1.6 Proportional Systems and Electoral Reform Debates in the UK

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief but must be accurate. For levels-marked questions write a structured, developed response using named systems, accurate facts, and clear argument. The final 30-mark essay requires a judgement and evaluation.

1 State the voting method formerly used for electing the Mayor of London and give its common abbreviation.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 Explain briefly how the Supplementary Vote (SV) operates in a single winner contest and give one critique of the system in terms of proportionality.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 State two features of the closed regional list system used for Senedd (Welsh Parliament) elections from 2026 onward, introduced by the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

---

4 State the nationwide result of the 2011 UK referendum on the Alternative Vote in terms of 'Yes' or 'No' and give the approximate percentage for the winning side.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Evaluate the view that the UK should adopt a more proportional electoral system for general elections.

(Total for Question 5 is 30 marks)

6 Explain two arguments commonly advanced against adopting a more proportional system for UK general elections, focusing on governance and local representation concerns.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

7 Using the source, evaluate the strengths of the arguments for and against introducing a proportional system for UK general elections.

(Total for Question 7 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.6 Proportional Systems and Electoral Reform Debates in the UK

Question 1

identifies the Supplementary Vote, SV cao **B1**

Answer: Supplementary Vote, SV.

Question 2

identifies that voters mark a first and second preference **B1**

explains that if no candidate has over 50% of first preferences, all but the top two are eliminated and second preferences of eliminated candidates are redistributed to top two **B1**

gives one critique, e.g. SV is not proportional because it elects a single winner and does not reflect party vote shares across multiple seats **B1**

development of critique, e.g. smaller parties struggle to convert support into seats under SV **B1**

Answer: SV allows voters to name a first and second preference; if a candidate wins over 50% of first preferences they win, otherwise all but the top two are eliminated and second preferences from eliminated candidates are added to the top two. A critique is that SV is not proportional, since it elects a single winner and does not aggregate party vote shares across seats, so smaller parties find it hard to gain representation compared with proportional systems.

Question 3

one accurate feature, e.g. all 96 members are elected from closed party lists across 16 six-member regional constituencies **B1**

a second accurate feature, e.g. seats are allocated within each region using the dHondt method, with no first-past-the-post constituency element **B1**

Answer: Any two: all 96 Senedd members are elected from closed party lists across 16 six-member regional constituencies; seats within each region are allocated proportionally using the dHondt method; there is no first-past-the-post constituency component, unlike the Additional Member System it replaced.

Question 4

identifies that the 'No' side won cao **B1**

gives an approximate percentage for 'No' around 67% cao **B1**

gives an approximate percentage for 'Yes' around 33% cao **B1**

may note the turnout was around 42% as further development **B1**

Answer: 'No' won; approximately 67% voted No and 33% voted Yes. Turnout was about 42%.

Question 5

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of electoral systems and reform arguments with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Claims are asserted rather than supported by evidence. **1-6**

Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge of alternative systems and relevant arguments with some developed analysis. Evaluation is present but may be one sided or rely on generalised evidence. **7-12**

Level 3 Detailed and accurate knowledge deployed in a sustained analysis of the implications of adopting proportional systems, drawing on relevant examples and evidence. Evaluation is balanced and begins to weigh trade offs and likely consequences. **13-18**

Level 4 Sophisticated, wide ranging and accurate knowledge used to construct a tightly argued evaluation comparing different proportional models and their likely effects on representation, governance and local accountability, with well-selected evidence and clear judgments. **19-24**

Level 5 Exceptional response with precise, comprehensive knowledge and incisive evaluation that directly addresses counter arguments and reaches a fully substantiated, balanced judgement on whether the UK should adopt a more proportional system for general elections. **25-30**

Indicative content:

- Arguments for adopting a more proportional system: fairer conversion of votes into seats reducing wasted votes; increased representation for smaller parties and minority groups; potential to increase political pluralism and reflect regional or ideological diversity more accurately.
- Evidence from UK devolved institutions: AMS in Scotland, the closed regional-list system used for the Senedd from 2026, and STV in Northern Ireland provide concrete examples where proportional mechanisms have produced more balanced party representation compared with single member systems, allowing parties like the Greens or smaller regional parties to gain seats.
- Practical design choices matter: systems range from compensatory AMS that preserve constituency links to full list PR which maximises proportionality but risks weakening local accountability; hybrid designs can balance proportionality and local representation.
- Arguments against: risk of fragmented parliaments and coalition or minority governments that may be less decisive; possibility of small parties holding disproportionate influence in coalition negotiations; public preference for clear single party government as evidenced by the 2011 AV referendum result.
- Local accountability trade off: single member constituencies create a clear link between voter and MP; more proportional systems often use larger districts or lists which can dilute that link, though designs such as mixed member models aim to retain constituency MPs while improving proportionality.
- Electoral culture and public views: the 2011 AV referendum saw a strong No vote, suggesting limited public appetite for change; political parties with effective local organisation can suffer under some proportional systems while others may benefit, changing party competition dynamics.
- Institutional and transitional considerations: think about the complexity of implementation, effects on party system, funding and campaigning, and whether reform should be national, phased or require thresholds to prevent fragmentation.
- Comparative evidence: cite examples where proportional systems have produced stable coalition governments with effective policy making, for example in some Scandinavian countries, and counter examples of fragmented systems with frequent elections in other contexts.
- Possible judgements: a reasoned conclusion might argue for cautious reform via a mixed or compensatory system that increases proportionality while retaining constituency links and avoiding extreme fragmentation, or alternatively conclude the costs to governability and public preference make major change undesirable without broad public mandate.

Question 6

identifies one con argument, e.g. proportional systems may produce coalition or minority governments, reducing decisiveness	**B1**
development of that point, e.g. potential for instability and frequent negotiations	**B1**
identifies a second con argument, e.g. weaker constituency link if larger multi member districts or regional lists are used	**B1**
development of that point, e.g. voters may be less able to hold a single MP accountable for local issues	**B1**
further development or example, e.g. SV and AMS debates highlight trade offs between proportionality and clear local accountability	**B1**
additional nuance, e.g. some proportional systems can be designed to preserve strong local links but often at cost to proportionality	**B1**

Answer: Common arguments against more proportional systems include that they can produce coalition or minority governments that require constant negotiation and may be seen as less decisive, and that multi member districts or regional list systems can weaken the direct constituency link, making it harder for voters to hold a single representative accountable; while some systems try to preserve local links, this often involves trade offs with the degree of proportionality achieved.

Question 7

Level 1 Basic identification of points in the source with limited explanation. Little or no evaluation and minimal use of own knowledge. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear explanation of the source arguments with some development, and some use of relevant own knowledge. Evaluation may be one sided or underdeveloped. **4-6**

Level 3 Developed analysis of both sides of the source with well-chosen own knowledge and argument. Evaluation is balanced and starts to weigh evidence for plausibility and impact. **7-9**

Level 4 Thorough evaluation driven by the source and supported by wide, accurate own knowledge. The response weighs the comparative strength of the claims and reaches a substantiated judgement about their overall persuasive force. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- From Source A, the strength of the pro argument is that proportional systems reduce wasted votes and produce seat shares closer to national vote shares, which can be shown by comparing vote-seat disproportionalities under single member systems with devolution examples where AMS or STV produce more proportional results.
- Source A also asserts proportional systems encourage turnout among smaller party supporters; evidence could be evaluated, noting turnout effects are contested and that the 2011 AV referendum had low turnout, suggesting electoral system change alone does not guarantee higher turnout.
- From Source B, the argument that proportional systems can produce fragmented parliaments is supported by examples from some European countries where multi party systems lead to coalition governments, though counter examples exist where coalitions are stable and deliver coherent policy agendas.
- Source B's concern about weakening the local MP link is credible where national list systems are used, but mixed systems such as AMS can retain constituency MPs while adding regional list members, mitigating that risk.
- Evaluation might weigh the magnitude of the problems: wasted votes under the current system are significant in some seats and regions, but the practical effects of proportionality on governance depend on system design, for example whether a mixed member or regional list model is adopted rather than pure national lists.
- Evidence and nuance: devolved examples such as AMS in Scotland and STV in Northern Ireland show more proportional representation can coexist with effective government and maintained local links, though politics and party systems shape outcomes.
- A strong judgement could conclude that both sources raise valid points: proportional systems do improve fairness of representation and reduce wasted votes, but the risk of more fragmented parliaments and potential weakening of constituency links is real and depends on the chosen model; therefore reform merits serious consideration, ideally via a mixed or compensatory system that balances proportionality with local accountability.