2.5 Parliament's Legislative Process and Scrutiny of the Executive

Total Marks

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief but must be accurate. For levels-marked and source-based questions write a developed, well-structured response using accurate terminology and named examples where appropriate. Show any planning clearly.

1 State one principal function of the Second Reading of a Government public Bill in the House of Commons.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 Explain the purpose of Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons and outline one limitation of PMQs as a tool for sustained scrutiny of government policy.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 State two formal parliamentary mechanisms used specifically to scrutinise the executive and name the principal feature of each.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 Source for use with the question: Extract A and Extract B. Extract A, contemporary briefing from an academic commentator on Westminster practice, 2023: 'Prime Minister's Questions has high visibility but limited depth. It forces short answers and theatrical exchanges, which can highlight ministerial slip ups but does not provide the time or evidence-gathering needed for sustained policy scrutiny.' Extract B, report summary from a Commons select committee, 2021: 'Departmental select committees have compelled significant change by exposing failures of implementation and by securing ministerial commitments in response to reports; their inquiries are evidence-based and have influenced both policy revision and public accountability.' Using these two extracts, analyse the strengths and limitations of different parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms for holding the executive to account.

(Total for Question 4 is 12 marks)

5 Evaluate the view that Parliament is effective in scrutinising the executive and holding it to account.

(Total for Question 5 is 30 marks)

6 Explain the role of departmental select committees in scrutinising government policy, giving two specific functions these committees perform and a brief development of each function.

(Total for Question 6 is 5 marks)

Mark scheme · 2.5 Parliament's Legislative Process and Scrutiny of the Executive

Question 1

One valid function, such as debating the main principles of the Bill and usually holding a vote at the end to decide whether it proceeds	**B1**

Answer: To debate the main principles of the Bill and to hold a vote on whether the Bill should proceed to the committee stage.

Question 2

Identifies the purpose, for example to allow MPs to question the Prime Minister directly on current issues and government actions in a high visibility forum	**B1**
Develops the purpose, for example PMQs promotes direct political accountability, enables opposition to challenge the PM, and signals issues to the media and public	**B1**
Identifies a limitation, for example the short, time-limited format encourages brief answers and theatrical exchanges rather than detailed examination	**B1**
Develops the limitation, for example it prevents thorough evidence-based probing and can prioritise spectacle over detailed policy interrogation	**B1**

Answer: PMQs allows MPs to question the Prime Minister directly, providing high public visibility and immediate political accountability; it enables the opposition to challenge the PM and places issues on the public agenda. A limitation is the short, adversarial format, which encourages brief answers and theatrical exchanges rather than sustained, evidence-based scrutiny, limiting its usefulness for detailed examination of complex policy.

Question 3

One valid mechanism named with a correct principal feature, for example Select Committees, which hold inquiries, take evidence and publish reports	**B1**
A second valid mechanism named with a correct principal feature, for example Prime Minister's Questions, which provide a weekly oral question and answer session with the Prime Minister in the House of Commons	**B1**

Answer: Select Committees, which hold inquiries, take evidence from witnesses and publish reports; Prime Minister's Questions, a weekly oral question and answer session where MPs question the Prime Minister directly.

Question 4

Level 1 Basic selection of material from the extracts with limited analysis. Points are descriptive and show limited linkage between the extracts and the question.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear use of one extract with some analysis of strengths or limitations, or limited use of both extracts with partial analysis. Some contextual knowledge may be present.	**4-6**
Level 3 Good use of both extracts to identify and analyse several strengths and limitations of scrutiny mechanisms, supported by additional knowledge or brief exemplification.	**7-9**
Level 4 Excellent, balanced analysis driven by the extracts, integrating them with accurate, developed contextual knowledge and clear evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of different scrutiny mechanisms.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Extract A identifies PMQs as high visibility but limited depth, a strength being public exposure and political accountability through rapid questioning and immediate answers, while a limitation is lack of time and evidence to probe complex policy.
- Extract A also suggests PMQs are theatrical, which can deter detailed scrutiny and encourage soundbites rather than factual testing, reducing substantive accountability.
- Extract B highlights departmental select committees as evidence-based mechanisms that conduct inquiries, take detailed evidence and produce reports that can compel ministerial responses and policy change, a clear strength in sustained scrutiny.
- Extract B implies select committees can influence policy implementation by exposing failures and securing commitments, showing capacity for practical impact beyond theatrical exchanges.
- A balanced analysis notes that the mechanisms serve different functions: PMQs provides political accountability and media spotlight, useful for signalling and short term pressure, while select committees provide forensic, expert-led scrutiny over time that can lead to policy change.
- Evaluation might consider constraints on select committees, such as limited enforcement powers, dependence on government willingness to implement recommendations, and resource or time limits, which temper their effectiveness despite evidence-based strength.
- Evaluation might consider constraints on PMQs, such as party confrontation, scripted exchanges and the limited legal compulsion on ministers to answer beyond political consequences, which reduce depth even as they increase visibility and immediate political accountability.
- A strong conclusion weighs both mechanisms and argues that neither alone is sufficient: effective scrutiny requires a combination of visible parliamentary questioning to raise issues publicly and the detailed, evidence-led work of committees to secure substantive accountability.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Examples, if present, are generalised or inaccurate.	**1-6**
Level 2 Clear knowledge of several scrutiny mechanisms with some developed analysis of how they hold the executive to account. Evaluation is present but may be partial or one-sided, relying on general assertions.	**7-12**
Level 3 Detailed and accurate knowledge deployed in a sustained analysis of multiple scrutiny mechanisms, considering both strengths and limitations. Evaluation engages with efficacy and offers substantiated judgements, though some strands may be less developed.	**13-18**
Level 4 Sophisticated, well-developed analysis using a wide range of accurate examples and named mechanisms; evaluation is balanced and reaches a clear, supported judgement on the overall effectiveness of Parliament in scrutinising the executive.	**19-24**
Level 5 Exceptional, wide-ranging knowledge and analysis deployed to construct a tightly argued evaluation that weighs competing perspectives, uses precise, well-selected examples and reaches a nuanced, well-substantiated final judgement on the extent to which Parliament is effective in scrutiny and accountability.	**25-30**

Indicative content:

- Arguments that Parliament is effective in scrutiny: departmental select committees conduct evidence-based inquiries, compel evidence, publish influential reports and secure ministerial responses and commitments; select committee inquiries have in some cases led to concrete policy revisions or resignations.
- Arguments that Parliament is effective in scrutiny: the Liaison Committee, which questions the Prime Minister and coordinates select committee work, can expose inconsistencies and bring sustained focus to major issues, while PMQs provides immediate public scrutiny and forces the executive to answer to Parliament and the media.
- Arguments that Parliament has important legal and procedural powers, such as votes on legislation, confidence motions and the ability to demand papers, which can constrain government actions and require ministerial accountability.
- Arguments that Parliament is limited: the government controls the legislative timetable and has a significant payroll vote, meaning that when the government has a strong Commons majority it can resist scrutiny and limit time for detailed examination of Bills and inquiries.
- Arguments that Parliament is limited: PMQs is often theatrical and party-driven, producing headlines rather than deep scrutiny; select committees lack direct enforcement powers and rely on the government to implement recommendations, limiting their practical effect in some cases.
- Arguments that Parliament is limited: the House of Lords is only a revising chamber and can be circumvented via the Parliament Acts; resource constraints on committees and the specialist expertise required to scrutinise complex modern policy can reduce effectiveness.
- Evaluation might discuss how effectiveness varies by context, for example being stronger when cross-party consensus exists, when select committees choose high-profile issues, or when media and public attention amplify parliamentary findings, and weaker when governments pack committees with loyalists or restrict time and access.
- A strong conclusion will reach a balanced judgement, for example arguing that Parliament provides multiple, complementary mechanisms that do deliver meaningful scrutiny in many circumstances, but that structural advantages enjoyed by the executive, especially a large Commons majority and control of the timetable, mean parliamentary effectiveness is conditional and uneven rather than absolute.

Question 6

Identifies a first function, for example conducting inquiries and taking evidence from ministers, officials and external experts	**B1**
Develops the first function, for example evidence gathering allows committees to test government claims and expose weaknesses	**B1**
Identifies a second function, for example producing reports with recommendations to which the government must respond	**B1**
Develops the second function, for example reports can shape public debate and press the government to change policy or explain its actions	**B1**
Identifies that select committees have the power to call for persons, papers and records, strengthening their capacity to scrutinise	**B1**

Answer: Departmental select committees conduct inquiries and take formal oral and written evidence from ministers, officials and outside experts, which allows them to test government claims and expose policy weaknesses. They produce reports with recommendations to which the government must respond, and such reports can shape public debate and pressure ministers to change policy or provide fuller explanation. Committees also have the power to call for persons, papers and records, which strengthens their ability to obtain information and scrutinise government action.