



POL.UKG5 Parliament's Legislative Process and Scrutiny of the Executive

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · Calculators not allowed · about 70 minutes

Total Marks

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** Define the term 'First Reading' in the UK House of Commons legislative process for a public Bill.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

- 3** State two types of committee that may consider a public Bill in the House of Commons and state their principal difference in membership or purpose.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Explain the purpose of Report Stage in either House when a public Bill is being considered.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5** State the statutory effect of the Parliament Act 1911 on the House of Lords ability to block a public Bill in ordinary circumstances.

(Total for Question 5 is 1 mark)

- 6** Explain two ways in which the House of Lords acts as a revising chamber during the passage of legislation, giving brief development of each way.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** Explain the process known as 'ping pong' between the Houses when a Bill is amended by the House of Lords and returned to the House of Commons, mentioning the role of possible government decisions during this process.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

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

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** 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 9 is 5 marks)

- 10** 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 10 is 12 marks)

- 11** 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 11 is 4 marks)

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

(Total for Question 12 is 30 marks)

Mark scheme · POL.UKG5 Parliament's Legislative Process and Scrutiny of the Executive

Question 1

- **B1** A concise definition that the First Reading is the formal introduction of a Bill to the House, its title is read and copies made available, with no substantive debate
- **Answer: The First Reading is the formal introduction of a Bill to the House, at which its title is read out and the Bill is published or made available to members, with no substantive debate on its content.**

Question 2

- **B1** 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
- **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 3

- **B1** One correct committee type, for example Public Bill Committee
- **B1** A second correct committee type, for example Committee of the Whole House, with a correct contrast that a Public Bill Committee is a selected small group while a Committee of the Whole House involves all MPs
- **Answer: Public Bill Committee; Committee of the Whole House. The Public Bill Committee is a selected smaller group of MPs for detailed line by line scrutiny, while the Committee of the Whole House involves all MPs sitting as the committee to consider the Bill.**

Question 4

- **B1** Identifies that Report Stage allows the whole House to consider and vote on amendments made in committee
- **B1** Explains consequence, for example it gives all members an opportunity to review, debate and propose further amendments before Third Reading
- **Answer: Report Stage allows the whole House to consider and vote on amendments made in committee and to propose further amendments, giving all members an opportunity to review and debate changes before the Third Reading.**

Question 5

- **B1** States that the 1911 Act removed the Lords power to permanently veto Money Bills and limited their power to delay most public Bills, an effect later modified by the Parliament Act 1949
- **Answer: The Parliament Act 1911 removed the Lords power to permanently veto Money Bills and made most public Bills subject only to Lords delay rather than veto, an arrangement later modified by the Parliament Act 1949.**

Question 6

- **B1** Identifies a first way, for example proposing detailed amendments to improve clarity or correct drafting
- **B1** Develops the first way, for example Lords members with expertise can suggest technical changes that the Commons may accept
- **B1** Identifies a second way, for example detailed scrutiny by Lords select committees feeding evidence into amendment proposals
- **B1** Develops the second way, for example committee reports can highlight unintended consequences and prompt government amendment or reconsideration
- **Answer: One way is by proposing detailed amendments to improve clarity or correct drafting, often drawing on the legal and policy expertise of Lords members; such amendments can lead to clearer, more effective statutes. A second way is through detailed scrutiny by Lords select committees, whose inquiries and reports can expose unintended consequences or gaps in a Bill and lead to amendment or further government reconsideration.**

Question 7

- **B1** Identifies that ping pong is the exchange of a Bill between the Commons and Lords as each House considers and responds to amendments
- **B1** Explains that the Commons may accept, reject or propose alternative amendments and return the Bill to the Lords
- **B1** Identifies that this exchange can repeat until both Houses agree or the government intervenes, for example by asking the Commons to insist or by using the Parliament Acts
- **B1** Explains consequence, for example persistent disagreement may lead the government to use the Parliament Acts to bypass the Lords or to negotiate concessions
- **Answer: Ping pong is the back and forth exchange of a Bill between the Commons and the Lords as each House considers, accepts or amends the Bill. The Commons may accept Lords amendments, reject them, or propose alternatives and send the Bill back to the Lords. This exchange can repeat until agreement is reached, or the government may intervene by negotiating, asking the Commons to insist on its position, or ultimately relying on the Parliament Acts to bypass the Lords where statutory conditions are met.**

Question 8

- **B1** 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
- **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 9

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 10

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic selection of material from the extracts with limited analysis. Points are descriptive and show limited linkage between the extracts and the question.
- **Level 2** (4-6): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Good use of both extracts to identify and analyse several strengths and limitations of scrutiny mechanisms, supported by additional knowledge or brief exemplification.
- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **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 11

- **B1** 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
- **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 12

- **Level 1** (1-6): Basic, limited knowledge of parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Examples, if present, are generalised or inaccurate.
- **Level 2** (7-12): 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.
- **Level 3** (13-18): 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.
- **Level 4** (19-24): 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.
- **Level 5** (25-30): 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.
- **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.