

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE A2 H495

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H095

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

HX95/R/11

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Chief Examiner Report

It was good to note the continuous increase in entries at both levels. The obvious increasing interest in politics by students from all types of centres made this summer's process very encouraging. It was also really pleasing to note the increasing focus on contemporary politics in the work of many centres. Poor technique was an issue noted by all the Principal Examiners and it could lower the attainment of a candidate who had a good knowledge and understanding of politics. We are looking increasingly for a focus on contemporary politics, and centres which adopt too historical an approach could well harm their candidates' chances. There could also be an issue when centres took too narrow a route through the specification, cutting down the optional topics covered at AS to the bare minimum or neglecting topics in F853 and F854 which might come up in the compulsory questions.

Some centres clearly took advantage of the full hour available for essays in F855 and F856, and we do expect to see substantial and well thought out essays being produced for those papers. On occasion the essays were very similar in depth and breadth to those produced in F853 and F854 which made the attainment of high marks unlikely. Care also should be taken to update knowledge on UK Politics when taking F855 and F856; it was often evident that candidates had placed their entire focus on US Politics or Political Ideas and were unaware that things like General Elections and coalition governments had happened since their AS examinations.

F851 Contemporary Politics of the UK

General Comments

This summer's paper was clearly to the liking of candidates, most of whom wrote at length on every question. As with all examinations, the best responses provided a direct answer to the question set, made a number and range of points and supported these with contemporary evidence and examples.

Candidates should be reminded of the importance of 'focus' if they wish to gain high marks. In practice very few candidates actually write 'wrong' answers, that is answers that have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the question, however, some do not focus sufficiently on the question. A consequence of this lack of focus is that some candidates do not do as well as their knowledge (AO1) suggests they should. For example, in answer to Q1b the best essays offered a number of explanations for pressure group success. Candidates who provided a list of pressure groups methods without assessing their relative efficacy did not do as well. Similarly, when tackling Q5 some candidates described a range of psephological models without assessing their value.

In the above examples, candidates would have been rewarded for their knowledge and understanding (AO1) of the topic but not for AO2 (analysis and evaluation) and AO3 (the ability write a balanced and well-focussed answer).

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1a** The best responses correctly identified a couple of key features of interest and cause groups and provided examples taken both from the sources and the candidates' own knowledge. Those who provided a basic definition and a single example were awarded half marks.
- 1b** The best answers provided a range of explanations for pressure group success and illustrated them with detailed, contemporary examples. Some candidates wrote about why pressure groups were unsuccessful, and while an answer could be inferred from this, responses that focussed on reasons for success were more effective.
- 2** The vast majority of candidates knew what a two-party system was and were able to argue that, in many ways, Britain no longer fitted this mould, supporting this belief with evidence and examples. To gain a high mark, candidates also needed to be able to explain why it might be argued that Britain still has a two-party system.
- 3** The best answers were focused, balanced and contained a range of points supported by contemporary evidence. Those who considered just one side of the proposition – that there was, or was not, a need to change the current system – or who took the question as an invitation to describe a number of alternative systems, were awarded half marks.
- 4** The best answers identified a number of possible reasons for the outcome of the 2010 election and then reflected intelligently upon them. Answers that were descriptive – typically describing one or two features of the campaign – rather than analytical, were not rewarded as highly.

- 5** The best answers managed to identify both the strength and weaknesses of social structures explanations for voting behaviour and the relative value of some of the alternative models. Most candidates managed to avoid the pitfall of discussing factors rather than models.

F852 Contemporary Government of the UK

General Comments

It was good to see much more effective source utilisation. Candidates are increasingly realising that the sources provide a lot of useful information which can be used to gain AO1 marks. Systematic use of the sources can really pay off. A positive feature of many scripts was the willingness of candidates to 'discuss' intelligently, and support their points with both contemporary and accurate examples. It is also worth stressing that 16% of the marks are available for 'written communication', so it really helps the final mark if answers are legible and well written, with words which are in the sources like 'Prime Minister', 'Parliament', and 'cabinet' correctly spelled. There was some evidence of a lack of knowledge of basic information on key aspects of the mandatory topics, such as the relationship between the Cabinet and Prime Minister, and the committee structure in Parliament. There is a strong case for ensuring that every part of the specification on the mandatory topics is carefully covered.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1a** The good answers clearly differentiated between 'role' and 'powers', and also kept the focus very much on 'describe'. There are no AO2 marks on offer here, so there was no need to debate whether the PM has too much/too little power. That should be saved for the next question. The best answers not only made good use of the sources, developing the points made in Source A in particular with their own knowledge, but also obviously brought in contemporary 'own knowledge' points, such as creating and managing a coalition.
- 1b** The best really thought about 'too few' with some care and considered what might be the 'right' amount of power for an elected figure to have in a democracy. There were some good discussions which had a focus on the Iraq/Afghanistan interventions, while at the same time showing awareness of the need to make decisions in a hurry. It is worth stressing that this question always starts with the 'using the sources' phrase and there are a variety of useful points available in the sources. Avoiding a rather narrow list and ensuring that there is clear evidence of balance in the argument is always a recipe for success.
- 2** The best really thought about the 'too much' aspect of the question. There was good awareness by some of the role that parties played in the day-to-day running of Parliament. It was also good to see how many did not just confine it to the House of Commons but also made mention of the House of Lords. The better answers looked at the role of the whips in both Houses and the way in which the party leaders controlled, or at least tried to, the way members voted and participated in committees and the rest of the work of the Commons. There were some very good answers which showed awareness of the degree of independence of individual MPs.
- 3** This was the most popular by far of the three optional questions. The better answers avoided the tendency to write prepared answers on the case for and against a written constitution, or spend a lot of time on the sources of the constitution. The best thought a little about what a 'too flexible' constitution might be, and developed a case each way. The merits of being able to adapt quickly on issues such as devolution or the House of Lords were well utilised and there were some good debates which looked at the threat to rights and liberties after 9/11. As always there was a lot on the US constitution, not all of which had much relevance.

- 4 This was done by few, but usually well done. There was invariably a good focus on the importance to the judiciary of the Act. There was a high level of awareness of the theoretical implications for the separation of powers and the merits of physically distancing the new Supreme Court from Parliament. There were some excellent arguments each way, with some arguing that the Act made only superficial changes and that executive domination of the judicial process was still present, and that the Act was not of great constitutional importance.

- 5 Again done by few, but they found it a straightforward question. It was good to see detailed knowledge of recent EU developments, ranging from enlargement, through Lisbon to the EURO crisis. Refreshingly few are now taking the opportunity to just criticise the EU in a negative way. There is still confusion over the role of ECHR which is seen by many as a sinister arm of Brussels, as well as a lack of awareness of the role of the ECJ. The best answers looked at different developments and then looked at the impact on UK politics in a fairly systematic way. There were some interesting answers on the rise of UKIP and the anti-EU BNP and the effect of these parties on voting behaviour.

F853 Contemporary US Government and Politics

General Comments

There was a good attempt to tackle most of the questions on the paper with the exception of question 8 on the protection of rights. Centres should pay more attention to this topic. From a teaching perspective, it can complement the judiciary and so allows for coverage of a good part of this, and other, specifications.

The rationale behind the compulsory question is to ensure that all topics on the specification are covered. The inclusion of a compulsory question on federalism did not present too much of a problem. Some were caught out however and this reinforces the need to ensure that candidates have a working understanding of all the main topics on the specification. Teachers can still prioritise certain topics over others but it would be perilous to completely ignore some topics on the specification. In this sense, breadth rather than depth might be the way to cover less popular topics. Given that the time allowed for each question (1a and 1b) is roughly ten and fifteen minutes and they will always be on a central aspect of the topic, this approach should adequately prepare candidates for the paper. The idea of a 'working knowledge' might sum up the level required for the less popular topics.

It is worth reiterating that this is primarily a US government and politics paper. Occasional and brief references to the UK and other systems are encouraged and rewarded if they serve to answer the question. It is possible however to score full marks without any such comparisons.

The title of this paper is 'contemporary' US government and politics and wherever possible this will be reflected in the questions set. On the January paper there was a question on the Obama presidency and this illustrates the point that centres need to keep an eye on current developments in the USA. Even if a question does not include a specific reference to a recent event or personality, they should be included in the study of the specification as a matter of course. References to contemporary developments, as is frequently stated in these reports, are a means to impress the marker.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1a** Three types of federalism were identified in the source and candidates needed to expand upon these to get full marks. The best answers managed this and others introduced other variations such as 'marble/layer cake', mandated, picket fence, coercive, creative, fiscal, permissive and kaleidoscopic federalism to name but a few.
- 1b** Candidates could glean quite a lot of help from the source such as the roles played by the president, Congress and Supreme Court. As is always the case with the second part of the compulsory question, there is more emphasis on analysis, whereas question 1a will always be more descriptive and definitional. Some candidates struggled to separate federal and state governments and wrote mainly on the former. Others were able to discuss the Clinton, Bush and Obama presidencies but without explaining the forces behind the changes in federal-state relations. The same applied to their discussion of the roles played by the Congress and the Supreme Court.

Those who referred to the importance of ideology, fiscal and institutional revival at state level and current budgetary problems were rewarded. Many referred to the Patriot Act, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the present economic crisis and stimulus package, as evidence of increased federal power over the states. Whilst not absolutely central to the question, this was credited. Good answers discussed the use of

block grants as opposed to categorical grants-in-aid and mentioned cases from the Supreme Court relating to federal-state relations.

- 2 The congressional elections might be regarded as the most significant development in US government and politics in the past year, hence their inclusion on the paper. It was a popular question and many were able to identify a range of factors which explained the Republican gains in the House and Senate. The best answers were able to place the scale of the defeat in the context of previous mid-term elections and made reference to 2006, 2002 and 1994. A discussion of the presidential elections of 2008 was not relevant. With questions which invite the candidate to discuss a range of factors, one good approach is to evaluate the relative importance of factors by ranking them in order of significance and considering whether their worth is increasing or decreasing. References to models of voting behaviour were appropriate here, especially rational choice given the importance of the economy.
- 3 This was a popular question with some excellent answers achieving full marks. It also illustrates the general point that centres need to ensure that their candidates understand the importance of the wording of the question – in this case, that third parties are “doomed to fail”. The wording guides candidates on how to plan and focus their answer. Candidates who simply regurgitate a pre-planned answer to a slightly different (but what might be regarded as a more standard) question will not access the highest marks.

It was good to see some attempt to consider the role of the Tea Party Movement. Candidates contemplated whether it was a third party or a pressure group, some asked if the Republican Party were absorbing its policies and applied the stinging bee analogy to this possible development. Others suggested that it was setting a new agenda as Perot and the Reform Party had in the 1990s. On occasion too much attention was paid to the candidacy of Christine O'Donnell. It is also worth pointing out that the role of third parties in the primaries and caucuses of the Democratic and Republican parties will be limited by definition and should not be considered.

- 4 This was another popular question which elicited some good answers. References to US pressure groups and the US political system are the key discriminator on this topic. Candidates need to consider the differences between the UK and USA with regard to the importance of for example insider status, and to build up a list of US examples that can illustrate the importance of money, organisation, leadership, the issue and the scale of opposition etc. Generally, candidates are able to use an analytical framework from their study of British politics to consider the democratic worth of pressure groups or factors which might determine their effectiveness, but they then need to apply their knowledge of the US system of government and politics to this framework in order to gain high AO1 marks. It was pleasing to see some references to *FEC v Citizens United* and examples of pressure group activity in the mid-terms.
- 5 Candidates who had prepared thoroughly were able to score highly on this question. The best answers were able to go beyond the standard consideration of shared and exclusive powers and illustrated how recent developments such as the passage of the START treaty and confirmation of Sotomayor and Kagan illustrated the ‘superiority’ of the Senate, whilst Obama’s travails with the budget revealed the power of the House. A consideration of power as opposed to prestige was a worthwhile course of argument to pursue.
- 6 Again, candidates were rewarded if they paid particular attention to the wording of the question. The roles of the president and his constitutional powers provided much scope for discussion. Real meaning could be given to the importance of persuasion if this discussion was complemented with reference to the difficult passage of Obamacare, problems securing a two thirds majority for the START treaty in the Senate with the

consequent need for the extension of the Bush tax cuts, references to the new Congress and the impact of the Republican majority in the House with the added dimension of the Tea Party sympathisers, and the loss of the filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. With a sharp focus on the question, such answers demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of US government and politics. The best answers adopted a critical approach and prioritised points according to their importance. The presidential power of pardon for example was not really worthy of a great deal of discussion.

- 7** To answer this question effectively, candidates needed to refer to current US Supreme Court cases when discussing judicial independence and rulings from the Court. *Brown v Board of Education* and the appointment of Warren as Chief Justice are relevant in this regard but given that they happened over 50 years ago, they did not provide the best material with which to answer this question. Candidates who considered the rulings of the Roberts Court and the impact of the Bush appointments after the death of Rehnquist and retirement of O'Connor against the impact of Obama's appointments were well rewarded.
- 8** Good answers considered a range of rights. Indeed a sound knowledge of the Bill of Rights and rulings from the Supreme Court provided an excellent platform from which to consider the case for and against. In this respect, the role played by the Supreme Court and recent developments, such as the renewal of the Patriot Act, invited comment on the role played by the executive and legislature. Similarly references to pressure groups such as the ACLU, NRA, La Raza, NAACP and NOW also helped candidates to develop relevant points.

F854 Political Ideas and Concepts

General Comments

Candidates are becoming increasingly familiar with the requirements of this paper and are demonstrating a better and more focussed use of political theory. Many centres prepare their candidates well with reference to the recommended textbooks. The Heywood series is particularly useful in this respect.

The rubric was largely followed and all candidates answered the compulsory question. All 7 of the optional Section B questions were attempted, with the democracy and political ideologies questions remaining the most popular. Those who planned their time accurately avoided the risk of running out of time and producing a short final answer.

Candidates are always advised to pay careful attention to the specific question asked, and this was particularly pertinent to the comparison questions on this paper. Good answers directly compared relevant features of the ideas and concepts involved, often using thoughtfully selected criteria to compare similarities and differences. These answers received higher marks than those that described the concepts and relied on either implicit points of comparison or brief concluding statements on the extent of similarity and difference. In order to achieve good AO2 marks on this kind of question, direct comparisons should be made.

Comments on Individual Questions

Q1a Good answers gave a clear definition of the concept, highlighting the idea of a penalty for a specific breach in a legal code. There were some very good references to the ideas of AV Dicey and Patrick Devlin on the role of punishment in modern society. Some answers also highlighted moral dimensions, looking at the origins of the concept relating to the causing of suffering to others. Common errors were to rely too heavily on the written stimulus material and to make no direct attempt to define the term, instead focusing on the models of punishment.

This question should take approximately 10-12 minutes to answer, so need not be overly lengthy, especially in comparison to Q1b.

Q1b Many candidates used the steer in the stimulus material to focus on the retributive, deterrence and rehabilitative models of punishment, although some also brought in ideas of restorative punishment. Good answers directly compared the models. They looked at issues of attitude towards human nature, focus of the punishment, ideological relevance and extent of severity, highlighting similarities and differences in 3 or 4 areas. As twelve out of the fifteen marks available are for AO2, there was no need to provide lengthy examples of the models in practice, nor for long descriptions of the models themselves.

Q2 This was quite a broad question that invited responses on the models of state intervention, social contract versus organic theories of the state, as well as more ideologically based theories on the nature of the state. Consequently, a wide range of different approaches were credited. Answers that included a range of theories received good AO1 marks. Answers that were rewarded highly with AO2 marks made direct comparisons between the different theories rather than only describing the different types of states. In order to gain the highest marks, answers needed to consider both similarities and differences.

- Q3** Good answers gave clear definitions of both power and authority, utilising the ideas of relevant theorists. A common error was to confuse the two concepts, talking about power when authority was meant and vice versa. Another error was to focus upon only one of the two concepts. Good answers, in terms of AO2 marks, directly considered the extent of similarity and often utilised different typologies of the two concepts to compare them. Answers that looked at similarity through their mutual compatibility were also credited. Answers that were descriptive of the two concepts did less well in terms of AO2 marks.
- Q4** Good answers focused upon human rights theory and animal rights ideas. A common error was to only refer to one of the types of rights. There were some very good attempts to link the universality of human rights and their moral basis to similar arguments proposed by animal rights theorists. Also many went on to reject such comparisons from a utilitarian perspective and covered issues such as sentience and applicability of higher order rights. These types of responses achieved good AO2 marks. Answers that tended to describe issues surrounding animal rights, often focusing on animal experimentation and the case for vegetarianism, without making reference to human rights ideas, did less well in terms of AO2 marks.
- Q5** Most answers had a generally good idea of the basis of democracy, and were able to define the two types. A common error was to only refer to direct democracy in its purely Athenian guise, without any reference to more modern usage regarding referendums, initiatives and other direct procedures. Good answers that clearly defined the two terms and were able to explain them, relating to the ideas of relevant thinkers, achieved highly in terms of AO1 marks. Good answers successfully commented on the extent of difference by considering issues such as the extent of involvement of the citizenship, the need for a professional class of politicians and the scalability of their usage. This comparative response achieved good AO2 marks, especially when the issue of extent was considered. Answers that were descriptive, or became sidetracked in discussing other models of democracy or representation, achieved fewer marks for AO2. This was also the case for those answers that focused upon the case for and against direct and indirect democracy.
- Q6** Many good answers had a clear understanding of the two ideologies. This was the case when answers recognised the variations in types of conservatism and nationalism, instead of treating them as monolithic entities. Answers that focused heavily upon either conservatism or nationalism tended to achieve fewer AO1 marks. There were many good answers that directly compared the two broad based ideologies. Better answers in terms of AO2 marks were aware that certain strands of nationalism do share comparable ideas with aspects of conservative thought, whereas other strands such as socialist and liberal nationalism do run counter to many conservative themes. A common error was to only describe aspects of both ideologies, or to try and compare them as single groups of ideas.
- Q7** Good answers, in terms of AO1 marks, were able to clearly define socialism and highlight a range of relevant principles. These were accompanied by reference to key socialist thinkers. Common errors were to describe socialism only in very general terms, or to focus exclusively on egalitarianism. In terms of AO2 marks, good answers did look at the relative importance of the different principles in relation to the different strands of socialism. Most good answers, however, did see the centrality of egalitarianism underpinning all strands of socialist thought, albeit with different attitudes to what type of equality was most desirable. Answers that focused exclusively on egalitarianism, often doing so in terms of wide ranging attitudes to types of equality, achieved fewer AO2 marks.

- Q8** Good answers in terms of AO1 marks did highlight a range of feminist perspectives. This also tended to be accompanied by appreciation of key values and made use of a range of feminist thinkers. Less well rewarded was a generalised understanding of feminist themes, which did not differentiate between different strands of feminism. More AO2 marks went to answers that did appreciate some commonality but also different priorities between the different strands. Answers that only described the different strands, or just talked in terms of feminism in general, did less well in AO2 marks.

F855 US Government and Politics

General Comments

All the questions were attempted on the paper in relatively equal measure. Question 4 on the protection of rights was the least popular question. The importance of this topic is clear given recent developments in both the US and UK post 9/11 and the Human Rights Act of 1998. It also dovetails nicely with the study of judiciaries and constitutions. Centres are recommended that this topic be given a higher priority in the teaching of the specification.

Candidates have to write two essays in two hours. Consequently they do have considerable time to plan their essays. There is an emphasis on 'stretch and challenge'. Consequently questions may have a certain emphasis which requires candidates to think a little bit more than on other papers and militates against writing pre-packaged answers. Candidates need not worry too much about semantics. The old tenets of 'using the words in the question' throughout the essay and of 'answering the question directly at the start and end of a paragraph' would help candidates to write much more effectively.

Candidates would also do well to keep their knowledge of British politics fresh and up to date as this is an essential element of this paper. It seemed on occasion that candidates had jettisoned parts of their AS studies as they frequently missed relatively 'open goals' to display knowledge of the UK system of government or politics that they had studied only a year ago. Teachers might like to consider the inclusion of a greater emphasis on British politics in the A2 year rather than just having a singular focus on the USA. Perhaps a brief résumé of an AS topic could serve as a prelude to the study of its US counterpart.

It is worth reiterating that this paper is essentially a comparative paper of US and UK government and politics. Where there is the opportunity to include comparative analysis from other countries, this is rewarded and indeed encouraged. This lends itself better to some questions than others. Voting behaviour for example tends to be a more restricted question due to the content of this topic. A question on electoral systems however is often more open-ended, inviting more international examples. It is possible to score full marks with an essay which only refers to the UK and the USA. The Economist is strongly recommended as essential reading for the course as it frequently provides useful material from around the world that can be used to good effect in providing points of contrast and comparison.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Given the proximity of the 2008 presidential elections and 2010 British General Election, there was a great deal of material to write a comprehensive answer to this question. Some candidates ignored the importance of personality and provided a detailed account of many factors that can influence voting behaviour. These answers needed more focus on the question. Discussion of other factors was relevant but needed to be placed into context by contrasting these with a consideration of the importance of personality. The best answers placed personality with other short term factors such as the campaign and media within the rational choice model. This can be tied to the impact of dealignment. Reference to voting behaviour models such as retrospective and prospective theories allowed candidates to develop lines of argument which allowed personality to be contrasted with factors such as economic stewardship and the recent economic crisis. Similarly sociological models allowed a contrast to be made between the floating voter and the aligned voter with personality playing a much lesser role in the latter. References to the Congressional mid terms with mention of the roles played by Obama, Palin, Angle, and inevitably O'Donnell were well received. Candidates were sometimes too willing to

accept the media as a vital influence. This can legitimately be linked to personality but given the time allowed for an essay, consideration might be given to the filter and reinforcement effects and the differences between the broadcasting and publishing media in the UK. References to the 'new media' were more common and whilst its precise impact may be uncertain, this was nonetheless credited.

- 2 A key discriminator between candidates is the ability to focus on the actual question. Sometimes one word can have a significant impact upon the focus of a question. This question had a specific angle for consideration, asking whether pressure groups have a 'vital' role to play in modern democracies. Many candidates saw the words 'pressure groups' and 'democratic' and produced a standard essay on the arguments for and against pressure groups in a democracy. Whilst this was credited as relevant, the best answers considered whether or not this role is vital. This invited comment on the meaning and state of democracy today in the UK and USA. The infrequency of elections, the decline of parties, the party functions usurped by pressure groups could be balanced against elitist arguments. This had a different focus to the more familiar 'help or hinder' democracy question.
- 3 Although there is no one way to write an essay, and the mark scheme allows for the many ways in which candidates answer a question, there are key lines of argument that form the core of an essay. In order to gauge the extent of party decline, for example, a clear consideration of the extent to which political parties fulfil their functions was central. Most candidates considered a relatively small range of functions carried out by political parties. Theories of party renewal in the US were not to the fore but those who discussed the significance of the increased polarisation of the parties in the Congress and the role of parties in fund raising and training of candidates were rewarded. Similarly, discussion of third parties (in providing ideological choice) and the impact of the Tea Party Movement (in terms of mobilisation and recruitment) was also well received. The best answers drew on other areas of the specification and included references to dealignment and the increased popularity of pressure groups. A common error was to write on ideological differences between the parties rather than answering the question asked.
- 4 The question allowed discussion of judiciaries, legislature and executives and their role in the protection of rights. Given recent developments with rulings from the British and European Court of Human Rights on issues such as the rights of prisoners to vote, super injunctions and the inability of the authorities to deport failed asylum seekers guilty of serious crimes, there was plenty of scope for discussion. Centres are advised ensure that their candidates know the different roles played by the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights with examples of their work in various areas such as the Bosman ruling from the ECJ.

This is a question which invites more international comparisons than some of the others on the paper. Consequently, good answers made reference to issues such as the banning of the burqa in France. Consideration of the nature of rights, with a discussion of natural, positive and negative rights and how the attitude to certain rights may vary depending upon circumstance, was useful. The attitude of the Roberts Court to first and eighth amendment rights for example might be contrasted with their approach to others relating to the fourth, fifth and sixth. The role of the executive and legislature in issues such as the renewal of the Patriot Act, the closure of Guantanamo Bay and the treatment of Bradley Manning provided good material with which to answer the question. From a pedagogical viewpoint, it might be worth giving social rights greater emphasis on this part of the course. Legislatures generally assume greater responsibility for issues relating to health, education and work. Such considerations would add different dimensions to an essay going beyond the narrower confines of individual rights versus state security issues in the post 9/11 world. The role played by pressure groups such as Liberty and

Amnesty International, the ACLU and NAACP and others helped develop valid arguments in support of the assertion in the question.

- 5** This was a popular question and one which was answered reasonably well. Good answers drew on knowledge of the UK legislature gained from studying F852. They discussed the role played by departmental select committees in the context of scrutiny or of public bill committees in the consideration of Parliament's legislative role. The best answers considered the importance of parliamentary systems of government and the subsequent fusion of powers against the US system based upon a real separation of powers. With regard to the latter, the impact of the 2010 mid terms provided scope for relevant analysis and evaluation. It was pleasing to see an awareness of the increased incidence of backbench revolts, if not government defeats, since the advent of the coalition government as recently outlined by Cowley and Stuart. Rather like the question on parties, knowledge of all the functions of legislatures provided an excellent framework for assessment, whereas knowledge of only a few functions encouraged a more partial answer. References to European Parliament, Scottish and Welsh Assemblies and others, such as Canada, were credited.
- 6** This was a first directly comparative question on this paper and it proved to be a popular one with the candidates. The question was quite open ended and candidates who thought about possible approaches had various lines of argument to pursue. Most adopted the approach of assessing reforms in the UK and then comparing these to arrangements in the USA. There was useful reference to reform to the House of Lords, devolution, the Human Rights Act and Constitutional Reform Act. Discussion could have gone further to include Brown and Cameron's proposals with regard to fixed term elections. The broader picture of a separation of powers, unitary versus federal systems, and written versus unwritten constitutions could usefully have been developed. Discussion of the EU in this context served to confuse rather than illuminate lines of argument.
- 7** The best answers responded to the obvious prompt in the question to discuss the debate surrounding prime ministerial government in the UK. The lack of reference to the notion of a 'British presidency' was perhaps understandable. Reference to more basic points of analysis, such as the power of patronage and control of the cabinet agenda, were expected. Good answers developed arguments surrounding the core executive and it was pleasing to read some assessments of the Cameron and Brown administrations. The best answers assessed the impact of coalition government on cabinet government and made comparisons between the EXOP and PM's office. As with the question on legislatures, discussion needed to take into account the differing constitutional arrangements in both the UK and the USA in order to address key issues relating to constraints. The question did mention 'forms of government' and consequently discussion of elections and campaigns was not really relevant.
- 8** Good answers were able to emphasise the differing levels of judicial review in systems with and without a written constitution. The best answers considered the impact of the Human Rights Act and the Constitutional Reform Act with more emphasis on the former with the ECHR amounting to a quasi Bill of Rights. Good use was made of international examples from a range of countries such as Venezuela, Italy and Pakistan to illustrate arguments. It was pleasing to see many references to administrative law and 'ultra vires' rulings in the UK. Answers could be placed in the context of a separation or fusion of powers. This is a point mentioned in the comments above on legislatures and executives and reinforces the usefulness of these concepts as the basis for discussion at some point in many synoptic essays.

F856 Political Ideas and Concepts in Practice

General Comments

Candidates displayed an improved understanding of the demands of this module. In order to fulfil the requirement for synopticity, the knowledge and understanding of political ideas and concepts built up through the study of F854 needs to be applied to modern politics. Teachers should therefore spend time guiding students on how to apply their understanding of ideas and concepts to the topic areas covered in the specification. It would be difficult for students to appreciate what is required without this guidance.

In thinking about these synoptic style essays there are two key questions that candidates should consider:

- Have I provided evidence of understanding the specific political theory relevant to the question?
- Have I applied this theory in practice using specific evidence from modern politics?

Unless both of these questions have been addressed, the subsequent answer would not be synoptic in style, and would be unable to access the higher mark bands.

In the examination, one effective approach was to write a paragraph outlining the relevant theory (including reference to specific political thinkers) for each aspect of the debate, followed by a paragraph outlining its relevance to modern politics, including specific evidence. Answers that mainly referred to modern politics, with only the most generalised reference to political theory, failed to address either of the above questions and thus were only able to access levels 1 and 2. Those that repeated the F854 essay style of pure theory, with only a generalised reference to modern politics, answered just one of the above questions and were restricted at best to the bottom of level 3.

Candidates should also think carefully about the title of the essay they have chosen to answer. Having an hour to answer each essay should allow approximately 5-10 minutes of planning time. This is especially important for thinking about what theories to use, what specific evidence from modern politics to deploy, and how to structure the answer in order to address the specific question asked.

Comments on Individual Questions

- Q1** Good answers showed a genuine appreciation of what a liberal democracy is, thus going beyond a standard definition of democracy to consider this specific form. Often these answers would then apply specific criteria for evaluating the areas in which the UK could be said to conform to a liberal democracy (eg cultural, procedural and institutional features of liberal democracy). In doing this, they went beyond a random list of ways in which the UK has democratic and liberal features. Answers arguing that the UK was or was not democratic (often through a lengthy discussion of the merits of FPTP) were not really synoptic in style, and also did not show the necessary understanding of liberal democracy. Similarly some less effective answers spent too much time debating which model of democracy the UK most conforms to, or on a critique of liberal democracy offered particularly by Marxist thinkers.

- Q2** Good answers had a real appreciation of the meaning of the nation state, utilising effectively specific theory on the concept of the nation state and central issues such as the location of sovereignty and the distinction between devolution and federalism. There was also some practical knowledge of how devolution has developed since its inception in 1998, creating an asymmetrical system across the UK as a whole. Less effective answers tended to describe only central aspects of devolution, especially in its initial phase. A common error was to discuss at great length other potential threats to the nation state, especially the EU and globalisation – this was not what the question was asking.
- Q3** Good answers had clear understanding about the theory behind models of political power. These focused mostly on Lukes' typology of power, although some good answers adopted an elitist and pluralist approach to the holding of power in the UK. Less effective answers had no real understanding of any feasible models of power and thus were unable to answer the question synoptically. A common error was to confuse the idea of authority for power, instead determining how far Weber's three models of power (*sic*) – legal rational, traditional and charismatic – were applicable to the UK. Good answers were able to apply the models in practice, looking at various key proponents in the exercising of power, including the Executive, Westminster Parliament, pressure groups and the media.
- Q4** Good answers did have a clear appreciation of the balance between rights and responsibilities in modern western societies, albeit many answers focused more on rights than responsibilities. This was often linked to effective understanding of liberal theory relating to rights. Many answers also had an acute grasp of potential threats to rights in the UK post 9/11 and 7/7, citing details from the various anti-terror legislation. The very best also could highlight similar legislation in the US (eg Patriot Act) and also linked measures in countries such as France, banning the burkha in public. Common errors included a general discussion of various types of rights, often ignoring responsibilities, and a focus on the rights and wrongs of the anti-terror legislation.
- Q5** Good answers had an acute appreciation of the role of an independent judiciary in upholding the rule of law (Dicey and Devlin were often used very well). These had a clear appreciation that a clear separation of powers is central to the ideas behind liberal democracy. There was also much good application to modern politics, dealing with potential political intervention in judicial cases (eg the sentencing of the Bulger killers) and the rise of judicial activism. The most common error was to only describe the role of the UK judiciary.
- Q6** Good answers had a clear appreciation of the central values and strands relevant to the UK Conservative Party. The best answers applied these to a coherent definition of ideology, thus moving beyond an essay that merely looked at whether David Cameron was adhering to traditional conservative principles. Some astute answers rejected the notion of conservatism as an ideology due to its pragmatic overtones and lack of an end goal. Often, they then argued that the modern Conservative Party has been strongly influenced by classical liberal forces through the New Right and more socially liberal values under Cameron's policy announcements on the Big Society etc. Less effective answers failed to address the meaning of ideology and tended to describe recent Conservative Party policy and see how far it reflected traditional values.
- Q7** Good answers tried to come to terms with a potential meaning of true socialism, through considering the core principles behind socialism as well as relating these to key strands in socialist thought. There was much good evidence on past as well as present policies of the Labour Party, although some less effective answers focused exclusively on the party post-Blair. The question was not meant to be a History style question, requiring a narrative of Labour Party history, however appreciation of the pre-Blair Labour Party was

central to the question set. There was also some very good detail on Labour under Miliband, with some candidates exploring themes such as 'Blue Labour'.

- Q8** Good answers to this question had a clear appreciation of the meaning of religious fundamentalism and also its subsequent relevant forms – especially with regard to Christian and Islamic variations. This then allowed a synoptic evaluation of how this has helped to shape the political agenda in the UK. A pleasing number of answers went beyond the issue of terrorism to cover other areas such as a backlash against social permissiveness and the increase in religious based education. Most answers did tend to conclude that, in comparison to other parts of the globe, this ideology had only a marginal impact on UK politics. A common error was to regard the essay only in terms of terrorism. Some interesting answers did try and link the essay to a post modernist approach in suggesting no ideology any longer had any relevance. Whilst this is an interesting polemic, it should not have formed the central focus for debate within the essay.

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