2.10 The Structures and Powers of the Devolved Governments of the UK: 30-minute Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief. For levels-marked and source-based questions, write a developed response using accurate institutional knowledge, examples and clear reasoning. The final essay requires a well-structured evaluation with a conclusion.

1 Evaluate the extent to which devolution has produced an unstable, asymmetric settlement within the United Kingdom.

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(Total for Question 1 is 30 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.10 The Structures and Powers of the Devolved Governments of the UK: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, general knowledge of devolution with limited analysis. Evaluation is superficial or absent and examples, if present, are undeveloped.	**1-7**
Level 2 Clear and accurate knowledge of devolved institutions and examples. Some analysis of asymmetry and instability is present, with an emerging evaluative judgement, but treatment may be one-sided or lack depth across AO1, AO2 and AO3.	**8-15**
Level 3 Detailed knowledge and analysis of the structures, financial powers and asymmetry of the devolved settlements. Evaluation is balanced, addressing causes and consequences and using examples to support a reasoned judgement.	**16-23**
Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging knowledge used to construct a sustained evaluation that integrates institutional detail, analysis of asymmetry and stability, and clear, balanced judgement. Demonstrates strong AO1, AO2 and AO3 performance with well-chosen examples and a final reasoned conclusion.	**24-30**

Indicative content:

- AO1 knowledge: the statutory basis of devolution: Scotland Act 1998 and 2016, Wales Act 2006 and 2017, Northern Ireland Act 1998; reserved-powers model for Scotland and Wales; Barnett formula; Scottish tax-varying powers and the modest Welsh tax powers; Sewel Convention and its statutory recognition but political nature.
- AO2 analysis: asymmetry illustrated by Scotland's broader fiscal and legislative powers compared with Wales and Northern Ireland, leading to divergent policy choices and different public service provision; practical implications for UK-wide policy coordination and fiscal equalisation.
- AO2 analysis: how Barnett consequentials can create perceptions of unfairness and fuel demands for greater autonomy, and how differing degrees of fiscal responsibility affect political accountability in the devolved governments.
- AO3 evaluation: arguments that asymmetry creates instability: territorial political conflict, increased demands for independence or further devolution (notably in Scotland), and difficulties during UK-wide crises when powers and funding responsibilities diverge.
- AO3 evaluation: counterarguments that devolution provides flexibility, allowing tailored policy responses and reducing pressure on Westminster by enabling local governance; fiscal powers can increase legitimacy by linking taxation and spending locally.
- AO3 evaluation: institutional mechanisms that mitigate instability, including intergovernmental forums, legislative consent processes, and negotiated funding arrangements, though their effectiveness varies and political tensions can override procedural mechanisms.
- Consideration of Northern Ireland's distinct context: power-sharing requirements and the potential for political collapse in the Assembly create a different kind of instability that is not solely explained by asymmetry of powers.
- Weighing of evidence: acknowledge that asymmetry is real and can produce tensions and perceived unfairness, but that instability is not an inevitable outcome; careful design of finance, clearer rules and stronger intergovernmental cooperation can reduce instability while preserving the benefits of tailored governance.
- A balanced conclusion might argue that devolution has created an asymmetric settlement which increases the potential for political tension and instability in some circumstances, particularly where funding disputes or nationalist pressures exist, but that asymmetry also reflects democratic responsiveness and can be managed institutionally, so the settlement is not necessarily permanently unstable.

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