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Examiners' Report January 2010

GCE Government and Politics 6GP04/4C

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New GCE 6GP04 4C - Governing the USA

General Comments:

The introduction of the new specification has resulted in a clear divide between Section A and B. The short answer questions in Section A followed the traditional demands of the subject and allowed the breadth of the curriculum to be covered.

Additionally, it allowed the centres which had not developed the synoptic approach required in Section B to prepare candidates with the expectation that they would answer competently.

Section B with the emphasis on synopticity presented a new and clear demand which most centres failed to meet. There was little evidence that the synoptic skills identified in the assessment objectives had been fully understood and as a result the candidates did not attain the levels of performance anticipated.

The questions were enterprising allowing all candidates apart from the ill-prepared to score well although Section B was generally disappointing. Candidates revealed a breadth of knowledge much of which was current and reflected some imaginative teaching.

Section A

Question 1

The question was attempted by many candidates who were able to outline the major limitations on the powers of the Supreme Court. Many were able to quote accurately from Article 111 of the Constitution which confirmed that the Supreme Court had been covered in some detail. The lack of enforcement powers was well known and the example cited was *Brown - v - Board of Education*. Candidates commented on the separation of powers and the checks and balances as well as describing the most recent appointments. However, too many candidates suggested that the Supreme Court conducted the impeachment hearings and centres need to correct the error.

Question 2

The understanding of federalism was evident but the weakness of the answers were due to the failure to focus on the reasons for the disagreement and its extent. Candidates resorted to a descriptive mode and there were many answers that described the various types of federalism in some detail and with accuracy but failed to develop an answer which accounted for the disagreement concerning its importance. A few candidates did comment on the different stance of the federalists and anti-federalists but on the whole the answers suffered from being too descriptive.

Question 3

A popular question which allowed candidates of all abilities to score. The various requirements of the appointment process were known although too often the sequence of the stages was not described accurately. The answers generally dealt with the two strands of the question and the political nature of the appointments was known. It was also reassuring to discover that the examples offered were accurate and illuminating.

Question 4

Probably one of the most popular question and the different types were described accurately. A few candidates cited the legal decision which banned the "line-item veto" and included the signed statement technique which it was claimed by some was almost as effective as the line-item veto. It was refreshing that in addition to the mechanics of using the veto candidates did attempt to offer some political arguments which again confirmed that the Supreme Court and its impact receives some attention in the centres.

Question 5

This was the most popular question, suggesting that the topic of political parties in the USA receives attention. The answers were generally of two kinds: the one that suggested that they had no significance and dwelt on the need to reflect the wishes of the constituency, and suggested that primaries minimised their importance.

The alternative approach took the contrary view and highlighted the increasing partisan nature of the voting in Congress with good examples as well as referring to Gingrich's "Contract with America". Very few mentioned the absence of a third party. However, answers tended to be descriptive and the significance or otherwise was not truly developed.

Section B

Question 6

This was one of the more difficult questions on the paper and it was reflected in the number of candidates who attempted an answer.

Candidates ranged over many features but it was disappointing to discover that too many answers made no reference to the Bill of Rights. Even though the role of the Supreme Court was known, it was not developed fully. *Brown -v - Board of Education* was cited and its lack of enforcement powers was commented upon.

The candidates were able to describe with various levels of insight the difference between the Republicans and Democrats and some answers echoed the argument relating to federalism offered in Section A. Candidates generally agreed that there was disagreement on the effectiveness of constitutional protection of freedoms but failed to offer convincing arguments.

Question 7

This was the least popular question in section B. There were some distinctions drawn between the House of Representatives and the Senate which attributed to the constitutional need for almost permanent electioneering by members of the House of Representatives. This demanded an emphasis on the district. However, little was made of the role that the House did play in international and national matters.

It was disappointing that very few candidates mentioned let alone develop the impact of PACs although some reference was made to iron triangles which offered little to the overall analysis. The proposition was accepted by most and there was little evidence of synoptic skills.

Question 8

This was the most popular question by a factor of five. Candidates were well informed and scored well, although the synopticity which the question was ideally suited for was not a major factor.

There was coverage of the separation of powers and checks and balances, although the majority of the answers dealt with the relationship between Congress and the President. There was a brief analysis of the imperial and imperilled presidency with good examples, and candidates did identify many loopholes in the limitations on presidential powers.

It was generally well answered and even weaker candidates were able to score.

Statistics

Overall Subject Grade Boundaries

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Overall subject grade boundaries	52	46	40	35	30
Uniform Mark	80	70	60	50	40

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