

GCE

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE **A2 H495**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H095**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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

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F851 Contemporary Politics of the UK

General Comments:

Candidates found this year's paper accessible and many scored highly. The best candidates wrote highly focussed, well-balanced and detailed responses in good English, deploying a wide range of arguments. The weaker responses lacked some, or all, of these features.

When marking, examiners look for a range of qualities, principally focus, balance, range and detail, as well as the quality of written communication. To do well, candidates' answers need to demonstrate all of these characteristics.

For example, on this year's paper, Q2 asked candidates to discuss the factors that might influence the methods a pressure group uses. The focus was therefore on 'factors' and not 'methods'. Strong responses identified a factor, for example, status, that might influence a pressure group's choice of method and then went on to discuss how and why this was the case. They also provided an example, or examples, to support their contention. Weaker responses often identified a factor but then left it to the reader to determine how this might affect a pressure group's choice of methods. Poor responses simply described a number of methods. As a general rule, the more an examiner has to infer, the lower the mark is going to be.

At the top end of the mark range, even relatively small matters of presentation can make a difference. For example, Q1b asked whether the UK had a multi-party system, Q3 if the time had come to reform the way MPs are elected, Q4 whether the campaign decided the 2015 general election and Q5 if class and age still influenced voting behaviour. Although credit is given for all relevant points, the best answers argued in favour of the suggestion in the question first, before going on to consider why this might not be the case, so, yes, the UK has a multi-party system/no it doesn't; yes, we should reform FPTP/no, we shouldn't; yes, the campaign did decide the outcome of the last general election/ no, it didn't; yes, class and age are still important influences on voting behaviour/no, they are not.

Comments on Individual Questions:

1a Often very well done. The best candidates were able to provide clear and accurate definitions of two-party and multi-party systems and to use the source material and their own knowledge to support their explanations. A number of candidates used European and American examples to good effect. It was not necessary to cite non-UK examples in order to gain full marks, but, in the context of this question, it was entirely legitimate to do so. Rather than focus just on what the terms meant, weaker candidates often broadened their focus and, for example, discussed explanations, or listed their advantages and disadvantages. This was not required and was not rewarded.

1b Often well done. The best candidates were able to provide a range of arguments both for and against the view that the UK was now a multi-party system and supported their views with detailed evidence. The best answers looked beyond Westminster and considered a wider range of arguments. They also paid close attention to the wording of the question and in particular the injunction to discuss the view that the UK now has a multi-party system. Weaker candidates often spent too much time and space placing their analysis in an historical context.

2. Frequently well answered. An accurate and consistent focus on the question was required to gain high marks. The best candidates considered the factors that might influence a pressure group's choice of method. As with many questions, what distinguished the good candidate from the very good was the range of points made as well as their quality. Weaker candidates often focussed on pressure group methods, or the reasons for their success, rather than the factors that might influence a pressure group's choice of methods.
3. Often well done. Most candidates knew the strengths and weaknesses of the current system used to elect MPs, but the best used this knowledge to address the question set and to discuss whether the time had come for fundamental reform. While the existence of, arguably, superior alternative systems can be a valid point in favour of reform, weaker candidates sometimes ended up describing and assessing a range of other electoral systems in considerable detail at the expense of more relevant points.
4. Some candidates knew a lot about the 2015 general election and were able to use this knowledge to discuss whether the campaign had been the decisive factor in determining the outcome. They provided a detailed assessment of the campaign itself but also of the other factors which might have had an impact. Weaker candidates either ignored the instruction to discuss the 2015 election and wrote about elections in general, or they lacked the detailed knowledge of 2015 to score highly.
5. A very popular question, though not as well done as it might have been. Many candidates knew their models and factors, but not all of them used this information to answer the question. The best candidates discussed the correlation between class, age and voting and considered the impact of class dealignment before going on to reflect on the relative importance of other factors. They also supported their case with detailed examples. Weaker answers often lacked this detailed evidence and sometimes included factors which they themselves admitted were unimportant. The Dominant Ideology model, as opposed to the idea that the media may influence voting behaviour, continues to be poorly understood.

F852 Contemporary Government of the UK

General Comments:

There was an encouraging increase in candidates directly answering the questions set this year, with many able to retain a clear focus on the question throughout each essay. The most straight-forward way of doing this remains starting each paragraph by using the terms of the question.. Most candidates now successfully adopt such a structure, and produce a series of relevant paragraphs in each essay.

Many candidates also made good use of contemporary examples to support their points, with the best answers being illustrated with examples since 2010, and some even employing relevant developments in UK government since the 2015 general election.

That said, weaker answers tended to discuss a range of relevant points, but only in very general terms. The best answers provide clear, relevant and specific examples that back up (or refute) a point being made. Doing this has a significant impact on AO1 marks.

Although conclusions can often help secure more AO2 marks if candidates can successfully demonstrate why one argument is more convincing than another, introductions are not recommended given the tight time constraints of AS essays.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Q1 (a)

Most candidates were able to outline the general composition of the cabinet in terms of its structure and the names of some cabinet ministers. Level 4 answers also described examples of reshuffles, the qualifications/requirements for appointment and the make-up in terms of political, regional, ethnic or gender balance. Candidates needed to focus on composition to be awarded marks. Some focused on the roles of cabinet, and were less successful.

Q1 (b)

The best answers focused on whether the cabinet has become more important since 2010, with many successful essays discussing the ways the coalition impacted on the role of the cabinet. Many candidates argued successfully that the coalition meant that more decisions were taken at cabinet level, and that the power of the prime minister had been reduced. There was some excellent knowledge of the role of the 'quad' in arguing that cabinet had not in fact become more important. Some candidates also engaged in an effective discussion of the importance of cabinet since 2015, taking in Cameron's full powers of patronage, the EU referendum and the resignation of Iain Duncan Smith. The main discriminator in this question was whether the answer focused on the period since 2010 or not. Whilst knowledge of the Blair and Brown era was very useful if it was used to compare the pre- and post-2010 era, less successful answers spent too much time describing the New Labour era without linking it to the question.

Q2

Many candidates were able to present a balanced view of the power of the House of Commons, with most understanding the argument that a government's majority tends to weaken the chamber. There were some excellent answers arguing that the House of Commons does not have too little power, and has in fact played a more significant role in recent years. This often included knowledge of the increased rebelliousness of MPs, opposition days, urgent questions, the impact of the Wright reforms and the work of committees. At the same time, less successful answers struggled to provide real examples of the work of the House of Commons much beyond Prime Minister's Questions.

Q3

This question elicited some excellent responses. Most candidates had a very good grasp of the range of constitutional reform since 1997, and most attempted to discuss whether the constitution had been transformed as a result. Some very good answers assessed this transformation in terms of the impact of the reforms on the principles of the constitution, such as the decline of the unitary state and rise of the 'quasi-federal' or 'union' state after devolution. The incomplete nature of House of Lords reform, or the precariousness of the Human Rights Act in light of the Conservative government's plans for a British Bill of Rights, were often held up as examples of the constitution not being transformed. Weaker answers tended to just describe the reforms and not consider the 'transformed' aspect of the question.

Q4

The best responses here outlined various roles of the judiciary, and then assessed each role one-by-one using examples. Most candidates were able to identify four or five relevant roles, and were aware of the impact of the Constitutional Reform Act. However, to reach Level 4 candidates need to be able to employ relevant examples to support the point they are making, and only a minority of responses did this. The best answers knew some cases taken by the Supreme Court, for example, or occasions when they had issued a declaration of incompatibility.

Q5

Most candidates were able to put forward a range of relevant points in answer to the question. What tended to make an answer successful, however, was a range of relevant points combined with sound knowledge of how decisions are made in the EU, and the role of the various EU institutions. Those that demonstrated knowledge of the Council, the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice did very well indeed. Some candidates wrote about the European Court of Human Rights, which is not part of the EU.

F853 Contemporary US Government and Politics

The paper did not seem to present any particular difficulties to candidates. All questions were attempted in relatively equal measure. The compulsory questions did not present any great difficulties and many were able to score well on both of these. Whilst most of the questions dealt with familiar themes, there was a need to focus on the precise wording of the question set. Better answers, as always, provided a range of arguments supported by a range of examples, preferably of a contemporary nature. Centres are advised to pay specific attention to the content of the specification as this provides the basis for exam questions. In a similar vein, it is worth reiterating the manner in which marks are awarded. AO1 marks are given for detail, factual evidence, quotes and statistics. AO2 marks are awarded for analysis and evaluation. Occasionally, candidates were able to argue well but failed to provide supporting evidence from US government and politics, or conversely, to provide vast swathes of detail without providing a range of balanced arguments. A)3 marks are awarded for fluency, structure and style. The spelling of amendment, Hillary and bear arms came into play here on occasion. There were some issues of time management with occasional papers having two long essays and a shorter, and inevitably, weaker third essay in section B.

1a.) The recent death of Justice Scalia and President Obama's travails with a replacement allowed students to provide some excellent answers to this question with many scoring full marks. Some entered into the territory of the next question and candidates are advised to read both questions before starting to help establish the differences between the two.

1b.) The best answers focused on criticisms with politicisation of the process being the primary line of attack. Again, the Garland nomination provided a rich source of material to identify the respective roles of the executive and Senate. It was surprising not to see reference to a judicial appointments committee as used in the UK post CRA 2005. Some strayed from the appointment process to discuss more tangential issues such as the political:judicial debate.

2.) This was a popular question with the best answers assessing the worth of the nomination system in light of the 2016 contests. The question did require a clear focus on arguments for and against and surprisingly the range offered here sometimes fell short. As mentioned candidates needed to ensure detailed examples did not squeeze out analysis and evaluation. Pleasingly, there was only the odd answer which focused on the Electoral College with the inevitable consequences.

3.) Unlike previous years, most candidates were able to provide plenty of US examples and the most answers included a range of factors that determine success. The best answers however went beyond providing just a list and tried to establish a rank order of their respective importance in the light of developments such as the impact of gun massacres and other contemporary developments.

4.) The question did ask for a discussion of recent elections. Consequently, a focus on Perot in 92/96 and the traditional factors that explain third party failure was not required here. Credit was still given for a discussion of these factors but, as mentioned earlier, candidates needed to pay attention to the precise wording of the question.

5.) Discussion of the success and failures of the Obama administration(s) was accepted here with the best answers dealing with the accepted definition of the term. Some were able to identify the extent to which President Obama had redefined the term which was in stark contrast to other second term presidents such as G.W. Bush, Clinton and Reagan, all of whom encountered a variety of problems. In some respects this assessment of the last year of the administration and its focus on contemporary US government and politics is exactly what the paper sets out to achieve.

6.) Good answers were able to discuss the 'hyper partisanship' and ensuing divided governments of recent years in order to establish the increased importance of party as a factor influencing voting in the Congress. Discussion of other factors such as constituencies, pressure groups, the administration and individual consciences, allowed candidates to provide an effective answer to this question.

7.) Candidates were able to provide a discussion of the Bill of Rights and relative cases, however, evaluation of the role played by the Roberts Court proved to be the main discriminator on this question. Centres would do well to note that rights is a stand-alone topic and a more holistic approach is needed to one which centres solely on rulings from the Court.

8.) This question offered the opportunity for a discussion of central themes such as the separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and individual liberties. As directed in the specification, candidates needed to go beyond a discussion of the bill of rights and a similar discussion to the one found in question 7.

F854 Political Ideas and Concepts

General Comments:

It was pleasing that candidates are increasingly familiar with the demands of this unit. The important feature to note about the successful answering of questions for this unit comes from its title, Political Ideas and Concepts. It is expected that answers focus upon the relevant theory debate and illustrate their analysis and evaluation with reference to the ideas of specific political thinkers. Many weaker answers still tend to be too generalised in their coverage of political theory, often focusing their answers upon modern politics. These references to modern politics are not relevant for this unit and should be reserved for use in unit F856. Candidates are also reminded to make sure they understand what the specific question is asking. A 'discuss the view' question requires a balanced assessment of both sides of an argument, whereas a comparison question requires consideration of both similarities and differences.

Specific issues to note are highlighted below –

AO1 marks – these are awarded for knowledge and understanding of the relevant ideas and concepts. It is expected that answers should display knowledge of the views of relevant political thinkers and where this is not done, answers will not be able to be credited beyond the very bottom of L2. For access to L3 and L4 marks there is an expectation of good understanding of the relevant concepts (definitions help in this) as well as the use of a wide range of the views of political thinkers. This should be specific and avoid listing or 'name dropping'. The latter case can be seen in phrases such as, 'liberals such as Mill support nationalisation', or 'Marx, Gramsci and Engels' are opposed to capitalism'.

AO2 marks – these are awarded for analysing and evaluating relevant theory based arguments. Descriptive answers that fail to address the question set will only be credited at best at low L2. For L3 and L4 a good range of relevant arguments with balance should be used. As a general rule 5 or 6 relevant and well-constructed and developed arguments are required for L4 marks. One-sided answers fail to fully address the question set and thus will only access top L2 marks at best.

AO3 marks – these are awarded based on the quality of written communication and the relevance of the answer. Where answers have no relevance to the question set then it is not possible to credit marks for AO3, or indeed for also AO1 or 2. Most answers will be awarded at L3 in terms of AO3 marks, with L4 answers displaying very good use of QWC and a sharp focus upon the question, including effective introductions and conclusions. Very short answers tend to be rewarded at L1 or the bottom of L2.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.1a

Answers in general had a good understanding of the key values of nationalism. They were able to give a largely effective definition of the concept and explain relevant key themes. Also better answers were able to illustrate their understanding with reference to relevant political thinkers. As a guide answers should explain the ideas of at least two relevant political thinkers. Answers that only extracted information from the source, including the thinkers mentioned, were not credited highly. Note there are no AO2 marks available for Q1a thus there was no credit given for sections of answers that got into a debate over the rise or decline of nationalism.

Question No.1b

Answers were expected to compare liberal and conservative nationalism. Better answers were able to explain at least a couple of similarities and also differences before concluding by assessing the extent of similarity/ difference. Weaker answers struggled to get beyond a description of the two concepts or even made statements based on similarity or difference without explaining these for each of the strands of nationalism (e.g. liberal and conservative nationalists both support the principle of national self-determination without then explaining why this was the case for both). Also weaker answers tended to confuse liberal nationalism with a broad reference to liberal themes and likewise conservative nationalism with conservatism.

Question No.2

This proved to be a very popular question. The best answers were able to explain at least 5 or 6 similarities and differences between direct and representative democracy and illustrate these with a wide range of relevant thinkers (often 8 or more specific and explained references). Weaker answers however struggled to go beyond descriptions of the two types of democracy. Some answers also were very narrow in their definition of direct democracy, exclusively linking it to Athenian style direct democracy (classical model of democracy). This meant false comparisons were made such as direct democracy had a limited franchise whereas representative democracy supported universal suffrage.

Question No.3

Good answers were able to focus on the arguments for and against popular sovereignty. Many did this by examining the arguments also for limiting sovereignty to parliament or to an absolute sovereign. Weaker answers tended to want to write for and against arguments over the merits of democracy. Whilst there was relevance in some of these arguments they tended to lack full focus on the question.

Question No.4

Better answers were fully aware of Weber's 3 ideal-types of sovereignty (legal-rational, traditional and charismatic) and were thus able to assess the extent of the legitimacy for each. Very good answers tended to do this by applying Beetham's analysis of how legitimacy is conferred (electoral consent, adherence to traditions and customs and also application of constitutional guidelines). Weaker answers struggled to go beyond vague descriptions of each of Weber's typologies and/ or generalised criticisms of charismatic or traditional authority. There was also some confusion over the basis of legal-rational authority as emanating from electoral office. Whilst this can be true it is not always the case, with the real basis for this form of authority being based upon recognition of the legal right of the office holder to exercise their authority.

Question No.5

Good answers were able to discuss the compatibility of liberty and equality. Normally this was through breaking down liberty into its negative and positive forms alongside considering equality in its foundational, opportunity and outcome formats. This allowed direct associations between negative liberty and foundational equality for example. Weaker answers tended just to discuss the arguments for liberty and equality in general.

Question No.6

Good answers were able to directly compare natural and positive law concepts by considering issues of origin, morality, universality and legal application. On the whole answers were well prepared and tended to produce thorough comparisons. Some weaker answers confused natural law with natural rights and positive law with positive liberty, thus limiting severely any effective comparison.

Question No.7

Good answers had a clear understanding of libertarian and new liberal ideas. Most answers focused on libertarian as a classical liberalism although some also associated it with neo-liberal economic theories. Thus a range of comparisons were made over the size of the state, degree of interventionism, attitudes to individualism, human nature and tolerance. Some weaker points of comparison were made by those that stated both forms of liberalism supported toleration and/or reason without any development to cover specifically new liberalism and libertarianism.

Question No.8

Good answers were able to identify the key criteria for what makes an ideology and thus were able to evaluate how far ecologism met these. Weaker answers struggled to go beyond a generalised description of ecologism.

F855 US Government and Politics

General Comments:

There were many excellent responses across all eight questions, with the range, depth and sophistication of the best answers very impressive indeed. Level 4 answers tended to make a range of points in answer to the question, supported those points with examples from the UK, US and sometimes elsewhere, and then analysed each argument made.

Given the hour available to write each essay, most candidates were able to write a lot, but less successful answers tended to exhibit one or both of the following features. One was to write about the US, and then about the UK. The synoptic nature of this unit means that candidates should be *comparing* political systems and not, in effect, rewriting an A2 essay on the US, and then an AS essay on the UK. Level 4 answers often kept their focus on this synoptic element by including both US and UK material in the same paragraph, and comparing them. This worked much better than writing extensively about each country in turn, and it has an especially positive impact on AO2 marks for analysis. The second common weakness seen was to make a range of relevant arguments but fail to support them with clear, specific and relevant examples from both the US and the UK. This impacted on AO1 marks for knowledge.

Another feature of the best answers was clear and explicit focus on the question asked. This is of course important in any essay, but it is perhaps even more so on this unit where questions might ask about a standard topic in a more thought-provoking way. Successful candidates had often clearly spent some time planning their answers before writing them, which in many cases was time well spent.

Candidates sometimes made good use of examples from other countries. Although this is not a requirement of the unit and answers can score full marks without them, specific and relevant examples from elsewhere were often deployed very effectively to enable further comparison. These should not, however, be a substitute for good knowledge of the US and UK.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Q1

There were some well-argued responses to this question, with candidates balancing arguments suggesting voters are becoming increasingly volatile with arguments suggesting long-term factors like social class, ethnicity and gender are still important. That said, many answers did not feature much in the way of supporting examples, and resorted to vague claims about voters becoming more volatile. In addition, it remains very important to keep going back to the question, for some candidates ignored the reference to voter volatility and wrote a more generic essay on voting behaviour.

Q2

The most successful answers here looked at the functions of parties and pressure groups, and assessed whether parties are in decline while pressure groups flourish in each area. Candidates that did this put forward a range of very interesting arguments, with many using the decline of party membership in recent decades as a starting point. It was impressive to see candidates integrating recent developments such as the impact of Corbyn in the UK and Trump and Sanders in the US on the role of parties. Many candidates also successfully linked the question to the rise of 'anti-establishment' parties and movements across the world. Less

successful answers tended to describe individual party and pressure group successes and failures, and so lost focus on the question.

Q3

Most candidates had a clear understanding of the relationship between the party system and the electoral system. However, candidates were perhaps more confident in outlining the role plurality systems play in producing two-party systems than the role proportional systems play in producing multi-party systems. The best answers provided evidence from the different party systems across the UK, and sought to explain the growth of multi-party politics. Few attempted this, however, and most stuck to general elections when discussing the UK. Those that identified other factors that might determine the party system, such as ideological divides, the growth of new ideologies, constitutional arrangements or electoral volatility, often produced excellent answers.

Q4

There were many very good answers to this question, with candidates often structuring their answers by assessing different types of rights, and then providing a wealth of examples from the US, UK and elsewhere in each area. Less successful responses tended to focus overwhelmingly on the US instead of comparing political systems, and it was notable that knowledge of the US system on this topic tends to be far better than knowledge of the UK.

Q5

Most candidates understood the standard argument that parliamentary systems often lead to executive dominance, and presidential systems (or, at least, the US presidential system) tend to feature a strong legislature checking the executive. Most were also able to balance their argument by arguing that the reverse can also be true. The real dividing line was between candidates who could support their assertions with examples and those who discussed parliamentary and presidential systems in only vague terms. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the question uses the term 'elective dictatorship', but many candidates still used the term 'elected dictatorship' throughout their answer.

Q6

This was a popular question, and generally very well done. Successful answers tended to assess the role of crises (often both in enhancing and detracting from the power of the chief executive) and then comparing crises to other factors, such as constitutional arrangements, election results, control of the legislature and personality. Many excellent answers suggested that crises can quickly increase the power of a chief executive, but that this is only short-term. As elsewhere this year, the ability of candidates to support their points with relevant examples proved to be a good discriminator.

Q7

There were some excellent answers to this question, with many candidates having a detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of a variety of court cases that help determine whether or not judges are 'politicians in robes'. The best answers were able to compare their knowledge of the US system with the UK and – like Question 4 – only a minority of candidates did this. Weaker answers tended to either treat the US and UK entirely separately, or spend much more of their answer on the US.

Q8

The best answers here linked the question to the various functions of second chambers, and compared the UK's House of Lords and the US Senate. Many candidates did, however, lose sight of the question and focused on the pros and cons of second chambers without really focusing explicitly on the statement in the question. Such answers might have secured good AO1 marks for knowledge, but a really tight focus on the question is required for AO2.

F856 Political Ideas and Concepts in Practice

General Comments:

It is pleasing that a large number of candidates are now familiar with the demands of this unit. The important feature to note about the successful answering of questions in this unit comes from its title, Political ideas and Concepts in Practice. Unless there is evidence of the use of political ideas and concepts and also the application of them in practice, answers will not be able to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. The key word is synopticity. By this it is meant that the question is answered through a debate centring on the relevant theory aspects (including illustration through the use of relevant political thinkers) and then this debate should be evaluated by the application to modern politics (once again specific examples drawn from modern UK and EU Politics are expected). The idea of this unit is to take the political ideas and concepts studied in F854 and apply them to modern politics, as largely studied at AS Politics.

Specific issues to note with the marking process are highlighted below –

AO1 marks – these are awarded for the knowledge and understanding of the theory and also modern politics. As such L1 answers tended to have only a generalised understanding of the relevant issues, often having no specific reference to relevant political thinkers and/ or very few practical examples drawn from modern politics. L2 answers tended to have a degree of understanding of the relevant issues but once again, had only a few examples of the ideas of relevant political thinkers and some specific examples drawn from modern politics. L3 answers made use of a good range of examples, both in terms of relevant political thinkers and specific modern examples. For L4 there needed to be a relatively balanced wide range of examples of the ideas of specific thinkers and specific modern examples. Answers that had a very wide range of modern examples but much fewer examples of the ideas of political thinkers were awarded at L3. It is important to note that the ideas of political thinkers must be explained to some degree and not just listed. Examples where the use of political thinkers was not credited fully included comments such as – ‘Liberals such as Mill believed in the importance of freedom’. This example is far too generalised and specific detail on what Mill believed about freedom would be required for full credit to be given. Another example that was not fully credited was the listing of a range of thinkers without any specific reference to their ideas, such as – ‘Marxists, including Marx Engels, Gramsci and Lenin all oppose capitalism.’ It would be far better to deal with each separately and explain their specific ideas.

AO2 marks – these are awarded for the ability to evaluate the theory based debate through the application to modern politics. Here credit is given for appropriate synoptic links. An example of this is when the arguments of a specific thinker have been discussed and then they are evaluated by applying their relevance or validity to modern politics. Thus a good synoptic link would have an argument debated in theory using the views of specific thinkers and then evaluated in practice applying it to specific aspects of modern politics. L1 answers tended to lack any evidence of synoptic links and often were heavily based around AS style modern politics. L2 answers were only able to make a few weak synoptic links. L3 marks were awarded for the use of a range of synoptic links, and L4 answers had a wide range of these as well as good balance and sophistication in the arguments. One-sided answers tended to be credited at maximum bottom L3. Ideally 5 or 6 relevant arguments with good synoptic links should ensure access to L4 for AO2.

AO3 marks – these were awarded based on the quality of written communication and the relevance of the answer. Where answers had no relevance to the question set then it was not possible to credit marks for AO3, or indeed for also AO1 or 2. Most answers were awarded at L3 in terms of AO3 marks, with L4 answers displaying very good use of QWC and a sharp focus upon the question, including effective introductions and conclusions. Very short answers tended to be rewarded at L1 or the bottom of L2.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.1

Better answers had a clear understanding of the trustee model often illustrating this with the views of Edmund Burke. Good evidence was often given on how individual MPs defied the party whip and/or constituency pressure over key votes such as Syria and Iraq. There was also some good evidence over the educational background of MPs used to exemplify the arguments of thinkers such as Mill and Plato. Furthermore, better answers were able to adopt a similar approach to the other key models, delegate, mandate and resemblance. Weaker answers struggled to go beyond a description of each model, or even worse confusing what each model said about the role of the representative. Overall there was plenty of scope for practical application to this question, drawing on case study evidence of individual representatives, socio-economic statistics on the background of MPs and also extent of rebellions against party whips.

Question No.2

This question invited a lot of practical evidence drawn from recent events surrounding devolution, Brexit and the demands of globalisation. With this in mind many good answers were able to examine the theory behind arguments for and against the continuation of parliamentary sovereignty and test this out by application to on-going events. Weaker answers struggled to get much beyond an explanation of the arguments for and against Brexit.

Question No.3

This question invited an assessment of the relative strengths of arguments made by pluralist and elitist theories. This then allowed an assessment of how far the UK in practice is no longer ruled by a permanent elite. Good answers were able to apply pluralist and elite theory to modern politics through consideration of a range of issues relating to the socio-economic background of politicians, judges etc., the role of the media, pressure groups, political parties and business. Weaker answers struggled to get beyond a limited assessment of media bias and the unrepresentative nature of the political system. Only the very best answers particularly focused upon the idea of a permanent elite.

Question No.4

Better answers were able to examine theory based arguments about equality, differentiating between the relative importance of foundational/ formal, equality of opportunity and outcome. These then applied importance through analysis of recent legislation, government actions or political party commitments. Some good answers focused their analysis by looking at different ideological attitudes towards equality. Weaker answers struggled to get beyond a generic identification of specific policies that either promoted or undermined equality in general.

Question No.5

Better answers were able to analyse the arguments for and against law-breaking for political purposes and then apply these to specific case study examples. Good answers were able to explain the views of theorists advocating each perspective (Gandhi, Thoreau, Locke, Hobbes were popular) as well as make effective synoptic links through evidence of pressure group activity from groups such as Occupy, Greenpeace and the animal rights lobby. Weaker answers struggled to get beyond descriptions of extremist pressure groups or terrorist atrocities without any real theory based argument to link them to.

Question No.6

Good answers had an appreciation of the different types of nationalism in operation in the UK, ranging from liberal, conservative and right-wing nationalism. This was then evaluated through application to the role of specific nationalist influence through nationalist based parties (SNP, UKIP and BNP being the most popular) and also nationalist influence particularly in the Conservative Party. Some answers also then contrasted the relative importance of other ideologies in the UK. This was relevant as long as there was a substantial section of the essay devoted to nationalism and not a generic assessment of the importance of different UK ideologies. Weaker answers tended to focus on assessing the strengths of the SNP, PC, and UKIP in recent elections without a real assessment of what type of nationalism they were identified with.

Question No.7

Good answers tended to approach this question by assessing how important each theme of liberalism was to modern politics. Others were also successful in arguing if either classical or modern liberalism was in decline or still relevant. Weaker answers tended to just associate liberalism with the Liberal Democrats and fail to consider how liberalism has significant influences in other mainstream parties in the UK. Further to this some weak answers wanted to assess whether liberal democracy was in decline. Whilst aspects of this were relevant, an answer that focused upon the role of the democratic aspects of liberal democracy was not really relevant to a question asking about liberalism.

Question No.8

This question tended to invite descriptions of how well women are represented in modern politics without really addressing the significance of feminism. Better answers did attempt to do this by considering the significance of the different waves of feminism or the different strands – liberal, radical and Marxist. Overall, answers struggled to consider the idea of significance and most answers were either descriptive of the evidence or theory or very superficial in assessing the role feminism plays in modern politics.

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