



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary
Level

In Politics (8PL0-02)

Paper 2 UK Government

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Publications Code 8PL0_02_2306_ER

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Introduction

Overall candidates and centres should be commended for their hard work and commitment to the study of UK Government. There was a good standard of responses across the different question styles and specification areas covered in this summer's exam paper. It was very pleasing to see candidates engaging well with the sources and the questions, and a strong use of contemporary political examples to help bring their answers to life.

A key area that is still worth reflecting on is timing; it is vital that candidates plan their timing so they can give the necessary time to each question to meet the demands of the whole paper.

There are, as with any examination, however, several areas to reflect upon and lessons to be learned, which will enable future cohorts to address the examination effectively.

Question 1(a)

This was an optional question and was more popular with candidates than Q1(b). Most candidates were able to describe at least one role of backbenchers. The main approach adopted was to get straight into describing the roles, which was exactly right as there is no need for an introduction or conclusion in these responses.

Better answers had breadth and depth; candidates were able to exemplify the roles, including representing their constituents, scrutiny of the executive, legislation and debating as well as explain them. A good example of this here was where candidates could talk about backbenchers and how they performed their role of representing the interests of their constituents. Stronger answers were able to deploy key terminology from the specification in their writing.

Weaker answers tended to focus more on who backbenchers are, their behaviour and what they could not do, rather than remaining focussed on their roles. A lack of exemplification also made it difficult to really develop any depth in the answers. Some answers also strayed into discussing the role of Peers in the House of Lords.

Another role of backbench MPs is that they are a way to scrutinise government. Backbenchers can be present in debates and hold government to account about legislation and policies they have created. Backbenchers don't have a significant amount of power but can influence decision making by holding a backbench rebellion. They can scrutinise the government through select committees. Select committees are formed with a certain number of MPs who focus on scrutinising the government on certain policy areas. The PAC (Public Accounts Committee) mainly focus on how the government spend taxpayers money and if it is used effectively and efficiently. The Liaison committee also hold the government to account twice a year, and in this time can question anything about government actions or policies.

Examiner Comment

This is part of a Level 3 response. Here is a clear example of one paragraph on the role of backbenchers in scrutinising the executive. The response shows depth by developing the role of scrutiny by discussing several different ways scrutiny can be carried out, illustrating the role of select committees with the examples of the PAC and the Liaison Committee.

Finally, backbenchers also play a role in opposing legislation through Private Member Bills. These are bills proposed by backbenchers which are selected at random to be debated, and approved or rejected. Since 2020, around 16% of all bills passed started as PMBs, and the latest bill PMB to become law was the Autism Syndrome Act 2023, clarifying which underlined how people with down syndrome should be treated in places like schools, and which also shows that backbenchers do play a role in creating legislation through PMBs.

(Total for Question 1 = 10 marks)

TOTAL FOR SECTION A = 10 MARKS

Examiners Comment

In this paragraph from a Level 3 response, the role of backbenchers in legislation in terms of Private Members Bills is developed using the example of Dr Liam Fox's Down Syndrome Act of 2022.

Back bench MP conduct lots of constituency work behind the scenes. This may include redress of grievances where an MP supports an individual constituent who has had a disagreement with the local authority eg local education board. They may also attend events within their constituency like fetes and fundraisers to get opinions from the general constituents that it can be reflected in parliament.

Another key role of backbenchers is to represent causes or pressure groups in parliament. There may be causes that the MP has background in eg business or it could be an issue that affects their constituents like HS2. They can also lobby the government and try to introduce private members bills into law eg Cheryl Gillan in 2009 when her proposal of giving better help to autistic individuals was passed. This is important because it is an outlet for backbenchers to speak out on issues that aren't being addressed in parliament or are not included in the government's legislative agenda but are affecting their constituents.

Finally, backbench MPs conduct a bulk of committee work in parliament whether through public bill committees or ad hoc. A key role of backbenchers is to scrutinise the government and its legislation proposals. In recent years, the Wright reforms (2010)

introduced the backbench business committee. This not only allows backbenchers to be more effective in rallying together to lobby parliament but also gives them control of backbench business days in parliament in which issues raised exclusively by backbenchers are discussed in detail. The backbench business committee also are in control of introducing e-petitions (once they receive the relevant amount of signatures, 100,000) into parliament for debate. This was the case with the Hillsborough disaster as a petition to make documents regarding it public was passed and which resulted in further inquiries to be initiated.

Examiner Comment

This is an example of a Level 3 response with a range of different roles and some good exemplification.

Question 1(b)

This question was less popular. The question focussed on the composition of the Executive branch and drew a wide range of responses. The main approach adopted was to get straight into describing the composition of the executive, which was exactly right as there is no need for an introduction or conclusion in these responses.

Many candidates were able to detail the PM and Cabinet, with better answers also referring to junior ministers, government departments, the civil service and/or special advisers. Stronger answers again here provided exemplification. A good understanding of key terminology of the specification provided a good framework for answering this question.

Weaker answers just outlined the composition of the executive without really expanding their points or providing exemplification. A more structural problem was clear in the responses that did not really understand what the executive is and took a scattergun approach that included naming as many parts of the UK political system as possible including backbench MPs, the judiciary, the Lords, and the Monarchy.

Chosen question number: Question 1(a) Question 1(b)

The executive is made up of the Cabinet (which includes the Prime Minister, Ministers and junior ministers), governmental departments, ~~and~~ quasi-governmental organisations, the civil service as well as various Cabinet committees. The Cabinet is the most prominent organisation within the Executive and contains around 20 ministers at any given time, although this number can vary between different governments. These ministers are all MPs (as well as junior ministers), as the executive is fused with the legislature (they can also be Lords although this has become increasingly rare). For example Rishi Sunak (PM) is ~~the~~ MP for Richmond and York. The Prime Minister heads the executive and cabinet and can be described as first among equals. Governmental departments are headed by individual ministers and supported by junior ministers who are responsible for specific policy areas within departments. For example Suella Braverman is the Home Secretary and Helen Whately is a junior minister within the Department for Health and Social Care and she is the ~~Minister~~ Secretary for Mental Health. There are quasi-governmental organisations as well, for example Ofsted,

responsible for carrying out inspections of educational facilities (schools, colleges etc) and those which do not fall under the authority of governmental departments, are still funded by the government. Finally there is the Civil Service, non-elected bureaucrats responsible for managing the implementation of policy and of the day to day management of the executive. Examples of prominent members of the Civil Service would be Dominic Cummings during the premiership of Boris Johnson.

Examiner Comment:

This is a Level 3 response. This is an effective response to this question that is clearly focussed on the question and covers the composition of the executive, with development and examples. There is a strong use of key terminology from the specification here.

Question 2

This question is a compulsory question and focussed on source skills. The subject area was the role of the House of Lords in improving legislation. As an explain question, there was no need here to use an introduction or a conclusion.

Stronger answers used the source to answer the question by developing their analysis of how the Lords improve legislation and were able to use examples to build higher levels of analysis. This was often done by using a short quote from the source, then explaining how this impacted on the role of the Lords in improving legislation. Stronger answers remained clearly focussed on the question throughout.

Weaker answers tended to quote or paraphrase the source rather than build on it. There was a tendency also to draw on the source but not really focus on the question.

Firstly, the source exemplifies the expertise within the Lords is important in improving legislation as the majority of its members (except the 92 kept in the Cranborne Compromise) have been chosen for their role due to some sort of expertise. Even the Lords Spiritual are said to be experts in morality and ethical issues. As the source says, the Lords, "is known for its independence of thought and expertise." This is incredibly helpful in the improvement of legislation, as this expertise can be used to improve bills that concern the area of knowledge of a certain peer. Whilst MPs in the Commons will of course have knowledge in certain areas, it will not be as refined or detailed as that of the Lords.

Secondly, the Lords can often use their platform to publicise issues. Whilst safeguards such as the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 as well as the Salisbury convention have been put in place to prevent the Lords from seriously delaying any legislation, their position as a Lord means that any comments made about legislation, especially criticisms, will often be reported

on. This publicity can sometimes, as the source says, force the Commons to "accept amendments". Whilst no amendments have yet been proposed, this idea of Lords creating negative publicity was seen recently when the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby spoke out in criticism of the government's Illegal Migration Bill. Due to the scathing nature of his comments, many news outlets publicised what he had said. As the Archbishop of Canterbury is a well respected figure, he used this platform to show the public the injustice of the bill.

Finally, the Lords is able to improve legislation as its members do not have any representative ties. Whilst MPs on the Commons have to spend a significant amount of time on constituency work, the Lords do not. This allows them, according to the source to, "spend 60% of their time on legislation". This possibly allows for more thorough scrutiny of a bill which would result in more beneficial changes being made. This is further aided by the lessened nature of party representation in the Lords. Out of about 700 members, only 261 are Conservative. Possibly more important is the presence of cross-benchers and non-affiliates who have no party whip and are purely focused on benefiting legislation for the good of all, instead of towing a party line.

Examiner Comment

This is a Level 3 response that remains clearly focussed on the question. It clearly uses the source as a springboard to develop the analysis of the role of the Lords in improving legislation and helps develop the explanation with well selected examples.

the governing party. 'Over 180 crossbenchers' further reinforces the ^{idea} of dominance that the governing party has ~~over~~ the Lords. ~~As seen as~~ 'governments can reverse Lords' defeats in the Commons' which is done after the Public Bill has been delayed by 1 year (According to the Parliament Act of 1949), 'negative publicity sometimes makes them accept amendments' suggesting that the Debates and criticisms of government legislation in the Lords is heavily publicised in the media, widening the Lords' ~~the~~ ⁱⁿ ability to place pressure on the government to alter legislation. 'neither the 2010 or 2017 elections produced a single party majority' suggests that the importance of the Salisbury Convention in restricting the Lords has been eroded over time as the ^{idea} of a majority party government results in ~~a~~ ^{the} ~~idea~~ ^{winning party} lack of a 'manifesto day'. For example in the 2010 or the Cameron-Clegg coalition agreed, leaving the coalition government with no ^{own} ~~own~~ manifesto to impose resulting in an increase in ~~the~~ government defeats in the Lords.

'The Lords is viewed as a revising chamber' this is due to Lords ^{being} ~~being~~ democratic legitimacy as they are not elected and therefore cannot be held accountable to the public for their changes to legislation. 'fewer points than the Commons' is stated as the powers of the Lords have been reduced several times by the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949. 'check and challenge' the actions of the gov' is stated as the Lords have many legislative committees such as the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee which reviews and scrutinises ^{secondary legislation} the House of Lords has many experts ^{in various fields} in its membership which is why ^{independent} ~~it~~ provides a forum ^{for} ~~it~~. As Lords ^{represent} ~~are~~ ^{members} ~~are~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{their own} ~~the~~ ^{circumstances}, they spend a lot of time on legislation.

Examiner Comment:

This answer takes a different approach but also achieves level 3. It clearly uses the source and remains focussed on the question set. It explains a wide range of points from the source.

Question 3

Question 3 is another compulsory question that focusses on source skills and in this case, the assessing whether devolution has been successful or not. In many ways, the structure of responses to this answer is all important. The structure must focus on similarities and differences between the sources to answer the question. In answering the question, candidates need to build the debate from the sources to reach justified conclusions about the success or otherwise of devolution. An overall conclusion to this answer is valuable.

Stronger answers clearly focussed on locating differences and similarities between the sources, whilst the best answers used these to develop an argument to reach mini conclusions and an overall conclusion.

Weaker answers tended to repeat the source through quoting it or paraphrasing it without really developing any analysis. There were some answers that just wanted to answer the question and ignore the source, and this really limits the ability to score well under the mark scheme.

(10)

Both source source 2 & 3 agree on the idea that devolution has allowed for more specific decisions to be made based on each assembly's needs. This can be seen by source 2 stating that "each nation can make policy and spending decisions in line with local preferences", similarly source 3 states devolution has "allowed for policies to be developed to fit the people". This is a strong point from both sources which is the fact that since devolution in the ^{late} 1970s, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have all been given more and more power regarding legislation and policy that can be made, the point where Scotland now has the most power than before it is independent. Also in Scotland and Wales, there is differences in things such as education and healthcare with Scotland university being free for students. This allows the assemblies to make decisions based on what their specific population desire, instead of going with Westminster ^{by tradition} ~~tradition~~ for everything. The policies made in the sources are strong and clear, devolution has been ^{successful} here.

Both sources disagree on the idea of whether or not Devolution is democratic and equal to all. Source 2 states "devolution has allowed for greater democratic expression", whereas source 3 states that "lack of an English parliament has led to an inequality of representation across the four nations". I believe that the point in source 3 is stronger than source 2, since to the fact that MP from devolved assemblies can vote on English issues.

Both source 2 and 3 identify how the devolved bodies are not temporary, but rather 'a permanent feature of our constitution' [source 2] and 'effectively permanent' [source 3]. In effect, this is true, the Scotland act 2016 and Wales Act 2017, established these devolved parliaments as permanent fixtures. Source 2 views this positively as, 'there is no great demand for devolution to be abolished'. This means that these devolved bodies are legitimate as people recognise their right to exist and rule. Furthermore, this is due to a rise in both Scottish and Welsh Nationalism, with the rise in Nationalist Parties like the SNP, Plaid Cymru and Sinn Féin'. This reflects how devolution has been a success. However, source 3 states how this permanent fixture is burdensome for taxpayers, described as an 'ongoing cost'. This is a valid point, the devolved bodies need some funding to be upheld. However, overall, I take the

opinion of source 2 (devolution is a success) ^{if it was} ~~has~~ the case that devolution is merely an ongoing cost for taxpayers, then there would be a demand for its abolition.

Both source 2 and 3 acknowledge how devolution has enabled policies to be 'in line with local preferences' [source 2] and 'closer to 'the people'' [source 3].

This means devolution may be a success as it allows for locally relevant policies i.e. free university tuition fees in Scotland. Source 2 speaks to how it has allowed for 'greater policy and public service development'. One way this can be seen is the SNP devolving 8/13s of the Scottish government to improving healthcare. However, source 3 states that devolution has meant that Wales 'have fallen behind England'. While regional inequality may be a possibility, I feel that this isn't the failure of devolution, rather the failure of the devolved body itself and overall I agree that devolution has led to increased policy developments, and that any falling behind is not a failure of devolution.

In conclusion, I agree with the overarching view of source 2 that devolution has been a success in terms of permanence and policy development.
(Total for Question 3 = 10 marks)

Examiner Comment

This Level 3 answer clearly engages with the question, using comparative analysis of the source to show differences and similarities and reach judgements about the success of devolution.

Question 4 (a)

This question was the more popular of the two. Most candidates were able to “refer to the current uncodified nature of the UK constitution, and codification” in answering the question. Generally, candidates were able to include effective synoptic links back in particular to rights in context from Component 1 (synoptic being part of A01).

Timing was all important here; candidates needed to ensure that they gave themselves adequate time to really do justice to the longer essay format.

Structure was also crucial here. The most effective structure started with a short but clear introduction that detailed the nature of the debate, defined codification and then laid out the main direction of the argument to be pursued. Next paragraphs were built using an effective pairing of argument – for and against codification with clear analysis (AO2) – to build mini conclusions (AO3) throughout the answer. These mini conclusions offered steppingstone judgements that took the answer to the conclusion (AO3). The most effective conclusions were the ones that the reader could write for themselves in their own mind from reading the main body of the essay and found it matched the actual conclusion on paper.

This question was generally well answered with a range of different arguments about codification developed with better answers pairing arguments and developing a real sense of debate backed by well selected examples. The more contemporary examples were an effective way to select and deploy information precisely (AO1) to help build analysis (AO2).

Weaker answers tended to offer arguments with little evidence limiting the ability to access the higher-level mark bands or stray more into descriptions of constitutions which really moved away from answering the question. There was still a tendency to write all the arguments for then all the arguments against more like a list than a real debate, sometimes making it harder to really develop analysis (AO2) and evaluation (AO3).

The argument that the UK should keep its uncodified constitution is extremely strong. It has proven effective ~~to the~~ until this point, and its flexible nature allowing for parliamentary sovereignty was effectively ~~enhanced~~ maintained Human Rights. The uncodified constitution means that instead of the rules of the state being contained in a single document, such as in the US, they are instead found in a variety of different sources such as statutes, treaties, and conventions. The UK is one of three countries without a codified constitution along with New Zealand. Although the desire for a codified constitution may be changing due to constitutional developments in Brexit and protection of freedoms regarding Covid-19, at this time, there is no apparent necessity.

Examiner Comment

This is a clear introduction. It sets up the debate, defines codified and uncodified and details a clear direction of travel for the answer.

A strong positive of the UK's uncodified constitution is that it is flexible ~~and can be amended~~. The unentrenched nature means laws and legislation can be relatively easily to adapt to changing circumstances. This is essential as it ensures the engagement of politicians in public conflict and events measuring that is the position of priority change for citizens, the law adapts to reflect this. For example, following the

Dunklank school shooting, resulting in the death of 16 people, the government were able to amend the ~~firearms Act~~ and install the Firearms amendment act to ban handguns guns the following year to prevent a reciprocal ~~incident~~ ever incident. ~~Amend~~ In the USA, the constitution has been present since the 18th century with amendments requiring $\frac{2}{3}$ of the congress to vote in favour of amending. In 2021, 654 people were killed in school shootings and over 2000 injured. Barack Obama tried four times to amend the second amendment permitting handgun guns but was unsuccessful. This flexible nature of the constitution is proven to be effective as it has protected Human Rights and prevented ongoing criminal activity which should be banished from modern society allowing a constantly modernised political system. Contrary to this view, a codified, rigid constitution in which legislation is difficult to change would demonstrate a clear procedure for the events that should take place in political situations. In some cases this would improve the efficiency of political operations. For example, following the Brexit referendum there was no codified set of rules for the events that should take place following ~~the~~ leaving the EU. This meant that Theresa May in 2017 was forced to construct Brexit ~~and~~ three Brexit deals which all failed, dominating the political system. This led to other political issues such as social issues being

ignored resulting in ~~the~~ decreased support from the government as a whole due to the lack of a rigid structure meaning human rights were less effectively maintained. This argument lacks credibility in regards to the first as although the flexible structure may enhance the complexity of issues, events can easily alter legislation and protect rights, reflecting society.

Another positive aspect of the uncodified constitution is that it protects parliamentary sovereignty. This is essential for maintaining democracy and the decisions clearly lie in the hands of the PM who are able to conduct the wishes of the people. It also concentrates the power in a central government creating a unitary constitution so that political decisions are easily able to be passed avoiding conflict and restrictions of a written constitution. For example, following the Brexit referendum, Gina Miller put forward the Miller 1 case in which she argued that ~~the PM had~~ ultra vires - 'beyond the powers' - of parliamentary sovereignty and royal prerogative powers had taken place and that ~~her~~ the action was unlawful. The Supreme Court ruled that it was within the powers granted. This reaffirmed parliamentary sovereignty and allowed the will of the people, with 55% in favour in the referendum, to be exercised and

ensuring Brexit took place enhancing democracy and Parliament was able to fulfil the wishes of the electorate. & juxtaposing this, a codified constitution would give the judges more power as they could refer to ~~various~~ elements in the constitution in cases. They would limit the power of parliament and ensure representation of all in the constitution. & Currently, the Supreme Court are limited to the extent that they can protect democracy as they cannot enforce recommendations of the PM. For a majority in government has allowed parliament to pass controversial bills. For example, the passing of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, led by Melia Brannen has allowed for the removal of immigrants to Rwanda. Some have argued that this is encroaching upon civil liberties of people in the UK but the courts are limited to the extent to which they can scrutinise the actions of parliament. Although this argument is convincing, it should be effective that the ultimate power remains in the control of the elected body, representative of the electorate. Therefore, Parliamentary sovereignty, established by the uncodified constitution is a key principle that must be upheld.

Another benefit of the uncodified constitution is that there is no immediate desire for one. Typically, codified constitutions are implemented following a major historical event or conflict, as occurred in the US following the civil war. This has not occurred in the UK and

indicating something which would be extremely expensive when it could be deemed unnecessary is not convincing. For example, during Covid-19 the uncodified constitution was extremely efficient, permitting the tier system to be implemented allowing the protection of citizens. In Greater Manchester, as numbers of cases rose, Johnson was able to install tier three restrictions meaning shops were forced to shut, preventing the spread of disease. This is contrary to America in which restrictions were difficult to implement due to the constitution and 1.6 million people died of covid-19. In this regard, a codified constitution would be considered unnecessary. Contrasting, it could be argued that the UK is in need of a constitution as power becomes increasingly devolved from the central body of Westminster. A codified constitution, within the quasi-federal nation, would clearly illustrate the powers in which each body has, diminishing conflict and ambiguity. They would ensure the devolved powers were upheld and not abused by the authority of Westminster. For example, the SNP, who dominate in Scotland with 59 out of 72 seats, ~~tried~~ passed the Gender Recognition Act 2023 which would have allowed transgender individuals to self-identify themselves, protecting minority individuals within society. Westminster vetoed this legislation as ultimately ~~the~~ power is held there meaning that

the power of the Scottish government was undermined. This meant that highlighted the lacking clarity of the constitution as Scotland were not able to pass legislation to benefit their citizens that they previously believed they were able to. Although a clear political system is important, power has only been devolved and not transferred to such bodies and their interests should not be prioritized. There is no apparent need for such expensive reform at this time.

Overall, an ~~un~~ uncodified constitution is most suitable to the political situation in the UK. The principles and foundations of its ~~just~~ flexible and unitary nature uphold democracy and ensure parliament is sovereign limiting the power of the unelected supreme court judges. In the ~~future~~ Rules and procedures are still maintained in the UK through a variety of resources such as the treaty of the bill of rights, protecting human rights. This shows that at this time a written constitution is not necessary as the stability of the UK is maintained but in the future, if an internal political conflict occurs, or if friction between devolved bodies increases, a codified constitution may become necessary.

(Total for Question 4 = 30 marks)

Examiner Comment

This is a very strong and detailed Level 5 answer. It clearly pairs up the arguments from the opposing views on this question to create a real sense of debate throughout the answer. The debates are illustrated through an effective selection of evidence, including some very contemporary examples. This helps to build effective analysis and the essay clearly argues throughout to a clear conclusion. By the time the conclusion is reached, there is no doubt which view the candidate has been arguing towards. There are clear synoptic links to democracy, referenda, rights, and political parties.

Question 4(b)

This answer was the less popular of the two and candidates adopted a wide range of different approaches to the answer. There was more difficulty in candidates meeting the wording – “refer to one post-1997 Prime Minister and one pre-1997 Prime Minister”. It was important for candidates to note and follow this instruction and the use of a wide range of evidence really helped to develop more analytical answers.

Generally, candidates were able to include effective synoptic links back in particular to elections and political parties from Component 1 (synoptic being part of A01).

Timing was all important here; candidates needed to ensure that they gave themselves adequate time to really do justice to the longer essay format.

Structure was also crucial here. The most effective structure started with a short but clear introduction that detailed the nature of the debate, defined the ways in which the House of Commons aims to exert significant control over the Prime Minister. Next paragraphs were built using an effective pairing of argument – for and against significant control with clear analysis (AO2) – to build mini conclusions (AO3) throughout the answer. These mini conclusions offered steppingstone judgements that took the answer to the conclusion (AO3). The most effective conclusions were the ones that the reader could write for themselves in their own mind from reading the main body of the essay and found it matched the actual conclusion on paper.

Stronger answers used themes to create debate like size of majority, votes of no confidence, committees and PMQs exemplifying them with different PMs. This allowed a sense of argument to appear and allowed candidates to build evaluation.

There were some issues here with candidates struggling to focus on the Commons and the PM, with the power of cabinet vs the PM, the Lords vs the PM and the Courts vs the PM all making appearances in a range of answers. Weaker answers tended to stray from the question, or just try to explain the answer by giving narratives about different PMs.

There was still a tendency to write all the arguments for then all the arguments against more like a list than a real debate, sometimes making it harder to really develop analysis (AO2) and evaluation (AO3).

Chosen question number: Question 4(a) Question 4(b)

The House of Commons exerts power over the Prime Minister with the use of these factors: Size of the majority, the loyalty of backbenchers, and Committees. For the Commons to be more effective, they require a minority / coalition government, undisciplined backbenchers, and Committee work (such as in the Liaison Committee) to be effective in order to challenge the PM.

Examiner's Comment

This introduction sets up the debate by defining the key factors that will be used to analyse the questions and lays out a clear direction of travel. It is short and to the point.

For the size of the majority, the Prime Minister will hold the upper hand in a large majority government, with this being shown by the governments of Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher and Boris Johnson, who all only suffered a few defeats in the Commons in their entire times as PM. This was because due to it being large majorities, the party whips could be used to easily pass legislation in the Commons without any opposition. This did not apply in the governments of Theresa May, who suffered many defeats in the Commons due to her being a minority government (with the most major defeat being a 257 vote loss on a Brexit Bill). Another good example of Parliament's effectiveness at exerting control over the PM is the vote of no confidence against Jim Callaghan, who would lose

this confidence vote by a very small minority. This means that when there is a small majority, parliament can exert more power as then a Bill is more likely to be blocked by the opposition. Despite this though, coalition governments are different, with the Cameron - Clegg coalition in 2010 suffering less than 20 defeats, however this was likely due to this coalition creating a decently sized majority.

The Loyalty of Backbenchers is a key element to allowing the Prime Minister more power over parliament, as under Thatcher, she would not see any backbench protests to vote against her, only going out due to advice from Cabinet. This is good for the PM, as backbenchers are bound to their party through manifestos and through ideology, meaning they are all likely to vote united on Bills. This however has not been the case as of late, as there has been a rise in WhatsApp scheming against the PM, with groups of backbenchers (such as the ERG) voting against May's Brexit Deal Bill in 2017, and another example of backbenchers showing power over the PM is when 63 ministers would resign over Johnson's handling of the Chris Pincher scandal (aka Partygate), showing that despite the party whips forcing MPs to vote with the party, this has recently not been the case as of the 2015 election, where

Cameron is the last PM as of late to not have a major backbench plot against him. Loyalty of Backbenchers is key to any Prime Minister, as ~~being~~ ^{without} any MP support, the PM cannot pass through legislation. This means that if the backbenchers become unruly, then parliament holds more power to be able to effectively exert control over the PM.

Finally, the PM has to rely on the control of Committees in order to not allow parliament to exert control over the PM, with the PM holding the power to allocate times in the timetable to these committees, along with holding a majority in all committees (meaning that whips can sometimes be used to ensure that MPs in the committee still vote with the party) — example of the PM utilising the timetable being the Illegal Migration Bill, where the PM gave them 12 hours to scrutinise the Bill, meaning it could be rushed through the Commons. Prime Ministers can also ignore committee amendments, ~~despite~~ ^{despite} ~~with~~ meaning that despite the scrutiny, the PM can override these decisions in the Commons. Despite the PM having power over the timetable, as of 2010, backbenchers have been allowed to select committee members and the Chair, meaning that they are more likely to be MPs who have expertise in the field, and also

ones that may be more independent than the traditional MP. Examples of where committees have been effective is more modernly, where in Liaison Committees they have grilled Rishi Sunak over his finances, along with doing the same to Johnson over his COVID PPE scandal. Johnson would however show power over this committee too, choosing not to attend 5 times due to different issues. Despite the PM holding power over the timetable, committees allow for the HC to exert control over the PM by allowing for them to point out flaws in Government Bills, as they tend to be very poor at drafting them.

Overall, it depends on these factors for the House of Commons to hold control over the PM, as a PM with a minority and with unloyal backbenchers (like a May) has proven that parliament can have a lot of power if they have the correct conditions, however in the future, it is likely that the PM will continue to exert power over the Commons, as the 2025 election sees Starmer predicted to win a ~~very~~ large majority.

Examiner Comment

This is a Level 5 answer that clearly engages with the question. It uses a range of different PMs, including both post and pre 1997 PMs. There is an attempt to really use the factors to bring structure to the debate, create analysis and reach substantiated conclusions. The response also has a very strong, clear conclusion that finishes with a prediction on how this question will be resolved in the near term. There is clear synoptic links here back to political parties from Component 1.

Indicate which question you are answering by marking a cross in the box ☒. If you change your mind, put a line through the box ☒ and then indicate your new question with a cross ☒.

Chosen question number: Question 4(a) ☐ Question 4(b) ☒

The House of Commons parliamenting assembly, theoretically makes it the most powerful democratic body in the UK. However with the rise of presidential leaders symptomatic of the increasing influence of social media, parliament has struggled against the 'tyranny of the majority'; large governments with huge majorities like Blair's 1997 New Labour and Johnson's 2019 Conservatives dominate parliament, with the Commons struggling to assert significant control.

The epitome of an 'elective dictatorship' in recent years was Boris Johnson's 2019 Conservative government, following his crushing election victory over Corbyn's Labour. ~~One way in which~~ This is the most significant way in which a party and government can dominate the House of Commons. For example after removing the whip from many 'rebelling MPs' such as Boris Johnson, Johnson's 'own rules' Brexit deal was easily passed through government, due to the massive size of the Conservative majority. This meant that through a combination of presidential leadership, in which Johnson gained a personal mandate to rule due to his ^{immense} ~~popularity~~ popularity, and aggressive use of the

party whip, removing most of the 'remainers' and protestors from the Conservative party, Mr Johnson managed the massive majority ^{and} to dominate parliament ~~and~~ ensuring his bills passed through uncontested. However a counterpoint to the effectiveness of the huge majority, is a weak/unpopular leader could lose control of ^{the} party and ~~lose~~ the house of commons could exert significant control of the Prime Minister by contesting bills. For example in 2022 Liz Truss lost 44 day premiership as prime minister was mired with parliamentary rejection and rebellions, so much so that a vote of no confidence loomed dangerously close, despite the enormous conservative majority. This shows that despite having a large majority in parliament, due to Truss weak leadership skills, the commons still managed to exert control over her. This demonstrates the most important aspect of the success of a political party: its leadership. ~~After~~ Labour's record-smashing 1997 election victory was primarily down to their handsome, media-savvy leader Tony Blair who even defied the status-quo by befriending Rupert Murdoch and ^{convincing} ~~convincing~~ the Sun, a traditionally right wing paper to support his New Labour (the Sun 'backed Blair'). Overall if a ^{government} party has a large majority, means that they are able to dominate parliament, however in order to do so

party unity is required, which is dependent on the parties leader especially in the populist, presidential environment of contemporary UK politics.

Due to the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, the House of Commons can exert significant control over a prime minister and their ^{party} ~~policy~~. The extent of parliament's control over a prime minister is the ability to call a 'vote of no confidence' in which the House of Commons can remove a government ~~and~~ and trigger a general election. This happened to James Callaghan's Labour in 1979, whose popularity had plummeted during the 'winter of discontent'. Indeed, right wing media ~~attacks~~ ^{attacks} also contributed to Callaghan's downfall, for example the Sun headline 'crisis? what crisis?' referring to Callaghan's ~~own~~ ^{own} seemingly out of touch comments after returning from a trip to the Caribbean. In 1979 the House of Commons triggered a ~~general~~ ^{vote of no confidence} in which Callaghan lost by one vote. Labour narrowly lost the following election to Thatcher's Conservatives. The ability to replace a government shows how parliament is able to exert significant control over the prime minister and the executive. However even if a ^{prime minister} ~~government~~ is extremely unpopular, they can still retain power due to the difficult criteria needed for a vote of no confidence, showing the

Limitations of the House of Commons power. After the controversial decision to invade Iraq, in 2003 Tony Blair popularly ~~planned~~^{sell} and so did his Labour party. Eventually Blair resigned, handing power to his number two, Gordon Brown. However he didn't resign due to ~~instructions~~^{instructions} from parliament but from outside criticism and pressure from the media and public. This shows that the public has the most agency to exert control over the Prime Minister, through protests, pressure groups and other forms of participation. Overall the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, exemplified by its ~~characteristic~~^{characteristic} ability of the House of Commons to call a vote of no confidence shows that parliament can exert significant control of the Prime Minister, although only in the ~~correct~~^{correct} circumstances, whereas the opinion of the public is the most significant control of a Prime Minister shown by Tony Blair's resignation.

In conclusion the majority of the time, a Prime Minister and their government can dominate the House of Commons with a strong leader who can command their majority and mandate of political acceptance. However, it must be noted that in a particular circumstance that drastically affects a leader's popularity the House of Commons does have the ability to

exert significant control over a Prime Minister and their government.

Examiner's Comment

This answer is a Level 5 answer that shows clear focus on the question. There is a good selection of evidence selected and deployed here including PMs from post and pre-1997. There are clear synoptic elements here to political parties, elections, and mandate.

Paper Summary

The following key points should be taken away from this exam series:

- Candidates and centres should be congratulated for the readiness for this exam series.
- The importance of exam timing.
- In Describe questions, the importance of focussing on the question and exemplifying the points made.
- On Explain questions, using the source as a springboard to answer the question.
- On Assess questions, comparing the sources, showing similarities and differences to build clear analysis and evaluation in answering the question. Conclusions must be reached.
- The need to plan essay answers so that responses have a clear structure that focusses on the demands of the question.
- The essay questions are on the big debates in politics, so answers should read like a debate where competing views are considered to reach a clear judgement on the question.
- The use of contemporary examples can really strengthen analysis in answers to the questions.
- The effective use of key terms from the specification helps lift the quality of responses.
- The importance of introductions and conclusions in essay questions.