



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCE
GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
AS/Advanced**

SUMMER 2023

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Government and Politics

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UNIT 1 Government in Wales and the United Kingdom

General Comments

The level of knowledge (AO1) seen throughout this year's paper was acceptable although there was less convincing development and depth on issues relating to the Welsh Parliament when compared to UK questions.

The ability of candidates to demonstrate and meet the demands of AO2 continues to improve with a clear focus seen in Section B responses on comparing, contrasting or explaining connections. This year's Unit 1 paper provided two Section B questions that assessed AO2 in different ways. Whilst Q.3 had a focus on comparing/contrasting, centres are encouraged to also emphasise the importance of explaining connections when preparing candidates for Section B.

The continuing challenge seen with AO3 in Section C is encouraging candidates to analyse and evaluate the specific question offered in the paper. Most candidates were able to organise and communicate their ideas in an effective manner but there were a significant minority of scripts that didn't use paragraphs effectively in their extended answers. The depth and range of contemporary examples in the Section C essays was inconsistent with many candidates offering a great range of relevant examples on power within the core executive but less so with Supreme Court decisions and matters relating to the Welsh Parliament.

There were a minority of candidates who did not manage to complete all the questions in the paper. There was little evidence of candidates who answered too many Section B or C questions and the overwhelming majority followed the instructions correctly in terms of navigating how many questions to answer from each section.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** This question, regarding the role of collective responsibility within the Cabinet of Wales or the UK, was answered well. The overwhelming majority chose to discuss the concept within the context of the UK government although some gave examples from within the Welsh Cabinet. There was some confusion of the term collective responsibility with individual ministerial responsibility in a minority of responses.
- Q.2** Many candidates offered a convincing and thorough outline of the main features of a codified constitution. The exemplification and development showed clear focus and candidates often wrote an overly thorough response to the question.

- Q.3** Many candidates were heavily reliant on the extract for their knowledge on the House of Lords. It is important that they use the extract as well as their own knowledge in Section B answers. In many responses there was an encouraging focus on comparing the work of MP's and peers. Often, the development was unconvincing as regards detailed knowledge and understanding of the role and influence of peers as well as backbench MP's.
- Q.4** Many candidates relied heavily on the extract for the constitutional principles and were able to establish relevant connections to their impact on governance in the UK today. Most chose to focus on parliamentary sovereignty and rule of law and discussed executive power and the role of the Supreme Court. Some responses discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the UK constitution and lost focus on the specific demands of the question.
- Q.5** The knowledge seen in this question was general. Occasionally, detailed and relevant examples were seen. Some candidates conducted a general discussion around the powers of the Supreme Court with little focus on the 'improved the way UK is governed' aspect of the question.
- Q.6** Many responses to this question managed to offer a two-sided discussion of where power lies within the core executive. Most chose to evaluate Prime Ministerial power against Cabinet, although some broadened their response to include the civil service, SP.AD.'s and other relevant factors. Some failed to focus on the core executive and discussed the relationship between parliament and government which failed to meet the demands of the specific question.
- Q.7** The responses to this question showed some promising knowledge at times, although there was a lack of depth compared to other Section C essays. At times, the arguments were generalised and failed to offer specific development. Some candidates confused the methods of scrutiny employed in the UK parliament with methods used in Welsh parliament.

Summary of key points

In Section A answers, candidates are reminded to be concise in their responses. There were many answers to Question 2 in this year's paper that offered detail far beyond what was necessary for full marks.

The use of the extract and their own knowledge is something that should be emphasised to candidates regarding Section B answers. Many of this year's cohort focused on the extract and failed to bring their own points of contrast and comparison to the answers.

When analysing and evaluating Section C essays candidates should be reminded to answer the specific question as opposed to a general, topic-based response on the subject area being discussed.

Unit 1 is called Government in Wales and the United Kingdom and candidates and centres should fully engage with the Welsh aspect of the unit.

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UNIT 2 Living and participating in a democracy

General Comments

Unit 2 covered a good range of topics from the specification and allowed candidates to answer a variety of questions on different topics. The questions allowed candidates to demonstrate AO1 skills of knowledge and understanding in all three sections, AO2 skills in application of knowledge in Section B and AO3 skills of analysis and evaluation in Section C.

It was evident that Section A, Question 1 and to a lesser extent Question 2 were, overall, answered poorly by many candidates. There appeared to be a lack of understanding on the concept of pluralism, and this led to weak answers by candidates from some centres.

In general, it was apparent that candidates had a range of examples that they could apply to the questions but some of the evidence used was quite outdated and not always the most relevant choice.

In terms of timing, there was still some issues with candidates not completing the whole paper, but it appears that candidates have learnt to keep answers concise for Q.1 and Q.2, which had previously been an issue with some in previous years.

Candidates did have a choice when answering Q.3 and Q.4 and Q.5, Q.6 and Q.7, all questions were attempted (although were some were more popular) which would suggest that the paper allowed candidates a good range of topics and they were able to choose questions that best suited them.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** Candidates did not on the whole answer this question well. Many candidates struggled to note any relevant knowledge on the question, and this appeared to be reflected by whole centres. Some centres had clearly taught pluralism, and when this happened candidates were able to describe its key features and use relevant examples. Some candidates in these centres, described pluralism as a feature of a liberal democracy, most knew it was linked to distribution of power and many gave examples of pressure groups and parties. Strong candidates linked it to idea of diversity and diverse groups of individuals existing peacefully with competing views. Other centres appear to have not taught the concept of pluralism as all candidates failed to answer the question; some candidates confusing it with the simple plurality election system.
- Q.2** This question did have a better response than Q.1, but there were mixed results from candidates. A number of candidates described rights generally, but did not focus on minority rights, therefore not answer the question set. These answers generally focused on the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act. Better answers did address minority groups and focused on specific groups and legislation that had been passed to protect minority rights.

Many of the candidates focussed on race, but others looked at religion and LGBT+ rights. A large number of candidates were able to give specific legislation as evidence, most used the Equality Act 2010 to show example of a law used to tackle discrimination.

- Q.3** This question was popular with candidates with varied levels of success. Most candidates were able to show some differences between elections and referendums. Although most candidates were able to give examples of referendums, they were often not the most relevant, for example many referred to the Brexit referendum as having a low turnout in comparison with elections.

Notably, some candidates did not use the information in the extract, which was a lost opportunity to gain AO2 marks. There were a number of candidates who paraphrased the extract, without using their own knowledge to explain and give examples, therefore not gaining higher band marks. A minority of candidates who answered this question referred to similarities as well as differences that were not required in the question set. Many candidates were able to use their own knowledge to explain the differences, with stronger candidates effectively using the information in the extract and their own knowledge to develop sustained answers and gained Band 4 marks in both AO1 and AO2.

- Q.4** This was a popular question in some centres. There were some very strong answers as well as some very weak ones. There was some lack of focus on the range within the set question, which asked for a comparison between both ideologies and platforms. Some candidates tended to be descriptive, giving a detailed history of the main parties, focusing on their development and changing focus, which was not the question set. Many candidates were able to compare and contrast the main parties with the smaller ones, with some candidates using a good range of smaller parties, both ideologies and platforms. Many were able to explain the significance of the ideologies of smaller parties on the policies of main parties, using examples of UKIP and the Green Party. Many candidates did use the extract as a basis to expand their own knowledge and use relevant examples but there were a minority of candidates who described the ideologies without any comparison, use of extract or referring to set question. This question appeared to be challenging for weaker candidates.

- Q.5** This was a popular question and candidates identified a range of factors influencing voting behaviour in the UK. Many centres had covered a list of factors, that candidates used to varying degrees of success. Most candidates were able to give a balanced debate, but some just focused on why the media was important, rather than answering the question set on 'more important'. Other factors considered were age, class, region, partisan alignment and dealignment, the role of party leaders, policy and economic factors. This seemed a popular practice question in centres, with some answers being more general on the topic of voting behaviour not the set question. Most candidates used relevant examples, although they tended to be the same as other candidates in their centre. The majority of candidates were able to draw a conclusion on whether the media was the more important factor.

- Q.6** This was generally not a strong answer for most candidates, with a number of candidates not answering the question directly, and not focusing on driver of political change. Although a popular question, many candidates did not grasp the full scope of the question and there were some candidates that gave a weak commentary on social movements, not answering the question set. For some candidates, there was lack of reference to global movements, notably with many candidates using the suffragettes as a core example.

Many candidates used the same examples throughout the essay, not using a good range and did not fully develop their ideas to focus on the question. Stronger candidates evaluated social movements with other factors that influenced political change to form a valid argument. This question did prove challenging for candidates to draw a relevant conclusion based on evidence.

- Q.7** This was a very popular Section C question and most candidates constructed a debate, with a minority using a one-sided argument. The majority of candidates were able to show knowledge and understanding on the issue of the protection of human rights with some good knowledge of issues of parliamentary sovereignty, rule of law and some relevant legislation. Some candidates tended to use a formulaic answer with a for and against, whilst stronger candidates were able to include a wider range of points and fully developed, balanced arguments. Generally, candidates did focus on the question set, with varied attempts at a conclusion. This question did generate some very strong answers, with effective AO1 and AO3 skills evident and was accessible to all candidates, with a full range of marks allocated.

Summary of key points

Examiners noted the following from what they saw and suggest this advice:

- Ensure awareness of key concepts – pluralism is clearly stated in the specification (2.2.1, page 12), yet many candidates gained no marks on Q.1 as they were unable to make any relevant comments.
- The extract should be directly referred to in Q.3 and Q.4; both own knowledge and interpretation of the extract are needed for an effective answer. There is no need for an overall judgement in these questions, some candidates wasted time with long conclusions.
- More up to date examples would benefit answers in all questions in Sections A, B and C, some examples were repetitive or not the most valid.
- Read the question clearly before answering, noting key words, and answering the question on the paper, not a question on the topic.
- Timing was still an issue for some candidates, with one of the Section C questions being underdeveloped.
- Judgements were sometimes missing, superficial, or not backed up with evidence. An appropriate judgement is needed at Band 4, reasonable at Band 3 in Q.5, Q.6 and Q.7. Candidates need to ensure they are answering the set question in their conclusion with a concise judgement backed up by evidence.

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UNIT 3 Political concepts and theories

General Comments

The examination produced an expected range of responses, and overall, the standard was generally maintained. There were very few candidates who weren't able to complete the required questions fully, and an even smaller number who had not attempted all questions required.

The overall quality of knowledge and understanding was very impressive, with the vast majority of candidates having both breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding across the ideologies, concepts and theories on this paper. There were some excellent scripts that demonstrated admirable competence in holistically integrating knowledge and skills and showed independent thinking. These were well-rewarded.

The majority of candidates answered the questions in an academic way and there was only a very small number of candidates who clearly had not revised and were producing an answer from what they could remember on the day. However, very little planning of answers continues to be observed in the scripts, and often where plans were made, they were very simplistic and brief (no more than a list). Time is allocated within this examination to give candidates time to think and plan effectively especially for their answer to the heavily weighted essay in Section C. Unfortunately, there was little evidence that the majority of candidates did this.

The assessment objectives are not equally weighted for the questions in this examination, and there is a premium on skills which attract more marks than knowledge.

Unapplied knowledge, however thorough and accurate the long list of examples might be, on its own does not score well. However, unsupported assertions with no 'proof' will not score top band marks either.

Most candidates structured their answers well. There was a sizable minority where no paragraphing was obvious. Many candidates struggled to write an introduction that scored them marks, with many defining terms in the question or rephrasing the question and asking it again.

In general, introductions were poor. It is also worth reminding candidates and teachers that the examination is a test of the candidates' knowledge and understanding of the published specification. It is not expected that answers will be, essentially, history essays.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** Many answers to this question were very good, with most candidates able to explain the reasons why tradition and order is so fundamental to Conservatism. However, an awful lot of answers simply described various traditions but failed to explain the purpose of them. Some answers included introductions and conclusions that merely rephrased the question which added no value and wasted exam time. There is no need for an introduction or conclusion for Section A responses.
- Q.2** Answers to this question tended not to be as focused as Q.1 with some responses describing examples of national symbols rather than explaining why they are used by nationalists to promote collective identity. Better responses focused on collective identity rather than listing symbols. Again, introductions and conclusion almost universally added no value to the responses.
- Q.3** Many candidates felt confident of their knowledge of Social Democracy and Socialism in general. Most responses were able to refer and to use Socialist concepts within a balanced argument. Most candidates argued that Social Democracy was still consistent with socialist values and ideas, while a minority argued that it had moved too far away to be considered socialist. Both arguments were equally rewarded. Candidates found it difficult to score well by only giving two points in favour and two points against. Likewise, analysis and evaluation were difficult to discern when points were listed rather than discussed.
- Q.4** Most answers to this question demonstrated a secure knowledge and understanding of Liberalism and Welsh political parties and movements. However, there was a tendency to describe other ideologies and their impact on Welsh politics when the question explicitly focused on Liberalism. Some candidates discussed Liberalism's impact by only referencing Nineteenth Century historical examples. This made it very difficult for them to access higher scores where there is a need to exemplify a thorough range of knowledge and a thorough ability to analyse and evaluate. Many who did show a thorough knowledge and offered a thorough analysis did use Nineteenth Century historical examples, but not exclusively. There is an expectation that candidates are studying contemporary politics rather than political history.
- Q.5** The majority of candidates discussed the similarities and differences between different strands of conservatism in order to ascertain the ideology's consistency. While a minority of candidates discussed the description of Conservatism as an ideology rather than a tendency. Both strategies were equally rewarded. However, candidates who described the different characteristics of different strands rather than discuss them found it more difficult to get into the higher bands.
- Q.6** This Section C question is very demanding in its wide scope and the fact that candidates are expected to demonstrate all three Assessment Objectives. Many candidates took a mechanical approach to this – basically describing one ideology after another and weighing up its successes and failures. However, the really good responses evaluated several ideologies by comparing and contrasting their stances on a particular aspect and integrated the discussion so that range, depth and all three Assessment Objectives were demonstrated holistically and fluently, and this was sustained in a discussion that was individual and highly focused. This is very difficult to perfect and requires a great deal of preparation and practise. Candidates had a secure grasp of the knowledge and understanding of the course but did not feel confident enough to move away from a mechanistic listing of ideologies.

The more successful responses were able to apply their knowledge and understanding of equality to discussions around human nature, society, the state and the economy or other aspects. This would suggest that the higher scores are entirely within reach of candidates.

Summary of key points

Candidates and teachers are advised to practise the different sorts of questions enough in advance of the examination and pay attention to what the marks will be awarded for.

Centres need to focus candidates' attention on the Assessment Objectives for each question.

Independent research and reading are essential to give candidates the best chance, especially with the Section C essay. Model answers will not be a very useful preparation.

The essay in Section C is demanding and carries 40 marks; candidates are advised to plan well before beginning it in the examination, and to avoid answering it in a mechanistic way.

Candidates should avoid lengthy descriptions that are not made overtly relevant to the question set and avoid 'drift' and 'stream of consciousness' answers that are little more than a candidate's personal opinions.

Candidates are advised not to write the questions out, as this wastes valuable time, although they should ensure all their responses are numbered accurately.

The length of answer needs to take into account the number of marks available for each question type – there were some over-long answers to Section A questions which meant answers to Section C were shorter and yet each question in Section A is worth 16 marks and the Section C essay is worth 40 marks.

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UNIT 4 Government and politics of the USA

General Comments

This year's Unit 4 paper was one that was answered in an encouraging manner by many candidates. The paper produced an appropriate range of responses, and it was pleasing to see many candidates answering the questions with a combination of appropriate knowledge and well-developed skills. The Unit 4 paper is 2 hours and 30 minutes in length, and learners are reminded of the importance of effective timing and planning to successfully complete the paper's three sections.

Planning time is crucial for the Section C essays where candidates are reminded to think of the specification in a holistic sense to meet the demands of all three assessment objectives that underpin the question. This year's Section C responses were quite promising with many candidates able to discuss what they had been taught from the Unit 4 specification within the context of where power lies in the USA. However, there were a significant number of candidates who offered a descriptive trawl through checks and balances, and such responses did not fully meet the question's challenges. Both centres and candidates are encouraged to note the wide-ranging nature of the Section C essays. It is not a question limited to a specific topic and it is for the candidates themselves to select which parts of the specification they will use to construct their response. Most of this year's responses limited themselves to discussing the three branches of government: Congress, Supreme Court and Presidency when answering Question 6. Whilst it was perfectly possible to offer an analytical and effective response within such confines there were other responses that offered a wider range of factors in their discussion. Some candidates were able to effectively analyse the power held by states, money, the media and were able to offer a broader discussion than simply where power lay within the federal government in Washington D.C.

The range and depth of examples seen in Section B was encouraging with many candidates able to offer appropriate and well-chosen examples for the arguments they were advancing. This was slightly less true for Question 5 where some scripts showed an inability to offer convincing development to arguments relating to the comparative influence of EXOP and Cabinet. In Section A most candidates tried to meet the challenge of explaining the impact and connection between various aspects of US politics. Some candidates chose to offer knowledge unrelated to the AO2 skill of establishing and explaining connections and this was a feature seen most often in Question 2.

Unit 4 is a skills-based paper and there is diminished reward for stand-alone knowledge when compared to AS level. At this level, knowledge (AO1) should be deployed and used to establish and explain connections (Section A) or to develop analysis and evaluation (Section B). Candidates who offer detailed and precise knowledge need to ensure that they are using that knowledge for a specific purpose.

Most candidates were able to answer the examination paper in its entirety. There were some candidates who chose to leave out a particular question or section and this inevitably impacted their outcome in the paper.

There was little evidence of candidates running out of time with some choosing to answer Section C first and concluding with Section A. There was also growing evidence of candidates planning their answers, and this is to be further encouraged.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** Many candidates were able to establish and explain connections between the national nominating conventions and the elections. There was often a discussion of both the formal and informal functions of the conventions with many impressive answers showing a thorough understanding of the potential impact of conventions. Unfortunately, some responses described the electoral process and did not meet the question's demands. There was also some analysis evaluating the importance of conventions which did not focus on the question's demands.
- Q.2** Some candidates were able to firmly establish a connection between the principles seen in the Declaration of Independence and the content of the US Constitution. There were clear explanations in some responses of how the ideas written in the Declaration impacted and influenced the content of the Constitution. Some candidates supplied detailed knowledge of both documents and extrapolated clear connections. Some responses discussed constitutional principles and their impact on American life and so did not engage with the thrust of the question.
- Q.3** The significance of third parties and independent candidates was well-discussed in most responses. Many candidates provided relevant arguments and examples to conduct a two-sided discussion of the topic. The arguments and analysis provided were largely built around the content anticipated by the mark scheme and the question was a popular choice within Section B.
- Q.4** The extent of the recent politicisation of the Supreme Court was an issue that most candidates discussed with relevant arguments and exact knowledge. Some candidates focused their evaluation on the issue of 'recent politicisation' and evaluated the extent the Supreme Court had become recently politicised. Other candidates chose to evaluate the different judicial approaches adopted by the Court. Many were able to discuss recent judgements and appointments and only some failed to offer a two-sided discussion.
- Q.5** Some candidates were able to offer impressive and detailed knowledge of both Cabinet and EXOP and use this knowledge to formulate a coherent and developed argument. However, the knowledge around EXOP and Cabinet wasn't as consistent or detailed as for other Section B essays. Some chose to answer the question by discussing presidential power which failed to engage with the question set.
- Q.6** Many candidates took advantage of the broad and holistic nature of this question to compose a detailed and wide-ranging response that formed arguments from the full range of the specification. There was clear and full focus on the concept of 'where power lies' and they were able to provide convincing arguments and development which displayed an impressive understanding of American political life. Many responses chose to evaluate the three branches of government. Some candidates described the system of checks and balances without any real evaluation and analysis. These responses did not meet the full demands of the question.

Summary of key points

Candidates should avoid descriptive responses in Section C. Whilst the question is designed to be broad and holistic in nature it is imperative that candidates analyse and evaluate in their responses as well as looking to explain relevant connections/points of comparison from across the specification.

Section C questions in Unit 4 will not be limited to a specific topic area or a particular bullet-point of the specification. Teaching should reflect this and develop in candidates the ability to think about Unit 4 in a holistic sense.

All knowledge offered in responses should be selected and deployed to demonstrate a particular skill and satisfy a particular assessment objective. AO1 is the least rewarded of the assessment objectives in all sections of the paper and AO2 drives Section A questions in the same way as AO3 drives Section B questions.

There were many candidates this year who failed to effectively use paragraphs in their answers. Teaching should emphasise the importance of candidates organising and communicating their ideas in an effective manner.

In Section B candidates are reminded of the importance of engaging with the key words and specific focus of the question.

Candidates should continue to reflect on the features of an effective introduction and conclusion in Sections B and C of the paper.



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