
AS Level Politics

Report on the Examination

7151
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General Comments

Students were in general able to access the entirety of the question paper. There was a tendency for some students to write less extensively for section B than section A. Some students did not allocate time well in the exam and a common error was to write an equivalent amount for 12-mark extract questions as for 24-mark essay questions. It is important that students allocate time to answering questions in proportion to the marks awarded for them.

The students that scored well also often paid close attention to the command words in questions; “explain with examples” in a 6-mark question does not require a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of a topic, whereas the command word evaluate does require students to consider in balanced way different points of view in relation to the question and reach a reasoned and sustained conclusion (for higher level marks).

Question 1

Most students were able to identify some of the different methods of scrutiny. Weaker responses tended to only identify one method of scrutiny without using examples to illustrate them. A common error was discussion of the House of Lords when the question referred specifically to the Commons. Responses that were at a higher level were able to illustrate a range of methods of scrutiny as well as giving an accurate definition of the term parliamentary scrutiny. Students who gained the highest marks were often able to illustrate methods of scrutiny with recent examples such as exchanges at prime minister's questions, chairs of select committees, or significant debates and opposition days.

Question 2

Most students were able to cite some of the powers of the Scottish parliament. At lower levels of response there was often little more than the assertion of the ability to "pass laws" or stating that policy areas such as health or education were devolved. A minority of students also confused the role and influence of Scottish MPs in Westminster with the power of the Holyrood parliament. Answers at higher levels typically explained the reforms of the Scotland acts of 2014 and 2016. Many stronger answers also explained the limitations of the power of the parliament referring to the reserved powers of Westminster such as foreign and defence policy.

Question 3

This question elicited a wide range of responses. Many students found the extracts accessible and were able to find the main arguments within it (the ease of amendment and lack of entrenchment, the lack of clarity of the constitution and the suggestion that an uncodified constitution reflects Britain's relative political stability historically). Weaker responses did little more than identify the relevant element in the passage and describe or restate the point that was made in the extract. At middle levels of response there was some explanation of these points. Many students however did not fully address the demands of the question and therefore did not access the highest level of marks. Few students compared the arguments (for example clearly contrasting points of view on the ease of amendment in the constitution), and this therefore limited their evaluation of the sources. Similarly, many answers either did not deal with the provenance of the extracts or did so in a very superficial way. Students who evaluated the provenance of the extracts by considering the authors of the sources (many answers reasonably pointed out that the UCL constitution unit study and a select committee report will have been written by well informed people) scored well, and those that were able to link the purpose of the extracts to arguments the within it (for example some students explained that a select committee would have had a political purpose and may have reflected the views of Conservative MPs who were the largest group on the committee) scored highly.

Question 4

This question was the more popular of the two essay questions in this section of the paper. Weaker responses tended to be brief or drift from the question. A common error was for extended to longer middle-level answers to concentrate excessively on the power of the Prime Minister when the focus of the question was on the cabinet. At higher level of responses, a wide range of arguments were considered which included the structure of cabinet and relations with the executive. Some students also effectively made the argument that when parliamentary majorities are very small or there is minority or coalition government then parliament and the governing

parliamentary party becomes more significant. Answers that included analysis of cabinet “no longer” being the main decision maker typically scored very highly.

Question 5

There were many impressive responses to this question. Weaker responses often described the role of judges or simply asserted that judges made had to make decisions, and that this made them political. Mid-level responses were often able to identify relevant recent reforms such as the Human Rights Act and the Constitutional Reform Act though evaluation of whether this made judges more political or not was often limited. At the highest level of responses, the provisions of recent legislation were often accurately identified and linked clearly to the concepts of judicial neutrality and independence. In these answers there was a generally extensive evaluation of how this could affect the politicisation of the judiciary. Students who also discussed longer standing protections of neutrality and independence to evaluate if judges were becoming “increasingly politicised” often scored very highly.

Question 6

This question had the highest proportion of students who scored zero or the lowest level of marks. The most common error was to conflate pluralism with plurality voting systems. Students who discussed pluralism in terms of multi-level governance or a multi-party system were credited for their explanations. It should be noted that pluralism is identified in the specification as a key concept in the pressure groups section, and significant number of students made no reference to pressure groups in their answer. Those that discussed the elements of the theory in relation to pressure groups tended to score well and those who identified good recent examples (such as the Ghurkha campaign for citizenship) or key theorists (such as Dahl) often scored very highly.

Question 7

There were many excellent answers to this question, though a minority of students did score very poorly. Most students attempted to explain the Additional Members System rather than the Single Transferable Vote, and answers that only focused on first past the post, Supplementary Vote, or Alternative Vote systems were given no credit. Students who confused electoral systems used by a devolved body (for example some suggested that the Scottish Parliament was elected using the Single Transferable Vote) were credited though the quality of their explanation was limited by an inaccurate use of examples. At the lowest levels of response, students did little more than identify the electoral system in use. A typical reason that mid-level answers did not score higher was that they failed to explain how an electoral system operated (for example 2 ballots in the Additional Members System) and focused solely on the effects (such as minority or coalition government).

Question 8

Students tended to score less well in this question than they did in question 3. At lower levels of responses students tended to identify some of the arguments in the passage. Responses that focused excessively on arguments for remain and leave in the European Union referendum often did not address the focus of the question about the use of referendums generally and so tended to score lowly. As with the other extract-based question students failed to directly compare arguments (such as the need for “consent” of the British people versus the preference of the electorate to “delegate responsibility for complicated decisions”) and to discuss the provenance of the two extracts. Students who discussed that a manifesto of a political party would have the intention of

persuading the public to a point of view and that a professor who specialised in European politics is well informed but may also have a point of view often scored very highly.

Question 9

This question was the more popular of the two optional questions in this section. Students who moved little beyond the impact of the first past the post electoral system and the dominance of the Conservative and Labour parties in government tended to be awarded marks at lower levels. Mid-level answers often reflected on the recent tendency for Westminster elections to produce small or no overall majorities and that this tended to make smaller parties more significant. Many students wrote excellent answers that included a wide range of points from the impact of multi-level governance to the adversarial nature of Westminster and a decline in partisan alignment to the two major parties. Students who were able to evaluate a range of points on both sides of the debate typically scored very highly.

Question 10

This question was less popular than question nine and had a higher proportion of students who scored less well. A common pattern among answers at the lower level was to describe an election campaign and the various elements of it without evaluating its impact. Typical mid-level answers tended to discuss a wider range of factors, such as major political events or the perceived qualities of party leaders, but often did not evaluate their impact on election results. At higher levels students typically were able to analyse and evaluate the importance of such factors (many cited the 2017 election and discussed the significance of the campaign and the reasons why the result differed from the outcome suggested by polls at the start of the campaign). Those students that evaluated whether the campaign “is increasingly important”, relating it to long-term factors and concepts of voting behaviour such as partisan and class dealignment tended to score very highly.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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