

Examiners' Report
June 2013

GCE Government and Politics 6GP02 01

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Introduction

This examination conformed closely to the type and standard of questions set in recent papers. The structure of the examination was unchanged, as was the distribution of marks under various assessment objectives. On the whole this year's candidates tended to score slightly less well on assessment objective 1, about the same as recently for assessment objective 2, but better than usual for assessment objective 3. This resulted in similar overall levels of attainment to recent years.

Question 2 was not attempted by many candidates. This may have been because, as usual, questions on rights and the judiciary are not popular, but it may also be because candidates were attracted to question 1, the constitution topic always being popular.

Similarly question 3 was more popular than question 4. Both required a good deal of contemporary knowledge, but questions on the prime minister do tend to be more popular. This examination was no different.

Question 1

This question was generally handled competently by candidates. There is widespread awareness of the features of the constitution, its sources and some of the issues that arise from it. It was also encouraging to see so much current knowledge, especially of reforms. There remains some confusion over what 'constitutional' issues are and what are not. For example, the regulations and laws concerning the criminal law are rarely constitutional, whereas laws and practices relating specifically to the political process and political institutions clearly are constitutional. Some candidates wasted some time by defining the nature of a constitution in all three parts of the question. This may be good practice for the longer (c) part questions, but is not needed for (a) and (b). On the whole candidates divided their time sensibly between the three parts of the question.

Most candidates were able to identify two features of the constitution, usually referring to lack of codification and entrenchment. A small minority achieved no marks at all by referring to the functions of the constitution (which were in the source) instead of its features. Where candidates did not achieve full marks for 1(a) it was usually because they failed to explain the meaning of 'uncodified' and 'not entrenched'.

1(b) was handled well on the whole, though a common failing was to include insufficient explanation of statute law and conventions. Common law was often mentioned but rarely well explained or exemplified. Similarly many referred to EU treaties but then failed to explain why they have become part of the constitution. Conversely there was a substantial minority who used the O'Donnell rules as an example of how the constitution has evolved.

Approaches to 1(c) were invariably sensible with most candidates pointing out the strengths of the constitution also often led to weaknesses. For example, many said that a strong executive can be seen as a weakness as well as a strength and explained the point very well. Similarly, flexibility was normally fully assessed. This kind of 'assessment' question is much better handled than it used to be.

In order to achieve high level 3 marks it was necessary to identify and explain clearly three sources of the constitution, at least one from the source and at least one from the candidate's own knowledge. In order to access all the marks for assessment Objective 2 full explanations of the sources was needed. The source referred to statutes and conventions, therefore at least one other source should have been included. Most chose common law and constitutional works of authority. This example included foreign treaties.

(b) From the ~~source~~ extract one source of the UK constitution are "conventions". Again from the source these are "unwritten practices which have developed over time and regulate the business of government". An example of this is the Salisbury convention. This stated that the lords could not hinder legislation that was in the government's election manifesto. Therefore this creates understanding and adaptability of government policy parliamentary policy, thus helping the effectiveness of Parliament.

Another source of the UK constitution is ~~not of~~ "law passed"

by parliament." These acts, like the parliament act 1911, have created important law such as the government's ability to pass financial law legislation without interference from the lords. This has now meant that it is acceptable for the government to pass laws which make law that affects the way we are governed. For financial decisions are important and vital for the United Kingdom.

Another source of the UK constitution are treaties. An example of this are the Maastricht treaty and the European Convention of Human rights. These therefore guarantee rights of citizens in the UK, thereby affecting the way the government passes legislation such as the in the Belmarsh case this had to adapt how long they kept un-suspected terror suspects in prison for. Thereby these guarantees that the government had to go through certain procedures when passing legislation.

((b) continued) ~~In~~ Another source of the UK constitution is common law, which is law set down by judicial over real and general laws such as not killing anyone. ^{That} This is the oldest form of the constitution as most people know most of the common law.

In conclusion sources of the UK constitution are convention, law passed by Parliament, treaties and common law.



ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

The candidate included four sources, two from the source and two from his/her own knowledge. Common law was neither explained nor exemplified properly, but this did not affect the marks because the other three sources were well explained. Note the straightforward, clear language, good organisation and use of examples.



ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

Always use examples if you can. Examples should not replace explanations but they are a useful addition. Try always to use the most recent examples you can, though you do not have to be absolutely up to date.

This was a highly evaluative question and good answers needed to reflect that. Each perceived strength needed to be evaluated; pointing out that some strengths may be seen as weaknesses. There needed to be some overall sense expressed of how well the UK constitution works in terms of democracy and good governance.

(c) UK constitution is uncodified and not entrenched, unlike many nations nowadays. ~~There~~ There are several sources that build up the UK constitution. ~~So~~ Its traditional and historic value has been praised, but its unmodernised features are often criticised. However, it is believed that as ~~the~~ the UK constitution has been working for centuries, UK constitution has more strength than weakness.

Firstly, the constitution has been tested and proved by time. The origin of the constitution ~~can~~ can be traced from Magna Carta, which was established for more than 800 years. Since then, the UK constitution has never face any much challenges, as there ~~are~~ were no political uprisings and revolutions, such as in France or Germany. Many ~~are~~ countries have ~~got~~ codified constitution after war or independence, such as Japan or Singapore, but as Britain did not face these experiences, a codified constitution is not necessary. Today, the political system is still functioning well, with the executive, legislature and judiciary working effectively on average. It shows that an uncodified UK constitution does work even without a single legal document ~~that~~ defining fundamental laws.

((c) continued) Even though ~~when~~ ~~the~~ the constitution is proved to be working, still some people may suggest that it is not modernize enough to keep track

with other countries political system, which weakens UK's political structure.

Secondly, UK constitution provides flexibility. The UK constitution ~~cannot~~ ^{can} ~~be~~ ^{easily} be changed with an Act of Parliament. It means that it is organic and can react to public opinion ~~more~~ efficiently. For example, devolution of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can be easily done by just a statute, such as Scotland Act 1998, Wales Act 1998 and Northern Ireland Act 1998. The same effectiveness applies to the reform of House of Lords, which all but 92 hereditary peers are removed in 1999 under the House of Lords Act, in response to public's wish in increasing House of Lords' legitimacy and fulfill Labour's election manifesto in 1997. However, this may lead to excessive executive power.

③ Thirdly, UK constitution ensures democratic rule, as the winning party has the mandate to ~~to~~ implement policies on their manifesto

((c) continued) without being restricted by a codified constitution. This ~~means that~~ ~~to~~ enhances democracy as public opinion becomes the most important source of authority. However, tyranny of majority may occur, as minority interest may be neglected. Also, the current electoral system for Westminster election is not representative, undermining the legitimacy of the Parliament and government formed.

On the other hand, UK constitution is criticised of too flexible, which cannot limit government's power, leading the elective dictatorship. As constitutional change is easily changed by Act of Parliament, when the government has majority in Commons and well whipped backbenchers, almost every bills can be passed. It is dangerous as people's right may be in danger, ~~if government impose~~ such as the Anti-terrorism Acts 2001 which people can be detained without trial. But codified constitution is too rigid, ~~affecting effective~~. In the US, Second Amendment of US constitution which allow people to bear arms is difficult to change as it requires referendum and Senate approval. But in UK, right after the Snardrop Campaign in 1996, use of handgun is banned simply by a statute.

((c) continued) Also, some argue that UK constitution creates uncertainty, for example in 2010 when a hung parliament appeared and no rules explain what should be done. However, a coalition government is formed and is still working well at the moment. It shows that even without clear rules, political system of the UK can still work its own way out.

In conclusion, UK constitution has more strength than weakness, as an effective government can usually be formed, quick response to public opinion can always be made and is proved to be working.



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Examiner Comments

This answer demonstrates an unusual 'scene-setting' introduction, rather than an explanation of the main arguments to follow. It works, however, because it begins with an overall evaluation and so does presage the rest of the answer. By pointing out how enduring the UK constitution has been the answer is offering some evaluation at the beginning.

After that it is well organised, making each point clearly and then offering some evaluation. It is well illustrated and offers some contemporary material to underpin its analysis. Its strongest element is its evaluation, near the end, of the flexible, uncodified nature of the constitution. It also offers a very clear conclusion which can be justified by the evidence deployed. Even though the candidate seems to have run out of time he/she has reached a firm conclusion.



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Examiner Tip

Conclusions are important. They should be firm, coming down on one side of the argument or the other. The conclusion should be justified in some kind of way (eg what is the 'clinching' argument, or what is the balance of the arguments on each side?). This candidate has not been able to do that fully, but has included some sense that the constitution is 'working well'

Question 1(a) the two features which most candidates were able to identify were that the constitution is uncodified, therefore flexible, and that it is not entrenched. There were various ways of describing lack of entrenchment, all equally valid. Some stated it meant that constitutional rules can be easily changed, others noted that there is no dual system of laws, with one kind of law higher than another, and a few referred to the sovereignty of parliament making constitutional laws unentrenchable.

(a) The first, and probably most notable aspect of the UK's constitution is that it is uncodified. Most democratic countries employ a codified constitution which sets out the laws, rules and regulations by which the state is to be governed. The UK's constitution is uncodified which ~~means that~~ as the source says means: "There is no single legal document, rather the laws are derived from a variety of sources."

In an uncodified constitution, there is no hierarchy of laws. All laws have equal status and are not entrenched. This means that the government of the day can legislate on almost anything they want, and can change previous laws through passing a new law. Entrenched law would mean that it is fixed and can only be changed with great difficulty. This is not one of the features of the United Kingdom's constitution as it is uncodified.

(b) The UK constitution is uncodified which means that the laws which state how the country should be governed are not all found in one legal document, but rather, come from a variety of sources. ~~None~~ None of the laws takes precedence over each other and can all be changed. A few main sources of the UK constitution are as follows.

The first one is common law. Common law means law which is inferred from the courts. This means that if there was a court case, the final ruling would be considered the law in the UK. Many laws have been made in this way, but less so today. This is because there is ^{a very limited} ~~no~~ supreme court to decide if something is

constitutional so these cases don't end far between. They are mainly from past governments.

A second source of British law is conventions. These are laws which are not written or made clearly by an individual or a body, but rather they have come about over time, and are basically traditions. The nature of conventions obviously implies that they cannot be passed today as they come about over time, whereas the less, conventions play a key role in today's parliamentary system. Many key concepts are the results of conventions. For example, how the prime minister is appointed, or the situation in which government ministers should resign is governed by convention.

(b) continued) A third source of the UK's constitution is statute law. This means law which is made by parliament. This is the most common of the three mentioned as it is done on a regular basis by the government of the day. It can easily be changed though by the government's successors, unlike conventions which are changed much less.

(c) The United Kingdom's uncodified constitution has many strengths, and also some weaknesses. In this essay I will look to assess the strengths of the UK's constitution and determine to what extent these strengths apply.

The first strength is simply that the uncodified/centralised constitution has proven it is worth over an extended period of time. The way society and its values are constantly changing which requires the laws to change and match the day and age, and it has proven that it can evolve over time to reflect the values of the British people. A codified constitution is extremely rigid and would have been difficult to change which could be

problematic, unlike the uncodified model which has evolved

The UK's form of government produces a responsible government due to a series of checks and balances, ~~but~~ not accountability. At the end of each term, the government is accountable to the electorate for all the decisions it made during the term.

In many cases of the government the it is collective responsibility which means they are all responsible for the mistakes made, again this helps 'joined up government' where the government looks ahead at possible knock on effects, and ~~it~~ makes responsible decisions.

((c) continued) possible the most important factor in the success of the Westminster model is the fact that its strong. It produces a strong and centralised government in law which the executive and the legislature are fixed. This gives the government the power to act smoothly and respond to important matters, without many of the difficulties which a very decentralised government could bring. Parliament has sovereignty which means they are the absolute legal authority and can impose almost any law. It means they can be strong and decisive and enact laws which the citizens might not think are good, but only because they can't see into the future. They can push them through - because they have sovereignty.

But are the above strengths really as strong as they are made out to be?

My first argument is yes but it has evolved over a long time. Has it really done so? Some of the laws are hundreds of years old and do not apply today. A change to this could modernise the laws and make them easier

to interpret

My second argument was that the government is responsible
then in reality they are not as responsible as they are made
out to be. One of the ways they are held to account is
through Prime Minister's Questions at noon on a Wednesday
morning, some of the questions are prepared by the party to
(c) continued make him look good, and secondly how accountable
can you make the government in half an hour? its too
short an amount of time to do anything serious. Another
form of accountability is the debates in Parliament. This is
undermined by the fact that MPs only have to attend a required
number of days in a year, so many important debates are
almost empty ^{especially in the summer} because lots of MPs are on holiday or have served
their time.

My final point was that it is strong because it is centralised
and there is sovereignty.

Even if its strong it ~~is~~ is still undemocratic - the
dictatorships are also strong but that doesn't make them legitimate.
The UK is a pluralistic representative democracy which should have
devolution and many access points.

sovereignty may exist in theory, but in reality there are many
constraints on its power such as membership of the EU because
it takes precedence to ~~the~~ UK law and referendums. This shows its
is not as powerful as it sounds.

overall, my belief is that the most important aspect of the
constitution is, how it works, and the answer is, yes. It has
evolved over time. Another key point is its legitimacy and the
legitimacy could still be improved without compromising on the
constitution.

so my belief is that it is strong to a great extent.



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Examiner Comments

Here is an example of a clear, well explained account of two features, as mentioned in the source. Note how the candidates has described lack of entrenchment



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Examiner Tip

Make sure you identify from the source exactly what you are being asked to identify, including the correct number, usually two or three. Do not add anything from your own knowledge at this stage. Always add some of your own explanation to what is in the passage. Be careful not to confuse 'features' with 'functions'.

Question 2

This was an unpopular question. Questions on the judiciary have always tended to be avoided by many candidates and clearly this was a prime example, though the material needed could largely be taken from recent political developments. 2(a) perhaps looked more challenging than it actually was, the source clearly explained the overlaps between legal and political issues and why judges became involved in such controversies. 2(b) should have been a relatively straight forward question but it was clear that many candidates did not have enough knowledge of recent well-publicised issues relating to the HRA to be able to tackle the question. However, a much more serious problem was to be seen in a majority of the answers seen. This was a continuing belief demonstrated that the HRA and the ECHR emanate from the European Union. While this is a misconception which is common among the general public, it should not be a mistake that politics students make. It is clear that many candidates must have been taught this in lessons, which is very worrying. This error compromised many answers because candidates were mixing up human rights cases with sovereignty issues concerning the EU.

As expected Abu Qatada figured commonly in answers and this was a positive feature, as were discussions of Belmarsh. More able candidates pointed out that the HRA had tended to politicise the judiciary, as discussed in the source, and this was a high level of response. The very best candidates introduced the debate on a 'British Bill of Rights', but too many spoiled their answer by suggesting the HRA was one of the drivers behind an EU referendum. It may well be, but it needed to be pointed out that this is an error, whatever many people believe.

2(c) was better handled on the whole than parts (a) and (b). This was probably because the issue of judges versus politicians has appeared in some guise or other in the past. Many candidates used the question to demonstrate their knowledge of issues relating to judicial neutrality and independence and this was a valid approach. It was encouraging also to see candidates discussing issues relating to accountability and the electoral mandate. The very best candidates brought in issues concerning the application of the rule of law and even the impact of the media on issues considered in the courts.

To achieve level 3 marks it was only necessary to include at least three issues, at least one from the source and at least one from the candidate's own knowledge. Of course, more than three are welcome, especially as there may be a lack of depth which can be compensated for by more range. Examples should be included and are almost always a prerequisite for achieving the very top of level 3 for assessment Objective 1.

(b) The Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998 was brought into UK law in 2000 under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It has had numerous effects on the British political system.

Firstly there has been an increased number of judicial reviews concerning human rights since the implementation of the act. This means that there are more frequent cases when citizens appeal to the courts. ~~Another~~ An example of this is because citizens feel that

they have been ill-treated. An example is the ^{review on} appeal by the Abbey National vs Office of Fair Trading case, in which the office of fair trading illegitimately accessed ^{financial} accounts of Abbey.

Secondly an effect of the HRA is that there has been more conflict between the Judiciary and the executive (Government). This is because, as the judiciary enjoys independence and security of tenure, they can make decisions against the ~~government~~ government, such as the 2010 case where the government tried to freeze the financial assets of terrorist suspects, which was ruled as a violation of human rights by the courts.

Finally the HRA is enforced by the judiciary through case law and judicial reviews. As a result the judiciary ~~is~~ becomes the governmental body which has ultimate

(b) continued) power. As a result, the HRA causes the sovereignty of parliament to be challenged, which goes against the ~~the~~ UK (uncodified) constitution. This was seen in the Belmarsh Case 2004, where the Judiciary ruled against the Parliamentary legislation which allowed them to detain terrorist suspects without fair trial.

The HRA has had many effects on the UK's political system, the most important of which are the increase in Judicial reviews ~~(as stated in the source)~~, the conflict between ^{the} executive and judiciary (which as both ~~stated in the source~~), and the way in which the judiciary ^{challenges} ~~challenges~~ the sovereignty of Parliament.



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Examiner Comments

This is an example of a plainly expressed answer, clear in its meaning, with material both from the source and from the candidate's own knowledge. Three issues are explained clearly. The candidate has also included two appropriate examples. There may be better answers possible, with more issues raised and more examples, but this is an example of the minimum needed to achieve all the marks available.



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Examiner Tip

Always include material from both the source and from the candidate's own knowledge. Ideally, two examples of each. It is also important to include examples. In order to gain marks under assessment Objective 2 it is necessary to explain each point fully and clearly, including material on causes and effects as well as information on links between institutions and processes. In this case, that might include explanations of why and how the HRA has tended to bring judges into politics. This candidate successfully linked HRA judgments to the sovereignty of parliament.

Despite the poor handwriting this is an example of a good response to 1(a), demonstrating that the candidate is able to identify the correct information from the source and can also add some of his/her own explanation. This is a full, clear answer, ideal for part (a) answers.

(a) ~~Judicial review is the~~ Judicial review is an opportunity for judges to scrutinise and become involved in governmental policies and issues with regards to human rights. In recent years the extent to which judges have been able to manipulate the power of judicial review, ~~has~~ has been heavily criticised and heavily scrutinised. Some people have argued that the creation of judicial review pose a danger to 'trespassing on the proper functions of government', demonstrating that the judges use of judicial review in recent years has become a hindrance to the success of the government in dealing with issues such as human rights. The 'vigorous exercise' of judges' powers as a result of judicial review has been not controversial, in relation to the government's decisions with regard to human rights. For example, Labour's 2000 Anti-Terrorism Act was criticised by judges who caused the introduction from 90 to 28 days detentions. The use of judicial review increased judges' powers and undermined the powers of government. The 'proper functions of Parliament' such as those in relation to policy making and controlling the executive's policy, have been manipulated by the movement of judges in high raised use of the judicial review in order to undermine their powers over the government's policy making.

(a) continued



ResultsPlus Examiner Comments

Marks are not removed for handwriting. As long as it can be read it will be credited. This is just readable so gets by. Anything worse and it might have lost marks. Fortunately it is clearly expressed and so achieved full marks.



ResultsPlus Examiner Tip

For (a) part questions you have to identify the correct information, to describe it clearly and to add some explanation to clarify what it means. All three requirements are met here.

Question 3

This was a popular question although the focus on the coalition clearly caused problems for students who had prepared for the kind of questions that have appeared in the past - on, for example, presidentialism or on the extent to which prime ministerial power has grown. While such preparation undoubtedly helped with this year's question, candidates varied in their ability to adapt their material. More able candidates focused on the question itself and clearly demonstrated a good deal of knowledge of contemporary coalition politics and its effects on the position of the prime minister.

A second issue which was common, was that many candidates discussed the effects of coalition politics on government as a whole, rather than on the prime minister specifically. This approach attracted credit, of course, because the prime minister is affected by whatever affects government as a whole, but only the best candidates were able to focus on the prime minister specifically. This is a perennial issue with questions on the prime minister, so students and teachers are urged to differentiate between the prime minister as an individual and the government in general. For example, it is common to see candidates erroneously writing that 'prime ministers make laws' or something similar. It is accurate to describe the prime minister as something like 'pre-eminent policy maker within government', but that is not the same as making laws which are actually drafted by government and promulgated by parliament. Similarly the coalition has caused the Conservative leadership to amend or even abandon some policies, but not all these policies have been the responsibility of the prime minister specifically.

The more successful responses dealt with such issues as prime ministerial patronage, the relationship between the prime minister and his cabinet, the importance of 'quad' government and the general effect a hung parliament has had on the prime minister's authority. Issues such as prime ministerial style, the growth of the 'Downing Street machine' or foreign policy pre-eminence, have little to do with the coalition. It was, however, encouraging to see a good proportion of candidates who were able to show how prime ministerial power has strengthened under coalition, notably pointing out that Cameron is the first prime minister since 1945 who could claim that his government was elected by over 50% of the electorate. Many also correctly pointed out that Cameron has not suffered as many personal political defeats as might have been expected.

Here is an example of a response which constantly tries to focus on the position of the prime minister himself, not just the government as a whole. It is not at the top of level 3 because it has a slightly limited range and there is some lack of depth on the analysis of prime ministerial power. Also, in particular, the candidate seems a little confused over the effects of coalition on the cabinet. However, it is level 3 as it is well focused, clearly expressed and does cover a reasonable range of issues. Positive marking means that the confusing material on cabinet can be ignored.

Following the formation of a coalition government in 2010, the relationship between the government and parliament has changed therefore affecting prime ministerial power. In my opinion, the experience of coalition government has weakened prime ministerial power.

Firstly, it is evident that prime ministerial power has been weakened due to the increased reliance

of cabinet. In the previous governments such as the Thatcher and Blair government, there was evidence of a decline in cabinet government. However, the importance of cabinet government has increased with the formation of the coalition government. This is due to the fact that the cabinet contains some Liberal Democrats, such as Vince Cable, which weakens the Prime Minister's power to control cabinet. There is more emphasis on consensus and compromise as the Prime Minister has to gain the cooperation of Liberal Democrat Ministers.

On the other hand, it can be argued that Prime Ministerial power has been strengthened because of the introduction of fixed term parliaments. This has ensured an efficient reform of Parliament. Moreover, this sustains the life of the coalition which effectively deals with the issue of the weakness of coalition government. This ensures a stable government, making it easier for David Cameron to pass drive policies because the life of the coalition has been prolonged. For example in May 2013, both Cameron and Clegg announced their commitment to the coalition.

Furthermore, the coalition government has weakened prime ministerial power due to the fact that it is harder for David Cameron to drive policies through Parliament. When a government has a parliamentary majority, they are ensured the loyalty of their MPs to successful pass through bills. However, Cameron only has a small majority which increases his dependency on the support of other parties, in particular the Liberal Democrats.

He has to try and gain their support on bills in order to successfully pass bills however this is difficult through their opposition to his bills due to their ideological differences. For example, Cameron's bill on the EU budget was overruled by the Commons.

However, through an increased loyalty from ^{the Conservative} his party, ~~the~~ prime ministerial power has been strengthened. Through the imminent threat of the government breaking down as a result of the weakness of coalitions Cameron has inspired devotion and loyalty from his party as they want to remain the ruling party. Also, they have increased loyalty in hopes of being promoted to being senior ministers by Cameron. ~~For~~ This is due to the fact that Cameron's power of patronage is seen to be more important due to his limitations on the number of Conservative ministers in the cabinet. For example, this power is seen in Cameron's 2012 cabinet reshuffle.

In addition, the coalition government has weakened the government because it has decreased presidentialism. In the past, there was an increase in presidentialism as prime ministers had a tendency to 'spatial leadership', as evident through the notions of Thatcherism and Blairism. However, it is imperative for David Cameron to maintain the collective symbol of government in order to ensure the unity of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. If he tried to distance himself from government it would result in the alienation of the Liberal Democrats which could lead to a breakdown

in relations which could end government

Further to this, ~~Alternatively,~~ it is suggested that prime ministerial power has been ~~weakened~~ weakened due to the evidence of adversarial politics in the coalition government. Due to the ~~ide~~ opposition of both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats' ideologies, they can be obstructions to each other. ~~For~~ This is apparent in the Liberal Democrats refusal to approve of the Conservatives' plan to redraw constituency boundaries after the House of Lords reform put forward by Nick Clegg received considerable opposition from Conservative backbenchers. Due to these clashes, David Cameron has a reduced ability to carry out his mandate in fear of obstruct from the Liberal Democrats.

Alternatively, it can be suggested that prime ministerial power has ~~been~~ strengthened as there has indeed been an increase in presidentialism. The current coalition government uses 81 special advisors as opposed to Major who only used 8. This has led to the ~~decrease~~ decline of the importance of cabinet, rendering cabinet merely a soundboard for advice. Therefore, the Prime Minister dominates the political process which has furthered due to the recent appointment of Jo Johnson as head of Cameron's policy unit. Therefore unlike Bagehot stated, the Prime Minister is not 'primus inter pares'.

In conclusion, I think that the coalition government has weakened prime ministerial power.



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Examiner Comments

Notice especially how the candidate has introduced the general issue of 'presidentialism', but has used it to focus on the question. They have noted that there has been a trend towards presidentialism, but this has been halted by coalition, because Cameron is unable to dominate as Blair and Thatcher did, because of the nature of the coalition. There is also some analysis (not always clear) of the effects on prime ministerial patronage.

Note how well organised the answer is. Each new point is signposted and every issue is well evaluated with some balance, albeit with some dubious conclusions (for example, the idea that Cameron is inspiring 'devotion').

There is a clear introduction and a cogent conclusion.



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Examiner Tip

Though this answer could be fuller and could contain better analysis, it illustrates the value of a well organised piece of writing. The very good balance has attracted a high mark for Assessment Objective 2 and has compensated somewhat for the lack of clarity in places in the award of Assessment Objective 3 marks. Good, clear organisation is to be recommended.

Question 4

Most candidates were able to describe and compare the respective formal powers of the Commons and the Lords, usually reaching the conclusion that the Commons remains the more powerful chamber. Slightly less candidates were able to look beyond formal powers to discuss political considerations, such as the lower level of party loyalty and discipline in the Lords, together with the fact that the government does not have a majority in the Lords. There remains a good deal of confusion over the committee systems in each House, with a fair proportion still believing there are departmental select committees in the Lords. Indeed the candidates who discussed the growing importance of the Commons' select committees, including the PAC tended to be strong in most other areas too.

The most common omission was discussion of the behaviour of the two houses, notably the more active House of Lords in recent years. Only the very strong candidates tended to be able to discuss activism on such issues as Welfare and NHS reform. The absence of government defeats in the Commons was viewed by a minority as an indication that the Commons remains susceptible to executive pre-eminence. Indeed it was lack of hard evidence of this kind that tended to hold back the mid-level candidates. Too many answers were too theoretical. However, it was encouraging to see a large minority of candidates who were able to explain that the Lords' enhanced authority, since its reform, has been converted into greater activism. Thus, as ever, knowledge and application of contemporary political developments proved to be a key discriminator.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- A good deal of contemporary knowledge was required, especially for questions 2, 3 and 4. Such knowledge is important both for use as examples and illustrations, but also to ensure that candidates' knowledge is up-to-date.
- There remains much confusion over the origins and status of the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights. Far too many candidates still believe it originates and is implemented by the EU, rather than the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. This serious error should be eradicated.
- Though there is a good deal of knowledge shown among candidates of the *politics* of the coalition, there is too little *conceptual* understanding in relation, for example, to effects on the mandate, accountability, spatial leadership etc.
- Standards of analysis, evaluation and writing skills continue to improve. However, too many candidates demonstrate insufficient knowledge and understanding. Factual knowledge and understanding of issues remains an important key to higher level marks.
- It is clear that too little attention is paid to the political role of the judiciary. This leaves candidates with limited choices when selecting which questions to attempt. Ignoring a whole topic can prove a dangerous practice.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

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