

# ResultsPlus

## Examiners' Report January 2010

### GCE Government and Politics 6GP02

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## General comments

On the whole, candidates managed their responses well. Less candidates than in the past ran out of time and it was generally true that candidates divided their time quite evenly between questions and parts of questions.

That said, it was clear that candidates often had problems in having enough evidence and factual material to fill out their responses to the extended essay questions, 3 and 4. To some extent the extra knowledge and understanding required for these questions (carrying half the total marks) should consist of political context and examples, ie a knowledge demonstrated of contemporary political issues and events. Thus, for example, essay questions might include the following:

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Constitution</b>   | Examples of party positions on constitutional change, examples of problems related to the uncodified constitution, examples of the importance and use of conventions.   |
| <b>PM and Cabinet</b> | Material on the experience and record of recent prime ministers, 'expert' views on prime ministerial government such as Foley or Hennessy, examples of issues where prime ministerial power has been enhanced or limited in recent times.   |
| <b>Judiciary</b>      | Clearly recent politically important cases which illustrate the role and importance of judicial action, examples of when there have been disputes between politicians and judges, examples of the work of the new Supreme Court, knowledge of recent appointments to senior judicial positions. |
| <b>Parliament</b>     | Examples of important debates and votes in parliament, examples where Parliament has thwarted government action, notably the Lords, examples of parliamentary criticism of the Executive, examples demonstrating the weakness of both or either House.  |

It was also true that candidates were using excessive amounts of historical knowledge and exemplar material which is either out of date or too long ago to be authoritative.

For example, the Griffiths analysis of the social bias in the judiciary is now outdated, much material on the Thatcher years is of marginal relevance today. That said, key political developments from the recent past, such as the Factortame case or Belmarsh or even Thatcher's removal from office in 1990 remain important.

In general, candidates should use material which is as recent as possible and use older exemplars when there is little or nothing to use which is more recent. References to Harold Wilson may be useful in tracing prime ministerial domination to that era, but a Crossman-inspired analysis of the Wilson years is out of date.

Candidates typically achieved reasonably good marks for analysis and evaluation from the longer essay questions, but could only access a maximum of 12 marks for this assessment objective.

There was also encouraging use of appropriate vocabulary, even though much had been lifted from the stimulus. Thus, terms such as legitimacy, accountability, authority, representation and sovereignty abounded. While some of these may have been referred to in the stimulus, it was good to see candidates able to use them in the appropriate context.

Longer responses to (c) part and longer essay questions were generally well structured, with some useful introductions and conclusions. However, 'token' introductions or conclusions receive very little credit under assessment objective 3. Guidance on these is given in the individual question reports below.

**(a) part Stimulus Questions**



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**Examiner Tip**

It is obviously important to identify the issues or facts referred to in the question, in this case measure to maintain the independence and neutrality of the judiciary. However, a brief explanation needs to be given. Here is an example of a response to question 1(a):

*"The judiciary has the privilege of security of tenure; its salary is totally independent. Government, nor Parliament can have any say in their wage, therefore allowing judges to act as they wish without the fear of getting a lower salary, or even be dismissed".*



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**Examiner Comments**

The example above not only identifies the judges' salaries issue as a way of safeguarding independence for one mark, it also explains how it works, for a second mark.

**(b) part Stimulus Questions**



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**Examiner Tip**

These questions require a response based on the stimulus plus a demonstration of the candidate's own knowledge. It is useful if the candidate indicates clearly what is from the stimulus and what they are adding from their own knowledge. It is not absolutely necessary to do this, but it can help to clarify the answer. Here is an example of such a method from question 2 (b):

*"The stimulus refers to the fact that an elected second chamber would make the second chamber more accountable and so help it to carry out its role as a revising chamber and in bringing government to account....."*

*In addition to the comments in the stimulus, if a second chamber was elected by proportional representation it would be a more accurate representation of the parties and would prevent the government having a parliamentary majority".*



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**Examiner Comments**

This is very clear. It is especially significant that the second point raised, as well as being an excellent one, is obviously from the candidate's own knowledge as indicated by the phrase "in addition to the comments in the stimulus".

*(c) part questions and extended essays*



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**Examiner Tip**

A strong introduction is very important. The introduction can define terms (eg what is a codified constitution), it can explain what the question is asking and it can demonstrate how the candidate is going to approach the question. Here is an excellent example of an introduction to question 4:

*“The question of how much power the Prime Minister dominates the political system is one that has been highlighted by the premierships of Blair and Thatcher, two politicians who were notoriously domineering. However to state that there has evolved an intrinsic domineering of the UK’s political system by the prime Minister would be untrue, as can be seen when the tenures of Brown and Major are studied. The amount to which a Prime Minister is able to dominate the political landscape depends greatly on the extent and effectiveness of how they utilise their powers”.*



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**Examiner Comments**

This introduction achieves a number of objectives. Firstly, it demonstrates that the candidate is showing that the answer will be balanced, with two ‘strong’ and two ‘weaker’ prime ministers referred to. It indicates that the candidate intends to show how ‘domineering’ occurs, but will add reservations to this. It also presages the analysis which suggests that individual prime ministers may utilise their powers differently. To some extent, also, it is a ‘mini essay plan’. Incidentally, it further indicates that the candidate is going to use a good deal of recent political context (see general comments above).

## Reports on Individual Questions

### Q1 (a)

This question was generally handled quite well though a large number of candidates clearly still do not understand the difference between independence and neutrality. Fortunately, the distinction was not an essential element to a good answer. Most candidates achieved three marks for identifying the relevant measures, but additional marks for explanations of these were achieved by a smaller number, albeit still a majority. A prime example was the issue of payments of salaries from the Consolidated Fund. It was necessary to explain how this related to independence (see example under tips above).

A good example of a candidate who started well by explaining briefly the difference between independence and neutrality is shown below:

*"In order to assess whether they [the judges] are neutral and independent it is necessary to understand their meaning. Independence means, in this context, their freedom from government interference. Neutrality means being both socially and politically free from bias".*

Not only does the candidate understand the difference, but is now in a position to answer the question more precisely.

### Q1 (b)

Here again many candidates could identify the reforms referred to in the passage, but did not explain them clearly enough. There is, for example, a great deal of confusion over the changed position of the Lord Chancellor.

This needs to be clarified. The Supreme Court was usually mentioned, but candidates did not engage with why this measure was designed to increase independence other than to suggest it was different from the House of Lords. Its separation from Parliament is largely symbolic as the powers of the senior judges have not changed, but it does demonstrate a willingness to accept that the highest court of appeal in the UK needs to be seen to be independent. There was also too much confusion over the role and nature of the Appointments Commission, though knowledge of its significance was common.

### Q1 (c)

Most candidates successfully expressed ideas about the significance of the social make up of the judiciary, but were less sure about its significance, ie does it matter that most came from upper middle class backgrounds and are male. Evidence suggests the old Griffiths analysis no longer applies as judges are often accused by politicians of being anything but 'conservative' in outlook.

The issue of 'male domination' is less clear. Candidates often correctly referred back to measures making the judiciary more independent, but only a strong minority could quote recent examples of where judges had demonstrated their independence, notably Lords Woolf and Hoffman. Similarly, only stronger candidates could quote significant cases. Those who could were usually in level 3.

Encouragingly, most candidates attempted to be evaluative, but too often they lacked evidence to support their conclusions.

An excellent example of evaluation is contained in this passage by a strong candidate. Without demonstrating any detailed knowledge, the answer nevertheless shows good analytical skill:

*“At the moment it is only a theoretical danger that the prime minister will use his political knowledge to influence how judges behave, it is still a viable concern. The final way in which UK judges are kept independent from the executive is the knowledge that all senior judges would have enjoyed a lengthy career as a courtroom lawyer, thus they would be familiar with the rules and procedures in place to prevent external influence on their decisions”.*

The second point is especially valid and well expressed.

### Q2 (a)

This question was generally well done. The two main points of confusion which arose were, firstly, that many candidates saw increased accountability as a change rather than the consequence of a change (not a serious error); and secondly, too many referred to the lack of change of the House of Lords' powers which, by definition, is not a change.

Few spotted that there was a proposal for a smaller House, which was significant, but apparently all understood the meaning and significance of introducing a complete or partial elected element.

### Q2 (b)

There were many solid answers but relatively few which reached the higher marks in level 3. The most common error was to treat the question as evaluative, thus adding the arguments against an elected second chamber.

Positive marking meant that scores were not reduced for such mistakes, but equally, such material received no credit.

It was disappointing that under the heading of 'own knowledge' very few addressed the question of what electoral system would be used. Many simply assumed it would be FPTP and left it at that. Better candidates only pointed out that election by PR might help to break the duopoly of the main parties in the second house. They also tended to refer to its superior representative nature under PR. Many candidates did well in addressing the issue of a hybrid house, partly elected, partly appointed, suggesting it might represent the best of two worlds.

### Q2 (c)

As in question 2 (b) rather too many candidates treated this as a balanced argument, citing pros and cons of an appointed second chamber or elected second house. It was merely an analytical question on the arguments for retaining an appointed chamber.

Encouragingly, many pointed out the value of appointed peers and the fact that they would be more, not less independent, potentially at least. Strong responses concentrated on this point, adding the caveat that it might not be independent if patronage were to run out of control. Tradition and other conservative arguments opposing reform were also successfully deployed. Here is an example of an excellent conclusion:

*“The case against an elected second chamber largely hinges upon the electoral system used. If PR were to be used the make up of the second chamber would be radically different from the Commons and the case against it would be weakened. If FPTP is used, on the other hand, the second house would be a mirror image of the first house and so would strengthen, not control executive power. We assume that there would be the same majority in both Houses. Therefore the case against an elected*

*second house is strong, especially if the issue of electoral reform is not addressed”.*



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Examiner Comments

This conclusion achieves two things. First, it identifies what is for the candidate the key issue, the method of election. This is excellent evaluation. And second, it also comes to a logical and meaningful end.

### Q3

A key issue here was the use of the word 'now' in the question. This meant that this was meant to be a contemporary question and it was hoped that candidates would address the question of why a codified constitution has risen on the political agenda recently.

Unfortunately, too many candidates ignored the word 'now' and so could not access the higher marks in level 3. Those few who understood that recent growing concerns over the status of rights, over prime ministerial dominance, the weakness of parliament, the increasing independence of the judiciary, devolution and EU developments have contributed to the current debate and did get the very highest marks.

Most candidates simply rehearsed the general arguments for and against a codified constitution without referring to the current context. This meant that many candidates could not reach above level 2 (though the very best discussions did achieve level 3). On the whole these were done well. This is probably largely due to the traditional nature of this question. This meant that contemporary material was at a special premium.

One notable example of contemporary support material was given by this extract from a candidate's work :

*“Furthermore, in concentrating power in the hands of the executive, the government of the day is able to re-shape the constitution in order to benefit them. For example, the BBC political correspondent, Nick Robinson, has speculated over David Cameron's plans to prevent trade unions funding the Labour Party altogether if he were to be elected prime minister, which would undoubtedly disadvantage the Labour Party dramatically”.*



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Examiner Comments

This is excellent evidence in support of an entrenched constitution and is fresh and contemporary.

One apparently small, but important issue which is often ignored by candidates is the speculation that a codified constitution might just as well *strengthen* the executive as well as possibly weaken it.

Most candidates take it for granted that a codified constitution would automatically curb executive power. We must also not necessarily assume that a codified constitution would be entrenched. Strong candidates can point out that codification would mean entrenchment *de facto* if not *de jure*.

## Q4

On the whole, this was the most impressively answered question on the paper. Like question 3, it has been seen before in a similar form, but as with question 3, it required good contemporary knowledge and context.

Many candidates who concentrated on the experience of Blair and Thatcher ignored the rich variety of material which has been provided by Brown's short but eventful premiership. Recent issues such as the credit crunch, climate change debates, Iraq and Afghanistan and the Lisbon Treaty have all thrown into focus the role of the prime minister, his strengths and weaknesses. Too many candidates chose to use only pre-Brown material.

An example of how the Brown experience could be used as evidence to demonstrate the prime minister is far from omnipotent is provided by this extract from an answer:

*"However, as demonstrated by the recent struggles of Gordon Brown, it could be argued that the prime minister does not dominate the political system in the UK to that great an extent. While the collapse of cabinet government is true to an extent, it is vital that the cabinet is united in order for the prime minister to dominate the political system. This can be seen by the fact that Gordon Brown was seriously threatened last year by various cabinet resignations.*

*Pensions Secretary James Purnell resigned, calling for Brown to step down as leader. John Hutton, Margaret Beckett and Jacqui Smith also resigned so it thought that only the backing of lord Mandelson saved brown from a leadership challenge".*



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Examiner Comments

This is up to date, relevant and excellent evidence to support one side of the argument. Notice too that the candidate refers back to the actual wording of the question, thus reinforcing the sense of relevance. This is good exam technique. A fact or two (such as the nature of Jacqui Smith's resignation) may be shaky, but there is enough here to convince us that the candidate is successfully analysing the position of prime minister Brown.

Some attempted a full analysis on the basis of Tony Blair alone. This approach clearly lost many marks under assessment objective 1.

This question required a firm conclusion and this report ends with an example of one to illustrate what such a conclusion can achieve:

*"In conclusion, it could be argued that the extent to which the prime minister dominates the political system within the UK is determined by who the prime minister is and the circumstances surrounding them at the time. They certainly have the ability to dominate, but they can also be easily removed".*



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Examiner Comments

Although this conclusion does not assert that the prime minister is dominant, nor does it suggest he is not, it remains firm because it reiterates the circumstances which determine whether an individual can dominate or otherwise.

## Statistics

### *Overall Subject Grade Boundaries*

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Overall subject grade boundaries	50	43	37	31	25
Uniform Mark	80	70	60	50	40



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