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# A-LEVEL POLITICS

7152/1 The Government and Politics of the UK  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

Overall, most students were able to access the entirety of the question paper. Section A questions were generally well answered by the majority. Many answers were well structured, with three clear paragraphs and supporting evidence. Time management issues tended to be related to students who chose to answer section A last and ran out of time towards the end.

Question 4 provided the widest range of responses with most students familiar with the debate regarding the issue of electoral reform. Not all were fully aware of the assessment criteria in terms of using the extract and provenance.

Questions 5 and 6 provided a range of responses and many students were comfortable with their subject knowledge, regardless of which option they selected,. Students had clearly been very well taught on these two particular topics. Question 5 was the more popular option.

Overall, those who scored well across the paper managed their time effectively and were well aware of the assessment objectives. There was clear evidence of some excellent teaching and learning across all topics. However, it is important for students to recognise that all three sections are almost equal in worth and that we suggest spending 40 minutes on each section.

## Question 1

Many students were able to identify three ways in which the cabinet can limit the PM, although this was the question that many seemed to find most challenging on section A. Less effective responses tended to only identify one limitation and often described how the PM cannot pass laws without the cabinet. A common error was also to describe how Parliament can limit the power of the PM, using the vote of no confidence or internal party votes of no confidence, without specifically focussing upon the cabinet. Many responses started with how cabinet resignation, or threats of resignation, can limit the PM. The most quoted examples were Howe and Lawson under Thatcher, Robin Cook under Blair and Johnson and Raab under May. Responses at a higher level recognised that cabinet often featured rivals for the post of PM, such as Brown under Blair and Johnson under May, thereby limiting the PM's powers of patronage. Such responses often developed how some ministers refuse to be reshuffled, with Jeremy Hunt being a common example used.

## Question 2

Most students were able to explain three ways in which minor parties affect the political agenda. Less effective responses were descriptive and some merely stated that minor parties serve on select committees or vote and debate in Parliament, without providing any examples or analysis. Coalition or confidence and supply arrangements were usually accurately explained, with examples cited from 2010 and 2017. Responses that scored more highly developed examples of how this had led to a number of reforms and concessions, such as the AV referendum 2011 and increased funding for Northern Ireland post 2017.

Many responses used the example of UKIP's performance in the European Parliament elections 2014 to compel Cameron to offer a referendum on EU membership. More effective responses referenced the 2019 EU election results and the impact of the 'spoiler effect.' Such answers often considered how minor parties could do well in local elections or elections to devolved assemblies, referencing the impact of the use of AMS in Scotland and Wales and STV in Northern Ireland.

### Question 3

This question elicited a wide range of responses with most students being able to explain three factors that can lead to certain pressure groups performing more successfully than others. It is also the question where some students displayed problems with timing. Less effective responses often provided one, or at most two, descriptive points that lacked examples of pressure groups as evidence. The insider and outsider typology was identified by many students, with the BMA's lobbying for a sugar tax on soft drinks and the AA's lobbying for more effective penalties for the use of mobile phones in cars most regularly used as examples.

Less effective responses often merely stated that factors such as membership and money guaranteed success, without providing examples, analysis and evidence of success. Higher level responses argued that obtaining the support of the public and also government support was linked to success, with the Snowdrop Campaign after Dunblane regularly referred to. Such responses often discussed the organisation and leadership of a group, with a common example used being the RMT Union successfully negotiating a pay rise during the London 2012 Olympics. A common error for less effective responses was to merely describe how celebrity endorsement can lead to success for a group, without providing evidence of success or relevant examples.

### Question 4

The extract question provided a very wide range of responses, with the most effective using the extract as a 'springboard' for analysing and evaluating the key arguments within it, providing an excellent and pertinent range of supporting evidence. It was obvious that many such students had spent time planning and structuring extract style questions in preparation for the exam, demonstrating the assessment objectives that are clearly stated within the specification. Less effective responses made little or no reference to the extract and tended to write generic answers about arguments for and against electoral reform. Such responses were descriptive, with some merely copying parts of the extract without much further development.

Some students seemed to be totally unaware of the need to comment on the provenance of the extract and / or analyse the perspectives within the extract. However, those who did this effectively commonly referenced the BBC as an impartial source, accepting that the BBC has a duty to inform and educate. There were responses that commented on alleged bias of the BBC, ranging from favouring the Conservative Party to a supposed liberal bias. More effective students often quoted Caroline Lucas and Steve Double, identifying why both have a 'vested interest' in change or the status quo. There were very few references to the perspectives of the Electoral Reform Society. Those that scored highly were able to conclude by taking a stance on which side of the debate they were most convinced by, based upon the arguments that they had chosen to develop.

### Question 5

This essay question was very well answered by many students and most responses were able to identify and develop a range of constitutional changes and set the post 1997 changes within the ideological context of the New Labour government. Devolution, House of Lords reform, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 were the most commonly discussed. Well informed students were also confidently able to evaluate more recent reforms, such as the impact of the Fixed Term Parliament 2011. Some questioned its effectiveness due to the 2017 election, although more effective responses did recognise the role of Parliament in terms of providing parliamentary approval for the election to be called. Less effective responses tended to describe

change, rather than analyse and evaluate the extent of the changes, with some of these answers also tending to struggle in terms of time management. Again, it is important to stress the need to allocate sufficient time to each section of the paper, given the almost equal weighting in terms of marks.

Responses in the higher levels challenged the ‘few significant’ part of the question, often by comparing the extent of reforms to the House of Lords in comparison to the ongoing changes regarding devolution. Such answers evaluated the importance of the 2016 Scotland Act and discussed the concept of the UK as a quasi-federal system in comparison to a unitary system.

Some students compared changes pre 1997 to those post 1997, although those in the lowest level allowed this to dominate their answer, writing descriptive narratives of constitutional milestones such as the Magna Carta.

### **Question 6**

This question elicited a wide range of responses, with the most effective recognising the impact of the fusion of powers upon the parliamentary system of government and how, within this system, the legislature sustains the executive. The most effective responses also evaluated the importance of circumstances, such as the size of the government’s majority and the quality of the opposition. They compared governments such as Labour in 1997 or the Conservatives in 1983 with the current government post 2017. This often led to analysis of the role of party discipline, the impact of the whipping system. Many used the failure of the government to get the EU withdrawal bill through the House of Commons as an example.

Most responses were able to identify a range of parliamentary opportunities where checks upon the executive occur, with the most commonly discussed being PMQs, select committees, debates and the role of the official opposition. The most effective responses recognised that the question was asking about Parliament, rather than just the House of Commons, and effectively discussed the important role played by the House of Lords. They analysed its increasing assertiveness, whilst also identifying the weaknesses of the chamber. Some compared it to the Senate in the USA. Answers in the higher levels also made synoptic links to the strengths of congressional committees in comparison to their UK counterparts. The most effective evaluated the increasing independence of UK select committees and the impact of the Wright Reforms.

Less effective responses tended to be very descriptive of the opportunities for scrutiny. Some of these answers struggled with the time management issues already identified.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.