2.4 The Structure, Composition and Functions of Parliament

Total Marks

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 70 minutes · Write-in edition

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief. For levels-marked questions write a clear, developed response with accurate political knowledge and precise terminology. The source-based question requires answers driven by the extracts provided.

1 State one formal function of Parliament in the UK constitutional context, from the Edexcel 9PL0 specification.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 This short question concerns the remaining hereditary peers in the House of Lords as of Edexcel 9PL0 teaching. State how many hereditary peers remain entitled to sit, and name the mechanism by which they remain.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 This question is about the role of backbench MPs in scrutinising the executive in the UK Parliament, per Edexcel 9PL0.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Evaluate the extent to which the House of Lords is an effective second chamber in the UK Parliament. In your answer, consider composition, methods of scrutiny and the constitutional limits on Lords powers. Use knowledge and reach a reasoned judgement.

(Total for Question 4 is 30 marks)

5 Source extracts for the next question, context: the House of Lords role in scrutiny. Extract A is a short editorial from a national newspaper, dated 2024, arguing the Lords improves legislation by offering expertise and revision. Extract B is a speech by a member of the House of Lords, dated 2023, arguing the chamber lacks democratic legitimacy and frequently delays government priorities. Using these two extracts, analyse how the House of Lords contributes to legislative scrutiny and the limits of that contribution. Refer closely to the extracts in your answer and use your own knowledge. Each extract above is fictional but plausible and dated; base your answer on them and on Edexcel 9PL0 coverage of Lords functions.

(Total for Question 5 is 30 marks)

Mark scheme · 2.4 The Structure, Composition and Functions of Parliament

Question 1

identifies one correct function, e.g. legislating	**B1**
development, e.g. passing laws through both Houses and receiving Royal Assent	**B1**

Answer: One function is legislating, that is, debating and passing laws through the House of Commons and House of Lords before Royal Assent.

Question 2

states the correct number, 92	**B1**
identifies that they remain following the House of Lords Act 1999 transitional arrangement	**B1**
explains the mechanism, e.g. 90 elected hereditary peers plus two holders of offices (the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain)	**B1**
brief development, e.g. replacement hereditary peers are elected by hereditary peer groups when vacancies arise	**B1**

Answer: There are 92 hereditary peers remaining, retained as a transitional arrangement under the House of Lords Act 1999: 90 elected hereditary peers plus two office holders (the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain), with replacements elected by hereditary peer groups when vacancies occur.

Question 3

identifies that backbench MPs scrutinise government through questions, debates and votes	**B1**
explains the impact, e.g. exposing policy weaknesses, forcing ministerial explanation or changes	**B1**
identifies that backbenchers sit on committees or table amendments	**B1**
explains the consequence, e.g. shaping legislation or public opinion and constraining the executive	**B1**

Answer: Backbench MPs scrutinise the executive by asking parliamentary questions, initiating debates and using votes to challenge policy, which can expose weaknesses and force ministerial explanation or policy change; they also participate in committees and table amendments, helping to shape legislation and influence public opinion, thereby constraining the executive.

Question 4

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, generalised statements about the House of Lords with limited factual support and little or no developed evaluation. Work may be descriptive without clear judgement.	**1-7**
Level 2 Clear knowledge of the Lords composition and some methods of scrutiny with some developed analysis. Evaluation is present but may be one-sided, and judgement is asserted rather than substantiated with balanced evidence.	**8-15**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge of the Lords used to construct a sustained analysis of its effectiveness, considering strengths such as expertise and revision and weaknesses such as democratic deficit and limited powers. Evaluation weighs evidence and reaches a supported judgement.	**16-23**
Level 4 Sophisticated knowledge and analysis across composition, scrutiny methods and constitutional limits used to build a tightly argued, balanced evaluation. The response integrates precise examples, addresses counterarguments and reaches a clearly substantiated, nuanced judgement on the extent of the Lords effectiveness.	**24-30**

Indicative content:

- Composition strengths: large number of life peers appointed for expertise and experience across professions such as law, medicine, academia and business, which can strengthen technical scrutiny and amendment of legislation.
- Composition weaknesses: lack of democratic legitimacy because most peers are appointed rather than elected, presence of bishops and remaining hereditary peers, and political patronage in appointments can undermine claims to impartiality.
- Methods of scrutiny strengths: the Lords revises bills in detail during committee and report stages, can propose amendments that improve clarity and remove unintended consequences, and its expertise supports specialist scrutiny; Lords committees can produce influential reports.
- Methods of scrutiny weaknesses: the Lords lacks the power to permanently block most government legislation due to the Parliament Acts and the Salisbury Convention, so its influence is limited to delay and persuasion rather than veto in most cases.
- Constitutional limits: the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949 allow the Commons to override the Lords in many circumstances after delays, and the Salisbury Convention restrains the Lords from blocking manifesto commitments, both reducing the Lords capacity to frustrate government policy.
- Practical considerations: the Lords can be effective in improving legislation where government accepts amendments, and in detailed committee work, but effectiveness depends on political context, the government's willingness to accept revision and public pressure.
- Reform and evaluation: arguments for reform include introducing an elected or partially elected chamber to increase legitimacy, while arguments against full election stress the value of appointed expertise and cross-party independence; a balanced judgement weighs legitimacy against practical scrutiny benefits.
- Possible conclusion: the Lords is an effective second chamber in technical and revising terms, providing valuable expertise and improving legislation, but its democratic deficit and constrained constitutional powers mean its overall effectiveness is limited and contested, so it is partially effective rather than fully authoritative as a second chamber.

Question 5

Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, partial use of the extracts with limited explanation. Knowledge of House of Lords functions may be thin or inaccurate. Analysis is descriptive rather than driven by the source.	**1-6**
Level 2 Clear use of both extracts with accurate explanation of how the House of Lords can provide expertise and revision, and how critics cite lack of legitimacy and potential delay. Uses own knowledge to develop points, but source integration may be uneven.	**7-18**
Level 3 Good, sustained analysis driven by close engagement with both extracts, explaining mechanisms of scrutiny, examples of revision, and the democratic critique and practical limits. Own knowledge is used effectively to support the source analysis.	**19-24**
Level 4 Sophisticated, source-led analysis that evaluates strengths and limits of the Lords in scrutiny, integrates specific points from both extracts with precise factual knowledge and reaches a reasoned judgement about the overall contribution of the Lords.	**25-30**

Indicative content:

- From Extract A, the Lords improves legislation by drawing on specialist expertise from life peers with professional backgrounds, enabling detailed amendment and technical scrutiny that complements Commons debate.
- Extract A implies the revising role operates through committee stage amendments and line by line consideration in the Lords, which can identify drafting defects and unintended consequences missed in Commons stages.
- From Extract B, a key limit is lack of democratic legitimacy, since most Lords are appointed life peers rather than elected, and the presence of hereditary peers and bishops can be used to argue the chamber lacks a popular mandate.
- Extract B suggests that the Lords can delay government priorities by opposing or proposing amendments that force the Commons to reconsider, which can be politically costly for ministers seeking rapid implementation of manifesto pledges.
- Own knowledge: the Salisbury Convention and the Parliament Acts constrain the extent to which the Lords can block manifesto-based government legislation, limiting the Lords to delay and revision rather than permanent veto in most circumstances.
- Own knowledge: the expertise point is supported by real-world examples where Lords amendments led to policy clarification or small but important changes, while the legitimacy critique underpins calls for reform such as elected or partially elected second chamber proposals.
- Own knowledge: the composition with life peers appointed for service or expertise strengthens scrutiny in specialist fields such as science, law and medicine, but appointment processes can be politically influenced, which undercuts claims of independence.
- Evaluation might weigh the practical gains from expertise and detailed revision against the democratic deficit and potential for obstruction, concluding the Lords makes a distinctive and valuable contribution to scrutiny, but one that is limited and contested, and which depends on political context and conventions such as Salisbury and the Parliament Acts.