

**GCE**

**Government and Politics**

Advanced GCE **A2 H495**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H095**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2017**

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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 specification 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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**Advanced GCE Government and Politics (H495)**

**Advanced Subsidiary GCE Government and Politics (H095)**

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# F851 Contemporary Politics of the UK

## General Comments:

Most candidates found this year's paper very accessible, however, a number did not capitalise on what they knew because they did not answer the question. For example, Question 2 required candidates to discuss whether public support was essential for pressure group success. Nearly all candidates were able to identify, explain and exemplify a range of factors associated with pressure group success but to access the higher assessment levels they needed to be able to discuss the extent to which public support in particular was, or was not, essential. The weakest responses were those that simply listed a series of such factors without any attempt to answer the question.

## Comments on Individual Questions:

### Question No. 1a

Candidates generally used the source material well and few were awarded less than half-marks. To gain full marks, they needed to be able to identify four separate and distinct methods of party funding and to use the sources and their own knowledge to explain and exemplify them. Only the best candidates seemed aware of the distinction between trade union affiliation fees and donations.

### Question No. 1b

Most candidates were able to identify a number and range of arguments both in favour of, and against, parties being funded entirely by the state, however, many assumed that state funding meant equal funding i.e. that all parties would receive the same amount of funding, which led some to raise erroneous arguments. The best answers displayed the required characteristics of focus, range, balance and evidence. Bernie Ecclestone featured in many answers, but rarely accurately.

### Question No. 2

Candidates were almost universally aware of a range of factors associated with pressure group success and were often able to provide detailed examples to support their arguments, although they seemed divided on whether Greenpeace was an insider or outsider group. The best answers provided a direct answer to the question: weaker ones simply described a range of factors linked to pressure group success. It is worth noting that, while examples are essential for a Level 4 answer, they should illustrate the point being made. It was not uncommon for candidates to argue that public support was essential for pressure group success and then illustrate their point by reference to Fathers for Justice and Stop the War Coalition.

### Question No. 3

The Additional Member System was widely known and understood. Although the question focussed on AMS, rather than its specific use in Scotland and Wales, the better candidates were able to use data from recent elections in those countries to support their arguments, even to the extent of being able to identify successful candidates for both constituency and regional elections. Weaker answers tended to lack the supporting evidence necessary to develop the theoretical points they made or strayed into discussing the benefits of other systems.

**Question No.4**

Better candidates were aware of the nature and characteristics of parliamentary by-elections and were able to assess their importance using a range of recent examples, particularly those at Stoke-on-Trent Central, Copeland, Witney, Batley and Spen and Richmond Park. Poorer answers lacked both convincing arguments and evidence.

**Question No.5**

Questions on voting behaviour are always popular and this year was no exception, however a number of candidates failed to appreciate the difference between trends and factors. The best candidates were able to explain why growing support for nationalist parties might be considered to be the most important trend in voting behaviour in recent years, quoting evidence from recent general elections, referendums and elections to the Scottish Parliament (evidence from elections to the Welsh and Northern Ireland assemblies was less common). They were also able to explain why this trend may not be important and suggest other trends which might be considered to be more significant. Many candidates cited the decline in turnout in general elections since 1950 as an example of such a trend, though fewer noted its partial recovery since 2001. The question did not require candidates to offer explanations for such trends, but a number did so.

## F852 Contemporary Government of the UK

### General Comments:

Most candidates are now adept at staying focused on the question, and are able to produce essays with a range of relevant points, usually by using the terms of the question to identify each point being made. For example, 'Parliament can be seen as a representative body due to the range of powers used by the House of Commons to represent the interests of constituents' was a very effective way of starting a paragraph in Question 2. The best answers followed up these points by illustrating each with relevant and contemporary examples. It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates used recent examples, with the focus being on the period after 2010 for the most part.

In addition, most candidates were able to time their answers very effectively, producing a consistent set of responses despite the tight time constraints.

This year, weaker answers tended to demonstrate limited knowledge of the topic under discussion. Questions may be asked from any area of the specification, and it was clear that some candidates were surprised by the inclusion of 'ministers and civil service' and 'relationship between ministers and senior civil servants' under the mandatory executive topic, as well 'the underlying principles of the constitution' and 'parliamentary government' from the optional constitution topic. This had an effect on the AO1 marks secured by a good number of candidates.

Introductions are rarely helpful when candidates have only 28 minutes to write an essay, though conclusions that provide a reasoned judgement on the questions can help secure AO2 marks.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Q1 (a)

The best answers identified and described three or four roles of senior civil servants, with most making good use of the source as a starting point. Only AO1 marks are available in this question, so answers that started the debate addressed in Q1 (b) did not gain credit. It was pleasing to see some candidates bring in contemporary developments, describing the role of senior civil servants in the Brexit process or the transition between governments after elections.

Q1 (b)

This question proved to be a real challenge for many candidates, for many did not have a secure grasp of the relationship between ministers and senior civil servants. Although many candidates put together a series of relevant arguments using the source, knowledge and understanding of the relationship was often unclear. This underlines the importance of ensuring all parts of the specification are covered equally. Successful answers addressed the increased role of special advisors and the changing role of individual ministerial responsibility, compared to the traditional role of senior civil servants. Some excellent answers had impressive knowledge of ministers blaming senior civil servants for errors, of the role of special advisors like Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill, senior civil servants like Sir Jeremy Heywood and the coalition government's attempts to reform the civil service.

Q2

It was encouraging that nearly all candidates had up to date knowledge of the make-up of the UK parliament, and argued that although it is not presently descriptively representative, it is improving. Many candidates were able to show off a range of statistics about female, ethnic minority and LGBTQ representation in both the Commons and the Lords. The best answers, though, thought more deeply about what representation might mean, and also discussed the powers held by parliament in performing its representative function.

Q3

Only a minority of candidates were able to demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of parliamentary government as an underlying principle of the UK constitution, and many struggled to access AO1 marks as a consequence. The most common issue was candidates assuming that parliamentary government is the same parliamentary sovereignty. On the other hand, very few candidates confused the underlying principles of the constitution with the sources, and there was some excellent knowledge of the other principles like parliamentary sovereignty, the rule of law and the unitary state. As with Q1, the question revealed the importance of students ensuring all parts of the specification are covered.

Q4

Most candidates had a good knowledge and understanding of the arguments for and against the view that the UK judiciary is neutral. In addition, most candidates were aware of the main changes made to the judiciary in the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005. That said, answers would be much improved by reference to specific court cases to illustrate their points. This is the case in judiciary questions in units F853 and F855, and it would be great if candidates could seek to do the same for the UK judiciary.

Q5

There were a range of acceptable ways to address the question of ‘impact’ here, and many successful answers looked at the impact of EU institutions on the constitution and the workings of government, and of the EU’s impact on party politics and elections. Weaker answers tended to tell the story of the last 12 months, without really considering the ‘impact’ of the EU. Some candidates wrote about the European Court of Human Rights, which is not part of the EU.

## **F853 Contemporary US Government and Politics**

### **General Comments:**

The quality of the scripts was generally of a high standard. The compulsory question did pose some issues, which reaffirms the need for all centres to teach all areas of the specification. Candidates need to ensure that they fully consider the requirements of a question and avoid the temptation to produce pre-packaged answers to a different question.

### **Comments on Individual Questions:**

Question No. 1a: This was a straightforward lift from the specification. Candidates needed to avoid describing the contents of the Constitution and to focus on the principles. As has always been the case, this question was marked leniently recognising the challenge a compulsory question poses and the general *raison d'être* of allowing the candidate to ease into the paper.

Question No. 1b: This proved a better discriminator than in previous years. The ability to provide an effective answer hinged to some degree to recognising the principles in question 1a and considering the extent of change. Whilst federalism was generally analysed well; other principles like the separation of powers and the changing role of the presidency were less well covered. Those questions which considered change of 3 principles as requested in three separate paragraphs were able to access the higher mark levels.

Question No. 2: Pressure Groups. The best answers were able to focus on the question rather than reciting the traditional arguments for and against pressure groups in a democracy. They included lots of US examples and reached a conclusion after a balanced consideration of their role. It was pleasing to see reference to the latest developments such as the rise of new social movements such as Black Lives Matter and references to events relating to the Trump administration. In this vein, centres and candidates should seek to go beyond examples such as the role of the NAACP in the *Brown v Board of Education, Topeka 1954* case.

Question No. 3: Political Parties: most candidates centred on third party problems and whilst this was credited, the best answers developed concepts such as the one party, fifty and hundred party state. Again, rather like the previous question, the importance of Perot's performance in 1992 needs to be placed in context and discussion of Johnson and Stein is more welcome in this regard. It was interesting to read analysis of Trump's relationship with the GOP as a means of exploring the nature of parties in the USA.

Question No. 4: Voting Behaviour: There were some excellent well-informed answers to this question which made good use of statistics and voting models. The best answers explored the 2016 election and assessed the validity of the social structures model and the long-term factors outlined in the question. Discussion of the campaign and personality also provided a valuable platform for evaluation of relevant factors and an assessment as to whether or not the election represented a sea change in US voting behaviour.

Question No. 5: The cabinet: Perhaps surprisingly this was not a popular question. Those that tackled it the best made reference to the Trump administration and generally examined the role of the EXOP. Whilst weaker candidates were able to list appointments, the ability to analyse reasons for the cabinet's decline were less to the fore. Similarly the preference for the using the EXOP and detail of individual president's usage were not always discussed.

Question No. 6: Congress: This was probably the most popular question on the paper. The best candidates were not only able to detail the exclusive and concurrent powers of each chamber;

but also to effectively evaluate the significance of these powers. It was pleasing to see discussion of the Trump appointments and their confirmation votes as examples of Senate exclusive powers. Reference to prestige as opposed to powers invited a more effective evaluation of the question. Brief reference to the UK's institutional arrangements also allowed effective analysis.

Question No. 7: Supreme Court: Good answers identified a range of factors that influenced decisions whilst weaker answers were not able to go beyond the role of individual justices. Whilst discussion of cases was credited, these needed to be placed in context. Typically descriptive answers could score well on assessment objective 1 but of course, assessment objective 2 is awarded for analysis and evaluation and so candidates needed to write an effective answer to the question.

Question No. 8: Rights: The phrasing of this question seems to present a challenge to many candidates who were unable to go beyond listing cases and a range of rights. The best answers were able to assess the means by which rights are protected and examined the roles played: not only by the Supreme Court; but also by the Congress and the presidency; pressure groups; the media and the public. It appeared that those who had not examined rights as a separate stand-alone topic might have attempted this.

## F854 Political Ideas and Concepts

### General Comments:

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 with the marking process 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 – Most answers had a good understanding of the meaning of protective democracy and could relate their themes to the ideas of relevant political thinkers. Weaker answers tended to rely upon the attached source and/ or write a generalised account of the different types of democracy.

Question No.1b – Most answers were able to focus upon the relevant appeals of democracy often producing at least three different appeals allied with potential drawbacks. Weaker answers often only explained rather than evaluated appeals producing one-sided responses.

Question No.2 – Answers to this question varied considerably with better responses focusing upon the nation-state as opposed to the state. Thus weaker answers were only partial in their

relevance as they tended to look at the appeal of the state only – these were awarded at L2 for AO2.

Question No.3 – Answers to this question mostly were able to present a range of arguments relating to the positive and negative aspects of political authority. The best answers also distinguished between the ideas of necessary and desirable. Weaker answers often confused power with authority.

Question No.4 – Most answers had a least a good understanding of the meaning of moral and legal rights and were able to illustrate some aspects of similarity and difference. The best answers went beyond a standard comparison to highlight the fundamental difference aspect within the title.

Question No.5 – Most answers had some understanding of relevant arguments for and against the use of civil disobedience. A significant number however failed to differentiate justifications used within a dictatorship and those relevant to democracy. The very best answers did this and had wide-ranging use of the views of political thinkers.

Question No.6 – A very popular question in which most answers could distinguish between revolutionary and democratic forms of socialism. Weaker answers struggled to go beyond description of each whereas better answers used criterion to make valid comparisons.

Question No.7 – Once again a very popular question and one in which most answers did display a good understanding of the values of conservatism. A weak point in many answers was their attempt to explain the importance of property by using classical liberal thinkers. The question required a focus on conservative thinkers and thus classical liberal justifications were not relevant.

Question No.8 – Most answers were able to provide a relevant focus upon points of comparison between liberal and radical feminism and were able to illustrate with a range of relevant feminist thinkers. Better answers did focus upon the extent of difference as was highlighted in the question.

## F855 US Government and Politics

### General Comments:

There were some truly outstanding answers across all the questions this year. The range of knowledge and the sophisticated analysis of some candidates combined to produce essays that were a pleasure to read. It was also impressive to see how many candidates were able to successfully integrate the huge and potentially confusing range of recent developments into their arguments, including Brexit, the election of President Trump, the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and the apparent growth of populism around the globe. This demonstrated, in many cases, real intellectual agility.

Answers that reached Level 4 made a range of points focused on the question, illustrated them with examples from the US and UK (and sometimes from other countries), and then sought to analyse the points being made.

This year, there was an increase in answers that looked at the US and the UK in turn, however. This hindered AO2 marks for many candidates, as they then found it more difficult to make comparisons. Successful candidates structured their essays by making an overarching point in response to the question at the start of a paragraph, and then assessing the US and UK in the same paragraph before moving on to another point. This ensured that answers more clearly met the synoptic demands of the paper.

High AO1 marks were gained by those candidates who could support their arguments with clear, specific and up to date examples. Given the time available, most wrote at length, but weaker answers tended to repeat the same points using different terminology, or spend time on unnecessary explanations. Candidates should ensure they have a range of examples from the US and UK to support their arguments. In addition, those that were able to illustrate their points with examples from other countries were credited, although it is still possible to score full marks with focus on only the US and UK.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Q1

This was the least popular question on the paper. Successful answers stayed focused on the question and had a good knowledge of how hybrid systems such as AMS have worked in practice compared to proportional and majoritarian systems. Some students did not know what a hybrid system was and wrote a standard 'PR v FPTP' essay that was not focused on the question asked.

Q2

This was a hugely popular question and produced some outstanding answers. It was impressive indeed to see some candidates assess how the rise of Trump, Corbyn, Sanders, Macron and others had taken the candidate recruitment role out of the hands of parties. In addition, it was pleasing to see many candidates assess the changes in parties offering ideological choice. That said, while most answers could outline the functions of parties, weaker answers tended not to be able to illustrate their points with examples.

Q3

Successful answers here were those that sought to apply their knowledge of pressure groups to the question asked, rather than a question about whether pressure groups are good for democracy or the factors that determine success. Those that focused on the question tended also to have a very extensive knowledge of a wide range of pressure groups and did very well. Candidates should have a large bank of pressure groups to draw on – the weakest answers suffered from the double whammy of failing to address the question asked and knowing few groups outside the NRA and NAACP. Candidates would also benefit from considering what ‘success’ means – too often, groups were dismissed as ‘failures’ because governments did not change legislation as a consequence of their actions, but of course for some groups this may not be their aim.

Q4

Many candidates produced excellent comparisons of presidents and prime ministers, with some neatly and seamlessly adding examples from President Trump and Prime Minister May into the mix. There was some strong knowledge of the various checks and balances in different political systems and how they have worked in practice, and the extent of this knowledge proved a key discriminator. In addition, weaker answers tended to look at different systems in turn, and this had a detrimental affect on AO2 marks for some.

Q5

The most popular question on the paper, and done extremely well by a number of candidates. Most assessed the various functions of legislatures, and like Q4 the extent of clear, specific and up to date examples proved an important discriminator. A great many candidates were able to describe how each legislature worked, but the best answers were able to show them working (or not) with examples. There were some very good discussions of so-called hyper partisanship in the US, and interesting comparisons with the UK’s parliamentary system.

Q6

This question produced some impressive answers, and it is pleasing to see many candidates have such a strong grasp of a wide variety of court cases. That said, there was far better knowledge of the US judiciary than the UK, and while it might be expected that candidates include more cases from the US in their examples, candidates that could name UK cases often produced truly excellent answers.

Q7

The best responses here looked at the strengths of unitary systems and assessed whether they solved the problems with federal systems, and then looked at the problems of unitary systems and the strengths of federal systems. Few candidates could support their arguments with examples, however, and resorted to generalised comments about different regions. Many answers would have been much improved by examples of the work of US states, or specific policies introduced by devolved governments in the UK.

Q8

Like Q6, this question produced some excellent responses that combined focus on the question with a range of examples of where rights and liberties have or have not been protected, with some impressive knowledge of the recent debates surrounding the surveillance state. The vast majority of candidates assessed the role of the judiciary, the executive, the legislature and pressure groups, as well as the political culture of a country. On occasion, however, excellent

knowledge was hampered by a lack of balance, where some candidates simply agreed with the question and did not look at the way in which constitutions do, in fact, protect rights and liberties.

## F856 Political Ideas and Concepts in Practice

### General Comments:

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

This proved to be a very popular question and the better answers tended to use criterion to assess the health of UK democracy. Key areas of focus were the effectiveness of representation, participation and accountability. Weaker answers lacked real synopticity by failing to link practical issues about UK democracy with any specific theory.

#### Question No.2

Answers to this question were usually well prepared and almost all focused upon economic, political and cultural impacts of globalisation. There was plenty of scope for case study style evidence relating to the impact of multi-national organisations and TNCs.

#### Question No.3

This question required consideration of Lukes' three models of power, agenda setting, thought control and decision making. The better answers had good understanding of each deploying effective theory and practical application enabling good synoptic links to be made. Weaker answers often confused aspects of decision making with agenda setting.

#### Question No.4

This question required a range of balanced arguments for and against the decline of the welfare state. Many answers were able to relate theory from a range of perspectives to modern policy preferences of British political parties. Weaker answers struggled to go beyond an analysis of party manifestos from the 2017 General Election.

#### Question No.5

This was not a popular question and few answers struggled to apply relevant theory to issues relating to judicial activism. A number of weaker answers produced rehearsed arguments on how powerful is the British Supreme Court without any real theory used at all.

#### Question No.6

This answer required consideration of a range of types of conservatism. Most answers were able to show an appreciation of different types although many were ambiguous on the meaning of liberal conservatism. More successful answers related the term to economic aspects of the New Right and also social aspects promoting liberal values of tolerance and individual freedom.

#### Question No.7

This question required an understanding of democratic socialism and social democracy. Whilst most answers showed an appreciation of this, a significant number of weaker answers could only differentiate the two by analysing Labour's manifesto in 2017 and thus struggled to make synoptic links due to a lack of specific theory. Better answers tended to look at the two types through different principles of socialism and then apply these to Labour from Blair through to Corbyn.

#### Question No.8

There were only a few answers to this question and those that did attempt the question tended to have a good appreciation of the end of ideology debate. As such these were able to make strong synoptic links by applying post-modernist thinking to modern politics.

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