

GCE



Chief Examiner's Report
Government and Politics

Summer Series 2018



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

With the continued suspension of the Executive and Assembly, examination questions on the political institutions will, as in this series, continue to be time-framed. Questions will, as with Question 3 in this series, include the phrase “between 2007 and 2017” or words to that effect. This will indicate to candidates that they are not expected to discuss the institutions after 2017. Candidates seem to be fully aware of what is required by ‘institution’ questions.

Q1 Most candidates scored full marks. Those who did not, frequently gave two examples of Statutory Committees with the result that two marks were awarded. As in previous series many candidates wrote too much: explaining what committees do, how they are made up and so on. The question does not require this detail.

Q2 Collective Responsibility clearly does not operate in Northern Ireland but this does not take away from the relevance of the concept to the study of devolved government. It is argued by many academics and journalists that the absence of collective responsibility is a major, if not the primary, cause of the instability of the Executive Committee.

Most candidates were able to take out of the Source that part of the concept is that members of a government should not disagree with one another in public but present a united front. Better answers were able to build on this to develop a fuller explanation of Collective Responsibility and to support this with an example of how it had failed to operate.

Q3 This is a source-based question and responses that fail to refer to the Source, even implicitly, will face an upper limit, or ceiling, on the mark that can be awarded. Most candidates did identify the “symbolic” power sharing referred to in the Source and were able to explain what this meant and to support their explanation with a relevant example. Most were also able to identify two other instances of power sharing, although the quality of explanation varied. A significant number of candidates referred to power sharing within Assembly Committees but this is clearly not a case of power sharing within the Executive. It is important that candidates distinguish between the Assembly and the Executive Committee when it is required by a question.

Q4 (a) This was the less popular of the two essay questions. Most of those who chose this option were able to produce a balanced answer that considered both how DUP policies have changed and where they have not. Recent controversies over moral issues received too much attention in some responses at the expense of looking at other policy areas. For example, most candidates correctly argued that the DUP was opposed to power sharing with Republicans but then reversed its position. However, other areas where DUP policies at the time of the Good Friday Agreement changed subsequently were not discussed. This resulted in a narrow answer with gaps in knowledge.

(b) Few candidates now respond to questions of this sort with narrative descriptions of what happened or detailed records of changes in Assembly/Westminster party representation. These are not the reasons required by the question.

There were two clear issues with many responses to this question. First, Sinn Féin's shift from "Armed Struggle" to democratic politics was not included in a significant number of responses, yet in the view of many this was the primary reason why the party was able to overtake the SDLP. Second, many candidates attributed success to the emergence of Mary Lou McDonald and Michelle O'Neill as party leaders. Gerry Adams might disagree with this historically inaccurate judgement on behalf of himself and the late Martin McGuinness.

Assessment Unit AS 2 The British Political Process

- Q1** As with Question 1 in SGP11, many candidates wrote too much in response to this question but most candidates achieved full marks.
- Q2** Some candidates continue to confuse Select and Public Bill Committees. A significant number described what Select Committees do, with strengths being implied rather than made explicit. A final issue was that some responses did not make reference to a relevant example. However, most candidates were able to identify and explain two strengths with at least one example.
- Q3 (a)** This was, by far, the more popular of the two options. Most candidates did stay focused on the issue of legislation although, at AS level, there is a tendency for candidates to wander off into scrutiny or even representation. This irrelevant material is not penalised but is disregarded by examiners.
- A balanced answer is required to this question (and to Question 3 (b)) and almost all candidates succeeded in doing this. The UK has not had a single party government with a clear majority since 2010 when most candidates sitting this examination were eight or nine years old. They have grown up not knowing what a strong, single party government is and are therefore familiar with governments struggling to get their legislation passed. Many made the acute observation that governments are unlikely to introduce legislation that they know will not command a majority, giving Parliament a powerful legislative veto.
- (b)** Answers to this question were polarised, either weak or very strong. Weaker responses consisted of descriptive accounts of Prime Ministers who were 'weak' or 'strong' but with limited discussion of why this was so. Stronger responses did discuss reasons and debate whether their party was responsible for the demise of Prime Ministers who were brought down. In such answers there was a clear awareness that both the Conservatives and Labour are highly factionalised parties and that Prime Ministers struggle to hold these factions together and to avoid challenges to their leadership. How circumstances may affect the ability of Prime Ministers to carry out this very difficult task was discussed in some excellent answers. Sadly for Mrs May, the consensus among Politics students in Northern Ireland is that she is a 'Dead Woman Walking'.
- Q4** Some candidates continue to confuse Judicial Inquiries and Judicial Reviews. Those who did focus on Inquiries were able to identify a criticism, although some candidates identified two, three or four, leaving it to the examiner to decide which was best explained as only one can be rewarded. There is still a tendency to mistakenly believe that the Chilcot Inquiry was a judicial one.
- Q5** The creation of the Supreme Court was arguably the biggest change in the UK judiciary in decades, with significant consequences for its political role. This question produced many detailed responses that explained how the Supreme Court is able to hold the executive to account. Recent events provided candidates with relevant evidence to support their discussion.

However, some candidates left the Supreme Court out of their answer, discussing whether the judiciary is an effective check. Answers of this sort were relevant but not consistently so. Some other candidates digressed into whether the Supreme Court should have a political role, given that it is unelected, unrepresentative and so on. This was not what the question required.

- Q6** Almost all candidates were clear on the distinction between cause and sectional groups and were able to identify a difference between the two. Answers were differentiated by the quality of explanation of the difference. Some candidates get carried away with descriptive accounts of the activities of groups, with Fathers4Justice continuing to be the group of choice for many.
- Q7** As suggested in the mark scheme, most candidates interpreted ‘headline- grabbing’ to mean groups that are “outsiders” and which have to employ tactics that are more indirect in nature. Weaker responses focused on the distinction between “insider” and “outsider” and supported this with examples. Stronger responses took account of the “are often the least successful” part of the question to explain why indirect, publicity seeking activities are not as effective in influencing policy makers.

The evidence is that those Centres that have chosen to introduce Pressure and Interest Groups as a topic have done so successfully with the mean marks achieved for Questions 6 and 7 being very similar to those for Questions 4 and 5.

Chief Examiner’s Report

This was the first series of A2 units under the Revised specification. The evidence across both units is that candidates were well prepared for the revised forms of assessment and for the changes to content. The outcomes, in terms of candidate achievement, are very similar to those attained under the Legacy specification.

Assessment Unit A2 1

Option A A Comparative Study of the Government and Politics of the United States of America and the United Kingdom

- Q1** Almost all candidates understood the concept of pork barrelling and were able to explain it to varying degrees. Some candidates focused far too much on examples of pork barrelling and neglected to develop their explanation of the concept. An example should support an explanation but not become the explanation.
- Q2** Surprisingly, a number of candidates did not include Executive Orders in their answer. As this was a source-based question, such responses could not be awarded more than eight marks. A number of other candidates looked only at Executive Orders and their use by Trump. It is important that candidates take a broader perspective and not become obsessed with current events, no matter how interesting.

Quality of written communication is not being assessed in this question and candidates may present their material as two numbered or bulleted points.

- Q3** Some responses to this question took the form of descriptions of foreign policy actions by various Presidents. This may have succeeded in demonstrating that Presidents have greater freedom in this area but did not explain why this was so. Better answers did address the reasons why Presidents are less constrained in the conduct of foreign policy and there were many excellent and wide-ranging responses. Many of such answers included the argument that the current circumstances can

often determine how much independence a President can have in foreign policy: for example, the freedom enjoyed by Bush after the 9/11 attacks.

- Q4** This question resulted in a wide variety of valid responses. Weaker responses tended to rely heavily on the Source and contained limited relevant, additional material. Conflicts over gun control, budgets and health care were described but analysis of how the system is, or is not, the cause of these problems was limited. Stronger responses did seek to explain how the political system was possibly the cause of gridlock. For example, the separate election of the President and Congress often creates a situation where the former is opposed by a hostile majority in one or both Houses. Stronger responses were able to explain a range of “system” factors that may prevent effective government. The best responses debated what “effective” government actually is, arguing that it can be interpreted as accountable government based upon broad consensus.

Few candidates failed to observe the need for balance but there were a number of such responses.

- Q5** Quality of written communication is not being assessed in this question and candidates are free to present their response as two numbered or bulleted points. This is recommended as some candidates when writing in a short essay format have a tendency to identify more than the two points required by the question.

One issue with some responses to this question was that the explanations of the two differences overlapped. For example, the permanent nature of Standing Committees and the expertise of their members are two separate points. However, when it came to explaining these, and to explaining how committees in the Commons are different, explanations often overlapped.

- Q6 (a)** This was the more popular option and the majority of those who chose it understood that it was about the extent to which representative responsibilities dominates the activities of representatives in the USA and UK. Weaker responses tended to state that Members of Congress put much greater emphasis on being seen to act on behalf of their constituents but without explaining why this was so. Better answers did seek to identify and explain differences between the two political systems that caused Members of Congress to prioritise constituency work much more.

One issue with some responses was that the significance of party and party-voting in the USA was dismissed as being almost non-existent. This is not the case. Equally not the case is that MPs ignore their constituencies except at election time but some candidates suggested this was so.

- (b)** Most answers to this question presented a direct comparison of the powers of the President and Prime Minister. There was significant variation in the range of powers discussed, the depth of analysis and the quality of supporting evidence. Stronger responses took account of the full question and, in particular, the suggestion that the gap between Prime Ministerial and Presidential power has widened. A decade ago it was common to hear the argument that Prime Ministers were becoming more ‘presidential’ but this is heard much less frequently today. Presidents have also, in recent years, found themselves constrained as the last years of Obama’s presidency illustrate. Even Trump has found that Presidential power is not unrestricted.

Option B A Comparative Study of the Government and Politics of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom

Q1 Almost all candidates were able to define judicial review and to support the definition with a relevant example. As with Unit AS2, some candidates continue to confuse Reviews and Inquiries.

Q2 The point about quality of written communication made on page 7 (Option A, Question 2) also applies to this question.

Only a few candidates failed to identify the limitation on the power of the Taoiseach contained in the Source. Where this limitation was not discussed, a 'ceiling' of eight marks was applied. Of those candidates who did identify and explain the limitation in the Source, a number struggled to identify a clear second.

Q3 Ireland has one of the highest percentage of independent elected representatives of its legislature of any European state. This has major consequences for the governance of Ireland. Weaker responses were often restricted to one possible reason for the number of Independents, usually the electoral system. Even within such responses there was significant variation in the quality of explanation of the effects of Single Transferable Vote and in the quality of supporting evidence. Better responses moved beyond the electoral system to explore factors deeply embedded in Irish political culture. Some very good responses noted that there appears to be widespread acceptance in Ireland that an Independent TD is entitled to advance their own personal interests, as long as they also service the needs of their constituents. Corruption is not always a resigning matter.

Q4 Enda Kenny's period as Taoiseach was marked by a constant struggle to maintain the fragile coalition which Fine Gael had constructed. The Source reflects this and weaker responses relied heavily on it. However, since Varadkar became Taoiseach he would seem to be able to exert more dominance over the Cabinet, although the issues he faces are similar to those of his predecessor. Many candidates interpreted Varadkar's success in getting the Abortion referendum decision through Cabinet as an indicator of his strength. Perhaps a Taoiseach can still act as a "Chief".

Other candidates argued that, like Kenny, Varadkar is simply enjoying a honeymoon period and that, in time, he will face the same issues of cabinet control of all recent Taoisigh.

Q5 As with Question 2, quality of written communication is not being assessed in this question so the observations about presentation also apply here. Almost all candidates were able to identify a similarity but a number struggled to clearly identify and explain a difference.

Q6 (a) There was a tendency for some responses to this question to be unbalanced. This often took the form of agreeing with the view expressed in the question, with the Lords being presented as a much more effective second chamber than the Seanad. While there is much evidence to support such a view it was important that candidates should seek to highlight the positives of the Seanad. Obviously they were enough for Irish voters to reject its abolition. Another issue in some responses was imbalance in supporting evidence, with much more being presented on the Lords.

- (b)** Weaker responses to this question were often descriptive accounts of the scrutiny mechanisms in both systems. As the mark scheme makes clear, this can only result in a limited response as the mechanisms in both systems are very similar. Better responses were able to discuss how these mechanisms work in practice. Obviously the greater emphasis that TDs are obliged to put on constituency representation is a key issue affecting scrutiny in Ireland. It was important to balance this with discussion of the significance of party loyalty and discipline in the British system, both of which may inhibit scrutiny. Recent changes in the composition of the Dáil, especially the increase in the number of Sinn Féin and Independent TDs, also deserved attention.

Assessment Unit A2 2

Option A Political Power

- Q1** Almost all candidates had some understanding of what is meant by ideological control and were able to explain it with varying degrees of detail. Given the argument in the Source, it was curious that a significant number of candidates thought it to be a feature of only authoritarian systems. It would seem that some candidates did not read the Source to the end. This emphasises the importance of careful reading of the Source in its entirety. However, candidates who defined ideological control solely as a feature of authoritarian systems could still attain full marks.

- Q2** Quality of written communication is not assessed in Question 2 and candidates may present their answer as two numbered or bulleted points.

A number of candidates did not refer to the limitation given in the Source with the result that a ceiling was applied to the mark that could be achieved. A further issue was that some candidates wrote about the limited use of coercion, a phrase contained in the Source, rather than the limitations of coercion. Once again, this emphasises the importance of careful reading of questions.

- Q3** Almost all candidates were clear that the limited use of coercion is a feature of liberal democracies. Weaker responses tended to describe this limited reliance on coercion but without providing any reasons why this was so. Better responses did seek to explain why and a wide range of acceptable reasons were given. In such responses it was understood that liberal democracies enjoy a high degree of legitimacy and therefore do not require the extensive use of coercion.

Some excellent responses introduced theory and used Marxism and Lukes to argue that ideological control or the “third face of power” means that overt use of coercion is minimised. Never in the wildest dreams of examiners did they anticipate ‘Love Island’ and ‘Dragon’s Den’ would be used effectively in responses to a question about political power.

- Q4** Almost all candidates identified the concept as belonging to Elite Theory but not all were able to explain what it meant. A significant number argued that it described the prevalence of political dynasties such as the Bushes, Clintons and Gandhis. However, a large number of answers were accurate and detailed and achieved full marks.

- Q5 (a)** This is a political theory unit and it is therefore important that candidates should have studied the theories in the Specification in some depth. In response to this question, weaker responses contained limited or even little Marxist theory beyond general statements. Supporting evidence was also limited. Better responses contained both theory and evidence and there were many such responses.

One issue was that of evaluation of the Marxist case. Chief Examiner's Reports on the Legacy Specification examinations have repeatedly made the point that evaluation for many candidates is simply one of juxtaposition. This means that alternative theories are merely presented with little or no attempt at direct evaluation. In response to this question many candidates outlined Pluralist, Feminist and Elite Theories but without any engagement with the argument that wealth is the basis of political power.

- (b)** The points made above, in the comments on Question 5 (a), are equally applicable to this question: lack of theory and evaluation that does not move beyond juxtaposition.

Almost all responses to this question identified that it was Pluralists who regard liberal democracy as the best political system, in spite of its flaws. Answers listed the positive features of liberal democracy, as far as Pluralists are concerned. It was the range of features and the quality of explanation that differentiated responses. When it came to the flaws of liberal democracy some candidates struggled to identify any of significance. This was in spite of the fact that the same candidates had made critical remarks about liberal democracy in previous questions, such as in response to Question 3, where they were not required.

Option B Political Ideas

Under the Revised Specification, Section A of this option will focus on texts and candidates should study each text in detail. Section B covers Ideologies and this should involve a broader view of each ideology without going into the sort of detail required in Section A. The broad themes of each ideology, the variations within each and the major criticisms of each should be covered.

- Q1** A significant number of candidates responded in a very general way to this question by arguing that capitalism made the proletariat poor. Better responses contained more detail on how the progressive deskilling of the working class due to mechanisation would create a single, exploited proletariat. A more detailed reading of the Source –“machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour” and “reduces wages to the same low level”- may have helped to improve the more general responses.
- Q2** Some responses to this question went into considerable detail about what would happen after a proletarian revolution took place. This is not what the question asked and this illustrates the importance of candidates paying close attention to what the question asks rather than making up their own. However, there were many full and detailed accounts of the Manifesto's depiction of the nature of capitalism.
- Q3** The point made on page 10, in the comments on Option A, is also relevant to responses to this question. Rather than critique the idea of an inevitable proletarian revolution, a significant number of responses outlined some of the ideas of Burke and Mill. Sometimes these ideas were implicitly relevant but often this was not the case. Slightly more direct responses argued that Burke was an opponent of (not all) revolutions and Mill thought revolution unnecessary, but with limited development. In studying the texts it is important that candidates study the central criticisms levelled at each.
- Q4** There were many detailed and full responses to this question. Some made the distinction between natural rights and civil rights. This was not required by the question but did contribute to the explanation of natural rights.

- Q5 (a)** Weaker responses to this question were general accounts of Conservative ideas with only limited focus on the specific area identified. Better responses did focus on the Conservative view of human nature and related other elements of Conservative thinking to that view: strong law and order, custom and tradition, and the need for hierarchy.

A number of responses did not move much beyond Burke. While he may be the 'Father' of Conservatism, the ideology has evolved significantly and a full answer needed to take account of this. Not every variant of Conservatism needed to be examined in detail but responses should have included some recognition of different strands.

In the strongest responses, evaluation took the form of identifying direct attacks on the Conservative view of human nature.

- (b)** Just as some responses to Question 5 (a) focus largely upon Burke, some responses to Question 5 (b) only really considered Mill. To repeat, Section B is about Ideologies and requires greater breadth than just one thinker. However, there were many excellent responses to this question that included recognition that Modern Liberals have a different view of the state than their Classical predecessors. This has enabled Modern Liberals to support state action in areas such as health care, welfare and education.

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