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Paper 4A: EU Political Issues



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This paper saw a pleasing level of focus on contemporary events from many candidates; whilst question 1 specifically addressed the Brexit vote this could also be relevant to all other questions, in terms of the reasons for, and impact of, the leave vote.

The spread of popularity between questions was greater than has sometimes been the case, with even the least popular short response and essay questions being attempted by over 35% and over 20% of candidates respectively.

There was a reduced tendency this year to confuse institutions with similar names; for example it was pleasing that very few candidates confused the President of the European Commission with the Presidents of the European Council or European Parliament. The ordinarily common recurring error of confusing the European Court of Human Right and the Human Rights Act was also happily less prevalent this year, although this may partly have reflected the questions set.

Equally, more candidates than might be hoped for misconstrued, or attempted to reinterpret, expansion for integration or vice versa. A few were either unclear as to what constituted a 'nationalist party' within the meaning of the specification.

As last year, relatively few candidates failed to fully engage with multiple demands within a question, such as role and significance.

Most candidates made effective use of examples; sometimes of particular member states, particularly Turkey on question 5, France on question 6, and the UK throughout, and in other cases of relevant individuals, institutions, or policies.

Timing was good overall, with few candidates failing to find the time to answer the correct number of questions, and most candidates apparently devoting a roughly equal amount of time to each short response, and to Section B as compared with Section A. As has often been the case though a significant number of candidates included general introductions or conclusions to short response questions which do not cost marks but rarely gain them, and also lose time: introductions should focus on brief context and definitions whilst conclusions to short responses are entirely un-necessary.

One continuing concern this year, as on paper 3A, was that a higher proportion of candidates produced answers that were difficult to read. Although handwriting does not directly affect the mark received, a difficult to decipher script can limit the extent to which the examiner can ascertain the meaning of the candidate's response and therefore in term limit the credit that they can receive.

Synopticity was a little stronger than last year on two of the three essays, with more candidates specifically and accurately ascribing different viewpoints on questions 6 and 7. This was less well done on question 8, where the alternative approaches to the issue were perhaps a little less obvious albeit still accessible and creditable.

Q1

This was the most popular of the short responses and was attempted by almost all candidates, probably reflecting its very contemporary and relevant content.

In most cases the question was answered well, with candidates discussing a range of plausible reasons – most commonly immigration, sovereignty and cost; followed in popularity by the EU's perceived democratic deficit. The relative strength of the leave and remain campaigns, an anti-establishment backlash, the departure from the original aims of the EEC, and the particular impacts of the CFP and CAP, were also advanced by a minority of candidates as were a few other plausible reasons.

Despite the degree of agreement as to the main reasons we did not place a hierarchy on different reasonable responses, and candidates did not need to address any specific points to be able to access the full range of marks. Instead the major discriminating factor was the extent to which these reasons were developed and

evidenced, not simply asserted. Reasons why people did *not* vote to leave were not relevant or credible, nor were events post the referendum, but few or no candidates wasted time on these.

There was some variation in factual accuracy – particularly on the figures of EU costs that were suggested to instead be spent on the NHS. Many candidates correctly identified the amount involved but others gave wildly varying figures.

Level 1 responses were extremely rare.

Level 2 responses tended to be competent but to possess *either* range or depth but not both.

Level 3 responses offered a range of clear, accurate and developed reasons, often backed up with detailed and accurate figures or examples.

Q2

This was the least popular of the short response questions which perhaps reflected the need to be clear on a specific and perhaps less accessible concept – that of a European Social Model.

Only a few candidates had clearly misunderstood the concept – usually by assuming it to be identical to the Social Chapter, or akin to Socialism in general - but equally few showed a very clear and sharp understanding. Some candidates did offer a brief and clear definition which was helpful although not essential.

A few candidates did make general points that could apply to any controversial concept within the EU, without making it fully clear how these related specifically to the ESM – these could nevertheless gain some credit if the controversies discussed were relevant. More specific controversies tended to relate to the impact of business, the challenges of a one size fits all approach, and the degree of regulation required.

Candidates could creditably make a link from the ESM to wider criticisms of the EU – since it would be the EU that is looking to deliver an ESM, the lack of democracy, accountability in the process could clearly be made relevant. Some candidates did this, albeit relatively few.

Finally, as the question does not specify ‘how’ only ‘why’, it was not necessary to give examples of specific practical controversies. However, these were still creditable if they helped to elucidate ‘why’ points – for example that economic intervention is more controversial in former communist countries, and that the Eurozone crisis showcased the particular dangers of over-harmonisation for countries like Greece.

Level 1 responses misunderstood what is meant by a European Social Model, or alternatively gave few and thin reasons for it being controversial.

Level 2 responses discussed relevant controversies, but these were often quite general in nature, or alternatively focused very specifically on the social model but only on one point (usually a detailed explanation of the different social models seen within the EU).

Level 3 responses sometimes, but not always, gave an explicit definition of a European Social Model, but always considered a range of relevant controversies that clearly linked to an accurate grasp of the concept.

Q3

This was middling in popularity amongst the short response questions, and it was pleasing to see how few candidates confused the post of President of the Commission with the EU’s two ‘other presidents’ – some indeed made good use of accurate comparisons between the different roles, and mainly accurately referenced Juncker as the current post-holder. Equally relatively few candidates discussed the current post holder’s role in Brexit, which would have been very creditable although only insofar as it was specific and accurate.

The question had two clear aspects - 'role' and 'significance' – this is a style that has been utilised quite often in recent years with various EU posts and institutions, and the clear majority of candidates and centres seemed to be familiar with it, although a few still only discussed one or the other. A clear grasp of both aspects was needed to reach level 3, but it was entirely a question of taste whether they separated out these aspects or addressed them together. Specific examples of Presidents in practice were very creditable, although not having them did not preclude reaching level 3.

A minority of candidates did not explicitly discuss the role of the President, only of the Commission itself with the role and significance of its head remaining implicit, or relying on the fact that 'they are the President'. Such responses could achieve level 2 if done well, but could not go further.

Level 1 responses were rare – a very small number of candidates identified the 'wrong president', discussed only role but not significance, or else briefly discussed the Commission in general without reference to its President.

Level 2 responses tended to address significance as well as role but without the degree of range and/or detail required to reach level 3. Occasionally they were stronger versions of the 'Commission but not President' or 'role but not significance' types of response.

Level 3 responses engaged clearly with both role and significance, and often provided supporting practical examples and/or relevant comparison to the significance of other posts.

Q4

This was the second least popular of the short response questions. A similar question was asked several years ago but, like so much else, potential responses were somewhat different in the light of Brexit.

The most common weakness here was responses that focused on reasons that had no specific relation to nationalism – i.e. only general reasons for parties adopting a pro-European approach. These gleaned a small amount of credit but were not what the question was seeking.

More surprisingly too many candidates explicitly focused on the policies of the three mainstream UK wide parties; there could be some credit here for cross-over of points, but the same could not be said of the small number who attempted to paint DUP or even UKIP policy as pro EU. This was not what this question was seeking and candidates should have grasped this.

Equally many candidates did engage with the correct parties, and some showed sophisticated awareness of the common and varying issues that effect the nationalist positions in Scotland, Wales, and sometimes Northern Ireland (although not Cornwall, which would nevertheless have been creditable).

As the MS stated the plural 'parties', candidates needed to discuss reasons that relate to two or more parties to have a chance of reaching level 3, although they did not need to specifically name them – referring to the regions they operate in was sufficient if the response was of high enough quality.

Level 1 responses discussed the policies of the wrong political parties or, more towards the top of level 1, general reasons as to why any UK party might be pro EU.

Level 2 responses at the lower end focused on general reasons for a pro-EU approach, but to a higher level of depth and breadth. Stronger L2 responses either considered reasons relevant to just one nationalist party, but in some detail, or more than one but more briefly.

Level 3 responses considered specific reasons behind the pro-EU approach of at least two nationalist parties, often gearing these towards their specific geographical areas in a sophisticated way.

Q5

This question was the second most popular of the short response questions, although quite variable in how well it was addressed. The three key aspects of the question were firstly EU expansion, secondly the future, and thirdly how this could be justified.

A small minority but nonetheless surprising number of students confused enlargement of the EU with integration (sometimes referred to as 'enlargement of the EU's role'). This would have made the question cross over considerably with Q7 and was not what was sought. A few others either focused on past over future enlargement, or wasted time on discussing arguments *against* enlargement.

Candidates who did address the question well tended to consider benefits to both the EU itself – in terms of a larger single market, more geo-political clout, more secure borders etc - to the potential member states themselves, and sometime more generally to the world in terms of the spread of human rights etc. Many responses also accurately discussed the cases of specific candidate countries – most often Turkey – whilst the gap left by the UK's impending departure was also relevantly deployed by some candidates.

There was however some attempt to utilise weaker arguments – such as a suggestion that expansion would strengthen integration (the opposite of commonly accepted wisdom), or that new members would be net contributors to EU funds.

Level 1 responses generally misunderstood what was meant by EU expansion, or for a small number of candidates showed a rushed 'third short responses' which probably reflected timing problems.

Level 2 responses tended to discuss one or two relevant justifications for future expansion, but to either not develop further points or else to use up time discussing past expansion, or possible disbenefits of expansion.

Level 3 responses focused accurately on the possible benefits of expansion, giving argument rather than assertion and often accurately relating their points to specific examples of potential candidate countries.

Q6

This was the second most popular of the essay questions, albeit not far behind Q7 in popularity. Virtually every candidate correctly understood the CAP, and the level of detailed policy knowledge of it was quite impressive.

A more common challenge however was in realising that the two words 'unsuccessful and un-reformable' were specified for a reason, not simply for emphasis, and that it was therefore necessary to address both issues. Candidates who addressed only success and not reform, or less commonly vice versa, could achieve sound level 2 marks but did not enter level 3.

Where candidates did comprehend and distinguish both words they could adopt a number of different reasonable lines of argument – as well as the more obvious approaches they could for example argue that the policy had not been successful but had or could be reformed, or indeed that it has been successful in the past but is not now capable of being reformed for the future.

Within successes and reforms many candidates recognised the evolution of CAP: that it's success could be seen differently at different points in time as the political and agricultural context changed along with EU member states and the total cost of CAP. Furthermore, strong candidates identified that different reforms were aimed at tackling different issues, sometimes including new challenges created by earlier reforms (such as the 'set-aside scheme').

We were alert for candidates straying from the CAP into the CFP, or EU policy more generally, but this did not transpire to be an issue with many (and indeed a few managed to draw valid links between the challenges posed by the strengths of the respective agricultural and fishing lobbies).

Balance was another important requirement and it was more common for candidates to take a negative view of CAP than a positive one, particular in terms of reform, but balance did not need to be equal to achieve high marks provided that it was sufficient to show clear understanding of difference points of view.

As with any essay question the more specific, developed, and evidenced the candidates' points were, as opposed to being vague, brief and asserted, the more they were rewarded. In addition balance was also vital – it did not need to be *equal* balance but both sides had to be clearly considered.

Synopticity here were generally solid or better, and most commonly came from Brexiteers and Remainers, from different parties' views, from farmers' and consumers organisations, and from different EU member states.

The weakest candidates tended to focus only on success, and to offer a one-sided approach to that debate, or else asserted without development or supporting evidence.

Middling responses tended to adopt a balanced approach to either success or reform but not both, or to treat the two as synonymous. The degree of development and range of their points (for example considering the impact on different parts of the EU, not simply the UK) then determined their mark within the middle range.

The strongest responses considered both success and reform as distinct issues, and often looked at both sides of both debates. They also made strong use of evidence and of specific examples, and considered a range of accurately ascribed synoptic views.

Q7

This was the most popular of the essay questions, but also saw the most mistakes in basic question interpretation out of the three essays:

A small but nonetheless surprising number of candidates made the complementary mistake to that seen on question 5 – addressing enlargement (sometimes referred to as 'integrating more members') rather than further integration. This was not what was sought by the question and heavily limited these candidates' success. Clearly integration can have a relationship with enlargement but the two are very far from being the same thing, and some indeed see the two goals as being inherently in tension with each other. Candidates therefore *could* discuss enlargement, but only insofar as it effects the desirability of integration.

Another common and often significant flaw in responses was to interpret the question as being solely about whether further integration was desirable for the UK. This was not the question – there was crossover, but the question was about the EU as a whole.

Thirdly a few candidates failed to focus on future EU integration and instead spent too much time on the successes or failures of past integration without tying these into the wider points that might also affect its future desirability.

Where candidates did accurately grasp the demands of the question they often cited the benefits of stronger fiscal integration, a more level and smoother functioning Single Market, and a more cohesive foreign and security policy as arguments in favour. The loss of Britain as an 'awkward partner' was also seen by some as removing a barrier to further effective integration.

Having considered the arguments in favour of future integration there were a variety of ways in which candidates could choose to examine contrary opinions. They could question whether such integration was ever desirable, considering a range of Eurosceptic perspectives, or they could embrace the premise that it was desirable in the past but contend that it no longer is due to growing issues with border security, financial crisis etc. Many side-stepped the issue of past desirability and simply argued that it wasn't desirable in the future without specific reference to whether or not it previously had been, and this was also a perfectly reasonable approach. It was also possible to argue that, regardless of whether or not it *might* be desirable integration is no longer political or practically possible. Brexit and the growth of continental nationalist parties was often cited as evidence in this regard.

Beyond that many of the comments made on Q6 above still apply. The more specific, developed, and evidenced a candidates' points were, as opposed to being vague, brief and asserted, the more they were rewarded. In addition, balance was also vital – it needed not be *equal* balance but both sides must be clearly considered.

Synopticity here could again come from Brexiteers and Remainers, or from pro or anti EU parties in either the UK or other countries such as 5* or the Front Nationale. Some candidates also considered the viewpoints of different EU member states, of intergovernmental or supranationalist theorists, or of the EU itself. The neo functionalist perspective was also well utilised by a good number of strong candidates.

The weakest candidates often failed to grasp the basic requirements of the question, and focused on either expansion or solely on the potential (dis)benefits for the UK rather than the EU as a whole.

Middling responses were stronger in their appreciation of the demands of the question and gave a reasonable account of arguments in favour and against without quite showing the depth and/or breath of higher quality answers.

The strongest responses showed balance and sophisticated analysis throughout, strongly gearing all points towards the specific question asked and providing a range of evidence and competing viewpoints.

Q8

This was the least popular of the essay questions.

Key to addressing this question well was understanding the links between the first and second halves of the quote. Candidates who explained Lisbon reforms without fully recognising their significance, or discussed their general significance without linking them specifically to the institutions, did not do well. Similarly, candidates who addressed changes in the powers of the EU institutions only achieved full credit if they linked these to the Lisbon treaty, whilst changes arising out of earlier treaties were not relevant except as a contrast.

Since the question specified 'in practice', and since the treaty has now been in operation for several years candidates should have been looking to bring in practical examples as well as discussing the theoretical impact of changes, potentially on both sides of the question. High quality evidence of impact was a hallmark of level 3 responses, and one popular example was a discussion of the (lack of impact) of the two High Representatives so far

In common with all institutions essays, stronger answers distinguished more strongly between the impact on *different* institutions, particularly when considering what HAS changed, whilst weaker ones treated them more as a homogenous mass throughout (which gleaned some, but less, credit). Recognising how different aspects of Lisbon might have effected the same institution in different ways, and how it might have effected the relations between institutions was often evidence of sophisticated understanding and analysis. Misnaming an institution did not automatically invalidate whatever the candidates went on to say about it, but those arguments clearly did not gain as much credit as if they were ascribed to the correct institution.

As noted above, the more specific, developed, and evidenced a candidates' points were, as opposed to being vague, brief and asserted, the more they were rewarded. In addition, balance continued to be vital.

Synopticity here posed the biggest challenge of the three essays, as this topic is less of a subject of public debate than Q6 or Q7. Nonetheless the views of Brexiteers and Remainers were again relevant (with some candidates recognising that Lisbon had played some role in shaping the between between them, and between pro and anti Europeans in other member states). Also pertinent were the views of particular parties, members states and the EU institutions themselves, and these often arose from their views of the Lisbon Treaty itself. Adapting the approach of considering how supra-nationalists and inter-governmentalists would interpret the impact of Lisbon differently was another possible, and generally strong, option.

The weakest responses failed to engage with the impact of Lisbon, as opposed to its general desirability, or else were brief, rushed and sometimes one-sided.

Middling responses generally made links from the treaty to its impact on institutions, but did not separate out the different institutions sufficiently, or considered a relatively limited number of institutions. They also sometimes assumed that the level of impact on each institution was either of great or very little significance, rather than a matter of debate.

The strongest responses recognised the impacts of Lisbon on a range of different institutions, often in a nuanced way that showed balance within as well as between institutions. They embraced the challenge of synopticity by linking their arguments to theories, commentators, political figures, or a mixture of all three.

Paper Summery

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

- Read the question carefully, then read it carefully again, and ensure that they are addressing all aspects of it, whilst not wasting time on content which has not been for.
- Ensure that they have a robust understanding of all key concepts, and avoid answering questions where they are hazy on any of the concepts included in the question.
- Balance the need to write a sufficiently long and detailed response with the need for that response to be legible so that their content can be understood and credited.
- Avoid general introductions or conclusions to short response questions – they do not cost marks but rarely gain them and lose time. However, they should define key terms not only where specifically requested, but also by offering a brief definition where it is clearly helpful to addressing the question (for example defining x if asked to ‘explain why the EU has become involved in x’).
- Bear in mind the need for balance between range and depth of points, particularly on short responses where three well explained points will usually out-perform seven brief points, or one very in-depth point.
- Continue to develop their use of synopticity in essays, making use of competing viewpoints between, within and outside of parties, institutions, member states, and theories, where appropriate to the demands of the question.