

GCE



**Chief Examiner's Report**  
**Government and Politics**

Summer Series 2019





## Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2019 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 section on our website at [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk).



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# GCE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

## Chief Examiner's Report

### Overview

It is very pleasing to be able to report that GCE Government and Politics is in very good shape. The transition to the Revised Specification has now been completed and centres have successfully made the adjustment to new content and forms of assessment. The evidence for this is that the outcomes in the 2019 examinations are very similar to those of the previous series. The outcomes for individual units are also broadly similar to those in the past. The subject remains very popular and, rather than the number of candidates declining, subject entries were once again up on the previous series. The subject continues to attract some exceptional A Level students.

In the following report there are many specific issues identified that affected candidate performance in individual units and questions. One generic issue that features in every unit is the overuse of examples. Some candidates use multiple examples to illustrate a point but the examples are described rather than analysed. One example, with analysis, is sufficient. The consequence of introducing multiple descriptive examples is that an answer becomes very long but may still lack the ingredients of a top level response. As candidates look to enter Higher Education it is important that they develop the skill of directly and succinctly answering a question, even if that results in a shorter response.

### Assessment Unit AS 1      The Government and Politics of Northern Ireland

#### Overview

Candidate performance in this unit was very similar to that in the previous series, although the quality of the candidature was marginally lower as measured by GCSE performance. Overall, the outcomes were very similar to those in 2018.

One feature of candidates' responses in the previous series was a tendency to focus excessively on an event that is dominating local politics. This was not the case in 2019, perhaps reflecting the lack of any significant political movement at Stormont.

- Q1** Most candidates achieved full marks in response to this question as a wide variety of terms to refer to Bills was acceptable. Those candidates who did not receive full marks did so because they referenced UK Parliament Bills or because they included Bills that fell outside of the 2007 to 2017 time range.
- Q2** Most candidates made appropriate use of the Source in their response. They were therefore able to identify that "Victims Issues" was something that divides Unionists and Nationalists. Even those who were not entirely clear on the meaning of the term were able to work out that the issue was one of who should be regarded as a victim of the Troubles. If included, these two points would have put an answer into Level 2 in the Mark Scheme. However, many answers had a clear understanding of Unionist and Nationalist views and were Level 3 responses.

- Q3** Almost all candidates made use of the Source to identify policing as one of the areas of agreement between Unionists and Nationalists, although the quality of explanation of policing varied considerably. Some candidates went into much detail on the reform of the RUC which predate 2007. The devolution of justice powers was accepted as a second and separate area, even if the two are often linked together. Some enterprising candidates managed to extract from the Source that Brexit was an area of agreement: they argued that both sides agreed that a 'hard' Brexit was not good for Northern Ireland. This was accepted as valid. A wide variety of other areas were identified and explained to varying degrees: health service reforms; reduction in Corporation Tax; opposition to Dissident Republican actions were some of the most common areas.
- Q4 (a)** This was the more popular of the two options. Most candidates had a solid understanding of what scrutiny is and what the major mechanisms of scrutiny are. What differentiated answers was the degree of detail on the mechanisms and the amount and quality of supporting evidence. A 'ceiling' was applied for answers that contained no evidence, but the more significant issue was at the other end of the evidence spectrum. Some candidates gave multiple examples to support a point when one example would have been sufficient. For example, some answers became a list of examples of alleged malpractice by members of the Executive Committee that the Assembly did or did not expose. This was certainly relevant but a broader range of points would have produced a more complete answer.
- (b)** A significant number of responses to this question ignored the "no real power sharing" element of the question. Such answers became responses to a question on whether the Executive Committee was a success or failure which meant that they were relevant in places but less so at other times. This is typical of what the Level 3 descriptor in the Mark Scheme refers to as containing "more general material" and this is why so many of such answers were placed in this level. On the other hand, many candidates did take on the issue of power sharing and did display knowledge of how power sharing was supposed to operate and how it worked in practice. It has to be noted that the on-going suspension of Stormont is leading to a deepening cynicism among 17 year olds about the whole power sharing idea.

## Assessment Unit AS 2      The British Political Process

### Overview

As with the other AS unit, the overall performance of candidates and the outcomes in this unit were both very similar to the previous series. One distinctive issue was inappropriate time allocation by some candidates with too long being given to answering some questions at the expense of others. Another issue was that candidates were not doing what was required by the question and including material that was related but not directly relevant.

- Q1** Some candidates are still writing far too much in response to this question. Simple identification of two functions was all that was required with no marks for explanation, examples or evaluation available.
- Q2** This question was generally well answered with many responses achieving Level 3. One issue was the number of answers in which there was significant overlap in the two ways given. For example, holding constituency surgeries was given as one way and then an explanation of what happens at surgeries was given as a second. A discrete second way was required.
- Q3 (a)** This was the more popular option and most of those who chose it understood what scrutiny is and what the main mechanisms of scrutiny are. As with all essay answers, it was the depth of explanation of the mechanisms, the quality of the supporting evidence and the degree of analysis that differentiated candidates. One issue was that some answers gave little time to a discussion of Select Committees or left them out altogether. The best answers engaged with the suggestion that scrutiny has improved in recent years, suggesting why this might be so and analysing whether this is a valid conclusion. The May Government's struggles in Parliament provided a rich source of material that some candidates did not fully exploit.
- (b)** This question provided candidates with an opportunity to take on a more challenging question. As with similar questions in previous series, some weaker candidates chose this option and struggled to produce relevant material. However, there were many excellent answers that successfully adapted "PM Power versus Cabinet Government" material to create an answer. These answers not only made use of contemporary material on the May Cabinet(s) but referred to divisions in the Cabinets of even 'strong' governments. How Blair and Thatcher managed the divisions in their Cabinets was often well analysed. Some outstanding answers successfully stretched the question to include Shadow Cabinets, allowing for a discussion of the divisions currently paralysing the Labour Party.
- Q4** Most candidates were able to identify one way in which the independence of the judiciary is assured, although the quality of explanation varied. Some continue to confuse independence and neutrality. The latter is when members of the judiciary are expected to not be aligned with a political party or movement. This is different from the definition of independence given in the Mark Scheme.
- Q5** Only a handful of candidates made the mistake of putting forward a balanced answer to this question: this was much more common in responses to Question 7. There is still a tendency for some candidates to confuse judicial reviews and judicial inquiries. For example, a number of candidates stated that the Executive is able to choose the judge who will carry out a review. A disproportionate amount of time was spent in some answers in detailing the failings of the Widgery and Saville Inquiries and, while this is certainly relevant, a broader discussion was needed for a top-level response.

- Q6** Almost all candidates understood the meaning of the term but the quality of explanation varied widely. Some answers to this question exemplified the major theme of this Chief Examiner’s Report, that is, that some candidates produce answers that are heavy on examples but those examples do little to extend the explanation. In response to this question, some answers contained multiple examples of insider pressure groups but without analysis. As a result the examples added little to the explanation.
- Q7** A number of candidates put forward a balanced response to this question when a one-sided answer was all that was required. Many answers contained an extensive list of ways in which pressure groups could be said to threaten democracy but not all these ways were explained or analysed. One distinction between a Level 3 and Level 4 response is that the former contains “limited” analysis and the latter “sound”. For example, some candidates stated that Extinction Rebellion poses a threat to democracy but offered only limited, sometimes no, analysis of how.

## Assessment Unit A2 1      Comparative Government

### Overview

Most candidates were well prepared for this unit. This was especially apparent in those responses that required candidates to make use of Source material in their answers. However, some candidates failed to fully exploit the Source and so lost out on content that would have improved the quality of their response. Some answers reflected the major theme of this report: the inclusion of far too many examples that do nothing to benefit the explanation or analysis. Outcomes in this option were very similar to those in previous series.

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

- Q1** Most candidates understood Executive Orders. However, some answers categorically stated that an Order is a piece of legislation and then went on to say that an Order is a way in which a President can get around Congress. The contradiction between these two statements was not apparent to those who made them.
- Q2** Almost all candidates made use of the Source reference to Congressional “power of the purse.” However, some responses consisted solely of the use of the Source with no additional material, resulting in a very limited answer. The Senate’s power to confirm Presidential nominations was the second way identified by most candidates, although multiple examples were often included. This reiterates the point that fewer examples and more analysis is a better strategy.
- Q3** Many candidates launched into this question prematurely without carrying out a full reading of it. They therefore missed the crucial word in the question which was why. As a result, many candidates discussed ‘how’ representatives carry out their representative role rather than ‘why’ they have to focus on it so much. Some candidates recognised their mistake and were able to change the direction of their answer. Others did not, with the result that their response was only partly relevant. There were many direct and very knowledgeable answers that discussed the constraints faced by Representatives and not just the two-year election cycle.

- Q4** Virtually all candidates made reference to the Source in their answer. However, examiners expressed surprise at how many did not refer to the Executive Office of the President. It is the view of many that the EXOP has been one of the most significant factors in the increased power of the presidency. This is what is argued in the Source and to have included it would have benefitted many answers. This reinforces the point that full and careful reading of the Source is important. Another curious feature of some responses was that they focused on historical evidence and made little use of the Obama and Trump presidencies. This is not to say that more historical evidence is inadmissible – it most certainly is relevant. However, the Obama and Trump presidencies provide such excellent material that including them would have improved any response.
- Q5** A small number of candidates missed the word ‘legislative’ in the question which had major consequences for the relevance of the response. Another issue in some answers was that the same difference was repeated as if it were two separate differences. So, for example, some answers had a paragraph detailing how the Senate can ‘kill’ a Bill entirely. This was then followed by a paragraph explaining that the Lords cannot, under normal circumstances, stop a Bill. This was one difference presented as two.
- Q6 (a)** This was the less popular option. Most of those who chose it had good knowledge of the background factors that determine the relationship between the President/PM and their Cabinets. One issue in a significant number of answers was that candidates spent substantially more time on the USA than on the UK. This was most apparent in a lack of content on the Prime Ministerial/ Presidential Power thesis. This led to answers that assumed that the weakness of Theresa May was typical of all PMs in their relationship with Cabinet. In their A2 year it is important that candidates spend some time in revisiting the British material that they covered at AS in order that a balanced response is produced.
- (b)** The lack of balance in coverage of political systems noted above was even more apparent in responses to this question. It was almost as if some candidates had not revisited the UK at all in preparing for the examination. This was reflected in a lot more content and detail on scrutiny in the USA than in the UK. For example, some candidates had very little detail on the work of UK Select Committees: they were simply dismissed as being less powerful than their US counterparts. It is essential that candidates revisit the UK after studying the USA.

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

- Q1** Some candidates explained what happens after a hung Dáil occurs, without first of all explaining what a hung Dáil is. Some others gave multiple examples of hung Dáils but without explaining the meaning of the term itself. This was yet another case of examples without explanation.
- Q2** This question required candidates to consider how localism and brokerage affect the actions of TDs. A significant number of candidates spent a lot of time explaining why localism and brokerage are so much a feature of Irish politics and less discussing how TDs’ actions are affected. This emphasises the value of candidates asking themselves does this question ask me to discuss causes or consequences: in this case it was the latter.
- Q3** Candidates were well prepared for a question on this topic and were able to present a range of factors that affect a Taoiseach. Strangely, some answers did not include the impact of coalition government on the creation of a Cabinet when, for decades, it would seem to be the major constraint on the choices made by a Taoiseach. On the other hand, some candidates focused exclusively on the effect of coalition government and did not refer to other factors.

- Q4** All responses made use of the Source. However, some answers did not fully exploit what the Source offered, once again emphasising the importance of a complete and careful reading. So while questions to ministers and the Taoiseach featured in all answers, the extraordinarily high percentage of Independents in the Irish legislature was not discussed by all candidates. The presence of so many Independents has consequences for the operation of the Dáil, including its scrutiny function. While Independents may be very active in their constituencies (reducing the amount of time they have to be scrutinisers) they are also not bound by party loyalty and discipline. A number of candidates exhibited only limited knowledge of the structure and operation of Oireachtas Committees.
- Q5** Stating that members of the Lords have lifetime tenure, while members of the Seanad do not, was only one difference in the composition not two, as some candidates attempted to suggest. The same is true of the automatic membership enjoyed by Bishops of the Anglican Church in the Lords and the absence of any automatic religious representation in the Seanad. Some candidates got confused in arguing that PMs can influence the composition of the Lords but Taoisigh cannot do the same for the Seanad before then going on to refer to the Taoiseach's appointment powers.
- Q6 (a)** This was the more popular option. In some ways the very public demise of May's Cabinet and Government disadvantaged some weaker candidates who concluded that May's experience was typical of all PMs. The evidence of dominant PMs was largely absent from such answers. This resulted in a rather narrow response that lacked a broader perspective and did not include the evidence of extensive Cabinet control enjoyed by Thatcher and Blair, for example. In previous Chief Examiners' Reports it was noted that candidates should not focus exclusively on current events and this question illustrated how some candidates still do so.
- (b)** Almost all candidates who chose this option were aware that the legislative processes in the UK and Ireland are broadly similar. The same is true of the functions and powers of MPs and TDs. The differences therefore lie in how MPs and TDs perform their legislative functions in practice. Once again, some candidates focused too much on the current situation in the UK, suggesting that MPs were always able to have an enormous influence on legislation, unlike their Irish counterparts. The extraordinary nature of the current situation in the UK needed to be recognised. More attention needed to be given to Executive dominance and the significance of party loyalty and dependency in the UK.

## Assessment Unit A2 2

## Political Power and Political Ideas

### Overview

Candidates were generally well prepared for the two options in this unit and this was reflected in outcomes that were very similar to those in the previous series. Where there were issues these were similar to those identified in other units. First, the overuse of examples without analysis. Second, incomplete reading and use of the Source. Third, description as a substitute for analysis. However, as always with this unit, there were some responses of exceptionally high quality.

### Option A: Political Power

- Q1** It is becoming a bit of a mantra of this report but one that needs repeating for this question: some candidates give multiple examples at the expense of a clear explanation of the term. So lots of examples of the use of coercion were given but the term was not always defined.
- Q2** Almost all candidates used Nationalists in Northern Ireland as an example of a group that rejected the state. However, some accounts consisted of lengthy descriptions of Nationalist opposition to Stormont but with limited analysis of the reason(s) for this. This tendency towards description rather than analysis was also apparent in the second choice made by some candidates. The reasons behind a crisis of legitimacy were not always discussed. So, for example, the civil war in Syria was described in detail but the who and why of those opposing the Syrian regime were not.
- Q3** Most candidates were well prepared for a question on this topic and the range and degree of analysis of the reasons given were the major differences between answers. There were two issues with some responses. First was the Source not being read in its entirety. As a result the reference to “including all sections of society in running the state” was not included in a significant number of answers. The second was that some candidates used only negative examples to illustrate how legitimacy can be created. So, for example, the role of free and fair elections in creating legitimacy was illustrated by referring to how Saddam Hussein had rigged elections. A positive example would have been more effective: elections in Post-Apartheid South Africa.
- Q4** A significant number of candidates struggled to define the term. This was curious as many of those who struggled then went on to explain the idea in response to Question 5(a) where it was often used as part of the Pluralist critique of Elite Theory. Such candidates clearly understood the concept but were unable to do so when it was not put under the heading of Pluralism.
- Q5 (a)** Only a handful of candidates were unable to identify the point of view in the question as that of Elite Theory. The issues with this question were similar to those identified in previous reports in relation to the ‘Theories of Power’ essays. First, some candidates presented limited detail on Elite Theorists, offering instead a generic account of the theory. In a political theory unit this is a significant failing. Second, some answers had little in the way of evidence to support Elite Theory. Third, the evaluation of Elite Theory in some responses was simply juxtaposition of other theories with limited direct evaluation of the theory itself. These points have all been elaborated on and illustrated in the Exemplification of Examination Performance material available on the subject website.

- (b)** This was the less popular option but still attracted a significant number of answers. Some of those who chose it had limited understanding of Feminist Theory and evidence but others presented very detailed accounts of both. The question itself is phrased as a critique of the Feminist analysis but only a few candidates stated this. Most answers simply jumped into an account of the historical development of Feminism. This was then followed by the critique. A more logical structure, given the question, would have been to outline the critique of Feminism and the argument that Patriarchy has been ended and then set out how the various Feminisms have responded to this.

### **Option B: Political Ideas**

- Q1** Examiners were surprised at the number of candidates who did not explain Mill's opposition to any sort of paternalistic intervention by the state. Those candidates who did this opted instead for an explanation of the Harm Principle which should have formed part of an answer to Question 2. Candidates who did this then included the Conservative argument that paternalistic state action is essential in their response to Question 3. This would suggest that candidates need to think clearly about which material is most appropriate to an answer. Examiners cannot move material from one answer to another where it may be more relevant.
- Q2** Weaker answers to this question were very reliant on the Source and contained limited material beyond it. Stronger answers were able to elaborate on what Mill saw as the threat to individual liberty, the "tyranny of the majority", and also on how he proposed it could be avoided. One issue with some answers was that they contained quotations from Mill that were not genuine but were created by the candidate.
- Q3** The main flaw in Mill's Harm Principle is that all actions are potentially "other regarding" and therefore Mill inadvertently provided an argument in favour of unlimited state intervention. Some, but far from all, candidates explained this flaw and were able to illustrate the point with reference to Mill's own examples and contemporary issues. Another common criticism was that Mill argued for unlimited freedom of expression in spite of all the other regarding implications of that. This point was often well illustrated by reference to the flow of Twitter comments from the current incumbent in the White House. Another criticism that appeared in many answers was that Mill wanted to exclude the young and other races from the protection of the Harm Principle. Weaker answers contained few direct criticisms of Mill and instead simply juxtaposed the ideas of Socialists and Conservatives. It would have been possible for Mill to have criticised Burke. However, many candidates suggested that Burke was able to directly criticise Mill.
- Q4** Weaker candidates sought to explain the term by rearranging the words 'equality' and 'opportunity' in a variety of formats but without producing a developed explanation. Stronger responses did introduce the idea of meritocracy, although the use of the term itself was not a requirement of a top level response. Some candidates successfully used the contrast with equality of outcome to put together an explanation.
- Q5 (a)** A positive feature of responses to this question was that few candidates sought to explain Conservatism solely by reference to the ideas of Edmund Burke. However, some responses still lacked breadth in terms of their understanding of the different strands of the ideology and of its evolution. There were many very strong answers that did explain the different views of the state held by Traditional, One Nation and New Right Conservatives. The degree of sophisticated understanding displayed by some candidates was very impressive.

- (b)** As with Question 5(a), few candidates tried to explain Socialism by discussing the ideas of only one writer. Marx is certainly a key figure in Socialist thought but he is not the only member of this tradition. Most candidates understood that Socialists differ on whether capitalism needs to be totally eradicated. What differentiated answers was the level of understanding of why Socialists disagree on this issue. One area of concern was that some candidates were unclear on the distinction between Democratic Socialism and Social Democracy and their views on whether capitalism needs to be eliminated entirely.

## Contact details

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