

Government and Politics

Advanced **GCE A2 H495**

Advanced Subsidiary **GCE AS H095**

Report on the Units

January 2009

H095/H495/MS/R/09J

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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Chief Examiner's Report

It was good to note the smooth introduction to the two new AS levels. Hopefully the candidates will both note and benefit from the similarity in structure of the two papers as well as their much less complex format. We would also stress the changing focus in the new AS levels. We are not looking for the depth that was expected in the old pre-curriculum 2000 A levels, which we regularly got with Curriculum 2000 (along with complaints that we expected too much depth). We are looking more for breadth, understanding and awareness of contemporary UK politics, rather than extensive details about Californian propositions of the 1970s or intricate mathematical details on the 1983 election. Perhaps the time has come to review the material given out to candidates and see if it has the focus needed for the new AS levels? The prepared answer still reared its ugly head in both old and new AS level, as it did in the two A2 units and it was even sadder to see the rather mindless prejudice which emanated from essays on the EU. Given the views of the majority of the press on the issue we have learned not to expect much in the way of balance in the subject, but the low level of knowledge was concerning.

F851: Government of the UK

General Comments

The first examination of the new specification produced encouraging results and there were a large number of good answers to all the questions

As with all exams, candidates who had prepared themselves for the exam did well. Those with poor technique and those who had not spent enough time revising did not.

And, as with all other exams, the key to getting a good mark was to answer the question. Examiners reward focus, balance, range and depth; if a candidate ignores the question and simply writes about the topic they will get little credit.

Centres might find the following advice useful to candidates:

- Marks for Part (a) questions are limited to AO1, that is 'knowledge and understanding', so no analysis, judgement or discussion is required. If a question asks for a definition, that is all that is needed, but it should be at a reasonable length.
- For questions 1 (a) and (b), candidates must refer to the source and use their own knowledge.
- Candidates always do better if they answer the question. If the question asks for the 'case for' there is no need to provide both the 'case for' and the 'case against'. If the question asks why something is important, candidates provide reasons why it is important and not, for example, why it is an issue.
- Candidates should use paragraphs to divide their ideas up.
- Using the title to write the first sentence of each paragraph is a good way of ensuring that a candidate is answering the question (though not foolproof): "One reason why the funding of political parties has been an issue in British politics is because ..."
- Examiners are looking for focus, range, balance (when required) and depth. If any of these are missing it will be difficult to reach the highest levels of assessment matrix.
- Use of relevant contemporary examples will always raise the quality of an answer.

Examples of some of these points can be found below.

Comments on Individual Questions

1.a. Using the sources and your own knowledge, outline the differences between a pressure group and a party.

Most candidates knew the answer and gained at least half marks. To gain full marks candidates needed to provide a range of distinctions. The best answers used contemporary examples to illustrate their points. The weaker answers simply presented all that the candidate knew about parties and pressure groups regardless of whether what they were writing answered the question.

1.b Using the sources and your own knowledge, discuss the effectiveness of the various methods used by pressure groups to achieve their objectives.

As with all essays, the key to getting a good mark is to answer the question. In this case the focus of the question was pressure groups methods and their effectiveness and what was being looked for was a range of methods and some assessment of their value. Being an interest group or a cause group, an insider or outsider pressure group is not necessarily a method and candidates who simply wrote about these types of pressure group found it harder to access the

higher mark range. Further, too many candidates restricted their analysis to a narrow range of methods - marches, demonstrations, picketing – and no matter how good these answers were, they could reach the highest level of the assessment matrix.

As with Part (a) examples are central to getting a high mark and many candidates were up-to-date with their use of *Plane Stupid*, however, this is a contemporary politics paper and extensive use of material on the suffragettes seemed a little dated.

The best answers often considered briefly what 'effective' might mean in this context.

2. Why has the funding of political parties been an issue in British politics?

The best answers addressed the question, whereas weaker responses often didn't. What was being looked for was a number of reasons why party funding is an issue, but many candidates ignored the question and simply wrote all they knew about party funding. A significant minority concentrated entirely on the case for and against state funding.

Frustratingly, many candidates clearly knew a lot about the subject but seemed unable to use what they knew to answer the question that had been asked. Beginning each paragraph with something along the lines of 'Party funding is an issue because ...' would have made a difference to the marks of several candidates: explicit answers are superior to those that have to be inferred.

3. Discuss the advantages of replacing the current system for electing MPs with a different one.

Again, good answers addressed the question which asked only for the 'advantages' of replacing the current system (which could include the perceived weaknesses of the current system) and not the case for and against reform.

There are 12 AO1 marks for this question, but candidates who spent the first quarter of their answer simply describing FPTP or proportional systems were not making the best use of their time.

4. How important has the campaign been in deciding the outcome of recent general elections?

Questions on this area of the specification, that is *UK Parliamentary Elections*, focus on contemporary British politics and candidates need to reflect this emphasis in their answers. In this case, candidates needed to use evidence from recent general elections as the basis for their discussion of the importance of campaigns. They could do this either by considering the elections themselves or by discussing the importance of campaigns more generally and illustrating their discussion with reasonably detailed references to, for example, the elections of 1997, 2001 and 2005. Theoretical discussions that did not refer to recent elections did not score highly.

'How important' should also have suggested to candidates that they needed to make some sort of assessment of the relative importance of campaigns in deciding the outcome of recent elections, rather than just listing a series of factors that might affect the outcome.

5. Discuss the view that class is no longer an important factor influencing the way people vote.

Questions on this area, that is *Voting Behaviour in the UK*, will tend to focus on more theoretical issues, but, nonetheless, any discussion needs to be supported by evidence from the UK.

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

This question required candidates to reach some judgement about the importance of class as an influence on the way people vote. Weaker answers saw this as an excuse for simply described the many factors affecting voting behaviour, without attempting to answer the question. There was also a tendency to consider only longer term factors – age, partisanship, region – and to spend considerable time on factors usually regarded as being of less importance – gender and religion.

Good answers argued that class was, perhaps, less important than it used to be, and that other factors - both long and short-term - might therefore have increased in importance, but nonetheless, class remained an important factor.

F852 Contemporary Government of the UK

General Comments

Compared with F851, only a small number of centres did this first paper for 852 so those seen were probably not a truly representative selection of candidates and the following comments must be seen in this light. The main features of those who got into the A/B grades were

1. A willingness to use the sources
2. Sound 'textbook' knowledge backed up with some recent and relevant examples
3. Awareness of what was expected when asked to 'discuss' something, or 'make out a case for and against' something.

There was a lot of reluctance to use the sources, both of which provided useful points that could have been made in answering both Question 1 (a) and 1 (b). We are not expecting the rather overt use of sources we looked for in 2595, but there is information there which we would expect to be used to get into the higher levels.

There was also a real reluctance in some candidates to actually answer the question, even though they clearly had a good grasp of the relevant material and were therefore in a position to get high AO2 marks. We are looking for analysis, debate and argument when we award AO2 marks and candidates should be encouraged to work towards gaining those marks.

Questions

1 a) This asked about the roles of the Cabinet. Few seemed to grasp the co-ordinating role which is in the sources, and there were other hints about strategic planning and limiting prime ministerial power which might well have been used. We tended to get lots of generalised descriptions about the Cabinet, its membership, method of operating and committees (although often confused with parliamentary committees). Some felt that its job was to make law. There were lots of facts known, but a great reluctance to actually answer the question about roles. Inevitably there were some who got involved in a debate about whether we still have cabinet government or not. It is worth stressing that there are only AO1 marks going in 1 (a) and no argument or analysis is allocated marks.

1 (b) Lots of information about prime ministerial powers was forthcoming. Some wanted to write about prime ministerial styles. Relevance was the key issue here. Those who paused to think about the 'too few' aspect for a moment, and considered what 'too few' or 'too many' powers might consist of, tended to go straight to L4. They were asked to discuss a particular view and not list powers. A basic 'case for and against' approach worked well, initially looking at reasons why there might be too few powers (some argued that given the major problems facing the economy at present a Prime Minister needed a lot of power to sort out problems, like being able to nationalise banks etc). This was followed by a case 'against' with the second Iraq war being the most frequently quoted example here. Those who drew on the Major/Blair/Brown premierships for relevant examples were naturally rewarded. The title of the paper is after all 'Contemporary_Government of the UK'. Again there was surprisingly little use of the sources, where 'parliament', 'party', 'public opinion', the 'media', 'the cabinet', and even 'rivals', being put there to assist candidates.

2. The best paused to think what an 'effective' check might be. Some had a sound knowledge of the methods, and knew about Questions, the various committees, the Lords (and it was good to see so many mentions of the Lords) etc. Only a few utilised that knowledge to consider the strengths and weakness of those methods. Much of the knowledge was very theoretical indeed, and there was little evidence of any use of the Parliament Channel or Hansard to get any relevant examples. Some tried to build the whole answer around Prime Minister's Question

Time, but did not do well as that is perhaps more symbol than substance. Too many just picked up AO1 marks and by neglecting to 'discuss', preferring to list facts, got few AO2 marks. Answers could often be implicit, and we could be left wondering whether the information listed was part of a case 'for' or 'against'. There is a lot to be said for starting a paragraph with "One of the main reasons why it can be argued that Parliament does not check the executive effectively is because committees dealing with legislation have limited....." . Then we know exactly where the candidate is going and can start to allocate both AO1 and AO2 marks. So often we got a list of facts about checks, debates and so on, and it seemed to be the intention of the candidate to leave it for us to decide whether they were effective or not. We are not the jury-just the judge.

3. Given that those reforms are clearly listed in the specifications it was surprising to see so little knowledge of them. There was some grasp of the changes to the Lords and a little was known about the HR Act, but not a great deal more. Those who were aware of a range of reforms were reluctant to discuss the impact. The candidates who did really well not only had a good grasp of several reforms but were also prepared to argue a case each way. There were several comments about the fact that Charter 88 was disappointed!

4. Few did it and none did it well. Candidates simply did not know what the roles were and were therefore unable to compare their relative importance. We were looking for a clear description of the various roles and an argument both for and against the view suggested.

5. Few candidates were aware of any impact beyond that on parliamentary sovereignty. There was a remarkable amount of prejudice and little accurate knowledge. There was considerable confusion about which areas of policy the EU was actually responsible for. The few who did really well focussed on both government and constitution (and demonstrated that they were aware of the difference between the two). There was a depressing amount of ill-informed prejudice, viewing the EU as always, as a foreign conspiracy out to subvert all that is good in the UK.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Government and Politics H095 H495
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F851	Raw	100	77	67	57	47	38	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
F852	Raw	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

No candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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