

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE **A2 7834**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS 3834**

Report on the Units

January 2009

3834/7834/MS/R/09J

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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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Advanced Subsidiary GCE Government and Politics (3834)

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Chief Examiner Report

The overall performance at AS was a little uneven compared with previous years, clearly the majority were retaking papers, whereas in the past the majority were doing them for the first time in January. This led to there being less quality at the top end, but also far fewer in the lower grades. There was also greater familiarity with the requirements of the specifications in terms of source use in 2595, or the need to 'discuss' when asked in 2596 etc. On the whole candidates coped well with the different requirements of the three AS units and got the appropriate level of depth. One sensed that there was experience and greater maturity there, but not always the depth of knowledge needed. Performance in the two A2 units was as sound as ever. Slight variants on traditional topics caused problems for those who preferred to write prepared answers on 2694, but it was good to note an increasing number of candidates on that paper who had a really sound grasp of contemporary US politics and used that knowledge effectively.

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

General Comments

It was good to see a good range of sound scripts for what was the penultimate examination for 2595.

1. It was surprising that so many knew about the timing between European parliamentary elections and did not know what the rules were about UK general elections. Most picked up the hint in the source and were aware that the Prime Minister has some flexibility, but few knew about the 5 year maximum.
2. Rather a large number of candidates spent a lot of time in (a) answering (b), and then wasted time in repeating it all over again in (b). The best gave a clear definition of what is quite a complex topic, and used Source B to illustrate which party's supporters may well have voted tactically in the 2005 election (That date might have given a hint to those who got the timings wrong in Question 1). There were lots of suggestions as to why it has 'arrived' on the UK political scene, and we gave full marks to those who had at least two developed points. The most popular reason was its inevitability in a FPTP system, with factors like the growing partisan dealignment and the increasing sophistication of the electorate, use of internet etc as other valid ideas.
3. It was good to see two things with this answer. The first was that the majority used the source that helps with picking up the AO1 marks. The second was that only a determined minority spent much time on the case 'against'. There were plenty of good answers which dealt with the merits of the STV and other systems, pointing out the wider choice etc it offers, and also at the same time pointing out the possible flaws in the current UK system of wasted votes/safe seats (and those who thought about it – the evils of tactical voting...) As always there were the diehard defenders of the current system, predicting doom and gloom and 'coalitions'. The latter tended to find themselves short of time to deal with Question 4. A clear case 'for', perhaps arguing why one reason is more important than others, is all that was expected.
4. Normally voting behaviour questions attract a lot of good answers. The warning sign was a large number of candidates who seemed to make heavy use of the source, which usually indicates a lack of much 'own knowledge'. There seemed to be little in-depth knowledge around on the 2005 or 2001 elections. Few knew which social groups had voted which way in those elections, and rather a lot felt that the social structures model was entirely about class, and did not consider factors like gender or race at all. The best looked at the social structures model and applied it to 2001/5, quoting some accurate and relevant data from those elections, and then went on to look at other models in the light of those elections. Some were good at developing the other suggested models in detail, which gained marks. However for many the mention of the word 'media' in the source proved to be the classic trap for the unwary, and we got our usual overdose of it 'was the Sun wot won it', referring to almost every election since 1945.

2596: Politics of the UK

General comments

This paper produced the inevitable range of answers but with conspicuously few stronger scripts than has been the case in previous January sessions. Possibly this is attributable to the fact that candidates were likely to be taking the paper as a 're-take' having been disappointed with their initial performance.

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

As has been reported in the past, questions three and four often prove 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. On this occasion, question two also produced a wide range of scores. As ever, best answers were focused directly on the question from the start.

Questions

Q1. (Citizenship)

A generally straightforward question that saw most candidates score in levels 3 and 4 for both of the assessment objectives involved. Whilst most candidates were able to associate rights and responsibilities with citizenship (often with examples), a smaller number were familiar with the conventional definition of citizenship defining the relationship between an individual and the state. References to 'active citizenship' were rewarded.

Q2. (Advantages of the Human Rights Act).

Many candidates found this question challenging. Many were able to outline some of the rights identified in the HRA but fewer spoke of codification effect, clarifying basis of rights, changed role for UK judiciary, etc. Many indicated that such rights as due process of law, free speech etc. appeared for the first time in the UK or that this was the first time that rights existed in any 'written format.' There was much reference to the Act as 'entrenched' which, of course, is not the case.

As has been the situation in the past, anything which links 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', unfamiliar with the fact that the HRA was a political choice made by an elected government. Erroneous suggestions were made that the Act compelled minimum wage legislation and Social Charter. Another confusion over the Human Rights Act was the mistaken belief that it created a new right for UK citizens to access the Strasbourg court for the first time, rather than reducing the likelihood of going to Strasbourg.

Q3. (greater importance of pressure groups)

A challenging question for many candidates. Students often assume that questions about pressure groups inevitably require a definition and a lengthy typology. Candidates who spent most of their time on these areas tended not to get to the focus of the question and scored modestly as a result. Weaker candidates tended not to offer much beyond the material reported in the source whilst others answered a question as to 'whether or not groups benefit democracy' – not quite the question asked. Many answers offered unsupported opinions and thus scored modestly in Assessment Objective 2 (analysis). Better answers focused on the question and offered example evidence to justify their comments.

Q4. (Ideological differences between Labour and Conservatives)

Candidates on the whole found this question the most challenging question on the paper. Relatively few candidates discussed 'ideology' and most tended to focus on very contemporary policy issues such as management of the economic crisis. Even here, understanding was

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

uncertain with quite a number of candidates reporting that Gordon Brown was an 'enthusiastic, old Labour nationalising PM' (e.g. over Northern Rock) rather than recognising that circumstances forced the government to act against their preferences.

Most answers spoke of Labour moving from left to centre and Conservatives moving from right to centre but many offered little more than this. Relatively few answers were able to explain change beyond the desire for electoral success.

There was evidence of opinionated answers where candidates clearly have strong views that Labour and Conservatives are identical but they offered little or no evidence in support. Good answers showed some knowledge of relevant ideology (e.g. socialism) and considered both the degree of change and reasons for the change (e.g. industrial change, socio-economic developments, etc).

2597: Government of the UK

General Comments

As in previous years, candidates who had prepared themselves for the exam did well, those who had not spent enough time revising, did not. And, as in previous years, the key to getting a good mark was to answer the question. Examiners reward focus, balance, range and depth if a candidate ignores the question and simply writes about the topic they will get little credit.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. Sources of the British constitution/Britain would be better off with a written constitution.

Good answers identified a range of sources for Part (a) and provided examples of each. Weaker answers didn't. Fewer candidates than usual wrote about the principles of the constitution, but the need to explain what a constitution was before getting on with the business of outlining the sources of the British constitution was widespread and unnecessary.

Good answers included arguments for and against written constitutions and were illustrated with contemporary examples.

2. Role of the House of Lords/the House of Lords is no longer important.

In Part (a) candidates were able to describe a range of roles performed by the Lords, but too many adopted the kitchen sink approach and threw in everything they knew about the second chamber. If candidates just did what was asked of them, they would save time and get better marks.

In Part (b) the expectation was that candidates would discuss the importance of the House of Lords. Weaker answers often just described the House of Lords generally and irrelevantly, for example, by considering the case for reform. The fact that the Lords is unelected or not typical of the electorate does not necessarily mean that it is unimportant.

3. Cabinet and prime ministerial government/Britain now has a 'presidential' style of government.

Most candidates knew their definitions and could distinguish between cabinet and prime ministerial government. How good the mark was depended on the quality of the response.

Part (b) was often effectively answered by candidates who were clearly well-versed in the leadership styles of recent prime ministers.

4. Role of the UK judiciary /British judges should have more power.

This question attracted a fair number of responses, but few very good ones. Only a handful of candidates had a comprehensive knowledge of the various roles of the judiciary in the UK and even fewer were able to discuss at any length whether judges should be given more power.

As with other questions asking candidates to 'outline the role of' in part (a), those who focused on role did well. In such cases there is no need to discuss or contextualise.

5. Role of three major EU institutions/no more states should be admitted to the EU

This question attracted fewer responses than in previous years and although Part (a) was usually quite well done, fewer candidates were aware of the range of arguments for and against further enlargement.

2694: US Government & Politics

The paper invited answers on all the questions set. Not surprisingly perhaps, the question on voting behaviour was probably the most popular. There were several new angles to questions on standard topics and it is hoped that this will be a feature of questions on the new specification. Centres will therefore need to ensure that their students are aware of the importance of the wording of the question and try to ensure they avoid writing pre-packaged answers to similar questions that have previously been set. Better students provide focused answers to the actual question set whilst those who provide “one they have prepared earlier”, might struggle to reach the higher mark bands. As has always been the case on this old specification, and will continue to be so on the new one, references to contemporary developments will be rewarded. Where possible this will be flagged in the title with words like “today” and the papers are and will be set in anticipation of future developments in US government and politics. Centres would do well to incorporate a study of current developments into their teaching strategies. This could include case studies and paper reviews. Journals such as the Economist, web sites such as the Washington Post, CNN and New York Times, TV programmes such as the Late Show on E4 could all assist in this purpose. This will help bring the study of US politics to life and also reap exam dividends.

1 Discuss the view that the campaign is the most important influence on voting behaviour in presidential elections.

As stated, probably the most popular question on the paper. There were several key words in the question – campaign, voting behaviour and presidential elections. Consequently students needed to discuss presidential elections rather than primaries and voting behaviour rather than just Obama’s election in 2008. The best answers had made use of the readily available data on voting according to race, religion, gender, region, income etc. and provided an analysis of developments during the most recent campaign. Others then failed to make reference to US voting behaviour at all and provided an analysis of Why Obama won based upon short term factors alone. Reference needed to be made to growing dealignment which needed to be countered by the considerable evidence of stability in voting patterns. This would have invited an appreciation of how the campaign could be influential to some but not to others. On previous reports I have commented upon the references to “historical” Supreme Court rulings, on this essay the Nixon-Kennedy debate and Daisy Chain advertisement were frequently mentioned. This was striking when one realises these examples are now nearly 60 years old. Given the saturation coverage of the 2008 election, more might have been expected with a contemporary focus.

2 Analyse the extent to which Congress has become more partisan since 1994.

This was not that popular a question although it was by no means passed over. Indeed there were some excellent answers to this question as it was quite open ended and provided scope for discussion of many issues. In this instance, given the wording of the question, discussion of Gingrich and the Contract with America and the Clinton administration were appropriate. This invited an assessment of the Bush administrations and their impact upon the Congress: His efforts at Bi-partisanship and the impact of 9/11, the style of the administration and consequences of the 2006 mid terms and subsequent developments. Better candidates were able to consider the nature of party politics in terms of ideology and influences on voting in the Congress.

3 Evaluate the claim that pressure groups assist democracy in the US today.

A popular question that was not always well attempted. There were two major shortcomings to answers to this question. Firstly some candidates did not make enough references to the US. In order to access Assessment Objective 1 marks on this question and others, candidates should be drilled to mention as many US examples as possible. Secondly there are many arguments for and against pressure groups in a democracy and candidates should be able to discuss a range rather than a few. Some were restricted by examining the purpose of pressure groups which was not always appropriate and restricted discussion. Better candidates made a judgement using pluralist and elitist criteria to assist them.

4 To what extent can the Senate and House of Representatives be regarded as co-equal chambers?

This question was generally well done by most of those who attempted it. They were able to discuss the shared and the exclusive powers for the senate and House. A judgement did need to be made and again candidates needed to focus on the meaning of the question and the significance of "co-equal". There was considerable discussion of prestige which was recognized. Common failings were for students to make factual errors about who could do what and inevitably the proportions needed to pass legislation, confirm appointments, treaties and impeachment proceedings. There was some good discussion of the differing reactions of the chambers to The Contract with America, Clinton's impeachment and Bush's bail out bill.

5 Assess the opinion that the US constitution does not fulfil its original purpose today.

A popular question that was not always well done. Candidates seemed to miss the most obvious aspect of the question which invited a discussion of the separation of powers and checks and balances. If the protection of rights was added to this there was great scope for discussion. Better candidates looked at contemporary relationships between the branches of government and considered if these principles had changed over time and whether they still applied today. Some students wanted to offer their "Why have there been so few amendments to the constitution" essay which serves to illustrate the need for a good essay technique rather than rote learning.

6 Discuss the view that the Supreme Court has become a political rather than a judicial institution.

There were some excellent answers to this question. Candidates considered the appointment process and rulings of the Court to determine the role it played. More might have been expected about the voting blocs on the Court rather than just a discussion of individuals. Inevitably Roe and Brown featured highly although Bush v Gore was also used to good effect. Better candidates were able to consider the most recent rulings from the Roberts Court such as Boumediene v Bush, Rasul v Bush and Gonzales v Carhart.

7 Examine the extent to which all presidents are doomed to be "lame ducks" in their second term.

This was question was attempted by many although not always successfully. Candidates needed to define the meaning of a "lame duck" and a loss of power would have been sufficient in this regard. Discussion of presidencies and the theories of presidential power should have followed. It was disappointing not to read a great deal on the Bush administration and the contrasting nature of the first and second terms and the causes of this. Good answers made reference to Clinton and Reagan.

8 Evaluate the role played by the Electoral College in recent presidential elections.

This was an essay which attracted a lot of “Should we reform the Electoral College” essays. Of course this was not the question although most of the material surrounding the reform debate could have been used to good effect. Good candidates were able to refer to 2008 and 2004 as well 2000, which provided different arguments in each case.

If centres are to take anything from this report, I would suggest it is that

1. Greater emphasis is placed upon the teaching of essay technique. It is this examiner's intention where possible to set new questions on the topics which would be accessible to students but which will require some forethought before they are attempted. Nothing radically different from what has gone before, but the nuances of words and the need to focus on the question will require careful attention.
2. Students are encouraged to consider the most recent developments in US government and politics and to incorporate them into their essays.
3. The teaching of the course should begin with a spelling test with the following: Hillary, receive, amendment, McCain, Montesquieu.

2695: Political Ideas and Concepts

With a relatively 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. Discuss how governments best gain and maintain their authority

A very popular question where candidates displayed a good appreciation of the concept of authority. Weaker answers tended to want to answer a separate question, relating the similarities between the concepts of power and authority and some talked almost exclusively about power with little attempt made to address the concept of authority itself. Better answers were aware of different ways in which authority can be achieved and maintained with the use of Weber's models of authority often analysed. Some very good answers even distinguished between different types of regimes, identifying different strategies offered by both democratic and dictatorial style governments.

2. Evaluate the criticisms of civil disobedience

This question was also very popular and most answers were aware of some of the main objections to civil disobedience, especially relating to conservative objections. Where many answers went wrong was that they were expecting a standard essay on the arguments for and against civil disobedience, and some even spent much longer on the arguments for than against. The pro-civil disobedience arguments could have been made relevant if they were deployed to dispute some of the ideas opposing civil disobedience, but many answers failed to use them in this way.

3. Discuss the view that legal sovereignty is meaningless without political sovereignty

Most of the candidates who answered this question did appreciate the distinction between legal and political sovereignty and related this to de jure and de facto application of government power. There were pleasingly fewer answers that tried to relate the question to issues relating to the loss of UK sovereignty, although some still tended to move to an irrelevant discussion on internal and external sovereignty.

4. Analyse the social contract theories on the role of the state

Many candidates attempted this question and most were able to identify the main social contract theorists (Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) and often made explicit reference to the different ideas on the role of the state. Unfortunately weaker answers tended to either just describe the ideas of the social contract theorists only making implicit reference to their attitudes on the state or only described the various models of state intervention. Better answers made direct comparisons between different social contract theorists and the very best even updated their consideration of social contract ideas by including Rawls in their analysis.

5. Discuss the ways in which democracy avoids a tyranny of the majority

This proved to be a popular question but one that was not that well answered. Many candidates wanted to discuss different aspects of democracy without displaying a clear appreciation of the meaning of majority tyranny. Better answers directly understood the concept understanding its

links to protective democracy and were able to identify popular ways to avoid it (indirect democracy, separation of powers and other checks on government to protect individual rights).

6. Discuss whether conservatism is an ideology

Most candidates who answered this question had a good understanding of the central principles that underpin conservative ideas. Better answers also displayed a clear understanding of what an ideology is and applied this through the use of appropriate criteria to conservative themes. The very best also distinguished between different strands of conservative suggesting some were more ideological than others.

7. Evaluate the different interpretations of animal rights theories

This was not a popular question and those that did answer it failed to really understand the different interpretations of animal rights theories. This topic is on the specification but not one that many centres appear to cover.

8. Discuss who, or what, should be represented in a representative democracy

Those candidates that did answer this question were expecting a question on the models of representation and whilst this information could have been used in a relevant manner, many only described the models without highlighting the who or what in the question. Better answers directly addressed these two themes highlighting a range of issues from geographical, sectional interest, characteristic and ideological representation.

Grade Thresholds

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Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2595	Raw	100	70	61	52	43	35	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2596	Raw	100	64	56	49	42	35	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2597	Raw	120	89	78	67	57	47	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2694	Raw	90	69	60	52	44	36	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2695	Raw	90	69	61	53	46	39	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	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	11.9	33.3	50.0	76.2	92.9	100	42
7834	0	55.6	100	100	100	100	9

51 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

14 – 19 Qualifications (General)

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

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Facsimile: 01223 552553

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