



*Rewarding Learning*

**ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY (AS)  
General Certificate of Education  
2025**

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## **Government and Politics**

**Assessment Unit AS 1**

*assessing*

**The Government and Politics of Northern Ireland**

**[SGP11]**

**FRIDAY 23 MAY, AFTERNOON**

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**MARK  
SCHEME**

## **General Marking Instructions**

### ***Introduction***

The main purpose of the mark scheme is to ensure that examinations are marked accurately, consistently and fairly. The mark scheme provides examiners with an indication of the nature and range of candidates' responses likely to be worthy of credit. It also sets out the criteria which they should apply in allocating marks to candidates' responses.

### ***Assessment objectives***

Below are the assessment objectives for GCE Government and Politics.

Candidates should be able to:

- AO1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and debates.
- AO2** Analyse and evaluate political information, arguments and theories; identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between the political systems studied.
- AO3** Construct and communicate coherent arguments making use of a range of appropriate political vocabulary.

### ***Quality of candidates' responses***

In marking the examination papers, examiners should be looking for a quality of response reflecting the level of maturity which may reasonably be expected of a 17 or 18-year-old which is the age at which the majority of candidates sit their GCE examinations.

### ***Flexibility in marking***

Mark schemes are not intended to be totally prescriptive. No mark scheme can cover all the responses which candidates may produce. In the event of unanticipated answers, examiners are expected to use their professional judgement to assess the validity of answers. If an answer is particularly problematic, then examiners should seek the guidance of the Supervising Examiner.

### ***Positive marking***

Examiners are encouraged to be positive in their marking, giving appropriate credit for what candidates know, understand and can do rather than penalising candidates for errors or omissions. Examiners should make use of the whole of the available mark range for any particular question and be prepared to award full marks for a response which is as good as might reasonably be expected of a 17 or 18-year-old GCE candidate.

### ***Awarding zero marks***

Marks should only be awarded for valid responses and no marks should be awarded for an answer which is completely incorrect or inappropriate.

### ***Types of mark schemes***

Mark schemes for tasks or questions which require candidates to respond in extended written form are marked on the basis of levels of response which take account of the quality of written communication.

Other questions which require only short answers are marked on a point for point basis with marks awarded for each valid piece of information provided.

### **Levels of response**

In deciding which level of response to award, examiners should look for the 'best fit' bearing in mind that weakness in one area may be compensated for by strength in another. In deciding which mark within a particular level to award to any response, examiners are expected to use their professional judgement.

The following guidance is provided to assist examiners.

- **Threshold performance:** Response which just merits inclusion in the level and should be awarded a mark at or near the bottom of the range.
- **Intermediate performance:** Response which clearly merits inclusion in the level and should be awarded a mark at or near the middle of the range.
- **High performance:** Response which fully satisfies the level description and should be awarded a mark at or near the top of the range.

### **Quality of written communication**

Quality of written communication is taken into account in assessing candidates' responses to all tasks and questions that require them to respond in extended written form. These tasks and questions are marked on the basis of levels of response. The description for each level of response includes reference to the quality of written communication.

For conciseness, quality of written communication is distinguished within levels of response as follows:

Level 1: Quality of written communication is inadequate.

Level 2: Quality of written communication is limited.

Level 3: Quality of written communication is satisfactory.

Level 4: Quality of written communication is good.

Level 5: Quality of written communication is of a high standard.

In interpreting these level descriptions, examiners should refer to the more detailed guidance provided below:

**Level 1 (Inadequate):** The candidate makes only a very limited selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. The organisation of material may lack any clarity and coherence. There is very little use of specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar may be such that intended meaning is consistently unclear.

**Level 2 (Limited):** The candidate makes only a limited selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. The organisation of material may lack clarity and coherence. There is little use of specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar may be such that intended meaning is not clear in places.

**Level 3 (Satisfactory):** The candidate makes a reasonable selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with some clarity and coherence. There is some use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are sufficiently competent to make meaning clear.

**Level 4 (Good):** The candidate makes a good selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with a good standard of clarity and coherence. There is good use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a sufficiently good standard to make meaning clear.

**Level 5 (High Standard):** The candidate successfully selects and uses the most appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with a high degree of clarity and coherence. There is widespread and accurate use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a sufficiently high standard to make meaning clear.

- 1 Two marks for each of **two** types of committee within the Northern Ireland Assembly. These can be Statutory, Standing, Ad Hoc or Joint Committees. **(AO1: 4 marks)** [4]

AVAILABLE  
MARKS

4

2 **Background**

The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and The St. Andrews Agreement contained mechanisms to ensure that important legislation can only be passed with the support of both communities. The inclusion of a “cross-community support” was designed to reassure both communities that their interests would be protected and that no discriminatory legislation would be passed. Mechanisms intended to achieve this include: the use of weighted majorities or parallel consent in legislative votes in the Assembly, Petitions of Concern, a mutual veto in the North South Ministerial Council and a mutual veto in key decisions within the Executive, e.g. in formalising the budget or the Programme for Government.

**Level 1 ([1]–[2])**

The candidate offers a basic explanation of what is meant by “cross-community support”. There is limited or no use of the Source or own knowledge.

**Level 2 ([3]–[4])**

The candidate offers a more developed explanation of what is meant by “cross-community support”. There is some use of the Source or own knowledge. If no reference to the Source is made a maximum of 4 marks can be awarded.

**Level 3 ([5]–[6])**

The candidate provides a full explanation of what is meant by the term “cross-community support”. There is good use of the Source and own knowledge.

**(AO1: 6 marks)**

Any other valid material will be rewarded appropriately.

[6]

6

3 **Background**

Representing the concerns of constituents is a key aspect of the work of MLAs. The Source states that MLAs can perform this task through participating in Ministers’ Question Time. Some of the other ways in which MLAs can represent their constituents include holding surgeries, attending local events, the use of social media and the mass media, communicating with officials and taking part in debates as a way of raising constituents’ issues. Any other relevant way.

If there is no reference to the Source, a maximum of Level 3 can be awarded. [9]  
If no evidence is given, a maximum of Level 4 can be awarded. [12]

**Level 1 ([1]–[3])**

The candidate demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of ways MLAs can perform their representative role. The answer is ill-informed and/or has a high degree of irrelevant material and/or makes general statements and/or has no evidence. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is poor. The use of political vocabulary is rudimentary.

**Level 2 ([4]–[6])**

The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge and understanding of ways MLAs can perform their representative role but there are major gaps in this knowledge

and understanding and only a limited attempt is made to answer the question. The response contains some relevant material but also significant irrelevant or general material. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is limited. The level of communication and the structure and presentation of ideas are both basic. There is restricted use of appropriate political vocabulary.

**Level 3 ([7]–[9])**

The candidate demonstrates mostly accurate knowledge and understanding of ways MLAs can perform their representative role but there are some gaps in this knowledge and understanding. The response makes a reasonable attempt at answering the question and contains relevant material along with more general material. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is satisfactory. The level of communication, the structure and presentation of ideas and the use of appropriate political vocabulary are limited.

**Level 4 ([10]–[12])**

The candidate demonstrates full and accurate knowledge and understanding of ways MLAs can perform their representative role and deploys this to answer the question. The answer contains relevant evidence and examples. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is generally good. There is clear communication and presentation of ideas. There is appropriate use of political vocabulary.

**Level 5 ([13]–[15])**

The candidate demonstrates comprehensive, detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of ways MLAs can perform their representative role and deploys this consistently to answer the question. A range of relevant evidence is presented. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a consistently high standard. There is effective communication and presentation of ideas. There is consistent use of appropriate political vocabulary.

[15]

15

**4 (a) Background**

Sinn Féin retains many of the positions that it held in 1998, especially the party’s commitment to achieving a United Ireland. It also remains committed to an equality agenda and to broadly left-wing positions on socio-economic issues. However, the party’s position on some other key issues is very different. It is anticipated that many students will argue that the party in 1998 was still in support of the IRA’s military campaign and this argument will be accepted even though Sinn Féin’s entry into the Good Friday negotiations was based upon their support for democratic politics. Similarly, students will be credited for bringing in the Party’s acceptance of the consent principle and its willingness to participate at Stormont. More recently, Michelle O’Neill has presented herself as a “First Minister for all” and attended the coronation of King Charles III. Students may also refer to the Party’s position on policing, decommissioning of weapons, Europe and on social issues such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

Stronger answers will display clear understanding of the point of the question, will present a range of evidence and will contain balance.

If there is no evidence/examples given a maximum of Level 3 can be awarded. [15]

If there is a lack of significant balance, a maximum of Level 4 can be awarded. [20]

**Level 1 ([1]–[5])**

The candidate demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the extent to which Sinn Féin policies have changed and makes little attempt to answer the question. The answer is ill-informed and/or has a high degree of irrelevant material and/or makes general statements and/or has no evidence. There is little analysis and evaluation of information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is poor. An argument, if present, is ill-informed and poorly constructed and the level of communication and the use of political vocabulary are both rudimentary.

**Level 2 ([6]–[10])**

The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge and understanding of the extent to which Sinn Féin policies have changed but there are major gaps in this knowledge and understanding and only a limited attempt is made to answer the question. The response contains some relevant material but also significant irrelevant or general material. There is some basic analysis and evaluation of political information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is limited. An argument is constructed although the level of communication and the structure and presentation of ideas are both basic. There is restricted use of appropriate political vocabulary.

**Level 3 ([11]–[15])**

The candidate demonstrates mostly accurate knowledge and understanding of the extent to which Sinn Féin policies have changed but there are some gaps in this knowledge and understanding. The response makes a reasonable attempt at answering the question and contains relevant material along with more general material. There is some limited analysis of political information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is satisfactory. An argument is constructed although the level of communication, the structure and presentation of ideas and the use of appropriate political vocabulary are limited.

**Level 4 ([16]–[20])**

The candidate demonstrates full and accurate knowledge and understanding of the extent to which Sinn Féin policies have changed and deploys this to answer the question. The answer contains relevant evidence and examples. There is sound analysis of political information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is generally good. An argument is constructed which displays clear communication and presentation of ideas. There is appropriate use of political vocabulary and a conclusion is reached.

**Level 5 ([21]–[25])**

The candidate demonstrates comprehensive, detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of the extent to which Sinn Féin policies have changed and deploys this consistently to answer the question. A range of relevant evidence is presented. There is thorough analysis of political information, arguments and explanations. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a consistently high standard. An argument is constructed which displays effective communication and presentation of ideas. There is consistent use of appropriate political vocabulary and a clear and logical conclusion is reached. [25]

**(b) Background**

Support for the Alliance Party has changed considerably since 1998. In the period immediately following the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement the Alliance Party struggled and its share of the vote was almost halved between 1998 and 2003. However, in 2022 Alliance was the third largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly, having outpolled both the SDLP and the UUP.

Answers should assess the importance of a range of reasons for the changing electoral fortunes of the Alliance Party since 1998. Answers might refer to factors such as the deep polarisation of Northern Ireland politics following the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, policy changes by the Alliance Party including moving away from non-sectarian unionism towards a more liberal, neutral position on the question of either a United Ireland or continued union with Britain, a greater focus on diversity and environmental issues, and more liberal positions on abortion, immigration, diversity and LGBTQ+ rights, the impact of the leadership of Naomi Long, the party's opposition to Brexit and the increased profile of the party through their involvement in the Executive. The Alliance Party has also enjoyed increasing levels of support among younger voters. Part of the explanation for the rise in Alliance support also lies in the deep level of frustration many voters feel at the failure of the DUP and Sinn Féin to deliver effective government. In addition, Alliance has benefitted from the difficulties facing the SDLP and UUP, with some disillusioned voters of both parties turning to Alliance instead.

Stronger answers will display clear understanding of the point of the question, will present a range of evidence and will contain balance.

If there is no evidence/examples given a maximum of Level 3 can be awarded. [15]

If there is a lack of significant balance, a maximum of Level 4 can be awarded. [20]

**Level 1 ([1]–[5])**

The candidate demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of why the electoral fortunes of the Alliance Party have changed since 1998 and makes little attempt to answer the question. The answer is ill-informed and/or has a high degree of irrelevant material and/or makes general statements and/or has no evidence. There is little analysis and evaluation of information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling punctuation and grammar is poor. An argument, if present, is ill informed and poorly constructed and the level of communication and the use of political vocabulary are both rudimentary.

**Level 2 ([6]–[10])**

The candidate demonstrates basic knowledge and understanding of why the electoral fortunes of the Alliance Party have changed since 1998 but there are major gaps in this knowledge and understanding and only a limited attempt is made to answer the question. The response contains some relevant material but also significant irrelevant or general material. There is some basic analysis and evaluation of political information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is limited.

An argument is constructed although the level of communication and the structure and presentation of ideas are both basic. There is restricted use of appropriate political vocabulary.

**Level 3 ([11]–[15])**

The candidate demonstrates mostly accurate knowledge and understanding of why the electoral fortunes of the Alliance Party have changed since 1998 but there are some gaps in this knowledge and understanding. The response makes a reasonable attempt at answering the question and contains relevant material along with more general material. There is some limited analysis of political information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is satisfactory. An argument is constructed although the level of communication, the structure and presentation of ideas and the use of appropriate political vocabulary are limited.

**Level 4 ([16]–[20])**

The candidate demonstrates full and accurate knowledge and understanding of why the electoral fortunes of the Alliance Party have changed since 1998 and deploys this to answer the question. The answer contains relevant evidence and examples. There is sound analysis of political information, arguments and explanations. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar is generally good. An argument is constructed which displays clear communication and presentation of ideas. There is appropriate use of political vocabulary and a conclusion is reached.

**Level 5 ([21]–[25])**

The candidate demonstrates comprehensive, detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of why the electoral fortunes of the Alliance Party have changed since 1998 and deploys this consistently to answer the question. A range of relevant evidence is presented. There is thorough analysis of political information, arguments and explanations. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a consistently high standard. An argument is constructed which displays effective communication and presentation of ideas. There is consistent use of appropriate political vocabulary and a clear and logical conclusion is reached.

[25]

**Total**

**AVAILABLE  
MARKS**

25

**50**