

! Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

**The Prime Minister and Cabinet**

There is no constitutional definition of the British Prime Minister's (PM) role or any authoritative specification of the office's functions, powers and responsibilities. They are a matter of convention and usage, not statute, and are thus, to a large degree, flexible and subject to variation and change over time. Official guidance on the PM's role is limited. The draft *Cabinet Manual* describes the PM as head of the government, chief adviser to the Sovereign, and chair of the Cabinet. The PM is thus responsible for appointing ministers, orchestrating the Cabinet committee system, and the overall organisation of the executive and allocation of functions between ministers and departments (this latter role is also noted in the *Ministerial Code*). The PM also has responsibility for dismissing ministers. The Cabinet is described in the *Cabinet Manual* as 'the ultimate decision-making body of the UK Executive', while the PM is said to 'usually take the lead on significant matters of state.'

In our view, the Prime Minister's role and powers cannot and should not be considered as separate from the role of the Cabinet in our system of government. Effective and successful Cabinet government needs a strong Prime Minister (and in the coalition context a strong Deputy Prime Minister too) to set the tone and provide a sense of direction and overall strategy.

The advent of coalition government in May 2010 impacted on powers and responsibilities normally regarded as belonging to the Prime Minister alone. Under the *Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform*, the Prime Minister was obliged to consult and agree with the Deputy Prime Minister over the appointment, reshuffling and sacking of ministers. The PM hires and fires but must fully consult, and the allocation of posts between the parties in the coalition is expected to operate on a 'one-in, one-out' rule to maintain the agreed balance between the two coalition partners. The Prime Minister's patronage power in all governments is subject in practice to political constraints, but during the 2010 coalition this was a new formal limitation.

(Source: adapted from Professor K Theakston and Dr. T Heppell (2012) [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpolcon/writetv/842/m9.htm>)

- (a) With reference to the source, outline **three** aspects of the Prime Minister's role in relation to ministers and their departments. (5)
  
- (b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, what impact has coalition government had on the office of Prime Minister? (10)
  
- (c) To what extent is the Prime Minister free from effective political constraints? (25)

OR

- 4 To what extent are modern prime ministers now presidents in all but name?

## 2 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Study the following sources and answer the questions that follow.

### Source 1

There are three reasons for government reshuffles: (a) because a minister or ministers leave office for whatever reason and the subsequent movements to fill the vacancies become a reshuffle; (b) because the Prime Minister is dissatisfied with the performance of particular ministers; and (c) to provide a progression route for talented backbenchers. Whether reshuffles have an effect on policy making and delivery depends on the reasons for the reshuffle and the personnel involved.

Source: extract of evidence of former Cabinet Minister, Alan Johnson to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. 18 September, 2012.

### Source 2

David Cameron summoned cabinet ministers on Monday night who are to be sacked or demoted in his first major government reshuffle which will see a comprehensive clear-out of ministers who have failed to deliver and the promotion of a new generation of ministers. There were signs on Monday that Andrew Lansley, the Health Secretary, and Caroline Spelman, Environment Secretary, will be among the victims. Lansley left the prime minister in despair when he struggled to explain the need for his plans to devolve most of the NHS's £100bn budget to new GP-led commissioning groups. Spelman has failed to recover from the fiasco of failed plans to sell off parts of the national forest.

Downing Street confirmed that Andrew Mitchell, the International Development Secretary, will replace Patrick McLoughlin as the government's chief whip. The appointment of Mitchell shows the influence of George Osborne, his close supporter. One government source said: 'The prime minister sees the second half of this parliament as the delivery phase. We want to have people who have a proven record in delivering in their departments.'

Source : adapted from Guardian article, 4 September, 2012

- 2 (a) With reference to the sources, what is a government reshuffle? (5)
- (b) With reference to the sources and your own knowledge, explain the factors a prime minister considers when appointing or dismissing ministers. (10)
- (c) To what extent do prime ministers control the decisions made by their government? (25)

Answer EITHER Question 3 OR Question 4.

EITHER

- 3 Has the experience of coalition government strengthened or weakened prime ministerial power?

(Total for Question 3 = 40 marks)

January 2013

### 1 Prime Ministerial Power

Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

The decision to introduce fixed-term Parliaments was one of the key features of the coalition agreement between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in 2010. The policy was, in due course, enacted through the Fixed-Term Parliament Act, 2011. The introduction of fixed-term Parliaments had long been advocated by the Liberal Democrats. It is often claimed that the reform will reduce prime ministerial power, because it means that prime ministers are no longer able to use their prerogative power to dissolve Parliament and call a general election when events turn in their favour. But a fixed five-year Parliament also means that they can plan ahead to complete their programme by a known date in the future.

The issue of fixed-term Parliaments is part of a long-running debate about how powerful UK prime ministers are. In addition to chairing cabinet meetings and controlling the cabinet system, prime ministers have attracted increasing media focus and become the 'brand image' of their party at election time. Some commentators have gone as far as to claim that UK prime ministers have, effectively, become 'presidents'. Concern about the growing powers of the prime minister has led, amongst other things, to calls for a fully codified written constitution, which would outline the role and responsibilities of the prime minister and government. This would establish clear guidelines for the exercise of prime ministerial powers, rather than allowing the prime minister to determine his or her own role as he or she sees fit.

Source: Edexcel, 12 October 2011.

- 1 (a) With reference to the source, describe how the introduction of fixed-term Parliaments affects prime ministerial power. (5)
- (b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain **three** reforms, other than fixed-term Parliaments, which could limit the powers of the prime minister. (10)
- (c) To what extent have UK prime ministers become more 'presidential'? (25)

**1 Prime Minister and Cabinet**

**Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.**

**Extracts from the Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform, 2010**

There is no constitutional difference between a coalition government and a single party government, but working practices need to reflect the fact that the UK has not had a coalition in modern times.

The initial allocation [in May, 2010 after the general election] of cabinet, ministerial, whip and special adviser appointments between the two parties was agreed between the prime minister and the deputy prime minister.

Future allocation will continue to be based on the principle that the parliamentary party with fewer MPs will have a share of the cabinet, ministerial and whip appointments approximately in proportion to the size of the parliamentary parties. The prime minister, following consultation with the deputy prime minister, will make nominations for the appointment of ministers. The prime minister will nominate Conservative Party ministers and the deputy prime minister will nominate Liberal Democrat ministers.

The principle of collective responsibility, save where it is explicitly set aside, continues to apply to all government ministers. This requires that there is an appropriate degree of consultation and discussion among ministers, that the opinions expressed and advice offered within government remain private, and that the decisions made by the cabinet are binding on and supported by all ministers.

Source: Adapted from Cabinet Office, The Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform, 2010

- 1** (a) With reference to the source, outline how coalition government has affected appointments to the Cabinet. (5)
- (b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain why collective responsibility is an important aspect of UK government. (10)
- (c) How important is the Cabinet? (25)

January 2012

**OR**

- 4** Are UK prime ministers as powerful as is sometimes claimed?

**(Total for Question 4 = 40 marks)**

June 2011

OR

4 Is the UK Prime Minister now effectively a president?

(Total for Question 4 = 40 marks)

January 2011

## 2 Prime Ministerial Power

Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

It is often asserted that 'the British prime minister is as powerful as he or she wants to be'. Margaret Thatcher wanted to be dominant and ensured this by removing her political opponents in the cabinet and replacing them with people she could rely on. Tony Blair similarly strengthened his position by including his closest allies in the cabinet. Prime ministers who want to be dominant will take their prerogative powers and stretch them to the limits. This can also be seen in the area of foreign affairs. Both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown spent much time attempting to take a leading role in world affairs, including conducting wars and negotiating international treaties.

This picture may nevertheless be misleading. There are powerful forces which can be ranged against them. The prime minister's cabinet colleagues can turn against him or her, as occurred with Thatcher in 1990. In the case of Blair, his position was undermined by growing criticism within the party, particularly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The media, too, can become hostile. Brown received unfavourable press coverage and he was presented as a weak and indecisive leader. A prime minister's strength also depends on many factors beyond his or her direct control. These include the size of the parliamentary majority and the course of world events.

April, 2010.

- 2 (a) With reference to the source, describe **two** limitations on prime ministerial power. (5)
- (b) With reference to the source, and your own knowledge, explain the prime minister's prerogative powers. (10)
- (c) To what extent can the Prime Minister control the Cabinet? (25)

(Total for Question 2 = 40 marks)

(Total for Section A = 40 marks)

## 2 The Prime Minister and the Cabinet

Study the following two passages and answer the questions that follow.

### Source 1 A Cabinet Meeting

The Prime Minister's Spokesman began by giving a brief summary of Cabinet of the previous day to the assembled press. Cabinet had met for an hour and 40 minutes that morning. There had been the usual update from Geoff Hoon (Leader of the House of Commons) on parliamentary business, there had been a brief discussion on the Draft Legislative Programme being published tomorrow and there was an update from the Foreign Secretary on the situation in Burma. Most of the Cabinet was spent discussing the economy in a discussion led by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, where he emphasised the global nature of the economic situation we were facing at the moment – not only the global credit crunch, but also rising oil and food prices.

Source: Prime Minister's Office press briefing, 14 May 2008

### Source 2 Gordon Brown's First Cabinet

Gordon Brown unveiled an almost completely new Cabinet today as he attempted to make good on his pledge for a 'politics of change' after the Blair years, including Britain's first ever female Home Secretary and its youngest Foreign Secretary for 30 years. As part of a huge overhaul, the Prime Minister appointed Jacqui Smith, formerly the Chief Whip, as Home Secretary, and David Miliband as Foreign Secretary. As head of the Home Office, Ms Smith will be in charge of the battle against terrorism, national security and policing. Standing outside the Foreign Office, Mr Miliband – who was himself widely tipped as Mr Brown's rival for the Labour leadership, before ruling himself out – said: 'I'm tremendously honoured'.

Source: adapted from '*Brown shuffles the pack for new Cabinet*' in Times Online, 28 June 2007

- 2 (a) With reference to Source 1, describe **two** types of issues discussed by the Cabinet. (5)
- (b) With reference to Source 2, and your own knowledge, what factors does the Prime Minister take into account when appointing cabinet ministers? (10)
- (c) To what extent is the Cabinet an important body? (25)

(Total for Question 2 = 40 marks)