

GCE



Chief Examiner's Report
Government
and Politics

Summer Series 2017



Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of CCEA's General Certificate of Education (GCE) in Government and Politics for this series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's microsite on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

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GCE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Chief Examiner's Report

Assessment Unit AS 1 The Government and Politics of Northern Ireland

- Q1** A wide variety of versions of departmental titles were accepted as correct responses and, as a result, most candidates scored full marks. In this question candidates need only to “identify” and no explanation is required. Many candidates wrote far too much, having achieved full marks in the first two lines of their answer.
- Q2** Almost all candidates were able to define what is meant by the term “legacy issues” although the definition was more explicit in some answers than others. Less explicit answers consisted of a list of legacy issues but with no attempt to define the term. Under the New Specification, this question is intended to assess candidates’ ability to define a term and examples will only partially achieve this. The issue of parading featured in most responses, simply named in weaker answers but explained in better. Some candidates identified issues as being “legacy” when they are not, for example, the differences between the DUP and Sinn Féin over gay marriage.
- Q3** This question asked for three continuing differences between the DUP and Sinn Féin but some candidates listed four, five or six. In these circumstances, the examiner’s role is to identify the three issues that are best explained and disregard the rest. Candidates should be aware that this can mean that only half of what they have written is being credited, with obvious consequences for the mark awarded. In order to stick to just three things, candidates are advised to use three bullet or numbered points to structure their answer: quality of written communication is not being assessed in this question.

The question contained the word “continuing” but this seems to have been missed by some candidates. This meant that there were extensive accounts of divisions over policing, often finishing with the statement that the issue had been largely resolved. This makes such material inadmissible.

- Q4 (a)** This question is almost identical to Question 3 under the Legacy Specification, both in terms of content and what candidates are being asked to do. In preparing for the examination candidates can legitimately consider the Question 3 from previous examination series.

Most candidates were well prepared for a question on this topic and were able to present a balanced account of the Executive’s record over the past ten years. However, some were almost fixated on recent events and presented descriptive accounts of the events leading up to the suspension of the Assembly/Executive, with little analysis of what these events revealed. It is important that candidates do not get carried away with the current ‘headline’ issue.

- (b)** This was another question for which most candidates were well prepared. In many, there was an impressive amount of detail on the number of Bills introduced and passed by the Assembly. However, a significant number of candidates discussed the record of the Assembly in more general terms, including its role in scrutiny and representation. The question referred to the Assembly’s legislative record and only material that related to that can be fully credited. As with Question 4(a), the RHI scandal featured prominently in answers. The best answers sought to analyse what the affair revealed about

the Assembly's legislative role, rather than just describing the events before and after.

Overall, candidates appear to have dealt effectively with the assessment structure in this new unit.

Assessment Unit AS 2 The British Political Process

Q1 The problem of candidates writing far too much in response to a question requiring them to simply “identify” was apparent in responses to this one. To obtain full marks a candidate only had to write “Select Committee. Public Bill Committee.” No additional information was required. Many candidates filled a page with explanation which is a waste of their time.

Q2 Candidates should respond to this question with two short paragraphs that are numbered or bullet pointed. This would help to avoid the situation found in many answers where more than two things were identified but with only limited explanation of any of them. As the Mark Scheme makes clear, only two marks are available for identification but eight for explanation, meaning a candidate could identify five ways but still only gain two marks.

Q3 (a) Both Question 3(a) and Question 3(b) are similar in style, content and marks awarded to Question 5 under the Legacy Specification.

Candidates who attempted this question were well prepared to discuss the issue of PM dominance over Cabinet. Most were also aware that a balanced answer is needed. Unfortunately, some answers focused exclusively on the two most recent PMs and, therefore, lacked the breadth to get into the top mark band. While the premierships of Cameron and May are certainly very relevant to a question of this sort, they should not provide the only source of evidence.

Many candidates argued that one power that the PM has over Cabinet is to use Whips to keep Ministers in line but it is not the case that Ministers are whipped in this way.

(b) This question was as popular as Question 3(a) and most who answered it correctly focused upon the scrutiny role of Parliament. There are still a large number of candidates who confuse the roles of Select and Public Bill Committees, with the result that a lot of factually inaccurate material was included in some answers. The strongest answers were those that identified the scrutiny mechanisms available to Parliament and offered a balanced assessment, with evidence, of how effective those mechanisms are in practice. Inclusion of the Lords was not essential to gain access to the top mark band but reference to the Upper House added depth and quality to answers.

Q4 Some candidates confused judicial impartiality with judicial independence. Others listed some of the mechanisms designed to ensure independence but without explaining what independence is. However, many candidates clearly understood the concept and were able to fully explain it.

Q5 The main problem with some responses to this question was the continuing confusion of judicial review and judicial inquiry. This meant that much of the evidence that some candidates produced was factually inaccurate. Another issue was the unrepresentative nature of the judiciary. While this may be relevant to another question, it was not so in this one. In answering this question candidates will be asked to “explain” meaning that a one-sided answer is needed, without evaluation. The unrepresentative nature of the judiciary would form part of any evaluation of whether the judiciary is successful in acting as a check on the executive.

The command word in Questions 5 and 7 will continue to be “explain” in future examinations. A balanced response is not required.

Q6 All candidates were able to identify a tactic used by a pressure group. In fact, many candidates identified four or five tactics with little explanation, leaving it to

the examiner to decide which one was best. Explanation in this question involved demonstrating how the tactic was designed to change policy, in other words, the rationale behind the tactic. For example, many candidates identified Fathers 4 Justice and the high-profile actions it has taken. Explanation is not simply stating what the group has done but the thinking behind its actions: drawing public attention to a neglected issue, putting the issue on the agenda for policy debate and so on.

Q7 A number of candidates ignored the question and debated the effectiveness of pressure group actions, often employing the insider/outsider model to do so. This is not what was required by the question. Better answers sought to explain the ways in which pressure groups made a positive contribution to the British political process, with the range of points made and the quality of explanation differentiating answers. Some candidates correctly introduced a theoretical element by identifying Pluralists as those who take the view that groups enhance democracy in many ways: this was not, however, necessary to gain access to the top mark band.

To repeat: a balanced response is not required in response to Question 7 (and Question 5) and the command word will remain “explain” in future examination series.

As with the new AS Unit 1, it appears that candidates dealt successfully with the new assessment structure of AS Unit 2.

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