

GCE Examiners' Report

Government and Politics

GCE

Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
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¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Executive Summary

There was a very pleasing level of performance this year in Government and Politics, especially at A-level. Candidates appeared to be increasingly confident at demonstrating their knowledge and integrating this with invigorated skills of interpreting and applying political knowledge, as well as analysing and evaluating issues linked to the questions set in the examination papers.

At AS, candidates were clearly able to demonstrate their knowledge across most of the questions. A notable exception to this was in Unit 1, Question 2 where it appeared that many candidates were unfamiliar with works of constitutional authority. Instead, a large number of candidates tried to subvert the question to encompass sources of the British constitution, but these could not be credited. Where candidates were aware of works of constitutional authority, their responses were sound and offered a range of appropriate examples. Interestingly, there were a handful of anomalies where candidates had focused on sources of the constitution for this question, but later referred to works of constitutional authority in subsequent questions, most notably in Question 7 on the rule of law. It was also noted for Section A that candidates – and this was perhaps reflected in their improved performance here – may have spent a little too much time on these questions and did so at the expense of subsequent higher-tariff questions. Given the improved performance we would caution against a sea change, but candidates could slightly temper their enthusiasm for this early section to enable them to enhance their responses to those valuable later questions.

Across both of the AS units, there was also evidence of improved performance in establishing and explaining connections. In Unit 1, one of the optional questions (Question 4, on the impact of devolution) was significantly more popular than the other (Question 3, on the impact of the civil service on the governance of the UK), whereas in Unit 2, take up on the two Section B questions was more equally distributed. Overall, candidate performance on these questions was also relatively equal, with the exception of the civil service question, which appears to have been more of a challenge to the candidates who attempted it. Nonetheless, performance here is on an upward trajectory, which is encouraging.

For A-level, there has been an improvement in responses to Section A questions this year. Knowledge in both Unit 3 and Unit 4 was good: it was applied well (to make connections (in AO2)) and utilised effectively as part of the candidates' analysis and evaluation (AO3). Indeed, there were some particular standouts, where the mean mark was exceptionally high. These included: Unit 3, Question 2 (conservatism's belief in authority) and Question 4 (socialism's division by capitalism); and Unit 4 Question 2 (the influence of social media on US elections), Question 3 (race, ethnicity and voting behaviour), and Question 4 (imperial presidency). In fact, during these early months of the second Trump presidency, the last of these questions was, it seems, quite the boon for the many candidates who attempted it.

Overall, performance across both the A-level units was heightened this summer, and it appears that the permeation of so much political discussion into everyday discourse is paying dividends for students of Government and Politics, for which they and their teachers are heartily congratulated.

Finally, an area of improvement that has been identified across AS and A-level is in relation to candidates' preparedness to develop their judgements. While some are still timid in expressing their viewpoint, consistently hedging their bets, increasing numbers of others – especially among those who had briefly planned their responses – appeared to feel more comfortable expressing a firm view, which was more effectively tied to the question, and which enabled many of them to access the top bands.

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UNIT 1 – GOVERNMENT IN WALES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Overview of the Unit

Unit 1 assesses all three assessment objectives. AO1 is assessed in all questions. AO2 is assessed in Section B, while AO3 is assessed in Section C.

The content and topic areas of this year's paper covered a wide range of the specification. There are two compulsory questions in Section A, a choice of one question from two in Section B, and two questions from three in Section C.

In this year's paper it became apparent that Question 2, on works of constitutional authority, was challenging for a significant number of students. This was in contrast to Question 1, where the responses on the role of peers were more detailed and correct. Teachers must ensure that all parts of the specification are taught in enough detail to enable candidates to write a response to Section A questions. There are many examples of effective Section A responses that achieve full marks that are only some six to eight lines in length.

There was encouraging evidence in Section B that candidates were improving in their ability to establish and explain connections and comparisons between aspects of the course. The two questions here focused on the impact of the civil service on how the UK is governed, and the impact of devolution on the UK. The question on devolution was the most popular choice, and candidates were able to explain and exemplify a range of effects regarding devolution with accuracy and precision. There was an improved performance at AO2, with students showing an increased confidence in their use of the extract. There were many candidates who persisted to offer unnecessary conclusions and introductions in their Section B answers.

Section C responses demonstrated that candidates were able to provide a developed and two-sided discussion. There was a range of relevant arguments, with good supporting examples to enrich the responses. It was pleasing to note that the question on the Welsh parliament was popular and that knowledge on this aspect of the course has improved from previous years.

As all questions were attempted, it suggested that candidates had experienced good coverage of the course, and the element of choice in Section B and C gave them the opportunity to choose their strongest areas of knowledge.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A questions are assessed against one single assessment objective (AO1). The questions in this section require candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a specific aspect of the syllabus. This year's paper asked the candidates to describe the role of peers in the UK parliament (Question 1) as well as describing works of constitutional authority as they relate to the British Constitution (Question 2).

The first question on the role of peers within the UK parliament was answered well by many candidates. Most candidates were able to identify a range of roles performed by peers and these roles were identified and exemplified with clarity and precision. The candidates that answered this question thoroughly were the ones that identified at least two roles (often relating to legislation and scrutiny) and were able to offer well-chosen examples to develop and explain their description. The offering of examples to enrich answers was an area that some students could look to improve when they reflect on their performance. There were some detailed responses that mentioned concepts such as the Salisbury Convention [Doctrine] and linked these to the role of peers – these tended to be well rewarded. Some candidates offered knowledge on the House of Lords and its peers but did not focus on the role of those peers. These examples were limited in their relevance to the question and were marked accordingly.

Overall, the second question on works of constitutional authority was poorly answered. There were responses that demonstrated their authors' familiarity with and confidence in their discussion of the topic. These were able to offer examples of valid and accurate works of constitutional authority with precise descriptions of how they related to the constitution. Unfortunately, a significant number of responses were less secure. Some answers offered a description of parliamentary sovereignty whilst other candidates gave descriptions of other sources of the British constitution such as statute law or common law. It is disappointing to note that some answers were not valid or creditworthy for this response. As stated in previous examiners' reports, candidates are encouraged to familiarise themselves with all terms in the specification to prepare effectively for these compulsory Section A questions.

In Section B, Question 3 invited candidates to explain the impact of the civil service on how the UK is governed, and this was, by some distance, the least popular of the Section B questions in the paper. A range of approaches was seen in the responses, with some candidates relying heavily on the extract and paraphrasing the information provided; these were not well rewarded. The more successful candidates used the extract as a stimulus and were able to explain a range of different ways that the civil service affects the governance of the UK. The support in terms of knowledge for these effects was inconsistent and few candidates were able to offer a range of well-chosen examples to support the connections they were seeking to explain. Some candidates relied exclusively on the extract in this question, and so again it is important that candidates are reminded to use their own knowledge in this question as well as using the extract. Some candidates continue to provide an unnecessary introduction and conclusion in this question.

Question 4 asked candidates to explain how devolution has affected the United Kingdom. This was a popular question, and it was pleasing to see many students able to explain and exemplify a range of impacts in their answers. The impact of devolution in terms of enabling policy experimentation across the UK was a popular connection and many candidates were able to demonstrate knowledge to support this connection in terms of different policies at work across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There was also a pleasing focus among some of the candidates on devolution in England and there was impressive contemporary knowledge on display in many answers. An area of learning for some students is to ensure that they do not rely exclusively on the extract and paraphrase its content. Some answers chose to write a Section C-style essay, evaluating and analysing the strengths and weaknesses of devolution. This was not a successful approach, and candidates are reminded that Assessment Objective 2 drives all Section B

All Section C questions aim to elicit a well-balanced analysis and evaluation of the set question from candidates.

Question 5 asked about how effectively the Welsh parliament scrutinises the government. This question was answered effectively by many students who were able to offer a range of arguments for and against the question. They were also able to convincingly explain and exemplify the arguments they provided, and this type of response is always well rewarded. The successful responses also organised and communicated their ideas in a logical structure and used an introduction and conclusion to powerful effect. There was some evidence of especially striking introductions and conclusions, but these were rare. The knowledge base for the Welsh political aspect of the course has improved from previous years. There was evidence this year of some responses that were familiar and confident in their understanding of the workings of the Senedd in Cardiff Bay.

Question 6, on the role and influence of backbench MPs, was a popular question. One successful approach seen here was to identify arguments for and against the influence of individual MPs. Popular arguments included MPs' ability to propose and vote on legislation, votes of no-confidence, committee work and the role of whips. Where these arguments were explained and developed with focus on the question, the answers scored highly. There were some candidates who lost focus on the role and influence of individual MPs and discussed other aspects such as government ministers, Cabinet members and the civil service. Consequently, a key piece of advice to offer candidates is that they read the questions with care and plan their answers accordingly.

Question 7 saw a number of candidates adopting an unsuccessful approach of describing sources of the British Constitution. The question related to principles rather than sources. The successful replies seen here evaluated the influence of the rule of law against parliamentary sovereignty and other constitutional principles. Responses to this question tended to lack a range of arguments and the analysis and evaluation wasn't as pronounced as with other Section C questions. Candidates should caution against writing in an overly descriptive manner in Section C essays. They need to be constantly reminded that the focus of this question is analysis and evaluation of the set question.

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UNIT 2 – LIVING AND PARTICIPATING IN A DEMOCRACY

Overview of the Unit

Unit 2 covered a good range of areas from the specification and allowed candidates to answer a variety of questions on different topics. The questions gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate AO1 skills of knowledge and understanding in all three sections, AO2 skills in application of knowledge in Section B and AO3 skills of analysis and evaluation in Section C.

Both Section A, Questions 1 and 2 were answered to a reasonable standard by the majority of candidates, with most answers demonstrating good AO1 skills, and their authors thus gaining Band 2 or Band 3 marks. There were a number of candidates who wrote more than required for both Question 1 and Question 2, which limited the time they had available on other questions – and simply is not needed to gain 6 marks. This goes against previous trends, where candidates were writing concise answers. There was no required number of factors stated but better responses included two or three separate paragraphs with examples for each point.

Candidates had a choice when answering Question 3 and Question 4. Both questions used written text, and candidates were able to use the material to formulate answers. The majority were able to achieve Band 2 and Band 3 marks, with very few responses placed in Band 1 and, pleasingly, some developed responses reaching Band 4. While candidates showed knowledge on both questions, like other years, there was still a minority that were not using their knowledge to engage with the extract to make relevant connections, and there was some drift from the set question.

Candidates had a choice in Section C (two out of three Questions). All questions were attempted, with Question 7 proving to be especially popular and offering a broad range in the calibre of the responses. As with other years, some candidates did not complete the required number of questions, which restricted their overall result. There were some well-developed answers that linked factors and emphasised the evaluation of the set question throughout. However, some candidates are using very formulaic responses: they often fail to address the set question and instead focus on the wider topic, which limits access to Band 4.

Comments on individual questions/sections

In Section A, for Question 1 most candidates described features of political party manifestos, and the majority used relevant examples. This question was generally answered well, with many candidates reaching Band 3. Although some candidates wasted time by expanding their answers beyond the required wording of “features”, and wrote about purpose or effectiveness, on the whole they gave a range of examples from different political parties and many of them used contemporary examples from the 2024 UK general election. This question appeared to be accessible to all candidates and was for some of them the only area in which they were able to access Band 3.

Question 2 saw the majority of responses outlining methods used by social movements. As with Question 1, there was some drift from “methods” with several candidates offering descriptive accounts on what social movements are, and several others lacking focus on social movements and instead emphasising pressure groups. In terms of examples, many candidates used contemporary evidence and linked this to social media campaigns, although a significant number of candidates used examples such as the women’s suffrage movement which, although credited, is an especially historical example that should at least be balanced out with contemporary examples.

In Section B, Question 3 gave the candidates who chose to answer it an opportunity to use their knowledge of the impact of non-participation on democracy. However, a number of candidates failed to address the issue of impact and instead focused on reasons for non-participation. Higher-achieving candidates used the information from the extract to make connections to the set question and used relevant evidence, particularly linked to recent trends in non-participation, when doing so. While most candidates used the scope of the information that was available in the extract, some did not, and leaned towards offering an essay-style response, and thus could not access AO2 bands in any meaningful way. Overall, the most successful responses effectively used the extract to make connections and address the set question.

Question 4 received a wide range of responses and, as for Question 3, most of these drew upon information from the extract to make some connections that addressed the requirements of the set question. Frequently, own knowledge was used to add evidence to the points presented, however, this was done with various degrees of success. Some candidates used a wide range of examples, but sometimes these examples lacked relevance to the set question and tended to include descriptive paragraphs that did not address the issue of impact. This was especially apparent in the responses that quickly evolved into essays on the pros and cons of the Human Rights Act. These failed to address the issue of impact and were unable to make many inroads in the AO2 mark bands. However, it was pleasing to see many candidates using contemporary examples and referring to recent discourse on the impact of the Human Rights Act on the protection of human rights within the United Kingdom.

All Section C questions were attempted and included the full gamut of responses. Although Question 5 was the least popular of the Section C questions, it was still responded to by a substantial proportion of the cohort, and in answering it, candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the electoral systems used in the UK. Some candidates described electoral systems used outside of the UK, which was not required for this question, and future learners would do well to be reminded of this. Many answers began with a descriptive paragraph on one of the systems (for example, First Past the Post or the Additional Member System), and then gave a brief evaluation of whether the system has improved fairness and proportionality. This style of response often produced weaker answers, particularly when the system being evaluated was First Past the Post: here there was a tendency to simplistic analysis that led to an underdeveloped judgement. A significant number of candidates wrote descriptive paragraphs on the various electoral systems but failed to address the key concept from the set question: that of fairness and proportionality. Responses that accessed the upper bands were those that consisted of recent examples of electoral systems that were effectively synthesised with the argument. Some candidates ranked the different systems in order of terms of fairness and proportionality and concluded which was fairest. This was not necessary.

While Question 6 also saw examples of candidate work that spanned the full range of marks, there was a notable number of formulaic answers here, with many using a “for and against” structure. This rather simplistic approach precluded those candidates from accessing the full range of factors, which in turn prevented them from accessing the higher band marks. Other candidates evaluated a variety of factors required by pressure groups to exert influence but lacked focus on addressing the set question, which emphasised the necessity of substantial membership to exert influence. Stronger responses linked factors to the issue of membership, evaluated the set question and drew conclusions. It was encouraging to see candidates using contemporary examples, although some answers lacked a range of those contemporary examples. In fact, several of these responses would subsequently revert to a dependence on older pressure groups, which were not really the most relevant examples. To gain Band 4 marks, candidates need an appropriate conclusion based on evidence, rather than judgement that is not fully supported, and this was lacking in the work of a sizeable number of candidates.

Question 7 was the most popular with three quarters of the cohort choosing this as one of their two questions. Responses varied but again covered a broad scope of the marks. By and large, candidates demonstrated good knowledge of party leaders, and many cited recent elections as evidence for their arguments. However, there was significant imbalance in some responses, with candidates either focusing on the issue of party leaders or focusing on other factors and not addressing the set question. Better answers linked together factors when evaluating the statement: for example, party leaders and their portrayal in – and use of – the media was a recurring theme, and many of the candidates who discussed this offered in-depth evaluation and drew valid conclusions.

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UNIT 3 POLITICAL CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Overview of the Unit

Unit 3 is divided into three sections. Section A has two compulsory questions and is driven by Assessment Objective 2. Section B offers the candidates a choice of two questions from three and the focus here is the analysis and evaluation required of AO3. Section C assesses all three assessment objectives at the same time. AO1 (Knowledge and understanding) is awarded in each question across all sections but is always the least rewarded assessment objective.

There was a clear improvement in standards overall in Section A this year. Nearly all candidates attempted both the compulsory questions and demonstrated reasonably equal performance in both their responses. Their knowledge of why constitutionalism is important to liberalism and why conservatism has a strong belief in authority was, by and large, good and gave most candidates solid scores for AO1. Their ability to interpret and apply political information (AO2) was also largely sound: many more candidates this year were able to draw some cogent links between the two aspects of both questions; however, several candidates struggled to draw clear connections at times and this was something that impeded their marks against the AO2 band descriptors.

Section B did not demonstrate quite the same level of progress year on year as was seen in Section A. Here, there were clear trends regarding to which questions candidates responded: Question 4, on the extent to which socialism is divided by capitalism, was answered by nearly all candidates, and Question 5 – on self-determination and nationalism – was answered by approximately two thirds of candidates. However, Question 3, which was on the defence of institutions that underpin society dividing conservatism, was significantly less popular and was answered by just a third of the candidates. Nevertheless, and regardless of the questions that were chosen, candidates performed at a similar level across the two questions that they opted to answer. Once again, knowledge was reasonable overall for AO1, but analysis and evaluation for AO3 was a little less strong, with many candidates not moving beyond the cusp of reasonable to adequate (with the caveat that, for Question 4, their performance against the AO3 descriptors was a very little stronger than it was for their alternative Section B question: be that Question 5 or Question 3).

Finally, in Section C, where the candidates had to demonstrate their abilities across the range of assessment objectives, the pattern of slightly stronger knowledge than skill emerged once again, although so did the overall improved standard year-on-year as was witnessed for Section A. In this final question, there were some excellent examples where candidates performed in the top bands across all three AOs. Overall, this was a very pleasing section of the paper in terms of the progress seen in comparison to prior examination series. To make yet more progress next year, we would strongly encourage further emphasis on candidates' developing their skills to fully complement the knowledge that many of them so clearly had.

Comments on individual questions/sections

On the whole, candidates performed well in Section A, although their knowledge of constitutionalism in Question 1 was fractionally weaker than their knowledge of authority in Question 2. Explanations tended to be reasonable, and most candidates were, therefore, able to access Band 3 in both of these questions. Only a few candidates reached Band 4, and those that did demonstrated the candidates' thorough knowledge and understanding of constitutionalism and authority, as the candidates used a range of evidence to support their views.

The most common way for candidates to answer these questions is to directly commence their explanation, develop their point, discuss a key thinker on the topic and give an example before referring to the question. There was no requirement in either question for candidates to use an introduction or conclusion, however, a sizeable proportion chose to do this without gaining any credit for it. Candidates were able to explain the significance of constitutionalism for liberals by referring to different aspects of constitutionalism such as checks and balances, codified constitutions and bills of rights, while others looked at aspects of liberalism such as individualism, minimal state and minority rights. All of these strategies were equally valid.

Candidates were able to explain the fundamental nature of authority to conservatives by making connections to other conservative values. Some referred to the imperfection of human nature, the fragile nature of society and/or hierarchy and the family. All were equally valid, but listing all of them was not necessary.

A minority of candidates spent too much time on the Section A questions, to the detriment of those that came later; however, many others left Section A until last, and it was clear from their hurried and unfinished responses that they had not given themselves sufficient time to adequately respond to these. As such, we would advise that candidates undertake some additional practice to ensure they are able to provide, in a shorter period of time, the required focused responses.

One area of concern was the failure of a handful of candidates to produce a coherent and organised response. These candidates offered a stream of information that lacked any real focus on the question.

Section B offers a choice of three questions that, this series, required candidates to analyse and evaluate the coherence of conservatism, divisions within socialism and defining features of nationalism, using relevant evidence and examples to support their viewpoint. On the whole, candidates performed well in this section. Although candidates much preferred to answer Question 4, their knowledge of nationalism in Question 5 was comparable to their knowledge of socialism in Question 4. Question 3 was noticeably less popular, and it was apparent in the learners' outcomes why: their knowledge of conservatism produced the weakest responses overall in this section.

Across the section, analysis and evaluation tended to be reasonable, and most candidates were able to access Band 3 in their chosen questions. Only a few candidates reached Band 4, and these demonstrated the candidates' thorough knowledge and understanding of conservatism, socialism and nationalism, using a range of evidence to support their views. This was especially noted in Question 4, where many of the top-scoring candidates emphasised concepts shared by all socialists and areas of tension within the ideology.

The most common way for candidates to answer these questions is to offer a two-sided response consisting of two or three points on each side. Each paragraph analysed and evaluated one part of the argument using examples and thinkers to elucidate their point. Some candidates analysed one side of the argument and then the other, while others preferred to deal with each point and counterpoint in turn. Both these strategies were equally valid.

Unfortunately, several candidates gave responses that weren't much longer than their Section A answers and, as a result, lacked the desired depth and range. Further, a handful of candidates failed to write in structured paragraphs. The responses of these candidates suggest that their authors found it exceedingly difficult to formulate a coherent argument and instead, were able only to offer a description of the ideology instead. This listing of key facts was not well rewarded.

In Section B, there were also some particular areas of confusion. Of note was a surprising number of responses that struggled with the political concept of self-determination, confusing it with the psychological term. Rosa Luxemburg, too, was a point of confusion with a number of responses projecting a plethora of political standpoints onto the revolutionary socialist.

Section C provided candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills across all three assessment objectives. This compulsory question, worth a third of the marks on the examination paper, requires candidates to recognise its relative value and to spend an appropriate amount of time on its completion; their responses being of greater depth and range than those to their other questions. Historically, candidates have performed less well in this section: analysis and evaluation tended to be adequate, and most candidates were, therefore, limited to Band 2 marks. However, this year saw a marked increase in the quality of responses. With far more candidates reaching the higher bands. In the past the most common way for candidates to answer these questions was to offer a formulaic list of ideologies with only a passing, superficial focus on the question. This strategy tended to limit candidates to the lower levels. However, this year many of them discussed comparisons and similarities between the different ideologies, which is a difficult task, and one that candidates need a lot of practice at before they are able to produce a sophisticated response. One successful strategy was for candidates to analyse different aspects of the concept of freedom, for example its economic, political and social facets before going on to compare different ideological positions. Such responses, when done well, were highly rewarded.

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GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS OF THE USA

Overview of the Unit

Unit 4 is divided into three sections. Section A has two compulsory questions and is driven by Assessment Objective 2. Section B offers the candidates a choice of two questions from three and the focus here is the analysis and evaluation required of AO3. Section C assesses all three assessment objectives at the same time and is a significant and unique challenge in the assessment arrangements of this unit. AO1 (Knowledge and understanding) is awarded in each question across all sections but is always the least rewarded assessment objective. This is a skills-based paper where the knowledge is secondary and is there to support a particular skill, for instance analysis, evaluation, and explanation of connections.

Section A showed a marked improvement in this year's paper. There was an excellent range of connections seen in many of the answers. The impact of social media on US elections was confidently explained and exemplified by many students. There was slightly less depth and range to the examples seen in responses on the impact of committees on the US Congress but overall, the ability to establish and explain connections improved markedly on previous years.

Similarly, Section C also showed improvement as candidates moved away from overly descriptive responses that failed to analyse and evaluate the set question. There were still some descriptive responses seen, but increasingly candidates were genuinely analysing and evaluating and engaging with the specific question. There remains a need for candidates to realise that Section C also assesses AO2, and they must look to establish connections and make comparisons from across the specification in their answer to this question. It remains a distinctly different challenge from the more traditional Section B essays, and they must plan and construct their answers accordingly in order to satisfy the demands of all three assessment objectives.

Section B answers were also, on the whole, encouraging, and candidates demonstrated good knowledge of voting behaviour and the imperial presidency. There was less evaluation and analysis for Question 5 on the death penalty and some candidates here offered generic arguments rather than discussing the issue within the context of the course. It is also important to answer the specific question and engage fully with the wording of the question rather than providing a more topic-based response on a subject, for example voting behaviour. However, the standard of traditional essays seen in some of this year's responses was very impressive. Overall, candidates demonstrated their ability to construct two-sided debates with a range of arguments and appropriate development. Judgements were reached, conclusions were established and there was evidence of effective planning in much of the work offered in Section B. This enabled the higher-achieving candidates to organise and communicate their ideas with great effect – and contributed to an improved performance in this year's Unit 4 paper.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

This section consists of two compulsory questions that require candidates to explain the impact of one aspect of the specification on another. Question 1 required candidates to explain the impact of the committee system on the work of the US Congress. This proved an accessible question for many candidates. There were a number of responses that identified a range of effects and offered some convincing development and explanation in support of these. The majority of candidates chose to discuss legislation and scrutiny as their effects and there was a variety in how well these connections were supported in terms of examples and explanation. Another popular effect was the work of committees on Presidential appointments, with Supreme Court nominations being the example most often provided to illustrate this point. Some candidates listed the ways in which a committee could have an impact on the US Congress without developing the point in any meaningful sense. It is necessary that these effects are explained fully to achieve the higher mark bands.

Question 2 asked candidates to explain the impact of social media on US elections. This was a well-answered question. The majority of candidates provided a range of ideas on how social media has had an impact on US elections. These ranged from polarisation to misinformation to its general impact on voting behaviour. There was a significant focus seen in many answers on explaining how social media has affected younger voters and there was an impressive range of support seen in this answer. Less successful candidates sometimes lost focus on explaining the impact of social media on US elections and provided a description of social media without any focus on the set question. The 2024 election cycle was given significant coverage in this question with many candidates discussing TikTok and Truth Social and bringing in a range of relevant knowledge to support their efforts in meeting Assessment Objective 2.

Section B

This section consists of three questions and candidates are expected to choose two of these to answer. This year's paper had questions on the influence of race and ethnicity on voting behaviour, the relevance of the term Imperial Presidency, and whether the death penalty is an infringement of the civil rights and liberties of US citizens.

Questions 3 and 4 proved to be the most popular choices with candidates and this was a section where candidates' performance was sound. Question 3, on voting behaviour, was well answered: the most successful responses discussed the factor of race and ethnicity in detail and sustained and integrated the discussion of race and ethnicity over a number of paragraphs. Their authors blended their discussion of race and ethnicity with other factors such as policies, region, and candidates, to provide a detailed and focused answer. There were other responses that provided a paragraph on race and ethnicity and then moved on to discuss other factors. These more 'topic-based' responses were not as well-rewarded as there wasn't a full enough focus on the question. The examples provided in this question were often contemporary and well-chosen, and they were often deployed effectively to further a point of analysis and evaluation. Overall, this was a question where candidates performed well.

Question 4 was also a well-answered question with many responses offering focused analysis and evaluation along with contemporary examples. The most successful candidates offered evaluation of this question in the context of the current Trump presidency, and they integrated a range of current examples with confidence and assuredness into their arguments. There were some less successful approaches, for example those that offered an historical narrative to this question, taking us back to Presidencies from the 1940s onwards and making scant reference to the set question. Nevertheless, the popular approach here was to evaluate checks and balances on the presidency and this was successful when the range and depth of argument and exemplification was sufficiently detailed. There was a pleasing focus and depth to some answers as their authors evaluated the presidency in detail, referring to such factors as presidential pardon and executive orders. There were some answers that failed to offer a balanced, two-sided discussion; either agreeing or disagreeing with the statement without giving the counterargument. Once again, this was a question that elicited a good level of knowledge and analysis.

Question 5 was the least popular of the Section B questions and the one where the standard of response was below that seen in the others. The best responses demonstrated analysis and evaluation within the context of the course: the death penalty was discussed in relation to federalism, the Bill of Rights and Supreme Court decisions, and this approach was well-rewarded. Some followed the approach of offering generic arguments for and against the death penalty without offering analysis and evaluation within the context of the specification. These responses did not reach the higher levels of the mark scheme as the analysis and knowledge wasn't fully applied to the demands of the question.

Section C

This question is intended to be an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the Unit 4 specification in its broadest sense. This is a question without topic specificity and the nature of the task enables candidates to choose for themselves what aspects of the course they wish to discuss. Obviously, they must relate their writing to the set question, but in answering this synoptic question they are free to choose whatever aspects of the specification they deem relevant. This year's question asked candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of the US political system.

There was evidence of improving and more focused performance in Section C this year. Rather than offering a narrative description of aspects of the US political system there was more evidence of candidates attempting to interpret and genuinely evaluate the question. The majority of candidates chose to discuss the branches of the federal government, individually and collectively, while some took advantage of the holistic nature of the question and evaluated aspects from 4.3 of the specification such as the electoral college, money, media and political parties. Another improving aspect of this question was the ability shown by candidates to draw connections within and across the specification. The highest-attaining candidates discussed how various combinations within the system can affect its effectiveness and the examples to illustrate these arguments were occasionally excellent. However, there were also some candidates who offered a narrative trawl that was high on description and low on analysis. It is important that candidates attempt to genuinely engage with the discussion offered to them in the question. Overall, the level of responses this year for Section C was a significant improvement on previous years' efforts, which was an encouraging feature to note.

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Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4285

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