GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS
AS/Advanced

JANUARY 2010

Statistical Information

This booklet contains summary details for each unit: number entered; maximum mark available; mean mark achieved; grade ranges. *N.B. These refer to 'raw marks' used in the initial assessment, rather than to the uniform marks reported when results are issued.*

Annual Statistical Report

The annual *Statistical Report* (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

General Certificate of Education

January 2010

Advanced Subsidiary

Principal Examiner: Alison Denton, B.A. (Hons); P.G.C.E., Croesyceiliog School, Cwmbran

Unit Statistics

The following statistics include all candidates entered for the unit, whether or not they 'cashed in' for an award. The attention of centres is drawn to the fact that the statistics listed should be viewed strictly within the context of this unit and that differences will undoubtedly occur between one year and the next and also between subjects in the same year.

Unit	Entry	Max Mark	Mean Mark
GP1	68	80	47.5

Grade Ranges

A	57
B	52
C	46
D	41
E	36

N.B. The marks given above are raw marks and not uniform marks.

GP1 : People, Politics and Participation.

General:

All four questions on the paper proved accessible to candidates, although fewer candidates attempted Q.2 and Q.3. Q.1 was attempted by the vast majority of candidates.

No candidates disobeyed the rubric by attempting more than two questions, and very few candidates failed to answer all parts of the two questions they chose.

Part (a) answers were generally well done with the majority of candidates usually gaining 3 or 4 marks usually. However, answers typically lacked contextual examples, or where they had this they lacked development of the term itself. Therefore, 5 mark responses were rare.

Part (b) answers tended towards narrative of the topic generally, or a listing of reasons with some candidates listing up to 7 or 8 reasons or factors in a description. However, the focus of the question is 'explain', and candidates need to develop and support an explanation appropriate to the question, with a range of reasons (typically 3 or 4) to score well. Some candidates write answers of several pages in length which are unfocused and descriptive and do not score highly. A succinct and focused answer with relevant support will score higher marks. Many candidates are making too little use of the extract to help them in this part.

Part (c) answers displayed an impressive range of knowledge but fewer than expected candidates were able to deploy this to answer the specific question set in an organised and convincing way. A substantial number of answers were of the 'stream of consciousness' variety, with little attempt to organise an argument even into 'for' and 'against' very clearly, and in some cases lacking paragraphing. This lack of clarity cost candidates marks for AO3. Most candidates are aware of the need for a conclusion but a high proportion of these are weak and do not analyse or evaluate the set question. Where examiners are struggling to discern the relevance of the candidate's response to the question on the paper, marks for AO2 will tend to be low. Candidates need to build up an argument, support their points, and consider differing viewpoints – a counter-argument, or other factors. At level 3 they will need to focus consistently on the question asked rather than the topic in general; provide evidence of the assertions they make; and provide an evaluative/analytical answer to the question set which demonstrates range/depth of understanding.

The generic mark scheme is clear about what kind of responses will attract top level marks for questions, and teachers and candidates are reminded about the need to balance knowledge acquisition with skills development, appropriate to the demands of the question.

Part (a) questions focus on description, AO1 only.

Part (b) questions use the trigger word 'explain', and an argument or analysis is not expected for this question. The skills marks (AO2) are for the quality of explanation.

Part (c) questions use a variety of trigger words such as 'discuss', 'analyse', evaluate'. There is a requirement in this question for candidates to construct an argument around the question posed; to discuss a variety of viewpoints (i.e. the one in the question and a counter-argument or other factors; and to come to a conclusion on the question set to be awarded the marks for AO2. Additionally, AO3 marks are awarded for this question and candidates need to structure clearly an answer, using appropriate political vocabulary in order to access these marks. More guidance can be found in the Teachers' Guide.

Examples from the government and politics of Wales are featuring more in candidates' answers in this unit than before, and this is a welcome development.

Q.1. (a) The term 'voter turnout' was well-understood by the majority of candidates.

(b) Answers identified a wide range of reasons for low turnout, ranging from general apathy to a conscious choice at different types of elections. Some candidates failed to pick up on the pointers in the extract about easier ways to vote, and the absence of candidates with specific policies that appeal.

(c) Most candidates were able to identify a good range of other factors that influence voting behaviour today. The descriptions of these were often good but exactly how, and to what extent, they affect voting behaviour was often more sketchy. Partisan identification was dealt with effectively by only a small number of candidates, with many dismissing it as irrelevant in a couple of lines without developing any argument. Some candidates were able to relate partisan identification to present-day voting trends, as opposed to the 1950s and 1960s only, and were able to argue convincingly for its decline and yet also for some relevance still in parts of the country.

Q.2 (a) Most of the small number of candidates who attempted this question were able to describe STV, albeit in fairly general terms. Many knew that 'a formula' is involved but few knew what it was.

(b) This question was done very well with most candidates able to identify and explain a range of reasons well. A small number of candidates concentrated on why FPTP is unfair, which was not the focus of the question.

(c) A significant number of candidates unloaded class notes on whether referendums are good or bad for democracy in answer to this question. Whilst such answers deal with the topic, there needs to be a sharper focus on the actual question set to attract top level marks.

Q.3 (a) Most candidates who attempted this question were a little unclear about a manifesto with many saying that it is a promise to do things when in power. Candidates struggled to give an example of a manifesto pledge for instance.

(b) Some candidates described a range of current Conservative party policies but were less secure on explanation of how they differed from pre-1997, or why they have changed.

(c) This question was generally done well in terms of identifying reasons why parties are significant, and some reasons why they are not. The development and support of these points with evidence was less convincing, and most candidates did not offer an overall conclusion about the significance of parties in British politics today.

Q.4 (a) Most answers to this part were well done, with candidates aware of different types of lobbying – direct and indirect, personal and through the use of consultants etc.

(b) Again, this was generally well done, with a range of reasons identified and explained. A minority of candidates drifted into discussion of why the government does not listen to protest groups using extreme methods, which was not the focus of the question

(c) There were some good answers to this question, but disappointingly a large number of candidates produced generalised answers to a different question, such as whether pressure groups are good or bad for democracy. Some candidates were able to focus, as required by the question, on outcomes, but mainly the answers centred around pressure group impact on policy. The impacts of protest movements were under-explored and very few candidates engaged with how far groups and movements shape society's values.

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Unit Statistics

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Unit	Entry	Max Mark	Mean Mark
GP2	31	80	43.6

Grade Ranges

A	59
B	53
C	47
D	42
E	37

N.B. The marks given above are raw marks and not uniform marks.

GP2 : Governing Modern Wales

General:

The first three questions on the paper were the most popular for candidates. Most candidates answered Q.1, and then opted for either Q.2 or Q.3 in roughly equal numbers. Very few candidates answered Q.4.

The overall standard of answers was lower than for GP1, and this may be because of the profile of the entry, with few of the candidates for GP2 sitting this unit for the first time. Few candidates disobeyed the rubric by attempting more than two questions, and few candidates failed to answer all parts of the two questions they chose.

In part (a) some answers were well done, but typically answers lacked contextual examples, or where they had this they lacked development of the term itself; and 4 and 5 mark responses were rare.

Part (b) answers tended towards narrative of the topic generally, or a listing of reasons with some candidates listing up to 7 or 8 reasons or factors in a description. However, the focus of the question is 'explain', and candidates need to develop and support an explanation, appropriate to the question, with a range of reasons (typically 3 or 4) to score well. Some candidates write answers of several pages in length which are unfocused and descriptive and do not score highly. A succinct and focused answer with relevant support will score higher marks. Many candidates are making too little use of the extract to help them in this part.

Part (c) answers displayed some relevant knowledge but fewer candidates than on GP1 were able to deploy this to answer the specific question set in an organised and convincing way. A substantial number of answers were brief and superficial, not really addressing the demands of the question either in terms of focus on the question set or depth/range of arguments and examples presented. Some candidates struggled with organisation. Candidates need to build up an argument, support their points, and consider differing viewpoints – a counter-argument or other factors. At level 3 candidates need to focus consistently on the question asked rather than the topic in general; provide evidence of the assertions they make; and provide an evaluative/analytical answer to the question set which demonstrates range/depth of understanding.

The generic mark scheme is clear about what kind of responses will attract top level marks for all part questions, and teachers and candidates are reminded about the need to balance knowledge acquisition with skills development, appropriate to the demands of the question.

Part (a) questions focus on description, AO1 only.

Part (b) questions use the trigger word 'explain', and an argument or analysis is not expected for this question. The skills marks (AO2) are for the quality of explanation.

Part (c) questions use a variety of trigger words such as 'discuss', 'analyse', evaluate'. There is a requirement in this question for candidates to construct an argument around the question posed; to discuss a variety of viewpoints (i.e. the one in the question and a counter-argument or other factors); and to come to a conclusion on the question set to be awarded the marks for AO2. Additionally, AO3 marks are awarded for this question and candidates need to structure clearly an answer, using appropriate political vocabulary in order to access these marks. More guidance can be found in the Teachers' Guide.

The processes and institutions in Wales are becoming better known by candidates and there was evidence of this in responses to question 2 in particular this series.

Q.1.   (a)   Most answers to this question were good, with sufficient development to achieve 3 or 4 marks. However, a number of candidates asserted the role of the judiciary in the UK as if it were the same as the judiciary in the USA.

        (b)   Most candidates were able to explain a number of ways the HRA has impacted on British politics with relevant examples. One or two candidates challenged its impact, convincingly explaining that it has affected the outcome of few cases.

        (c)   Most candidates were able to construct a general response to this issue. Clarity regarding differing viewpoints was often lacking, with answers tending towards description and narration rather than analysis. A few candidates produced convincing arguments, showing good awareness of recent judicial reviews of government actions and analysing the extent of judicial activism and restraint in the UK. There was some awareness of the activity of the UK Supreme Court in relation to this question

Q.2   (a)   Most candidates knew exactly what an LCO is, and scored well.

        (b)   Some candidates focused on the process at Westminster in answer to this question and did not score well. Most candidates were able to explain the points in the extract and add problems with the length of time the process takes, but few were aware in any detail of the problems associated with the roles of the Secretary of State for Wales and the Welsh Affairs Committee for instance, and very few developed the broader view about the lack of full law-making powers in Wales. Examples were lacking.

        (c)   Answers to this question were generally good, with most candidates exploring both political and social representation, though the opportunities for AMs to represent their constituents politically were not explored at length. Most candidates discussed how MPs and AMs represent their constituents but fewer were able to offer a judgement about whether they do this well.

Q.3   (a)   Most answers to this question scored 2 or 3 marks. Candidates were unsure about the status and role of special advisers and could not name any. Some candidates confused them with members of the Cabinet.

        (b)   Most candidates had a good understanding of how the Cabinet has declined in importance and produced knowledgeable narratives. Fewer were able to craft an explanation for this trend though and the prompts in the extract were not used effectively by many candidates.

        (c)   This was a weak answer generally, with candidates producing responses that were unfocused on the exact question set, but instead dealt more with whether the Prime Minister is too powerful or not. Where answers were more focused, they tended to support the view in the question mainly without considering a counter-argument very effectively. Hardly any candidates addressed the requirement in the question to look at whether a British PM could ever be presidential. Some answers were straight comparisons between the UK Prime Minister and the US President, which was not required by the question

Q.4.   No answers of worth were produced to this question.

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Unit	Entry	Max Mark	Mean Mark
GP4a	65	80	44.4

Grade Ranges

A	56
B	51
C	46
D	41
E	36

N.B. The marks given above are raw marks and not uniform marks.

GP4a : The Government of the USA

General:

GP4a is a 50% module for the A2 qualification. The percentage weighting for the three Assessment Objectives is different at A2 compared to AS, reflecting the nature of A2 with its greater expectation and stretch and challenge for candidates. There is a greater emphasis on skills at A2 compared to AS. Time will need to be devoted to developing these skills in the course of teaching the A2. This may be easier to do if candidates are prepared for 3 of the 4 topics in each A2 unit, rather than all 4.

For GP4a the range and quality of knowledge that candidates had about the government of the USA was very impressive, with the majority of candidates producing lengthy and detailed answers to all parts of their chosen questions, and demonstrating excellent contextual awareness of US government today. Nevertheless, the quality of explanations and analysis appropriate to the question set were less impressive. Candidates struggled to deploy effectively the very detailed knowledge they had, with many being unable to differentiate between the evidence itself and a point of argument it could support. Part (b) answers, in particular, tended to become lists of points without adequate development and exemplification.

Crafting an effective, convincing argument and counter-argument to a specific question; selecting and deploying relevant evidence in support and analysing and evaluating are all high order skills which need to be developed systematically at A2.

Very few candidates failed to complete the required parts of their chosen questions. However, some candidates spent too long on their first question and were rushed in answering their second choice, with a consequent reduction in quality and in the mark they achieved. Adequate preparation in advance of the examination, effective planning during it and sensible time-management are essential ingredients of success.

In part (a) marks earned for AO1 were generally higher than for AO2 as candidates tended to identify and describe a list of reasons or factors in a narrative rather than establish an explanation relative to the question set. Some candidates produced valid lists of examples without explaining what point they were supporting.

In part (b) many candidates described and explained a series of points well, but struggled to craft these into a coherent argument that addressed the question directly. Narratives of processes or institutions featured more highly than they should in this part. The construction of a sustained argument and counter-argument that engaged with the question directly in an analytical and structured way proved difficult for most candidates. Only a minority were able to offer anything more than a few sentences in the way of an evaluative conclusion. A significant number of candidates produced an answer that addressed only one viewpoint and was restricted to level 1 as a result (this was noticeable for Q.4 (b) in particular). There is a need for candidates to be succinct and focused in an examination, yet display range and depth of understanding; many candidates included sections in their responses that really earned few, if any, marks and the examination situation does not really allow for that. Those candidates that were able to craft a convincing discussion with sustained focus on the question; support it with relevant evidence; and analyse and evaluate the issues in a more mature way than at AS level were duly rewarded with top level marks.

Q.1 was very popular and a majority of candidates answered it. Additionally, most candidates chose Q.4, with smaller numbers opting either for Q.2 or Q.3, roughly in equal numbers.

Q.1 (a) This question was well done, with candidates identifying a number of ways such as federalism, the un-enumerated rights of the states, their role in amending the constitution, the role of the Senate etc. There was a lot of description of these issues, but fewer candidates were able to explain convincingly how these ensure the rights of the states. Some candidates concentrated on the rights of citizens which was outside the demands of the question

(b) The US Constitution was known in some detail by the majority of candidates. However, discussion tended to centre around the checks and balances and whether they are a strength or a weakness of the Constitution, in a fairly basic way. Few candidates addressed the crux of the question – the extent to which the Constitution obstructs effective government. Some candidates convincingly argued the meaning of 'effective government' in the context of the US and stressed that the Constitution is meant to obstruct government to a degree, and that this may in fact make it more 'effective'. Few candidates explored the extent to which government is carried out effectively unrestrained by the Constitution through federal agencies etc. A few answers unfortunately were almost entirely historical narrative.

Q.2 (a) This question was answered well, with most candidates able to identify and describe ways in which the Senate can be seen as more important than the House, e.g. its greater powers of confirmation, impeachment etc, longer terms of office. Most were also able to explain how and why these add to the status of the Senate.

(b) This question was poorly done on the whole with candidates writing generally about all the functions of Congress, or over-concentrating on the checks and balances or legislative oversight. The specific oversight responsibilities of Congressional committees with regard to oversight of departments, executive agencies and programmes were under-explored, as were Congressional hearings and investigations, and relations with the executive branch. Many answers described some of the processes but failed to evaluate the effectiveness of Congress in this function as requested by the question.

Q.3 (a) This question was well done with the few candidates who attempted it able to identify and explain a range of ways in which EXOP is important from direct everyday access to the President, to its advisory capacity. Some candidates pointed out the varying use of it made by different presidents.

(b) The quality of relevant discussion of the issues in answer to this question was high. Candidates showed contextual awareness including notions of an imperial presidency; the greater impact a president can often have on foreign affairs; the difficulties facing Obama in healthcare reform etc; and most candidates produced convincing responses which dealt with both sides of the argument and evaluated the question set.

Q.4 (a) A high proportion of answers to this question tended to narrate the process of Supreme Court nomination, or listed various nomination battles without developing why they were controversial. Candidates focused on the controversies surrounding the perceived political convictions of some nominees but did not effectively link this to the work that the Supreme Court does or the length of tenure of justices.

(b)   Answers to this question were disappointing in their lack of range. Many candidates produced one-sided responses which only addressed the argument that Supreme Court justices are politicians and did not consider a counter-argument, such as the idea of judicial independence, lack of enforcement, or examples of the way some justices have voted against their personal political beliefs and, in some cases in favour, instead, of the greater good of the nation. There was an over-concentration on the nomination and confirmation process. The nature and impact of Supreme Court rulings as political activities with political results was under-developed, though some answers were very good on this aspect and analysed a range of landmark cases including Bush vs Gore. Some candidates also explored the varying judicial activism of different courts under different Chief Justices to good effect.