

# Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

GCE Government and Politics  
EU Political Issues

6GP04 4A

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## **General Comments:**

The entry for this paper was very small, but the quality was reasonably high with relatively few poor papers. This perhaps reflects the fact that the small number of centres who entered candidates for this series took on board the feedback from previous' examiners reports, and gave over more time given to preparation than previously.

Synopticity in essay questions showed an overall improvement, although it was still variable. The most popular essay question, question 7, invited a synoptic approach that explicitly contrasted differing political views and many candidates did embrace this. However, synopticity remained stronger on the facts of differing stances than on the underlying beliefs behind them.

There was also greater evidence of contemporary policy awareness from Lisbon onwards, and post-2010 in terms of UK politics. It is critical for a contemporary issues paper that candidates employ up to date knowledge, and it was pleasing to see this taking place.

It is worth noting that there was a very even spread of responses on the short answer questions, but an extremely unbalanced split on the essays.

## **Comments on individual questions**

### **Question1: To what extent has the EU developed an effective Common Foreign and Security Policy?**

This was, just, the least popular short response question but in general it was attempted fairly well.

Candidates showed particularly good awareness of the role of the High Representative, including the limitations on it, but there was a general lack of reference to specific recent foreign policy examples such as Libya (the Iraq War was more commonly used).

Stronger answers were distinguished by the range of arguments considered, including both the strengths and weaknesses of the office of the High Representative. There was some effective use of extension beyond 'foreign and security policy' in general to specific issues such as terrorism.

Weaker answers fell into a more general discussion of sovereignty vs. integration within the EU with less explicit focus on foreign and security policy.

## **Question 2: How significant is the Council of the EU (Council of Ministers)?**

This was a moderately popular question and it was pleasing to see that most candidates took the trouble to briefly explain what the Council is and does before assessing its significance – this is helpful for placing their answer in context (unlike a general introduction which is not needed for short responses).

There was a good general level of awareness of recent developments including the impact of 'co-decision', although there was less use of specific examples of instances where the council had, or had not, played a significant role.

Stronger answers gave a clear, and not necessarily lengthy, definition of the role of the Council and followed it with a balanced mixture of specific strengths and weaknesses, including clear contrast to other institutions.

Weaker answers were most commonly hampered by a lack of a clear definition of the Council of the EU and subsequently showed some confusion between different institutions and their respective role and powers.

## **Question 3: What have been the main effects of the creation of the Single Market?**

This was, just, the most popular short response question and there were a good proportion of strong responses.

A surprising number of candidates did not take the time to give a brief explicit definition of the Single Market – though this did not preclude L3, it did mean that their points had to be rather stronger to compensate.

Stronger answers were distinguished by argument over assertion and the use of specifics rather than generalities in terms of *which* markets have benefited, *which* countries have experienced significant immigration and emigration etc.

By contrast, weaker answers were characterised by a more general and asserted approach. For example a small number of responses stated that the single market played a significant role in the financial crisis without proceeding to outline the nature or significance of that role.

#### **Question 4: Why and how has membership of the EU affected UK pressure groups?**

This was a moderately popular question in which the key to success was addressing both the 'how' and 'why' aspects of the question with reference to specific examples. The examples used by most candidates did tend more towards the general.

Stronger answers showed understanding of the degree and nature of the influence the EU now possesses, and/or its ability to overrule member nations through QMV; and combined this with knowledge of tactics and structures that specific Pressure Groups had employed. Some answers recognised that effects varied between sectors (national and supranational issues).

Weaker answers focused on either how or why, and some spent time discussing ways in which groups had *not* been affected (incurring no penalty, but suffering from an opportunity cost).

#### **Question 5: Distinguish between federalism and functionalism as theories of EU integration.**

This was a moderately popular question with the vast majority of responses being mid-high Level 2. Most candidates clearly had a grasp of the two concepts and were distinguished predominantly by their structural approach to addressing the question.

The most effective but least common approach was a clear definition of each concept, followed by discussion of specific differences between them.

The most popular and generally least effective approach was to offer two clear definitions but to leave the contrasts implicit.

The middle option, in terms of both popularity and effectiveness, was to leave the definitions implicit but provide explicit contrasts.

This choice of structures, and their usual impact, is common to all questions that require candidates to distinguish between two concepts and is therefore worth bearing in mind.

#### **Question 6: To what extent is the EU an example of supranational governance?**

This was only attempted by a very small number of candidates, but they performed well and there were no weak responses.

The strongest candidates explored a range of specific points on both sides of the debate, showing clear contemporary knowledge of key individuals, institutions, reforms and events.

Middling responses relied on more general arguments and gave less contemporary examples.

The major common fault was adopting a 'for/against' structure which left all candidates, despite otherwise strong answers, in Level 2 for synopticity, since there was limited *direct* engagement of viewpoints.

**Question 7: 'The major UK parties agree more over Europe than they disagree.'  
Discuss.**

This was by far the most popular essay question but also a sound discriminator – there were no very weak or exceptional answers, but a very clear spread in between.

Synopticity was fairly strong, being characterised by a thematic approach to policy on Europe and the use of direct contrasts. The few candidates who listed party stances in turn suffered significantly on Synopticity. There was one general synoptic weakness in that most candidates gave rather more 'what' than 'why' – to reach Level 3 they need to show better understanding of the rationale and beliefs *behind* the positions.

The lack of content on UKIP perhaps suggests uncertainty as to whether they are a 'major' party: they would have been credited as such for this question but were not needed to reach the highest marks. A Level 3 mark for content needed knowledge of the Conservative *and* Labour plus either the Lib Dems *or* UKIP.

The strongest responses showed good knowledge of up to date positions post-2010 and effective use of tensions not only between parties but also within them where it could be used to illustrate external (dis) agreement. Policy references were explicit, rather than generally 'in or out' or 'pro or anti', and there was strong use of the very recent referendum announcement with some fairly sophisticated awareness of Cameron's ambivalent position (to hold a referendum but support remaining in the EU).

Middling responses addressed the question in a solid fashion but generally fell down on one of two key areas – firstly that they showed understanding of positions but did not engage them. Secondly the positions were too general in terms of policy examples with more 'pro vs. anti' or 'in vs. out'; than specific details.

Weaker responses either made *both* of the errors discussed above, or else were overly historical with too much discussion of Thatcher and Major (which were of little use here except as a very brief context setter). There was also some time wasted focusing predominantly on internal differences without effectively engaging the external positions.

It was, in passing, surprising that a few candidates, having studied an entire ¼ A Level on the EU, still erroneously assert it to be directly involved in the ECHR/HRA.

**Question 8: To what extent is a single EU social model either desirable or achievable?**

This was attempted by very few candidates. Responses treated the concept of a single social model as being entirely synonymous with the Social Chapter and suffered from this – whilst the Chapter was relevant candidates needed to address the wider debate.

To achieve higher marks we were looking for a clear recognition of the concept of an ESM and awareness that there are currently a variety of such models in the EU. Candidates would have needed a discussion of both achievability and desirability to achieve Level 3, although a clear two-sided exposition of one of these aspects would have achieved Level 2.

## Conclusion

The main areas for candidates to be aware of to improve their performance on this paper are:

- General introductions and conclusions are not necessary for short responses, but it is helpful to give a short definition of the key concept or institution under consideration.
- Questions that require candidates to compare and contrast two competing viewpoints or concepts are most effectively addressed by providing a short definition of each followed by a series of explicit contrasts between them.
- The use of specific and recent examples to support their case is an important discriminator between the middling and strong response.
- A *direct* engagement of contrary views is important to securing a good synoptic mark.
- The consideration of 'why' as well as 'what' when considering alternative political viewpoints also aid synopticity.
- A contemporary focus is key, particularly with regard to the impact on UK politics but also elsewhere – content that predates 1997 Blair should receive very little attention and the predominant focus should be post 2010.

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