



GCE

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE **A2 H495**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H095**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

© OCR 2015

CONTENTS

Advanced GCE Government and Politics (H495)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Government and Politics (H095)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
F851 Contemporary Politics of the UK	4
F852 Contemporary Government of the UK	6
F853 Contemporary US Government and Politics	8
F854 Political Ideas and Concepts	10
F855 US Government and Politics	13
F856 Political Ideas and Concepts in Practice	16

F851 Contemporary Politics of the UK

General Comments:

Although candidates found Q1a challenging, there were many good answers to each of the essay questions, including Q1b, a topic which had not previously attracted high marks. There was also a pleasing awareness of contemporary politics with detailed references to the 2015 election, the Scottish referendum and recent changes to the Labour Party's leadership selection process.

As always, the best marks went to candidates who answered the questions set. For example, Q3 asked candidates to discuss whether referendums in the UK had done more harm than good. To reach Level 4, candidates need to focus on the British experience of referendums and to make an assessment of the harm or good they had done, rather than write a generic answer on the value of referendums. Candidates who appreciated this steer usually did well: those who didn't, performed less well.

Broadly speaking, and depending on the question, when marking, examiners look for:

- a balanced and well-focused answer;
- which correctly identifies a number and range of relevant and important factors;
- in detail;
- and communicates these clearly in a logical, fluent and coherent style;
- containing few, if any, errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Candidates who understand this, and provide what is required, inevitably do better than those who don't.

With regard to Q1, it is worth reminding candidates that the source material always contains information that can be used when answering the question. While most clearly understood this, a number did not attempt any answer to Q1a at all, even though the sources contained a number of helpful suggestions.

Finally, while introductions can serve a useful purpose by setting an answer in its context, and conclusions allow judgements to be made about, for example, 'to what extent ...', some candidates wasted valuable time and space by simply stating what they intended to say, and then, at the end, repeating what they had already said, often at some length and to little advantage.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Question 1a

The best answers were able to identify a number of ways in which pressure groups could use the courts to pursue their aims, including supporting litigants, bringing test cases, judicial review and appeals to the ECHR and ECJ as well as forcing a question on to the political agenda, gaining a higher public profile for an issue and attracting media coverage for a cause. Few, though, managed to identify a wide enough range of possible points to reach Level 4 and there was an almost universal belief that the ECHR was part of the EU. The simple advice when answering Q1a is to do what the question asks for: no more and no less. In this case there was no need for candidates to explain what a pressure group was, to outline the different types of pressure or the methods they use, before describing how they could use the courts.

Question 1b

Candidates were clearly well-prepared to answer a question on whether pressure groups make the UK more democratic or not, but the very best did what was actually asked for, making a number of arguments, usually five or six, which directly addressed the question and supporting each with numerous and detailed contemporary examples.

Question 2

The last time a question was set on this area of the specification it was generally poorly done. This time answers were much improved and most candidates were able to discuss a variety of reasons why the Conservative and Labour parties might, or might not, be considered to be undemocratic, usually focussing on choosing and dismissing leaders, policy-formulation and the selection of parliamentary candidates. Candidates who wrote about the contribution of the main parties to democracy in the UK were clearly not answering the question, but points about party funding, for example, were only rewarded where a clear link was made between such funding and internal party democracy. Finally, candidates should note that, while knowledge, for example, of how a party leader is chosen, gains AO1 marks, for AO2 marks they must use this information to answer the question. Simply describing the selection process without saying whether it was evidence of internal democracy or otherwise, was not, on its own, enough.

Question 3

The question asked candidates to consider whether referendums in the UK had done more harm than good, in other words, to reflect on the British experience of referendums since, say 1975, and to consider whether they had been, in some sense, good or bad for Britain. The best candidates often started their answers, "It could be argued that referendums in the UK have done more harm than good because ...", gave a reason and then provided an example of a referendum that supported that point. Weaker candidates simply wrote an essay on the pros and cons of referendums.

Question 4

The key phrase in the question was 'the results of recent general elections'. Candidates who simply trotted out the standard arguments for and against electoral reform for the Commons without any evidence drawn from recent general elections could not access the high levels of the assessment objectives. On the other hand, candidates who were able to use data from the last three or four general elections to argue that reform was, or was not, necessary often did very well. The result of the 2011 AV referendum was not relevant.

Question 5

Most candidates chose to answer this question by explaining why a government's record in office might influence how people vote before going on to consider the importance of other short-term factors, such as the campaign, the leader and the impact of the mass media, as well as longer term factors like class and age. This proved to be a successful strategy, though some candidates undermined their case by considering factors which they themselves said were unimportant.

F852 Contemporary Government of the UK

General Comments:

Candidates did well when they made a series of points in each essay which directly answered the question set, and supported those points with relevant and specific examples. Many candidates made good use of up-to-date evidence, and it is clear that most understand that this paper requires contemporary knowledge. There was lots of evidence from the period since 2010, and many candidates also demonstrated that they had thought carefully about the impact of the 2015 general election, although given the proximity of the paper to the election such knowledge was not required to reach the top level.

Responses that were less successful tended to suffer from a lack of focus on the question set. This was particularly noticeable this year, and in many cases, knowledgeable candidates wrote extensively about the topic, but did not answer the specific question asked. Such candidates were sometimes able to secure good marks for AO1, but were limited in what they could achieve for AO2. It is advisable to use the opening line of a paragraph to make a point directly answering the question set, and where candidates did this they tended to remain much more focused.

Some candidates wrote introductions, but they contributed little. With less than thirty minutes to write each essay, it would be more useful to get straight to the first argument. Although conclusions were often more useful, this was only when they offered a genuine conclusion demonstrating why one argument is more convincing than another. Listing the points made again or simply stating a view without justification added little to the answer.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Question 1 (a)

Most candidates made very good use of the source, which identified a series of roles of backbenchers. The best answers identified a role ('One role of backbenchers is....'), described that role and then gave an example. Three or four such short paragraphs were sufficient for Level 4.

Question 1 (b)

The best responses here focused explicitly on the role of parties in the House of Commons. Some candidates did this very well, and looked at the role of parties in various aspects of the work of the House of Commons, such as legislation, scrutiny and debate. There was some excellent knowledge of the work of the whips, and many candidates countered this with good knowledge of rebellious MPs. In addition, it was pleasing to see some answers that assessed the impact of the Wright Committee, including the reforms of select committees and the Backbench Business Committee. There was also some thoughtful discussion about whether the role of parties prevents MPs representing their own views and those of their constituents. Such candidates had clearly grasped the question. At the same time, many candidates demonstrated a weak grasp of this part of the specification. The focus was on parties in the House of Commons, but a good number of responses confused parties with the government, and wrote mainly about the power of the government over the House of Commons, and discussed whether

OCR Report to Centres – June 2015

the government could, or should, control the Commons. Whilst there is clearly some overlap between the two, this was not what the question was asking.

Question 2

It was encouraging to see plenty of good knowledge of the coalition era, and many candidates confidently deployed examples such as the Fixed Term Parliament Act, changing constitutional conventions in foreign policy, the role of the Liberal Democrats in the coalition and rebellious Conservative MPs. In addition, there was some very thoughtful analysis of what the result of the general election might mean for prime ministerial power. What distinguished the best answers, however, was focus on the question. Candidates were asked about the extent to which prime ministerial power has changed, and the best answers looked at two or three ways in which it has changed, and two or three ways it has stayed the same. Many answers, however, addressed ways in which prime ministerial power has increased, and ways in which it has decreased. Others looked only at a variety of ways it has changed. Both struggled to score good AO2 marks regardless of their knowledge of the last five years.

Question 3

The key discriminator here was again focus on the question. Successful answers addressed two or three arguments that the advantages of flexible constitutions outweigh the disadvantages, and then looked at two or three opposing arguments. Less successful answers addressed the pros and cons of a codified constitution. It is also worth noting that candidates need to sustain their focus on the question – although many answers started by focusing on flexibility, they had slipped into the standard codified / uncoded essay before the end. High AO1 marks were earned by candidates who had a confident grasp of the wealth of constitutional reform that has taken place since 1997, although it was noticeable that only a minority of responses were able to demonstrate this knowledge. Many candidates were quick to compare the UK with the US, but often this was unhelpful because their knowledge of the US Constitution was weak.

Question 4

Good responses outlined the ways in which the executive threatens rights and liberties, and then looked at some other threats, such as from the legislature, the judiciary or public opinion. There was some knowledge of threats to rights since 9/11 and 7/7, the proposal to replace the Human Rights Act and some Supreme Court or ECHR cases, but responses that demonstrated such knowledge were in the minority.

Question 5

Successful answers addressed the extent to which the decision-making process of the EU impacts on UK sovereignty. This required a good textbook knowledge of the decision-making process, and some candidates displayed a sound understanding of the way the EU institutions work and how decisions are made. Most, however, did not have this understanding and, if they mentioned them at all, struggled to distinguish between the role of the Council, the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. Some candidates wrote about the European Court of Human Rights, which is not part of the EU.

F853 Contemporary US Government and Politics

General Comments:

Most questions were attempted in relative equal measure and it was pleasing to see some excellent use of recent developments to support analysis and evaluation. The advances made in this regard over the years due to the internet have been striking. Candidates and centres would do well to consider the separate assessment objectives. In brief, marks are awarded for: detail and examples (AO1); analysis and evaluation (AO2) and fluency / structure / spelling, punctuation and grammar for (AO3). The purpose of conclusions for example is worthy of greater consideration as frequently they merely repeated what had already been said rather than reaching some sort of answer to the question posed. In a similar vein, candidates need to consider the focus of a question and to avoid the pitfalls of presenting essays they had prepared earlier.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Question 1a)

Using the study of voting behaviour at AS, past questions and the information in the stimulus material most candidates were able to provide decent responses to this question, although it did present a challenge to some candidates. It should be noted that the compulsory questions 1a and 1b are marked more sympathetically than others on the paper.

Question 1b)

Many candidates were able to reach the higher mark levels by providing a detailed discussion of race, religion and region supported by statistical evidence from 2012 presidential election and 2014 mid-terms. Reference to other influential factors was also credited. There was even reference to 'geographical sorting' which was impressive.

Question 2

The best answers to this question were able to use the functions of parties as the basis for an assessment of their importance. Similarly theories of party decline and renewal were used to provide an effective answer to the question. The best answers were able to incorporate the polarisation of the parties, the declining role of third parties and increased significance of pressure groups such as the Tea Party Movement.

Question 3

As always pressure groups was one of the most popular questions on the paper. The need for a range of examples of US pressure groups (a perennial issue) and a range of factors that contribute to success were the key to a good mark here. It is surprising to see continued references to the NAACP and Brown v Bd of Education, MADD, Chuck Norris and the NRA. All of these were credited but do seem dated when the Tea Party, Occupy & ACLU (and others) can provide a more contemporary analysis.

Question 4

This was not that popular a question and it was interesting to note that some who attempted this did not have a detailed knowledge of the component parts of the EXOP. Comparisons with the cabinet aided analysis and evaluation, as did reference to foreign policy issues such as Syria and the Ukraine or domestic developments such as the budget crisis and government shutdowns. These invited reference to the NSC and OMB respectively. Some did just write about the executive rather than the EXOP but these were few in number.

Question 5

The most interesting aspect of attempts to the question were the number of candidates who wanted to talk about why there have been so few constitutional amendments rather than pausing to think what the question might actually refer to. Good answers recognised that 'effective government' allowed students to discuss the presidency, Congress and the Supreme Court and other issues such as the lack of constitutional amendments. The 'catch all' nature of constitution questions might be recognised in the future by centres.

Question 6

Rather like Question 5, the wording of the question might have acted as a disincentive to students who might have been unfamiliar with the quote. A moment's reflection however, would have allowed them to realise that a discussion of how well Congress fulfils its functions would have provided a great deal of scope for effective analysis and evaluation. The notion of the 'do-nothing' 113th Congress and prospects for legislative progress after the 2014 mid-terms were successfully incorporated into essays by the best candidates. It is surprising to read that so many state that super majorities are needed to pass legislation.

Question 7

This was probably the most popular question on the paper. References to cases and voting provide the basis for AO1 marks. AO2 marks were awarded for discussion of 'political' and 'judicial'. Of the two terms, the latter generally needed more development but many candidates secured their highest essay mark on this question. Pleasingly, many were able to identify the constraints upon the Court and how this affects the debate. As mentioned earlier, access to cases from the last term (and this term) allowed key points to be made with regard to the extent of unanimity on the Court to counter the view of a 5 – 4 split on ideological grounds.

Question 8

Given the popularity of questions on the Supreme Court, it is surprising to see fewer answers to questions on rights on this and other papers. Given the degree of cross referencing cases and rights between the two topics, there is an obvious overlap. There were some excellent answers which included discussion of the roles played by the Courts, Congress and presidency with references to developments relating to GITMO, renewal of the Patriot Act / Freedom Act and Snowden WikiLeaks / NSA affair.

F854 Political Ideas and Concepts

General Comments:

The large majority of candidates have been well prepared for the demands of this unit. There was much evidence of a good understanding of the relevant political theory and most were able to illustrate their analysis with reference to specific political thinkers. However, candidates need to be aware that these references should avoid generalisations that merely prove that candidates are aware that certain thinkers can be attributed to certain ideologies. For example it is not enough to know that JS Mill was a Liberal, instead to gain better AO1 marks answers should deal specifically with what JS Mill argues. The important feature to note about the successful answering of questions for this unit comes from its title, Political Ideas and Concepts. It is expected that answers focus upon the relevant theory debate and illustrate their analysis and evaluation with reference to the ideas of specific political thinkers. Weaker answers, however, still tend to be too generalised in their coverage of political theory, often focusing their answers upon modern politics. These references to modern politics are not relevant for this unit and should be reserved for use in unit F856. Candidates are also reminded to make sure they understand what the specific question is asking. A 'discuss the view' question requires a balanced assessment of both sides of an argument, whereas an 'assess' question requires an evaluation of the relevant issues relating to the question.

Specific issues to note with the marking process are highlighted below:

AO1 marks – these are awarded for knowledge and understanding of the relevant ideas and concepts. It is expected that answers should display knowledge of the views of relevant political thinkers, and where this is not done answers will not be able to be credited beyond the very bottom of L2. For access to L3 and L4 marks there is an expectation of good understanding of the relevant concepts (definitions help in this) as well as the use of a wide range of the views of political thinkers.

AO2 marks – these are awarded for analysing and evaluating relevant theory based arguments. Descriptive answers that fail to address the question set will only be credited at best at low L2. For L3 and L4 a good range of relevant arguments with balance should be used. As a general rule 5 or 6 relevant and well-constructed and developed arguments are required for L4 marks. One-sided answers fail to fully address the question set and thus will only access top L2 marks at best.

AO3 marks – these are awarded based on the quality of written communication and the relevance of the answer. Where answers have no relevance to the question set then it is not possible to credit marks for AO3, or indeed for also AO1 or AO2. Most answers will be awarded at L3 in terms of AO3 marks, with L4 answers displaying very good use of QWC and a sharp focus upon the question, including effective introductions and conclusions. Very short answers tend to be rewarded at L1 or the bottom of L2.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Question 1(a)

Answers tended to display a good knowledge and understanding of the meaning of political power. Weaker ones tended to only paraphrase detail in the source whereas more reward was given for those that developed upon the core types of political power and explained and

OCR Report to Centres – June 2015

illustrated Luke's typology. Answers should explain the ideas of specific relevant theorists as well as make an attempt to define the term referred to in the question.

Question 1(b)

This question required candidates to compare the decision making and agenda setting concepts of power. Here there was an expectation of explaining similarities and differences with the best answers also dealing with extent in their comparison. This was a question that many candidates found challenging and weaker answers tended to be only able to describe the two types of power. Better answers were able to focus upon a balanced comparison with the very best often comparing them using criterion for their comparison.

Question 2

This proved to be a very popular question with the large majority of answers displaying at least a reasonable understanding of criticism of democracy relating to majority tyranny. Where some answers suffered was in their approach of writing a standard for and against democracy style question. The title required the focus to be on the criticisms of democracy and thus evaluation needed to be based upon the extent of their importance. A good approach utilised in a number of answers was to attribute importance to different ideological perspectives. Thus for classical liberals majority tyranny was possibly the most important criticism of democracy, whereas for Marxists it is the lack of economic equality.

Question 3

This question required answers to display an understanding of the importance of external sovereignty to the existence of the nation state. Weaker answers tended to lack an understanding of external sovereignty, often confusing it with internal sovereignty. Better answers did show a good understanding of the concept and were able to consider the relative importance of other factors such as internal sovereignty, territorial jurisdiction and a monopoly of coercive power. There were some interesting answers that looked at the topic from a globalisation perspective and this was entirely appropriate as long as it was related to the topic of external sovereignty.

Question 4

This question needed a focus upon the criticisms of negative liberty. A number of answers chose to adopt a comparison between negative and positive liberty and thus failed to fulfil the demands of the question. The best answers focused upon at least three criticisms of negative liberty and looked at how valid these were, thus producing six relevant arguments. Often answers linked the criticisms to the benefits of positive liberty. This was a legitimate approach as long as the benefits were linked to challenging negative liberty. A number of answers also legitimately looked at the criticisms from an ideological perspective.

Question 5

This question required candidates to focus upon the legitimacy of civil disobedience within a democracy. Many answers failed to focus upon the latter aspect of the question and wrote largely irrelevant sections on how it could be justified in a dictatorship. Better answers did focus upon the question and were able to highlight standard arguments about the justifications and criticisms of civil disobedience. Some of the very best answers also commented on the concept of legitimacy and how this was derived in democracy.

Question 6

This question required an assessment of the relative importance of the rejection of capitalism to socialist theory. Many good answers looked at this from the stance of analysing its importance to the different strands of socialism – revolutionary, utopian democratic and social democracy. Good answers also introduced other importance concepts such as equality, collectivism and social justice. This proved to be a popular question and on the whole was largely well answered.

Question 7

This question required a comparison between conservatism and nationalism. Most answers did this by comparing relevant values and principles for each. Better answers also tended to apply this approach to the different types of nationalism and conservatism. This approach tended to conclude that conservative nationalism had many similarities with traditional conservatism, whereas other strands of nationalism, most notably liberal and socialist nationalism had little in common with mainstream conservatism. The very best answers also alluded directly to the question highlighting how fundamentally they are not the same.

Question 8

This question required an assessment of how ideological is religious fundamentalism. Good answers displayed an effective understanding of what is meant by an ideology and tended to apply relevant criterion for this to religious fundamentalism. Weaker answers either displayed only a limited understanding of religious fundamentalism and/ or only described its constituent elements. Whilst this was not a popular question, most of those that did attempt it had a good understanding of the key principles behind this ideology/ concept.

F855 US Government and Politics

General Comments:

There were many excellent responses across all eight questions. The most successful answers discussed a range of relevant arguments that were sharply focused on the question, supported each argument with relevant and specific examples from the US and the UK, and then offered some thoughtful analysis. The depth of knowledge and sophisticated analysis of the best responses was very impressive, and it is pleasing to see that some candidates take advantage of the greater time available in this paper to put together wide-ranging, thoughtful and well-argued essays.

The synoptic nature of this unit means that direct comparison is a good way of scoring AO2 marks. In terms of examination technique, this worked best when candidates made an argument at the start of a paragraph, and then discussed that argument with reference to both the US and the UK in the same paragraph, before moving on to another argument. Comparison was often hindered, however, when candidates took each country in turn, effectively writing part of their essay on the US, and then another part on the UK.

Candidates sometimes made good use of examples from other countries. Although this is not a requirement and answers can score full marks without them, specific and relevant examples from elsewhere were often deployed very effectively to enable further comparison. These should not, however, be a substitute for good knowledge of the US and UK.

Conclusions to answers were of mixed quality, but they are an important component of a good essay at this level, where candidates have a full hour to produce their response. Conclusions worked very well when candidates made a clear judgement identifying and explaining why one argument or other is more convincing than others. However, much of the time conclusions either restated all the arguments again, or plumped for one argument over the others, but for no particular reason. These tended to add little to the answer.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

Question 1

There were some very detailed and well-argued responses to this question, with candidates pitting short-term factors like the campaign, personality and issues against long-term factors like class, ethnicity and gender. Many candidates had excellent knowledge of recent elections, and made good use of the recent UK general election, as well as the US midterms of 2014. Very few candidates were unable to identify a variety of arguments, but less successful candidates were unable to provide much in the way of evidence to back up their claims, and were forced to resort to vague claims about personalities or the role of class. Candidates were also sometimes too quick to accept each explanation of voting behaviour, and would have benefitted from challenging them some more. This was particularly true of candidates who argued that the media determines how people vote.

Question 2

Successful responses to this question assessed a variety of ways the ideologies of parties have converged, and ways in which they have not. There were some outstanding answers that considered ideas like triangulation, the 'end of history' thesis or the need to win the 'vital centre'.

OCR Report to Centres – June 2015

Some excellent answers also considered the impact of the financial crisis of 2008 on party ideology, so-called hyper-partisanship in the US and the positions of the UK parties ahead of the 2015 general election. In addition, candidates often discussed the growth of small parties across the world. Not unlike Q1, however, less successful answers were unable to refer to many actual ideological positions or policies to support their claims. In addition, a good number of candidates did not really discuss ideology at all, but focused instead on election results as evidence of ideological convergence or otherwise.

Question 3

This was a very popular question, and generally very well done. Most candidates had a confident grasp of the arguments for and against pressure groups, and could use a wealth of examples to support their points. The very best responses, however, really focused on the question and whether the activities of pressure groups 'weaken democracy'. Such answers also featured a wide variety of examples of groups and their activities beyond simplistic references to the NRA, the AARP and Fathers4Justice.

Question 4

Effective answers to this question outlined a variety of factors that make a federal system suitable for a country, and employed examples that illustrate the point. Whilst many candidates were able to identify some relevant factors, only a few were able to employ examples to support their point. There were, however, some good comparisons between federal systems such as the US and unitary systems with devolved power like the UK.

Question 5

This question was often done very well indeed, and it was clear that many candidates had excellent knowledge of ways in which rights and liberties are, and are not, being protected. Some outstanding responses had a very good grasp of the development of rights and liberties after 9/11, as well as the protection or otherwise of a variety of other types of rights and liberties. Some sophisticated candidates really considered what might be meant by 'adequately protected' and scored highly for AO2.

Question 6

Most candidates demonstrated a very sound grasp of the various ways in which legislatures check the executive, but only a minority successfully compared the ability of legislatures to scrutinise. Some candidates, for example, wrote extensively about the US, and then extensively about the UK, but without really comparing. In addition, although most candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the mechanisms through which executives are checked, they would have benefitted from using relevant and up-to-date examples to illustrate how they work in practice. Given the present divided government in the US, and the changing role of the legislature in the UK during the coalition era, there was a lot of material that could have been exploited.

Question 7

The best answers here looked at how 'style and skills' can determine the power of chief executives, and then assessed a variety of other factors, such as constitutional arrangements, party control of the legislature, public opinion or events. Candidates did well when they considered first what they understand 'style and skills' to mean, as in some cases candidates' paragraphs on this factor were often somewhat vague.

Question 8

There were some excellent answers to this question, with candidates having a detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of court cases. Pleasingly, the best candidates supplemented knowledge of US cases with those from the UK and elsewhere, including the EU. There was evidence too that candidates had carefully considered whether the power of judiciaries could be justified in a democracy.

F856 Political Ideas and Concepts in Practice

General Comments:

Candidates have largely shown that they are now very familiar with the demands of this unit. The important feature to note about the successful answering of questions in this unit comes from its title, Political ideas and Concepts in Practice. Unless there is evidence of the use of political ideas and concepts and also the application of them in practice, answers will not be able to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. The key word is synopticity. By this it is meant that the question is answered through a debate centring on the relevant theory aspects (including illustration through the use of relevant political thinkers) and then this debate should be evaluated by the application to modern politics (once again specific examples drawn from modern UK and EU Politics are expected). The idea of this unit is to take the political ideas and concepts studied in F854 and apply them to modern politics, as largely studied at AS Politics.

Specific issues to note with the marking process are highlighted below –

AO1 marks – these are awarded for the knowledge and understanding of the theory and also modern politics. As such L1 answers tended to have only a generalised understanding of the relevant issues, often having no specific reference to relevant political thinkers and/ or very few practical examples drawn from modern politics. L2 answers tended to have a degree of understanding of the relevant issues but once again, had only a few examples of the ideas of relevant political thinkers and some specific examples drawn from modern politics. Also at this level were placed answers that contained no references to specific political thinkers but had a wider range of examples drawn from modern politics. L3 answers made use of a good range of examples, both in terms of relevant political thinkers and specific modern examples. For L4 there needed to be a relatively balanced wide range of examples of the ideas of specific thinkers and specific modern examples. Answers that had a very wide range of modern examples but much fewer examples of the ideas of political thinkers were awarded at L3. It is important to note that the ideas of political thinkers must be explained to some degree and not just listed. Examples where the use of political thinkers was not credited fully included comments such as – ‘Socialists such as Tawney believed in the importance of equality’. This example is far too generalised and specific detail on what Tawney believed about equality would be required for full credit to be given. Another example that was not fully credited was the listing of a range of thinkers without any specific reference to their ideas, such as – ‘Marxists, including Marx Engels, Gramsci and Lenin all oppose capitalism.’ It would be far better to deal with each separately and explain their specific ideas.

AO2 marks – these are awarded for the ability to evaluate the theory based debate through the application to modern politics. Here credit is given for appropriate synoptic links. An example of this is when the arguments of a specific thinker have been discussed and then they are evaluated by applying their relevance or validity to modern politics. Thus a good synoptic link would have an argument debated in theory using the views of specific thinkers and then evaluated in practice applying it to specific aspects of modern politics. L1 answers tended to lack any evidence of synoptic links and often were heavily based around AS style modern politics. Bottom L2 answers also tended to lack use of synoptic links but at least had relevant arguments. Towards the top of L2 there tended to be some attempt at making synoptic links, albeit these were often weaker or inferred. L3 marks were awarded for the use of a range of synoptic links, and L4 answers had a wide range of these as well as good balance and sophistication in the arguments. One-sided answers tended to be credited at maximum top of L2. Ideally 5 or 6 relevant arguments with good synoptic links should ensure access to L4 for AO2. Some credit is given where there is an attempt to apply theory based ideas to modern politics but without any reference to the views of specific thinkers. This was awarded through a weaker synoptic link and this approach allowed answers to access at maximum L3 marks for AO2.

OCR Report to Centres – June 2015

AO3 marks – these were awarded based on the quality of written communication and the relevance of the answer. Where answers had no relevance to the question set then it was not possible to credit marks for AO3, or indeed for also AO1 or 2. Most answers were awarded at L3 in terms of AO3 marks, with L4 answers displaying very good use of QWC and a sharp focus upon the question, including effective introductions and conclusions. Very short answers tended to be rewarded at L1 or the bottom of L2.

Comments on Individual Questions:**Question No.****Question 1**

This question required focus upon the criticisms of democracy and in particular the idea that it produces bad government. Most answers approached this question in a standard for and against format, although the very best answers did tend to acknowledge the idea of what is meant by bad government. There was often very good synoptic links made applying elitist, Marxist and classical liberal criticisms to the operation of modern democracy. However some weaker answers tended to write AS style essays focusing upon the faults of the UK as a democracy, especially with regards to the operation of the First Past the Post electoral system and its inherent lack of proportionality.

Question No. 2

This question required an understanding of the night watchman model of the state and also appreciation of other models. Most answers displayed good awareness of each model and did try and apply these in practice. There were many answers that failed to illustrate their ideas with the views of relevant thinkers thus were only able to achieve weaker synoptic links by applying general theory based ideas to modern UK politics. Another common issue with this question was the lack of specific detail in the application to modern politics. Many answers could only illustrate their argument that the UK conforms to the social democratic/ welfare state model by highlighting that we have the NHS. Evidence is expected to be more specific than this thus answers should explain why the NHS conforms to social democratic principles. Likewise vague reference to privatising the NHS is not really sufficient when arguing that the UK is moving away from the social democratic model.

Question No. 3

This question required understanding and analysis of the basis of political authority. Good answers utilised Weber and Beetham's arguments over how authority is bestowed, thus applying electoral based consent to legal-rational concepts of authority and even aspects of charismatic authority also. Other alternatives explored were traditional forms of authority as well as adherence to constitutional arrangements and popular customs and values (Beetham). Weaker answers often confused authority with power and ended up writing largely irrelevant sections on Lukes' typologies of power and how they applied in practice. There were however some interesting arguments relating to the manufacturing of authority through the media adopting a Marxist perspective relating to bourgeois hegemony as argued by Gramsci and more latterly Chomsky.

Question No. 4

This question required consideration of the importance of protecting liberty as the most important principle in UK politics. Answers tended to either provide a variety of for and against arguments on the importance of liberty in the UK or consider liberty alongside other principles such as equality and the rule of law. Both approaches were perfectly acceptable as long as appropriate synoptic links were made. Better answers did tend to highlight how the protection of liberty has potentially suffered as a priority post 9/11 and the rise of threats to security from terrorism.

Question No. 5

This question required a comparison of party attitudes to law enforcement. Most answers tended to do this by applying different models of punishment to party policy. This was appropriate as long as the models were used as criterion for comparison of party policy on law enforcement and not as the focus of the essay itself. Better answers were able to make effective comparisons between party policies often highlighting ideological differences on areas such as human nature and how this affected attitudes to law and order.

Question No. 6

This question required an assessment of the influence of conservatism on modern politics. Most answers approached this question by looking at the core values of conservatism and examining their relevance to modern politics. Some answers were narrow in their application to modern politics, by focusing upon their relevance to the Conservative Party alone. Better answers also made links to other UK political parties whereas some very good answers also looked at international dimensions. Whilst it was possible to access L4 marks by focusing only on UK politics the range of international application by some candidates was very impressive.

Question No. 7

This question required a focus upon the ideological basis of the Labour Party. Some answers adopted a narrow approach by seeking to apply exclusively socialist principles to the Labour Party. Better answers considered the influence of other ideologies as well as consider the pragmatic features of modern Labour policies. The question specifically said the modern Labour Party. Unfortunately a number of answers wrote extensively about the history of the Labour Party. Instead the modern party should have been interpreted as at most the last couple of decades and certainly not a hundred years.

Question No. 8

This question had few answers and those that did answer it tended to lack a grasp of environmentalism. Good answers should have displayed an appreciation of the principles of environmental theory and considered their relevance to the UK in the age of austerity. Unfortunately answers tended to list party policies relating to the environment or look at the influence of the Green Party in the 2015 election. This was probably the least well-handled question on the paper.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2015

