**AS Government and Politics – Unit 2 Past Paper Questions**

**Stimulus Questions**

**January 2012:**

**Parliament - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.**

**Select Committees**

There is a House of Commons select committee for each government department, examining three aspects: spending, policies and administration. These departmental select committees have a minimum of 11 members, who decide upon a line of inquiry and then gather written and oral evidence. Findings are reported to the Commons, printed, and published on the Parliament website. The government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee’s recommendations.

Following the adoption by the House of Commons of recommendations from the Reform of the House of Commons Committee:

␣␣ Departmental select committee chairs are elected by their fellow MPs

␣␣ A backbench business committee has been established with the ability to schedule business in the Commons chamber and in Westminster Hall on days, or parts of days, set aside for non-government business.

**Legislative committees**

Both Houses of Parliament refer legislation to committees for detailed discussion and approval. These committees are part of the process of making laws. They scrutinise proposed laws and may consider amendments to improve the legislation. Amendments approved in legislative committees must be approved by the whole House.

*Source: adapted from www.parliament.gov.uk, October, 2010.*

(a) With reference to the source, why are legislative committees needed? (5)

(b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain the ways in which backbench MPs can call government to account. (10)

(c) To what extent has the formation of a coalition altered the relationship between Parliament and government? (25)

The Judiciary - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

The Constitutional Reform Act of 2005 guaranteed the rule of law. The rule of law is the foundation stone of any healthy democracy, in that it establishes that all conduct and behaviour throughout society should conform to a framework of law. Its principles include equality before the law and punishment only for breaches of law.

The Constitutional Reform Act drew a better division between the roles of the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice, as well as between the Lord Chancellor and the House of Lords, which now has its own Lord Speaker. The Lord Chancellor is bound by oath to preserve the principle of judicial independence.

The Act also created the UK’s Supreme Court. Its opening in October 2009, together with the other reforms, marked the end of a long process towards establishing the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. The process by which judicial appointments are made is also more independent and distanced from government. Indeed, there is now no meaningful role for the government in the appointment of judges, except for the most senior. Even in the case of senior judges, the government’s influence is extremely limited.

*Source: adapted from a memorandum by Jack Straw to the Justice Select Committee, March, 2010.*

(a) With reference to the source, what is the rule of law?

(b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain how the independence of the judiciary is guaranteed.

(c) To what extent can judges check the power of the executive and the legislature?

**June 2011:**

Parliamentary reform - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

Extracts from the document: ‘The Coalition: our programme for government ’.

We will establish five-year fixed term Parliaments. We will put a binding motion before the House of Commons stating that the next general election will be held on the first Thursday of May, 2015. Following this motion, we will legislate to make provision for fixed term Parliaments of five years.

We will bring forward a Referendum Bill on electoral reform, which includes provision for the introduction of the Alternative Vote in the event of a positive result in the referendum, as well as for the creation of fewer and more equal sized constituencies.

We will bring forward early legislation to introduce a power of recall, allowing voters to force a by-election where an MP is found to have engaged in serious wrongdoing.

We will establish a committee to bring forward proposals for a wholly or mainly elected upper chamber on the basis of proportional representation.

We will bring forward proposals... for reform to the House of Commons... starting with the proposed committee for management of backbench business. A House Business Committee, to consider government business, will be established by the third year of the Parliament.

We will ensure that any petition that secures 100,000 signatures will be eligible for public debate in Parliament.

*Source: ‘The Coalition: our programme for government’, Cabinet Office, May 2010 ©Crown copyright 2010*

(a) With reference to the source, describe three proposals that seek to strengthen parliamentary representation by increasing popular participation. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain how three of these proposals seek to make government more accountable to Parliament. (10)

(c) To what extent will the coalition government’s proposals bring about an effective reform of Parliament? (25)

The Judiciary - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

The government was slapped down in a judicial review by the Supreme Court when it ruled that a Treasury freeze on the bank accounts of suspected terrorists was illegal. A panel of seven judges allowed a challenge by five men (all suspected terrorists) who had had all their assets frozen under orders made when Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer. The terrorists’ assets were frozen in 2006 as a result of an executive order. This had been issued in response to UN Security Council resolutions calling for steps to be taken to hit the financing of international terrorism. But the orders were not voted on in Parliament.

Today the Supreme Court ruled that the Treasury had exceeded its powers, meaning that the orders were unlawful. The justices declared that if the Government considered ‘far-reaching measures’ were necessary to combat terrorism, ‘it must first obtain approval for them from Parliament’. The government has responded by saying it will ‘fast-track legislation’ through the Commons to make sure it can continue to freeze terrorists’ assets.

Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Chris Huhne said: ‘It is simply not acceptable for Labour to behave as if we are a police state and go around arbitrarily arresting people or confiscating their property without due process under the rule of law. The Government’s desperation to avoid consulting Parliament is creating bad laws, legal defeats and hefty bills for the taxpayer. It has to stop.’

*Source: adapted from Sky News online, January 27, 2010.*

(a) With reference to the source, why was the government criticised over the decision to freeze the assets of the suspected terrorists? (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain judicial review and its importance. **(10)**

(c) To what extent is there conflict between the judiciary and the executive in the UK?

**(25)**

**January 2011:**

House of Commons - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

Extracts from three days proceedings of the House of Commons

January 12, 2010

* Questions to the Secretary of State for Health
* Third Reading of the Personal Care at Home Bill

January 13, 2010

* Questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland
* Questions to the Prime Minister
* Opposition Motion presented by the Leader of the Opposition: ‘That this House notes with concern the increase in the number of young people not in employment, education or training….[continued]’
* Report presented by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on global security in Afghanistan and Pakistan

January 14, 2010

* Public Bill Committee on the Financial Services Bill to consider proposed amendments to clause 26.

*Source: www.parliament.gov.uk, January, 2010.*

(a) With reference to the source, describe two functions of the House of Commons. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain how the House of Commons can control the power of government. (10)

(c) To what extent is the House of Commons effective in carrying out its various functions? (25)

Prime Ministerial Power - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

It is often asserted that ‘the British prime minister is as powerful as he or she wants to be’. Margaret Thatcher wanted to be dominant and ensured this by removing her political opponents in the cabinet and replacing them with people she could rely on. Tony Blair similarly strengthened his position by including his closest allies in the cabinet. Prime ministers who want to be dominant will take their prerogative powers and stretch them to the limits. This can also be seen in the area of foreign affairs. Both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown spent much time attempting to take a leading role in world affairs, including conducting wars and negotiating international treaties.

This picture may nevertheless be misleading. There are powerful forces which can be ranged against them. The prime minister’s cabinet colleagues can turn against him or her, as occurred with Thatcher in 1990. In the case of Blair, his position was undermined by growing criticism within the party, particularly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The media, too, can become hostile. Brown received unfavourable press coverage and he was presented as a weak and indecisive leader. A prime minister’s strength also depends on many factors beyond his or her direct control. These include the size of the parliamentary majority and the course of world events.

*April, 2010.*

(a) With reference to the source, describe two limitations on prime ministerial power. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain the prime minister’s prerogative powers. (10)

(c) To what extent can the Prime Minister control the Cabinet? (25)

**June 2010:**

The British Constitution - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

A Possible Codified Constitution for the UK

Jack Straw, the Justice Secretary, has used a visit to Washington to hint that Britain could finally get a codified constitution spelling out citizens’ rights and codifying this country’s political system. He is already working on a new Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, clearly defining people’s relationship to the state, as part of a wide-ranging package of constitutional reform. But he has, for the first time, also said that the Bill could be a step towards a fully codified constitution to ‘bring us in line with the most progressive democracies around the world’.

Britain’s constitution has developed in a haphazard fashion, building on common law, conventions, case law, historical documents, Acts of Parliament and European legislation. It is not set out clearly in any one document. Nor is there a single statement of citizens’ rights and freedoms. As Jack Straw put it yesterday: ‘Most people might struggle to put their finger on where their rights are’.

Supporters argue that producing such a document could tackle disillusionment with politics, at the same time as setting new, clear limits on the power of the executive. Opponents of a codified constitution argue, ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,’ insisting that the existing arrangements, however piecemeal their development has been, have worked well in practice. There are, moreover, formidable practical problems to be overcome before such a document could be drawn up.

*Source: adapted from an article by Nigel Morris in The Independent, 14 February 2008*

(a) With reference to the source, describe three sources of the UK constitution. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain the arguments in favour of a codified constitution for the UK. (10)

(c) Make out a case against the adoption of a codified constitution for the UK. (25)

The Prime Minister and the Cabinet - Study the following two passages and answer the questions that follow.

Source 1 A Cabinet Meeting

The Prime Minister’s Spokesman began by giving a brief summary of Cabinet of the previous day to

the assembled press. Cabinet had met for an hour and 40 minutes that morning. There had been the usual update from Geoff Hoon (Leader of the House of Commons) on parliamentary business, there had been a brief discussion on the Draft Legislative Programme being published tomorrow and there was an update from the Foreign Secretary on the situation in Burma. Most of the Cabinet was spent discussing the economy in a discussion led by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, where he emphasised the global nature of the economic situation we were facing at the moment – not only the global credit crunch, but also rising oil and food prices.

*Source: Prime Minister’s Office press briefing, 14 May 2008*

Source 2 Gordon Brown’s First Cabinet

Gordon Brown unveiled an almost completely new Cabinet today as he attempted to make good

on his pledge for a ‘politics of change’ after the Blair years, including Britain’s first ever female Home

Secretary and its youngest Foreign Secretary for 30 years. As part of a huge overhaul, the Prime

Minister appointed Jacqui Smith, formerly the Chief Whip, as Home Secretary, and David Miliband

as Foreign Secretary. As head of the Home Office, Ms Smith will be in charge of the battle against

terrorism, national security and policing. Standing outside the Foreign Office, Mr Miliband – who was himself widely tipped as Mr Brown’s rival for the Labour leadership, before ruling himself out – said: ‘I’m tremendously honoured’.

*Source: adapted from ‘Brown shuffles the pack for new Cabinet’ in Times Online, 28 June 2007*

(a) With reference to Source 1, describe two types of issues discussed by the Cabinet. (5)

(b) With reference to Source 2, and your own knowledge, what factors does the Prime

Minister take into account when appointing cabinet ministers? (10)

(c) To what extent is the Cabinet an important body? (25)

**January 2010:**

The Judiciary - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

The judiciary is considered to be independent of the other two branches of government. Judges’ salaries are paid from the Consolidated Fund; this means that they do not have to be voted upon each year by Parliament. The House of Commons generally forbids MPs from making any reference to matters before the criminal and civil courts. By convention, a similar restriction is observed by ministers and civil servants.

For their part, judges by convention do not engage in politically partisan activity, thus upholding their neutrality. Indeed, they have generally avoided commenting on matters of public policy.

However, the dividing line between judges and politicians was never quite as sharp as these features would suggest. The most obvious example used to be found in the figure of the Lord Chancellor. Prior to the passage of the 2005 Constitutional Reform Act, he was head of the judiciary, the presiding officer of the House of Lords and a member of the Cabinet. The 2005 Act, which also proposed the establishment of a new Supreme Court by 2009, changed this situation, providing for the transfer of his judicial role to the Lord Chief Justice.

*Adapted from: `The Judiciary’, by Philip Norton in Politics UK, Bill Jones et al., 6th edition, Pearson*

*Education, 2007.*

(a) With reference to the source, describe the measures that exist to maintain the

independence and neutrality of the judiciary. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain how the judiciary

has been reformed since 2005. (10)

(c) To what extent are UK judges both independent and neutral? (25)

Parliament - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

White Paper on reform of the House of Lords

This White Paper sets out the government’s proposals for a reformed second chamber of the UK Parliament.

The proposals are based on the House of Commons votes for an 80% or 100% elected second chamber and follow cross-party talks on how this could be achieved.

The White Paper makes proposals for reform in a number of areas:

• **Role and composition**

The House of Lords plays a valuable role in holding the government to account and revising legislation. The reforms would strengthen those roles and make the second chamber more accountable. The House of Commons would continue to be the primary chamber in the UK legislature.

• **Membership of the chamber**

The proposed reforms would create a second chamber with directly elected members, which would be smaller than the House of Commons. The remaining rights of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the second chamber would be removed.

• **Powers of the new chamber**

The government proposes no changes to the powers of a reformed second chamber.

• **The possible role of appointed members to ensure independence**

If it is decided that there should be a 20% appointed element, the government proposes that its key purpose would be to provide a significant independent element in the second chamber. A statutory appointments commission would seek nominations and applications for membership.

The government is also proposing changes to the arrangements for eligibility, remuneration and accountability.

*Source: White Paper, An Elected Second Chamber, July 14, 2008.*

(a) With reference to the source, what changes to the second chamber are proposed? (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain the arguments for a fully or partly elected second chamber. (10)

(c) Make out a case against an elected second chamber. (25)

**June 2009:**

The role of Parliament - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

Citizens need an effective Parliament. They need a body that can call the government to account, that can ensure that government answers for its actions and the actions of civil servants. They need

a body that can scrutinise and, if necessary, change the legislative proposals brought forward by government. They need a body that can ensure that their voice is heard by government when they have a grievance, be it about the impact of a policy or the absence of a policy. They need the security of knowing that, if there is a problem, there is a body to which they can turn for help, a body that can force public officials to listen.

Government needs an effective Parliament. It needs it because its authority derives from Parliament.

The more government distances itself from Parliament, the more it undermines popular consent for the system of government. It needs Parliament to give its approval to measures and, prior to doing so, to scrutinise those measures.

*Adapted from Report of the Commission to Strengthen Parliament.*

(a) With reference to the source, describe three functions of Parliament. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain why government needs an effective Parliament. (10)

(c) Analyse the main factors that limit the effectiveness of Parliament. (25)

Prime Ministerial Power - Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

For centuries Prime Ministers have exercised authority in the name of the monarchy without the people or their elected representatives being consulted. So now I propose that in key areas important to our national life, the Prime Minister and executive should surrender or limit their powers. The exclusive exercise of these powers by the Government should have no place in a modern democracy.

These include:

• the power of the executive to declare war

• the power to request the dissolution of Parliament

• the power over recall of Parliament

• the power of the executive to ratify international treaties

• the power to make key public appointments without effective scrutiny

• the power to restrict parliamentary oversight of the intelligence services

• the power to choose bishops

• the power to appoint judges

I now propose to surrender or limit these powers to make for a more open twenty-first century

British democracy.

*Adapted from Gordon Brown, speech in Parliament, July 3rd 2007.*

(a) With reference to the source, outline the reasons Gordon Brown gave for proposing that prime ministerial powers be surrendered or limited. (5)

(b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain the ways in which

Prime Ministers are able to control Parliament. (10)

(c) To what extent has prime ministerial power grown in recent years? (25)

**40 Marks:**

**January 2012:**

To what extent have constitutional reforms since 1997 reduced the powers of

UK governments?

Are UK prime ministers as powerful as is sometimes claimed?

**June 2011:**

To what extent has the location of sovereignty in the UK changed in recent years?

Is the UK Prime Minister now effectively a president?

**January 2011:**

‘The UK constitution is no longer fit for purpose.’ Discuss.

Is the judiciary too powerful, or is it not powerful enough?

**June 2010:**

To what extent does Parliament control executive power?

How effectively does the judiciary protect civil liberties in the UK?

**January 2010:**

‘The advantages of a codified constitution now outweigh its disadvantages’. Discuss.

To what extent does the prime minister dominate the political system in the UK?

**June 2009:**

How effectively can the judiciary control executive and legislative power in the UK?

‘Constitutional reform since 1997 has not gone far enough.’ Discuss.