they are lobbied;

Discussion and consideration of direct action was often exaggerated, often described as the main strategy of groups (and usually successful);

Candidates rarely give consideration to corporate interest groups and their often more discreet methods of influence.

Candidates were often uncritical and superficial in considering the use of the media, not recognising that the cost of advertising campaigns is prohibitively expensive and often unsuccessful. They also fail to recognise the fickle and often critical nature of the media. Candidates do not appreciate that (overtly) political advertising is banned for the broadcast media.

2597: Government of the UK

General Comments

Good candidates who had prepared themselves for the exam did well. Weaker candidates, or those who had not spent enough time revising, did not.

One notable feature of this year paper was a certain unwillingness of some candidates to do what the question asked for. For example, the questions requiring an outline of the 'role' of the whips and the cabinet often contained details of 'membership' or 'organisation' which were not rewarded.

Another feature was the extent to which candidates either misunderstood questions or included irrelevant material in their answers, for example, 'separation of powers' was mistaken for 'devolution' and discussion of the ECHR/HRA dominated answers to the question on the European Union.

Finally, while relevant examples will usually raise the quality of an answer, they should be reasonably contemporary. Some answers to the question on the cabinet got no further forward in time than the abolition of the CPRS in the early 1980s.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. **'The separation of powers'/the British system of government would be improved if there was a greater separation of powers**

Good candidates were able to explain clearly what the constitutional principle of the separation of powers was in Part (a) and went on to consider a number of reasons why a greater separation of powers would improve the British system of government in Part (b) and reasons why it wouldn't. The very best distinguished between separation of function and separation of personnel.

Weaker candidates found it difficult to develop their answer beyond the basic principle, or could explain what the various branches of government were, but not what was actually meant by the separation of the powers involved. There was also a tendency to assert that a greater separation of powers would be more democratic without any attempt to explain why this might be so and to focus only on the independence of the judiciary.

A number of candidates mistook the separation of powers for devolution and consequently gained no marks in either part of the question. As smaller number assumed that it referred to a separation between the Commons and Lords or the prime minister and the cabinet.

The word 'separation' was misspelt by a very large number of candidates.

2. **Role of the whips in the Commons/MPs should always support their party**

In Part (a) good candidates were able to describe a range of roles performed by the whips in the Commons. However, while most candidates could explain, often in great detail, their disciplinary role, fewer were able to outline their other roles. More importantly, too many candidates wrote about whips generally rather than focusing on their roles and some used 'MP' and 'minister' as interchangeable terms.

When Part (b) has been set on previous papers, it has produced a number of very good answers, but for some reason this year large numbers of candidates wanted to write about the 'collective responsibility of MPs'. Further, many candidates mentioned free votes without apparently realising that there is no party line to follow on such occasions.

3. Role of the cabinet/the cabinet is of little importance in the British system of government

As with Question 2, large numbers of candidates chose to ignore the instruction to write about the role of the cabinet in Part (a) and simply wrote all they knew about the cabinet instead. Such answers did not score highly.

Part (b) was often well done, though answers were inevitably PM-centric. Perhaps understandably, candidates found it harder to write about why the cabinet is still an important feature of the British government than why it isn't.

4. Main features of the higher judiciary/method by which the higher judiciary are appointed

Unlike the previous two questions, Part (a) of this question did invite candidates to write all they knew about the higher judiciary, but many chose to focus on just one feature, while others clearly had little idea what exactly constituted 'the higher judiciary', sometimes turning the question into an answer on the House of Lords. Where candidates did as the question invited, they often scored highly.

There were several good discussions of the method by which the higher judiciary are appointed, but although allowance is made for candidates who may not be completely up-to-date, some candidates clearly were unaware of developments in this area.

5. A constitution/constitutional impact of the EU has had on the UK

Candidates who knew what a constitution was and who could exemplify their description with contemporary examples scored highly in Part (a), however many candidates saw this question as a way of unloading, often at great length, their knowledge of the sources and principles of the constitution. Such information was useful in so far as it illustrated what a constitution is, but not when it was an attempt to answer a different question.

Part (b) required candidates to consider the constitutional impact of membership of the EU on the UK. The best candidates suggested a range of such impacts and were able to discuss their relative importance. Weaker candidates often ignored the word 'constitutional' entirely and wrote about any impact - political, economic or social. Others were unable to go beyond the basic sovereignty debate.

Critically, far too many candidates devoted significant parts of their answer to the ECHR/HRA for which they gained no marks whatsoever. Further, although the question asked to candidates to discuss the impact that EU membership has had, many took the opportunity to speculate about the possible future impact.

2694: US Government & Politics

All the questions on the paper were attempted in equal measure by the candidates. At the time of writing, without the support of statistical evidence, it seems the overall standard of answers was not of the same quality as the January cohort. As stated though, this is subject to verification.

Candidates who were able to effectively argue for and against an assertion in the question title by displaying a range of balanced arguments or to identify several relevant factors supported by (contemporary) evidence generally accessed the higher levels of the mark bands. It was striking though on numerous occasions, candidates seemed to struggle with aspects of essay writing like the use of paragraphs and the structuring of essays. Time was wasted in introductions and conclusions stating was going to be said and / or what had been said.

Centres would do well to spend some time on writing skills as well as covering the content of the specification. Inevitably all the usual spelling howlers were evident. I did think that in this year of all years that "Hillary" might not have been so prominent. The Electoral "Colledge" always reveals the usual suspects of "recieve" and my personal favourite, "rouge" electors. I never realised that shirt sleeves were such a sensitive issue in the USA with the right to bare arms enshrined in the Constitution.

1.) Discuss the merits of the presidential primaries.

A popular question which was not always tackled that successfully. Many of the standard arguments both for and against were not evident with candidates writing partial answers as a consequence. Better candidates were able to discuss the 2008 primaries in depth and consider how their dramatic impact on the political process. Those candidates who relied on previous seasons alone were at something of a disadvantage in this regard. Surprisingly, references to the role of New Hampshire and "Super Duper" Tuesday were not that prominent.

2.) Assess the importance of political parties in US politics.

Whilst not necessarily the only way to approach this question, it was anticipated that the theories of party decline and renewal (as outlined in the specification) would be to the fore with this question. This was not regularly the case. Some candidates seemed to want to write their third party essay whilst others used the opportunity to consider the differences between the parties. Rather like the January paper, candidates need to consider the wording of the question and its focus. In this regard "importance" was key to writing a focused answer. Outlines of the historical development of the parties and party system in the US were sometimes too lengthy.

3.) Examine the claim that pressure groups enhance, rather than harm democracy in America.

This was a standard question which was tackled reasonably well. Good candidates displayed a range of arguments both for and against for which AO2 marks could be avoided. A good discriminator was supporting evidence of US pressure groups and examples to support the claims made with regard to their role in a democracy. References to pluralist, elitist and New Right / Public Choice theories helped access the highest mark bands. Some candidates rather wasted time outlining the typology of pressure groups at the start of the essay when they should have approached the question directly from the outset.

3.) Discuss the reasons why the US Constitution has been so rarely amended.

Candidates who were able to identify a range of relevant arguments did well on this question. There were some excellent detailed case studies of recent failures. Surprisingly, whilst many referred to the elastic clauses of the Constitution, there was scant mention of the "interstate

commerce clause” which has been pivotal to the Constitution’s development with regard to the role of Congress and federalism.

4.) Evaluate the importance of Congressional Committees.

Rather like the above question, candidates who had a detailed knowledge of the role of the various congressional committees were able to do well on this question. Most answers were detailed and the best included references to recent examples of committee work such as the Senate Judiciary Committee and their role in the Bush appointments to the Supreme Court. Candidates would have done well to place committees in the broader context of Congressional / Presidential relations and the separation of powers.

5.) Discuss the factors which influence presidential power.

I was surprised at the quality of answers to this question. It may have been a while since it has appeared on an exam paper but theories of presidential power is clearly stated on the specification and one would have thought that this was a central topic which might have been tackled better than it was. Essentially, many candidates failed to identify a range of relevant factors. Comment on the Bush presidency and its varying fortunes were used to some degree though many seemed unable to go beyond relations with Congress. Even then discussion of presidential strategies rarely went beyond the statement that the president needs the “power of persuasion”.

6.) Evaluate the effectiveness of the Supreme Court in protecting rights and liberties.

Candidates who were able to provide a range of examples of rights and cases which illustrated the role of the Court as a defender of rights were duly awarded marks. There was some excellent discussion of recent cases from the Roberts Court which provided arguments both for and against. Similarly discussion of the present composition of the Court and its impact was also credited. As is always the case, examiners are impressed by those who go beyond Brown and Roe! Credit was given to those who considered the role of other institutions.

6.) Examine the claim that “the Electoral College is undemocratic and unnecessary”.

This was a popular question which was largely done well. Better candidates focused on “democracy” rather than reciting all that know about the operation of the process. The best considered “necessary” by considering the viability of reform proposals. There was some confusion with the primaries and the same was evident in question 1 in reverse. I will be glad not to have to read about California and Wyoming at least for another year!

2695: Political Ideas and Concepts

General Comments

Once again the quality of responses 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 with regards to the extent of theory they are expected to learn. 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.

Comments on individual questions

1. Discuss the importance of political participation in a democracy

This was a popular question and one that all too often resulted in a list of different methods available for citizens to participate in the democratic process. What was more important was the debate in theory about how important democratic participation is, ranging from advocates of regular participation in law making (Rousseau) or frequent elections (Paine), through to those that dismiss or question the importance or desirability mass participation (Plato et al.). There was some good use of a variety of elite theorists to question the relative importance of public participation. Also some candidates did make reference to how different democratic regimes have different amount of public participation, ranging at one extreme Athenian style democracy to proletarian style democracy at the other.

2. Evaluate the extent of similarity between power and authority.

This was a very popular question and one that displayed very good knowledge of typologies of power and authority, especially the use of Lukes and Weber. However a significant number of answers failed to effectively compare the two, instead only able to highlight that often the two are mutually necessary for governments to continue to rule. The very best answers were

exceedingly sophisticated in their comparisons bringing in the notion of power as an empirically observable sociological concept whereas authority was a less quantifiable philosophical idea. This level of sophisticated comparison obviously received great credit.

3. Evaluate postmodernism's critique of mainstream ideologies

This was a new question for this paper and one, although the topic had now appears on the specification, that centres had not prepared their students for. Those that did attempt it varied from exceedingly limited knowledge, often confusing Fukuyama as a postmodernist (whist his triumph of liberal democracy has resonance with postmodernist end of ideology ideas is in fact an alternative perspective on ideological convergence), to those with a sophisticated understanding of postmodernist critiques of traditional meta-narratives. The very best even had understanding of the ideas of thinkers such as Foucault and Lyotard.

4. Compare and contrast negative and positive liberty.

This was a popular question and whilst most candidates had a reasonable working knowledge of the most obvious differences between the two, few were able to go beyond economic implications into ideas of self mastery and extent of political participation advocated by positive liberty. There was good use of the ideas of Mill in advocating aspects akin to both concepts, as well as Berlin, Locke, TH Green and Rawls. Some weaker answers went little beyond being able to identify negative as freedom from and positive as freedom to, thus writing either very short answers or often very generalised or confused responses.

5. Assess the importance of citizenship in different theories of obligation.

This proved to be a very demanding question, where few were able to effectively go beyond outlining different models of obligation (social contract, natural duty and teleological). Where reference was made to citizenship it tended to be focused on the extent of popular influence in the theories of obligation. The question failed to engage of different interpretations of citizenship could impact on the extent of obligation expected in society. Those that did answer the question tended to be able to make use of the standard thinkers relating to obligation – namely Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Plato, Burke and Rawls.

6. Discuss where sovereignty should reside in the nation state.

As with all questions on sovereignty a significant number of students see it as an opportunity to raise their misgivings on the extent to which the EU has usurped the sovereign powers of its member states. Unfortunately this is not what the question was about. Candidates were required to consider where sovereignty should reside **within** the nation state. Theorists have tended to argue for divinely based monarchical sovereignty (Bodin), or indeed for a similar Leviathan style figure (Hobbes), popular sovereignty vested with the people (Rousseau), or an institution holding sovereignty in the name of the people (Austin). Reward was given if candidates did consider if in the globalized modern world internal sovereignty could potentially reside with international bodies in the form of nation states pooling their sovereignty.

7. Compare and contrast the different models of the role of the state.

This was a popular question and one that tended to be done well. Most were able to consider a variety of models including the night watchman classical liberal model, social democratic, developmental, collectivist, totalitarian models. Most answers focused upon the relative differences with regards to state intervention, especially in the economy. Some looked more at the models on the nature of the state, focusing on social democratic models, but did at least consider the role the state should perform. Weaker answers tended to be very descriptive of a few of the main models.

8. Evaluate the main criticisms of indirect democracy.

This proved to be a popular question, although many answers failed to focus upon the criticisms or indeed indirect democracy. Thus some answers received very little credit for discussion of direct democracy unless it was used to highlight criticisms of the limited engagement of citizens in indirect systems. Better answers were able to focus upon the criticisms both by developmental

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and radical democrats on one side and by elite theorists on the other. This question was a good example on how students must be careful in planning their answer before they start writing.

2696: Government & Politics: Research Essay

At inset it has been stressed that the key to a good research essay might lie in the preparation. If considerable thought is given to the research essay at this stage many potential later problems can be avoided. Candidates should set themselves a challenging question as a title. Examiners will always treat a demanding topic with sympathy. The question should invite individual research and independent thought. It is always welcome to read something that you have not read before and this serves to highlight the personal element of the essay. In this vein, if a candidate chooses a standard topic such as "Should the UK reform its electoral system?" it is likely that many of the traditional arguments will be centre stage and consequently the scope for independent thought and analysis might be limited. However, if the candidate considers "What insights into the case for electoral reform does the use of AMS for the Scottish parliament provide?" the question automatically would appear to invite more individual input.

Most topics can develop this potential if they are given a contemporary spin. Possible topics might centre on the party conferences as an insight into structure and ideology of the parties or recent EU developments such as the Lisbon Treaty and the issue of whether a referendum should be held on the matter.

Better candidates adopted such titles. Contemporary or local issues are a relatively easy way in which independent thought and analysis will be automatically included in the essay. The role of the teacher at this stage is all-important. Advice can be given on what is and what is not a viable essay. Questions should invite analysis and not be too broad. Double questions might be best avoided. Consideration should be given to the amount of material available.

As is also stated in the syllabus, centres should avoid essays concentrating on the same area of the syllabus. The syllabus is broad and there is no reason for candidates to focus on similar topics. Centres can contact me at MPS@bradfordgrammar.com for advice in this regard. Topics chosen should be drawn from the syllabus. Whilst some leeway can be given under the guise of synopticity, centres should avoid a main and single focus on countries other than the UK, USA and EU countries.

Most candidates are making excellent use of the internet and the use of sources was generally not a problem. Good candidates had made use of the press and relevant publications such as *The Economist* in order to provide the most up to date analysis. In this vein it is recommended that teachers and candidates keep a scrapbook of cuttings from the quality press for this purpose. Better studies clearly indicated the level of research through use of footnotes and a "true" bibliography which was extensive.

At the start of an essay, it is recommended that the candidate states what the objectives of the essay actually are. The constraints of the word limit are understood and it is entirely legitimate for a candidate to state that they intend to focus on certain aspects of a topic. It should be noted however, that once a title or objectives are set, they must be adhered to. Weaker candidates frequently lost sight of the purpose of their essay. The lack of a sharp focus was frequently the main factor in a relatively low mark being awarded. Given the marks available for AO2, analysis and evaluation, this is critical to the writing of an essay.

Better essays then had a clear introduction which outlined the purpose and course of the study. They maintained a sharp focus on the question throughout the course of the study and provided a balanced consideration of the case for and against the case in question. They avoided lengthy discussion of historical developments and general background. They attempted to reach a conclusion. They were widely read and this was readily apparent from the use of footnotes and the bibliography. There were many excellent essays, indeed several achieved full raw marks, but many failed to achieve high marks due to the failings outlined above.

Footnotes should not be used as means of circumventing the word limit. They should merely credit sources and develop lines of argument. Footnotes and bibliography should also provide the correct accreditation of a source, providing detail of the author, article, date etc. Candidates should also take time to proof read their studies. It is particularly disappointing to find spelling mistakes when a document could have been spell checked by a computer. Some studies seemed to leave analysis until the conclusion and provided too much narrative. Candidates should avoid small fonts, Times New Roman 12 might be considered to be the default font.

The above comments are largely copied from the 2003 report and it has to be said that there relevance of these comments remain as salient today as they were then. Centres who heed this advice are able to effectively crack the research essay and find the way, if not to enlightenment, at least to the higher levels of the marking levels for the assessment objectives. That does rather beg the question however of how many teachers use these reports to inform their teaching. It would certainly seem the case that a "centre effect" is apparent from the approach of the students. I suspect with one more year to go that there will little change in this regard.

Below I have also pasted advice and a check list from a previous report which could be photocopied and given to students.

TIPS FOR WRITING THE RESEARCH ESSAY

When the research essay is marked, the examiners are looking for various things. There are three marks;

AO1 24 marks 4 levels

- These are for knowledge and understanding.
- This is factual knowledge, detail etc.
- One way to ensure that you have done a lot of research is to have around 20 footnotes from a range of sources.
- Footnotes can be easily inserted into an essay. Just go to insert in Word and follow the instructions. Put the footnotes at the bottom of the page rather than at the end of the document.
- Try and quote from sources such as internet sites, newspapers, journals rather than standard textbooks which are not so impressive.

AO2 48 marks 4 levels

- What might be striking here right from the start is that there are twice as many marks for this objective than for AO1. Clearly this where you can gain (or lose) a lot of marks.
- AO2 marks are awarded for analysis and evaluation. This is in effect, recognition of argument. If AO1 marks are for describing, AO2 marks are for explaining why.
- In order to gain marks here then, try and include a lot of argument. That is why the title should always be a question and a good title might invite arguments both for and against.
- Credit is given for "independent thought" and students are expected to go beyond the standard textbooks. So if you focus on a topic such as electoral reform, you can show independent thought, by using a standard text book you can come up with the main arguments and by focusing on the most recent elections alone at home and abroad, you can show independent thought and research. You need to go beyond standard texts.
- You might try and use the arguments for and against as a template for an essay.

AO3 marks 4 levels

- This is for how you structure and present your arguments.
- A major problem for students is that sometimes they do not answer the question they have set themselves. This is critical to AO2 marks as well. You should always think about the question and refer to it directly as often as possible during the course of the essay.
- **The introduction.** It might be a good idea if you start the essay with reference to a recent event or quote. It is a nice touch.
- **Lay out your methodology.** Say how you are going to attempt to answer your question. What areas are you going to look at? Set yourself four or five objectives or questions that you will address during the course of the essay.
- **The conclusion.** This will be the last thing the examiner reads before putting a mark on the paper so try and use it! Make sure that you have answered your question. If you have argued for and against, try and decide which side of the fence you sit on. Can you say something else about the topic? Say something about the future for example.

CHECK LIST FOR THE RESEARCH ESSAY

1. Have you read and noted the chapter in the basic textbook as a starting point?
2. Have you looked on the following websites and done searches
 - BBC news
 - Guardian (especially special reports)
 - Wikipedia
 - General google search
3. Try and keep an eye on contemporary developments in your field. Anything from 2008-9 will be well received for example.
4. Start the essay with a quote or recent event
5. In the introduction or second paragraph, outline what you are going to do in your essay. Say how you will answer your question. This might mean you outline for or five parts or mini questions that you want to answer during the course of the essay.
6. Include as many footnotes as possible from as wide a range of sources as possible. 20 as rough rule of thumb.
7. Maintain a sharp focus on your question throughout the essay. You might do this by using the words in the question at the start or end of a paragraph e.g. *Another reason why Obama / McCain won the 2008 election was.....* or *....Thus the economy was a major factor in Brown's resignation.*
8. Make each paragraph self-contained with an argument and the evidence therein. You might separate each paragraph with a line and a change in the line of argument with a few lines. The same might be done for the introduction and the conclusion.
9. Make sure your conclusion provides a clear and effective answer to your question.
10. The font should be Times New Roman size 12.
11. Include a bibliography. This can be cut and pasted from the footnotes in part. Remember research is a key element of the essay. Like the footnotes, the bibliography can show the evidence of the amount you have done. Do not exaggerate though! 10- 15 sources might be used.
12. The word limit should be stated and this should not exceed 2,500 words.

2698: Government & Politics (US Option)

It is again pleasing to report that the proportion of very poor entries for this paper was small. Even the weaker candidates had prepared for the exam, and produced work which showed knowledge and awareness. Our main discriminator as usual was application and discrimination in using material learned, and sophistication of the eventual product – it was not lack of knowledge.

In addition, most centres have embraced our notion of synopticity as a rounded appreciation of Politics with a capital 'P', and there were many good references to topical issues, with events in Zimbabwe quite rightly featuring in essays on the merits of written constitutions, and the power of judiciaries. Such references this year were almost entirely relevant to the issue, and rarely thrown in without warrant.

Candidates could still make more use of the wording of the questions in some cases as a way to get the best from their material. One good example of this would be the question on pressure groups' role in undermining representative democracy. Only the very best candidates took the trouble to spell out what exactly is meant by the term 'representative democracy', and weaker candidates read the question as one asking if pressure groups were simply undemocratic, and bothered not at all to define that term. Some questions do not invite this – there is little gained, for example, in defining terms in answer to the question: 'Contrast the power of judiciaries..' but useful analytic marks can often be won in questions using terms such as 'representative democracy'.

Equally useful work could be done in a conclusion – though it is important that candidates do not simply repeat points they have already made in the body of the essay. A conclusion is an opportunity to tie together and make a little more sense of some of the themes explored, and is very often helpful to the reader and examiner.

Examiners felt that the questions on this paper allowed candidates to sort themselves with the quality of their answers, permitting the better prepared and more able candidates the framework to show their ability, while still giving an opportunity for others to earn marks for what they could do; the questions themselves did not pose an obstacle.

Question 1

Compare and contrast the most important influences on voting behaviour in different elections. Here the operative term was 'most important'. Candidates who did well were those who gave priority to certain influences, or who showed how some influences apply greatly in some contexts but less in others. The poorest answers were those which simply listed factors in voting behaviour, and made no attempt to show their importance. On a separate point, it was quite common to find, even among answers from able candidates, a confusion of *models* of voting behaviour with *factors* influencing voting. Thus it was very frequently suggested that partisan affiliation was an influence. A model is not itself causal, but lays emphasis on factors which *are* causal. Partisan affiliation (or its decline) stands in need of explanation quite as much as the voting behaviour it was often deployed to explain. One might as well try to explain why people like chocolate by suggesting that they are disposed to buy it – nothing has been achieved. This was a popular question, nevertheless.

Question 2

Discuss the view that political parties no longer matter.

This was a popular question, and done well by most who attempted it. Most candidates began by asking what role it is that political parties play in modern politics, before making the point that

many of these roles have been overtaken by some other process or vehicle of expression. So far so good. What was missing from the weaker scripts was much in the way of reflection upon the issue of what might we do *without* political parties. Traditional politics seems tired; the electorate seem inclined sometimes to think that 'they are all the same', and seem amused by independent, or celebrity candidates, and political fads of other kinds such as single issue groups, but when we consider how we might get along in their absence, parties have a more obvious relevance. Candidates might have pushed the analysis a little beyond the obvious.

Question 3

Assess the effectiveness of legislatures in passing legislation.

This was not a popular question. The better answers began with analysis of what could be meant by 'effectiveness' in this context. Good AO2 marks could be won by teasing this out, and of course, the answer could spin off in pursuit of different definitions. Is it the ability to pass large numbers of bills into law, or is it best measured by how difficult measures are dealt with, or how speedy the process can be? Can we define effectiveness in terms of the system used – how many veto points are there in the process; what is the impact of true bicameralism etc. Weaker answers tended to focus on relations with the executive to the exclusion of anything else. Even the best answers lacked a sense of structure, and were rather chaotic in organisation.

Question 4

Discuss the methods by which rights and liberties are best protected in different political systems.

This was not a very popular question, but was well done by those who did it. Many candidates seemed prepared for it, and went through a variety of different processes and institutions which might be ways in which rights are defended. Some of these were quite topical, mentioning attention-seeking Shadow Cabinet members, and the recent vote on 42 days detention. Weaker candidates uncritically advanced the notion that Bills of Rights are the best method, without countering it with Guantanamo Bay. Quite a few really alert students of the US Supreme Court mentioned the *Boumediene* decision which had been announced a few days before. (It is this kind of detail that really catches the eye of the examiners.) Top candidates mentioned the growing importance of international law.

Question 5

Assess the merits of an unwritten constitution.

This question attracted many candidates. The most obvious points (flexibility, poor defence of rights, recognition of limited role for judges) were made by the majority of candidates (and of course, the counterpart arguments concerning written constitutions). These points however, were rather uncritically advanced, and few acknowledged that the flexibility of the British constitution rather depends on who is in government, and how interested they are in constitutional evolution. The better answers to this question challenged the usual presumptions, and turned the arguments back on themselves.

Question 6

Discuss the advantages of a presidential executive over a cabinet-based executive.

Good candidates interpreted this question (correctly) as one about the nature of the executive itself, - whether it is best organised as a collective, or as one under the command of single individual. The debate was then over the contribution made by the cabinet, over the advantages of collective responsibility, over accountability, decisiveness, and speed of reaction time. Too many of the weaker candidates saw the question as one about relations with the legislature, as if the question was about a parliamentary system as opposed to a separated system. It was impossible to reward this kind of answer beyond a certain point.

Some of the better candidates made the point that some recent British Prime Ministers have played their part in such a way that the distinction between a presidential *system* and a presidential *style* diminishes.

Lastly, may I say I do not know what a 'priminister' is?

Question 7

Examine the view that pressure groups undermine representative democracy.

This was a very popular question, and frequently well done. Candidates deployed the growing membership of groups, their role in financing elections in the US, iron triangles, revolving door syndromes and direct action activities thought to be detrimental to democracy. Some however used the question as an opportunity to deliver a diatribe against trade unionism; this was rarely balanced by an appreciation of the positive contribution trade unions have made to the development of democracies. This was a trade mark of weaker candidates – their readiness to see other points of view was sometimes limited.

I repeat the comments I made above about the usefulness of defining terms – the better candidates proceeded from such a definition.

Question 8

Contrast the power of judiciaries in different political systems.

Students remain very confused about the precise relationship of the ECtHR to the EU, and the impact of the Human Rights Act of 1998. The ECtHR is not an institution of the EU. This aside, many answers to this question were competent and well-informed. Answers largely concluded that the American Supreme Court was most powerful since its power of judicial review extended to acts of Congress. The more nuanced answers made much reference to the European Courts, and precedents such as *Factortame* and *Belmarsh*, which had the effect of requiring a change to parliamentary statute. The British angle to this question was not dealt with as well as the American.

Up to date examples included references to the Stuart Wheeler case, seeking judicial review of the government's decision to proceed to ratification of the Lisbon Treaty without a referendum.

2699: Government & Politics (Political Ideas and Concepts Option)

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 effective synoptic style, integrating wide ranging knowledge of political theory alongside evaluation of contemporary British and EU politics. Once again 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'. There were unfortunately a significant number of very able candidates who achieved potentially fewer marks than they might have expected due to the lack of sufficient synopticity in their essays.

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 significant 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, Lukes, Giddens, 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 questions 5 and 7 where there was a focus on the pros and cons of parties and referendums respectively instead of changes in their relative importance in modern democracy.

Question Specific Comments

1. Assess whether the advantages of democracy outweigh its disadvantages in theory and in practice.

This proved a popular question and one that many centres had prepared their candidates for effectively. Some centres differentiated between the different types of democracy, dealing with the pros and cons of each separately. Whilst more able candidates were able to cope with this approach, in some cases candidates often resorted to writing very descriptive essays merely explaining the different types of democracy. Those candidates that dealt with generic pros and cons of the system tended to avoid this pitfall. There were also a significant number who dealt effectively with the theory aspect of the question but largely ignored the steer, 'in practice', despite the specific wording of the question. Some who did deal with the practical problems spent perhaps too long questioning the merits of FPTP as an electoral system; in some cases

this being the only practical application of democracy. The better answers displayed an effective range of theory ranging from prominent advocates of democracy (Rousseau, Mill, Paine etc.) to elitist critics (Plato, Pareto, Mosca, Michels etc.)

2. Examine the extent to which freedom of action and expression is under threat in modern democracies.

Whilst there were a significant number of candidates who attempted this question, many were not fully aware of the potential threats facing citizens in modern democracy. Weaker answers tended to focus on what freedoms are available in modern democracies and how these are protected. Few attempted to successfully distinguish between freedom of action and expression, instead most saw it as an opportunity to generically talk about rights and freedoms in very broad terms. Some answers did link the question to the impact of 9/11 and whilst the very best did have very good knowledge of recent anti-terrorist legislation, some could make only the most superficial references to recent legislation in the UK or otherwise. Better answers did consider the paradoxical relationship between the increased limitations on rights and liberties in the UK whether through anti-terrorism legislation, or through other imposed limitations (e.g. anti-smoking legislation) and the growth of rights and liberties protection through the Human Rights Act and Freedom of Information Act. This approach enabled the best answers to use appropriate theory from Mill, Berlin etc. on the meaning of liberty and extent of acceptable state intervention.

3. Examine what, if anything, is meant by the term 'new conservatism'.

Surprisingly this was not a popular question, although those that did attempt to answer it did tend to do well. Due to there being potentially different interpretations of the term, credit was awarded for those candidates that explained new conservatism in its New Right, neo-conservatism form, or indeed in the more peculiarly British form as a concept associated with Cameron's rebranding of Conservative Party values and image. Either form required comparison with traditional values and beliefs of conservatism and an assessment of whether this new style was merely an updated form of conservative pragmatism. The best answers were able to link effective theory ranging from Burke, Disraeli, Oakshott, Hayek etc. to modern practical strands of conservatism from Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s through to most recently David Cameron.

4. Examine the extent to which modern democracies suffer from democratic deficit.

This was a popular question, although the understanding of what actually constitutes democratic deficit varied greatly. For weaker candidates the term was used very generally to describe a range of subsequent problems including limitations on the rights and freedoms of modern citizens. Whereas a number of candidates quite rightly highlighted how concepts of representation (particularly the trustee model) and weaknesses in forms of parliamentary and executive accountability constitute a democratic deficit, too many answers lacked focus. Also many answers used good evidence on the potential deficit in UK democracy (albeit perhaps questionably the role of Britain's uncodified constitution received many mentions here as did once again FPTP), surprisingly few referred to potential issues relating to the EU. Once again better answers did utilise theory to explain the meaning behind the concept of democratic deficit with Rousseau receiving much mention here.

5. Discuss the view that political parties are no longer as important to modern democracy.

This once again was a popular question, albeit one whose focus was often too much on the pros and cons of political parties rather than their continued importance. Better answers did highlight problems of ideological convergence, growing disillusionment with the activities of parties and politicians (e.g. donation scandals in the UK) and declining turnout in many modern democracies. A number also commented on how other alternative sources of public participation can be considered as growing in importance (pressure groups received much comment). There

was also ample opportunity to relate to theory on critics of political parties (e.g. Rousseau) and factionalism as well as elitist views on the relative unimportance of parties as vehicles for influencing decision making (e.g. C Wright Mills).

6. Assess whether the cultural characteristics of liberal democracy are more important than its institutions and procedures.

This question was all too sadly disappointingly answered with many candidates attempting to answer the question without any real differentiation between democratic culture, institution and procedures. Some better answers did seek to define liberal democratic culture as civic culture, but this is also a narrow definition. What was surprising were those candidates that attempted to transform the question into the generic, 'how far is the UK a liberal democracy'. This suggests that a number of students are only prepared to answer set questions and cannot be flexible with their knowledge and understanding or analysis. Some answers were very effective in considering the importance of cultural characteristics in the UK by comparing the deficiencies of its procedures (elections etc.) and institutions (Parliament etc.) with the US. Others also successfully used case study evidence of the lack of democratic culture in new Middle Eastern democracies (Iraq and Afghanistan) whom have had democratic institutions and procedures grafted onto religious based value systems, not necessarily conducive to liberal democratic values.

7. Examine the view that referendums are increasingly important in modern democracy.

Once again a number of candidates saw this question as an opportunity to examine the pros and cons of the use of referendums. Whilst this was partially relevant by not attempting to address why the use of referendums can be considered to be increasingly important (e.g. declining electoral turnout, ideological convergence and the particularisation of modern politics) many answers lacked full focus. What was also surprising was just how few examples of the use of referendums were made in many essays – some were only able to refer to 1975 (EC entry sic!) and devolution. At the other extreme there were some very varied examples drawn from the UK (regional and local), US states (California, Arizona etc.), EU states (France, Denmark, Holland and very contemporary reference to Ireland and Lisbon Treaty), and Switzerland. Theory once again was focused around the relative merits of direct democracy in comparison to representative systems.

8. Assess whether modern democracy is more elitist than pluralistic in practice.

This proved to be a very popular question and one that was largely done very well. There was some excellent analysis of both elitist and pluralist theory with wide ranging use of theorists from both camps. There was also some good analysis of the extent of pluralism versus elitism in modern democratic systems. This essay above all others tended to be the one that candidates displayed the greatest amount of synopticity.

Grade Thresholds

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

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2595	Raw	100	72	64	56	48	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2596	Raw	100	75	67	60	53	46	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2597	Raw	100	87	77	67	58	49	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2694	Raw	90	71	64	57	50	44	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2695	Raw	90	70	63	56	49	43	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2698	Raw	120	95	84	73	63	53	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2699	Raw	120	90	81	72	63	54	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie 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	25.6	45.5	62.5	78.4	88.6	100	1183
7834	29.4	54.7	77.6	92.1	98.2	100	890

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

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