**PARLIAMENT REVISION SESSION**

**POLITICS AS & A LEVEL GODALMING COLLEGE**

**AS style questions:**

**DESCRIBE** – the role/functions/powers of parliament; the role of an MP/peer; the concept of parliamentary sovereignty/parliamentary government

Essay questions as below, but a statement followed by ‘How far do you agree with this view’?

**A Level style questions (new spec)**

* Evaluate the view that the House of Commons is effective at performing its roles. (30)
* Evaluate the effectiveness of the House of Commons at scrutinising the executive. (30)
* Evaluate the view that the House of Commons is a more important institution than the House of Lords (30)
* Evaluate the view that the UK should have a fully elected Second Chamber (30)
* Evaluate the extent to which, in recent years, Parliament has been strengthened and it has improved its influence (30)

**Some useful definitions:**

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| **Bicameral** |
| **Fusion of powers** |
| **Parliamentary Government** |
| **Parliamentary Sovereignty** |
| **Ways in which sovereignty has been eroded:**  1.  2.  3.  4.  5. |

**What is the composition of…**

**What are the functions of Parliament?**

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| **House of Commons** | **Shared** | **House of Lords** |
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**Which House is more powerful? Why?**

What is the role of a Backbench MP?

**How effective are Backbench MPs?**

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| **Ineffective** | **Defence of the MP!** |
| Lobby fodder or party hacks, only wanting to be promoted | There are many independent minded MPs who are willing to put own views across. |
| Backbenchers are powerless in the face of frontbenches. Little or no influence on legislation. Fail to hold the government to account | Less true today. Since 2010, there have been more attempts to defy the government and select committees are strong. |
| Rarely attend debates, suggesting lack of interest | Much MP work is carried out behind the scenes, often in committees |
| Long recesses or holidays | MPs use recesses to do constituency work |
| Self seeking and sometimes corrupt? Expenses scandal of 2009-10 | MPs have set up processes to control this. Have a paid salary that is modest compared with similar jobs. |
| MPs are often unknown in their constituencies | Many represent their constituents in a large way even if unknown to many. |

**What are Select Committees?**

**What is the role of the Opposition?**

* The government in waiting
* Calling the government to account
* Defend interests of sections of society that are often ignored.
* Ceremonial functions, eg visits of heads of state.
* Organising opposition days in the House of Commons.

**How effective is Parliament at carrying out its functions?**

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| **Function** | **Effective** | **Ineffective** |
| Legitimacy |  |  |
| Legislation |  |  |
| Scrutiny of legislation |  |  |
| Accountability |  |  |
| Representation |  |  |
| Deliberation / debate |  |  |
| Recruitment of future ministers |  |  |

**The House of Lords**

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| **Lords Strengths** | **Lords Weaknesses** |
| Many members of the Lords are more independent from party control than MPs. They can therefore be braver at standing up to the Government. | In its unreformed state, the Lords lacks democratic legitimacy. |
| Peers represent a wide variety of interests and expertise, being largely prominent citizens with specialist knowledge. | The powers of the Lords are limited by law. It has no power over financial matters and cannot veto legislation in the long term. |
| The Lords can delay legislation and so force compromises on the government.. | Its proposed amendments can be overturned by the Commons. |
| The Lords has more effective time to conduct debates and to scrutinise legislation. | Like the Commons the Lords has a limited role in developing legislation. |

**Why is it more significant?**

**What are the different proposals for House of Lords reform?**

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| **Reform** | **Advantages** | **disadvantages** |
| Abolition | It would save money  It would streamline legislation  It would remove obstructions to efficient government. | An important check on government power would be lost.  It would deny many worthy individuals the chance to share their expertise. |
| All appointed | Many useful, knowledgeable individuals can remain being drawn into politics.  Membership could be managed to ensure a social balance.  It would be more independent than an elected chamber. | It would be put too much patronage into the hands of party leaders.  It would remain undemocratic. |
| Fully elected | Democratic  Members would be accountable.  The House would have more authority and legitimacy so could check the commons.  If elected by PR would be more representative. | The House might become too influential so obstruct the government excessively.  It might be unnecessary to have two elected chambers.  The people are already not voting, more elections might increase apathy. |
| Hybrid | Could enjoy the advantages of both the main alternatives. | Would suffer from the same problems as the main two alternatives. |

**What are the arguments for and against an elected second chamber?**

**Add your ideas to this grid:**

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| **House of Lords should be reformed** | **House of Lords should remain as it is** |
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**To what extent does the Executive dominate Parliament?**



**Evaluate the extent to which the UK Parliament is totally under the control of the executive today. (30)**

**Intro:** what does ‘control’ of Parliament by the executive mean? You could refer to the idea of ‘elective dictatorship’ which was the situation in the past, plus the idea that it is Parliament that holds sovereignty. ‘Today’ implies that the relationship between the two institutions in variable.

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| **Parliament is under control of the Executive** | **Parliament maintains independence from the executive** |
| When a government is fragile, its supports tend to be more disciplined in order to stay in power. MPs do not like the idea of an early general election. | Recently, **Parliament has shown signs of a growing independence from the executive.**  Since 2010, the executive has lacked a decisive majority.  If the government lacks a majority, or has a small majority, they are vulnerable to rebellions or obstructions. Due to May’s minority government, she is very vulnerable to backbench rebellion. The threat of a backbench rebellions has meant that government policies have been dropped (eg, removal of grammar schools policy and dropping of social care plans from 2017 manifesto).  Backbench rebellions are increasingly common, the coalition government faced the most rebellious parliament since 1945, with 37% of divisions facing a rebellion. In August 2013, Cameron faced a rebellion on military intervention, over Syria. In May 2013, 37% of the Conservative party staged a rebellion on the Queen’s speech, supporting an amendment regretting the absence of a commitment to an EU referendum. |
| **Governments still usually enjoy a Commons majority**. May is able to rely on the DUP to obtain a Commons majority. | The House of Lords has become more proactive and willing to obstruct.  Whilst the Blair government faced no defeats in the HoC during its first two terms in office, it faced 353 defeats in the HoL.. This was an increase on the pre-1997 rate of 13 per year and demonstrated the impact of the HoL reforms. The coalition government was defeated over 100 times. |
| Governments control the legislative process and enjoy a majority on the Public Bill Committees.  Party whips ensure loyalty of backbench MPs. MPs are just ‘lobby fodder’ | Parliament has the **reserve power of vote of no confidence**. They also have the reserve power of defeating government legislation. |
| **PM patronage** is able to create loyalty among MPs, the payroll vote. | Parliament may amend legislation. |
| **The Government has an advantage of resources over parliament –** it has government departments and Civil Service support, which Parliament lacks. | **Select Committees are increasingly powerful** and are able to force the government to reconsider issues such as bank regulation, tax avoidance, the procurement of equipment for the armed forces. The leaders of the Select committees have high status and increased salaries (eg, Margaret Hodge, Public Accounts Committee, 2010-2015). The Public Accounts Committee has become highly influential. The Liaison Committee calls the PM increasingly to account.  The Backbench Business Committee now controls part of parliamentary agenda and can order debates which may criticise the government. |
| **The House of Lords, despite being more active, can only delay legislation for a year** (Salisbury Convention). It lacks democratic legitimacy. The government has an electoral mandate**.** | **Parliament was able to influence the executive over foreign and military powers** over Syria. Since then, Parliament has demanded that it approves major military adventures abroad. |
| **Collective responsibility means that the government presents a united front.** |  |