
A LEVEL POLITICS

7152/1

Paper 1 Government and politics of the UK
Report on the Examination

7152
June 2022

Version: 1.0

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General comments

Most students overall were able to access the entirety of the question paper. All three Section A questions were answered by most students and were often well structured in terms of three clear paragraphs with supporting evidence. Time management issues tended to be related to students who chose to answer section A last and ran out of time towards the end. However, time management did not seem to be an issue for most students and is potentially a reflection of the increased timed practice that centres have been doing with their students across the two years. Question 3 was the one that provided the widest range of responses.

Question 4 also provided a wide range of responses, with most students familiar with the debate regarding the need for a codified constitution in the UK. In comparison to previous series, students were aware of the assessment criteria in terms of using the extract and provenance, with the majority identifying the relevant perspectives and commenting upon the authors and status of the extracts.

Questions 5 and 6 provided a range of responses and students, regardless of which option they selected, were secure with their subject knowledge. Centres had clearly taught students well on these two topics and made effective use of the advanced information for a focus for learning and revision.

Overall, those who scored well across the paper managed their time effectively and were aware of the assessment objectives. There was unmistakable evidence of excellent teaching and learning across all topics.

Question 1

Most students were able to identify three ways in which the media can have an influence upon the outcome of elections, with students demonstrating their knowledge of key elections studied. Weaker responses tended to be descriptive and made little reference to electoral outcomes. Common themes addressed were the influence of newspapers, with many responses referencing the switching allegiances of The Sun, 1997 or headlines such as 'Crisis, What Crisis?' 1979. Stronger responses analysed the impact upon undecided voters, whilst others commented upon how newspapers may just reflect the views of their readership – 'reinforcement theory' – rather than change opinions. The 1992 'It's The Sun Wot Won It' did feature widely. Responses recognised the influence of TV debates, with 2010 commonly referenced alongside 2017 and May's refusal to debate. The influence of social media was also a popular choice, with stronger responses recognising the potential impact of websites that encourage tactical voting whilst others discussed how parties have increasingly used social media to target specific groups of voters, making links between 2017 and the 'Youthquake.'

Question 2

Most students were able to explain three ways the Official Opposition can scrutinise the government. Weaker responses were descriptive and focused on general opportunities for scrutiny rather than how the Official Opposition can challenge the government. There was occasional drift in to explaining the opportunities within the House of Lords. Others provided a generalised description of how the Official Opposition is the government in waiting and can offer alternative policies, without linking this to how this can challenge the government and where. Stronger responses developed opportunities such as PMQs, which allows the leader of the Official Opposition to directly scrutinise the prime minister. They displayed

strong knowledge of the process, analysing issues such as partisan political point-scoring with many referring to PMQs as ‘Punch and Judy’ politics. Other popular opportunities were select committees and Opposition Day debates. Again, the strongest responses demonstrated detailed knowledge and understanding of each opportunity and provided excellent examples of the role of the Official Opposition. Popular examples used were Meg Hillier as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and Yvette Cooper when Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, using the Windrush scandal for development.

Question 3.

This question elicited the widest range of responses and is also the question where students displayed problems with timing. Weaker responses often provided one, or at most two, descriptive points that lacked in depth knowledge, understanding and analysis of the leadership selection processes. Such responses tended to drift into a general overview of what qualities parties look for when selecting a leader, whilst others identified one party’s method and wrote a generalised paragraph. The method used by the Conservative Party was most popular in such cases, although they tended to lack detail and analysis. Higher level responses provided detailed knowledge and understanding of the methods used by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party, with analysis focusing upon the levels of internal party democracy and the extent to which the parliamentary party and wider party membership is involved, alongside the problems associated with this.

Some students chose to separate their paragraphs into themes such as the involvement of the parliamentary party and membership. This tended to lead to their final method being repetitive, using points made in their previous two paragraphs.

Question 4

The extract question provided a very wide range of responses, with the best responses using the extracts as a ‘springboard’ for analysing and evaluating the key arguments within them, providing an excellent and pertinent range of supporting evidence. It was obvious that students had spent time planning and structuring extract style questions in preparation for the exam, demonstrating the assessment objectives that are clearly stated within the specification. Weaker responses made little or no reference to the extracts and tended to write generic answers about the differences between codified and uncoded constitutions. Such responses were descriptive, merely copying parts of the extracts without further development. They used Extract 1 to identify problems with an uncoded constitution, such as “lack of clarity,” but provided no development as to how the UK constitution lacks clarity.

In comparison, stronger responses were able to develop arguments such as how the lack of clarity creates constitutional issues, referring to the period following the results of the 2010 election that resulted in a hung parliament or the lack of clarity regarding the use of referendums. They successfully compared the extracts throughout, focusing upon the flexible nature of the UK constitution and the relative strengths and weaknesses related to this, providing relevant examples to enhance their analysis. Such responses referred to the ability for governments to adapt to societal changes or respond to crises, often using the Marriage Act 2013 and the Coronavirus Act 2020 as examples. Higher-level responses sustained this approach throughout, comparing the arguments related to the effective protection of rights, the impact of the uncoded constitution upon devolution and the debate regarding the role of the judiciary under codified constitutions. However, some answers tended to become too comparative to the USA in style, rather than focusing upon the extracts.

Most students were able to comment on the provenance of the extracts and / or analyse the perspectives within them. Stronger responses referred to the potential political bias of the author of Extract 2, making links to the nature of conservatism and why a former Conservative MSP may favour upholding the tradition of the uncodified constitution. Those that scored highly were able to conclude by taking a stance on which side of the debate they were most convinced by, based upon the arguments that they had chosen to develop.

Question 5

The essay question was well-answered by students and most responses were able to identify and develop a range of arguments that addressed the impact of the UK judiciary upon the executive and Parliament since 1997. Students were able to use a range of cases in support of the statement, although weaker responses tended to focus on describing them. The Miller cases were widely used to support arguments. However, there was a tendency to focus upon the view that the 2005 Constitutional Reform Act has given the judiciary more power rather than making them more independent and potentially more assertive. Lower-level responses tended to be descriptive and limited in their range of arguments and use of relevant cases.

Responses in the higher levels discussed the impact of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the Human Rights Act 1998, the power of ultra vires when reviewing cases, concerns regarding judicial activism and the existence of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. They also challenged the statement by examining parliamentary sovereignty and the ongoing limitations of the Supreme Court in relation to the other branches, citing cases such as the Terrorist Asset Freezing Act 2010 in response to *HM Treasury v Ahmed*. Conclusions were decisive and answered the question clearly, based upon arguments sustained throughout the essay.

Question 6

This question elicited a wide range of responses, with the best responses analysing and evaluating a range of arguments. Responses discussed the electoral system and the unrepresentative nature of FPTP, often in comparison to other systems that students had studied. Balanced answers argued that voters had rejected change in the 2011 AV referendum and argued that there were merits to FPTP in relation to the question. Students used referendums to discuss their impact upon parliamentary sovereignty, with such responses making links to challenges to the roles of elected representatives within a representative democracy, often leading to analysis of the Trustee model of representation. Concerns regarding turnout in certain elections, including referendums, did feature in a range of responses but did not dominate the essay in the higher levels and there were clear links to the focus of the question. Conclusions were decisive and answered the question clearly, based upon arguments sustained throughout the essay.

Weaker responses tended to be very descriptive, with a number limited to describing the work of MPs. Others tended to overly focus upon concerns regarding participation levels. Others examined the advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy without making links to challenges to representative democracy. This led to a drift away from the focus of the question towards pre-learnt responses on the pros and cons of referendums or whether there is a participation crisis.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.