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Examiner's Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback  
Summer 2018

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
Government & Politics (6GP02)  
Paper 1: Governing the UK



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## **Principal Examiner Report 6GP02 Summer 2018**

The collective general view of the Assistant Examiners on the summer 2018 examination for 6GP02 was that it was an accessible paper with a great deal of breadth and choice for candidates who had worked well and who had prepared thoroughly. It provided a very good basis for those who had revised and prepared, to do well and reach the higher level thresholds set on the paper. It was extremely pleasing for Assistant Examiners to see so many well-prepared candidates display a range and breadth of knowledge and understanding combined with an increased level of contemporary political awareness and a ready willingness to critically analyse the questions set. Assistant Examiners commented strongly on a continued improvement in essay performance with the possible exception of Q4 revealing clear evidence of better planning. Q1 on the Constitution attracted 58% of the responses whereas Q2 on PM and Cabinet was less popular, attracting 42% of the responses. Q3 on Parliament was by far the most popular extended essay question with a little under 80% of candidates opting for it. The least popular essay question was Q4 on liberties and human rights which attracted around 20% of the responses. The time factor again this year did not seem to be an issue with relatively few unanswered or partially answered questions.

### **Key areas to develop**

There were several major areas commented upon by Assistant Examiners and these will be developed in reference to each question and sub-section as appropriate in the body of the report.

- By way of overview in relation to Question 1(a) and to a lesser extent Question 2(a) with reference to both source questions many candidates introduced a range of reasons from their own knowledge which were not mentioned in the sources and for which no credit could be given. Candidates often did not quote evidence that was clearly in the sources and it is the collective view of Examiners that candidates seem to be looking for problems that are simply not there. Although very few centres will take the paper next year Centres might continue to take this on board in their preparation for and assessment of the new specification. Candidates should perhaps

also be reminded that the source material is always of value to part (b) responses and often to part (c) as was clearly evident this year in Q1 and Q2.

- Assistant Examiners were again a little disappointed in the level of response of some candidates to the two part (b) sections in Q1. Q1 caused considerable difficulty and although Q2 saw some improvement this year the general point remains valid. Many candidates tended here to be very 'source reliant' failing to advance and develop their own knowledge as required by the question. Candidates need to be aware that each question requires information from the source and their own knowledge. Candidates frequently do not quote information which is clearly in the source nor do they develop points from their own knowledge or develop the points made in the source as own knowledge and therefore move into Level 3. This is a point that has been made before but it does bear repetition with many candidates limiting themselves to level 2.
- The question on Civil liberties and human rights here Q4, again continues to be of concern. This year it was linked to the extent to which they have been eroded in recent years. This year saw a decrease once again from 27% last year down to the more usual figure of 20%, it is still the province of the few. There continue to be more very good/ excellent answers but the general message from Assistant Examiners is that questions on the judiciary, human rights and civil liberties tend to produce a binary outcome, the very good and the very poor. We are still seeing more of a gradient in the responses but the overall picture remains the same in that there were a large number of poor responses, many failing to rise above Level 1 or low Level 2. Many answers were brief and some candidates seemed to have little understanding of and were extremely confused about human rights and Civil liberties. Assistant Examiners believe that the role and increased importance of the Judiciary and the issues of the protection of rights and liberties are of fundamental importance in the UK political system, it has been a regular topic which is asked each year and it deals with the sorts of issues that should be of relevance and concern to candidates. It is clear that a number of centres either fail to prepare for this section of the syllabus or deal with it in a compressed manner towards the end of the course. Although there is less emphasis on these areas in the new specification there is a clear message here to centres that should be taken on board in terms of the allocation of time and resources.
- Assistant Examiners commented on an increased use of relevant examples this year but it remains a critical area for development for all candidates and all centres. Higher level responses invariably use more up to date and informed examples which clearly lift the overall mark and grade in all questions.

- Assistant Examiners commented that candidates seem to perform better when there is clear evidence that essays have been planned. The better responses invariably do commence with a plan and they believe that a few minutes thought prior to the essay to marshal ideas together is one of the keys to success.

**Q1 (a) With reference to the source why is codification seen as a difficult task?**

Assistant Examiners commented that most candidates were able to identify three reasons why codification is seen as a difficult task. Many were able to pick out from; the antiquity and continuity of the constitution, the flexibility of the constitution, the lack of a major trigger event to create the demand for a codified constitution. Fewer examined issues associated with parliamentary sovereignty and the difficulty in pleasing differing shades of political opinion. Good answers included more reasons or were able to expand on the points further to achieve Level 3. For example, candidates using the point about a trigger event made reference to or illustrated commonly with regard to the French or American Revolutions or explored parliamentary sovereignty in more depth. However, some candidates scored no marks as they did not refer to the source at all, relying solely on their own knowledge. The message should be clear to centres. If candidates ignore the instruction in the question altogether, however good your answer (and there were some very good ones) you will score no marks. It is vital that candidates read the question as set and use information only from the source in part (a) questions. Many candidates limited themselves to 3/5 by simply copying out or bullet pointing 3 reasons from the source.

**Q1 (b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, what tensions exist between creating a codified constitution and retaining the principle of parliamentary sovereignty.**

Assistant Examiners commented that many candidates had problems surrounding the concepts in this question. The source provided several tensions that exist between creating a codified constitution and retaining the principal of parliamentary sovereignty including, it will cause political instability, no parliament may bind its successor with any legislation, parliamentary sovereignty is incompatible with a codified constitution and it is highly unlikely that any consensus would emerge in parliament to enact the necessary legislation. Many candidates were unable to convincingly develop their own knowledge, thus restricting their AO1 marks and, in turn, making it more difficult to generate AO2 marks. Such responses remained firmly in Level 2 at best. Such responses were characterised by brevity

and lack of knowledge and understanding on the tensions that exist. The word tensions proved to be a problem to a number of candidates. To achieve Level 3 there must be references to both the source and own knowledge. Good responses were able to go beyond the source, illustrating their answer by reference to the likelihood of an increased role for the judiciary and the lack of consensus for such a change in the wider community.

**Q1 (c) Assess the impact of the reforms that have been made to the UK's constitution since 1997.**

Assistant Examiners commented that generally candidates responded very well to this question. It was a very popular question which attracted almost 60% of the responses. Candidates had been generally well prepared and their levels of knowledge and use of current examples were very pleasing. Most candidates understood what the question was asking, although the range, depth and quality of suggested reforms did significantly vary. The key wording in the question was to assess the impact of the reforms and this was the critical discriminator between Levels 2 and Level 3. There were very many Level 3 responses which typically included Reform of the House of Lords, Devolution including associated electoral reform, the HRA, Freedom of Information Act, Judicial Reforms and the Supreme Court, Fixed Term Parliaments and the decision to withdraw from the EU. This was not an exhaustive list and others could gain credit. The very best responses included a range of these reforms with detailed knowledge and understanding and above all, balance. There had to be some form of assessment of the relative importance of such reforms with balance between the strengths and limitations of each. Weaker candidates displayed limited knowledge and understanding of a couple of reforms only, typically the House of Lords and Devolution although Fixed Term Parliaments was also popular. Weaker responses tended to be one sided and lacking assessment with a limited range of examples. It was clear that the reforms in the earlier period of the question, typically the Blair years, were known much more fully than the reforms post 2010. Although it was generally well answered marks were lost by students who simply described each reform rather than assessing them and a number of weaker responses merely listed each reform without discussing the implications for the constitution. Most candidates however wrote confidently about the key constitutional changes and the very best answers were able to identify the long term implications of changes such as Devolution or Brexit and assess the relative importance of each individual reform. When this was recognised there were some excellent responses.

**Q2 (a) With reference to the source how have Cabinet Ministers seen their power decline?**

This question was accessible and generally well answered. Most candidates could identify three basic points from the source, typically three of 'sofa' government, many decisions made outside of the full cabinet, the demands of the media overshadowing the importance of cabinet ministers, policies presented to ministers without discussion and the sheer burden of government being too great. However, once again, very many failed to go on and develop this source material and remained at 3 out of 5 marks. Stronger candidates could achieve a maximum by developing knowledge and/or giving examples of 'sofa' government under Blair, development of the media with examples. It seemed that many candidates missed out on relatively easy marks by not putting in their own knowledge. Some weaker students largely ignored the source altogether and tried to introduce unnecessary own knowledge usually for zero reward. Centres should perhaps stress even more the obvious. Many candidates mentioned two points only from the source and could achieve 4 as a maximum. There are accessible marks available for parts (a) and (b) in the source material. 'Sofa' government plus an example equals 2 marks.

**Q2 (b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge how can the Cabinet effectively challenge a Prime Minister.**

This was probably the best answered question (b) response for a good number of years. Students clearly know a great deal about relationships between the PM and the Cabinet and there were many excellent Level 3 responses. Stronger candidates generally blended own knowledge along with source information quite effectively to get into L3 standard. Most answers seemed to get into at least level 2, combining a limited understanding from source and own knowledge, or merely from own

knowledge. Weaker answers were usually thinly developed and either quoting too much from source or largely ignoring source, as well as indicating poorly developed and vague/generalised personal knowledge of how the cabinet can challenge the PM, typically an incorrect depiction of Thatcher's resignation.

The stronger answers were more specific and developed in terms of providing at least 3 clearly explained points from the source and own knowledge with good to excellent knowledge of how the Cabinet can effectively challenge. From the source candidates accurately depicted the loss of cabinet support as exemplified by Mrs Thatcher, the problems created by a divided cabinet, the problems created by a leadership challenge as with John Major and the undermining of the PM's position as with David Cameron and the euro-sceptics. Own knowledge was particularly impressive on this question with development/illustration of previous points, examples of Boris Johnson, 'Big Beasts' in the Cabinet, perceived failures in policy, contentious policy options such as 3<sup>rd</sup> Heathrow runway, failures in ministerial responsibility and problems caused by coalition or minority governments.

## **Q2 (c) To what extent has the office of Prime Minister become 'presidential'.**

A highly popular question which generally resulted in a large number of good quality responses which often ranged very high into Level 3. There were also relatively few borderline Level 1 to 2 responses. It was a relatively straight forward question and it was clear to Assistant Examiners that many candidates had prepared well. It was a question that had obvious appeal to many candidates, offering a debate that many would be familiar with, but the key challenge was to move beyond the standard analysis of the powers and weaknesses of a UK Prime Minister. Weaker answers did merely present a list of rather basic arguments about how strong or weak the British Prime Minister was, without really grasping or developing the key concept of 'presidentialism'. There was little reference to leadership style or any understanding of the nature of a parliamentary system as opposed to a presidential one. This would reflect the fact that many candidates will have prepared for a specific question about prime ministerial powers which was similar but not the same as the one that came up in the exam. Stronger candidates successfully identified and addressed the 'presidential' element throughout the response, and there were some impressive references to academic theories such as Michael Foley's model of 'spatial leadership' and the 'Elastic Theory' as promoted by George Jones. The integration of such arguments was usually although not always the sign of a strong and on occasion a sophisticated answer, and the effective use of examples was also a feature of stronger answers, with Blair and Thatcher generally cited as the two best examples of 'presidential' leaders over recent times in the UK. This was linked to their often dominant personalities, and contrasts were often drawn with the less personally dominant figures of Major and Brown, who most agreed were not presidential. The existence of a small majority was often cited as a factor in determining how 'presidential' a Prime Minister is likely to be, although this can be seen as a speculative argument, with the example of David Cameron as head of a coalition government being used

as an example where his powers were certainly perceived to be somewhat restricted and limited as a result. Frequent references were made to the Prime Minister's role in foreign affairs and the importance, good and bad of media image. References were frequently made illustrating the different viewpoints and importance of and size of cabinet including 'sofa' politics and 'quad' government.

Comparison to the USA was a recurring theme due to that country's presidential structure, and some valid comparisons were made between the UK Prime Minister and the US President. The very best candidates highlighted the constitutional differences between the two positions including the role of Head of State, the greater separation of powers in the USA, and the limitation of terms that can be served by a US President. The uncodified and less flexible UK Constitution was also cited in a few, stronger answers as a factor in allowing the UK Prime Minister to wield powers in excess of the more restrained US President, kept in greater check by that country's codified system. Stronger answers also acknowledged the clear constitutional differences between the two political systems that prevents the UK government becoming presidential in a structural sense, although there was an acknowledgement that in style terms it could certainly be already moving in that direction. The emergence of personalised leadership, the role of the media, reaching out to the public and the 'cult of the outsider' were also highlighted as factors in pushing this presidential image in the UK, with better candidates again linking this point to the leadership debates of the 2015 general election. This aspect was also linked to the increased use of special advisors within British politics, which some stronger candidates likened to the presidential image of the 'West Wing'. Strong answers also referenced that the office of the PM has not become presidential arguing that although the style may have changed the substance remains the same. Senior Ministers are important in their own right, PM's can be constrained by a range of factors including the media, events and the crucial need for support in parliament and in the party.

### **Q3 To what extent do both Houses of Parliament fail to carry out their main functions?**

Assistant Examiners commented that this was an extremely popular and generally well answered question. It was by far the more popular of the extended essay questions, attracting almost 80% of the responses. Centres clearly prepare their candidates very well for Parliament, it is a main stream topic that seems to be attractive to students and the question here was extremely accessible. The overall levels of organisation, understanding and use of relevant contemporary examples were often impressive.

Assistant Examiners commented warmly on the overall level of response. There were a variety of approaches to the question but above all candidates needed to show a good understanding of the key functions performed by both houses typically legislation, scrutiny, representation, debate, the recruitment of ministers, legitimacy and the redress of grievances. Some good responses covered a great many of these functions in the form of an overview whilst others could do equally well by concentrating on a more limited number of roles (scrutiny, legislation and representation) and were therefore able to assess in more depth. Level 3 responses gave clear detail on a range of functions including representation in terms of the voting system and demographic issues for the Commons and lack of election and demographic statistics for the Lords. The mechanics by which both houses scrutinise and hold the government to account would be detailed as well as the robustness of the legislative process and its limitations. To enter Level 3 there had to be clear balance, an awareness of 'to what extent' and clear recognition of both sides of the debate. To enter Level 3 both Houses had to be addressed and an understanding and assessment of how well parliament carries out its functions. As ever Level 3 responses were characterised by the use of a range of relevant contemporary

examples typically relating to the work of select committees and challenges to the Government in both houses. There were a great many level 3 responses but surprisingly comparatively few at the top of Level 3 and less so than for Q4. The question tended to be a less effective discriminator than the Civil liberties and human rights essay.

Although this was a well answered question with a high number of low to mid Level 3 and high Level 2 responses there were a number of issues. Those who lost marks did so because they commonly failed to concentrate on the concept of functions and frequently their responses tended to lack a sense of direction. Such responses tended to become generalised essays on the power of parliament which failed to address the thrust of the question and which kept them firmly in Level 2. Level 2 responses also tended to deal with a narrow range of functions, commonly representation and scrutiny. Sometimes candidates struggled to give adequate weighting to both chambers though rarely was one chamber omitted. A number of responses were too general and did not provide enough examples and up to date evidence of select committees/statistical evidence concerning representation/Brexit etc.

It was pleasing to see that many candidates have again clearly been trained to write coherent answers that do focus on the question and it was actually very rare to see essays that were not written in clear paragraphs or without at least some attempt at structure.

#### **Q4 'Civil liberties and human rights have been eroded in recent years.' Discuss.**

This was not a popular question this year, attracting just less than 20% of total responses for the extended essay. The overall level of response was rather disappointing but somewhat mixed. There was less evidence of Level 3 responses to the question but it did differentiate very well, there were more higher scoring Level 3 responses than for Q3.

For Level 3 candidates needed to exhibit a clear and defined knowledge and understanding of both Civil liberties and human rights and the extent to which these have been eroded in recent years. Level 3 responses contained a focus on both sides of the debate and provided balance. On the case for the erosion of rights and liberties Level 3 candidates commonly examined the curtailment of rights and liberties by government largely due to the threat of terrorism, with examples, and in the interest of upholding national security. Good candidates included a range of factors: curtailment of the right to trial by jury, the restricted access to legal aid thereby denying justice to many, particularly the less well off. Others focussed on the limitations in scope of some of the measures to enhance Civil liberties and human rights including the Freedom of Information Act, the HRA and limitations on the freedom of the judiciary. The issue of the negative aspects of parliamentary sovereignty and strength of the government with a majority would be assessed. Other candidates outlined the traditional weakness of the judiciary at providing redress. On the case for the strengthening of Civil liberties and human rights Level 3 candidates typically referred to the passing of the HRA frequently with examples of its successes and the FOI Act. Many candidates referred to the greater focus on liberties and rights through pressure groups such as Liberty and Stonewall as well as the importance of social media. There was frequent reference to high profile cases to illustrate that civil liberties and human rights can triumph. Many good candidates referred to the increased use of judicial review with examples to illustrate where judges have

supported individual rights. The best answers gave detailed identification of the case for and against supported by accurate examples and evaluation, providing a balanced conclusion.

Unfortunately, the majority of the responses did not fall into the above categories and were somewhat disappointing. Many essays simply lacked depth and structure. Some offered a thin outline of how rights had been eroded. There was considerable confusion by a number of candidates on what civil liberties and human rights are. Some of the weaker responses lacked any real engagement with the question beyond generalisations relating to the judiciary concerning security of tenure, independence, neutrality, dominance of white/male/Oxbridge etc. Level 2 responses tended to be limited to the judicial aspects of the question such as the HRA and judicial review with a failure to address the wider aspects of the question and the debate over civil liberties. Level 2 responses tended to lack balance with a focus on examining the erosion of rights and liberties rather than on how they are protected.

Despite the disappointing level of responses overall discrimination was achieved here by those candidates who were able to focus on how in recent years there have been threats to civil liberties such as anti-terrorist legislation, erosion of legal aid and other measures and then counter with evidence that civil liberties and human rights have been protected more by developments such as the HRA and judicial review accompanied by an increasingly independent judiciary. There was an impressive use of relevant examples such as Belmarsh and Gina Miller and it was really encouraging to see a minority of candidates clearly energised by the issue of human rights.

Assistant Examiners were pleased with the improvement in performance in most of the essay style questions but repeat three points for the attention of centres.

- (1) The critical importance for L3 responses of the need to use contemporary and informed examples. This applies equally to Q1 and Q2 (a) and (b) and to the essays. The situation has improved but this was a crucially limiting factor in all questions.
- (2) The need for a balanced answer when a question requires an assessment to be made. 'Discuss, 'To what extent?' 'How far?' and so on.
- (3) The need to read questions carefully and to answer the question as set and not necessarily something that has been pre-prepared.

Clearly not all these points have equal relevance as we pass on to the new specification but many of them are still valid as we move forward.