The Government and Politics of Wales
Questions for discussion and case studies

Chapter 4 – The Welsh Government: The Core Executive
Pages 72–97, Author Russell Deacon

Teacher’s guide – in conjunction with the text book

Timing: Students should read the relevant chapter before undertaking the exercise questions and case studies, and discuss their answers. There are answer note suggestions behind all questions. The questions can be undertaken in class or at home with questions/answers and activities being undertaken in the classroom. The material is teaching material and NOT specifically material for answering examination questions.

Tutor guide: Tutors should familiarise themselves with the text, questions and answers before undertaking the activities in the classroom. For any unfamiliar terms an extensive glossary of key terms is provided on pages 206–22 of the book. The questions and case studies do not cover all of the material in the chapters. If tutors wish to cover this, they will need to set additional stimulus questions. Tutors and students may also wish to add material not provided in either the suggested answers or the text to the answers. Welsh politics is constantly changing, so answers provided now may well alter as these changes take place.

The questions for discussion and the case studies are found at the end of each chapter. The suggested answers and some ideas for teaching these are provided on the following pages. Tutors should seek to draw these answers from the students and also discuss their merits.

Suggested answers

Chapter 4 Questions for discussion

These questions cover some elements of the WJEC AS Government and Politics Specification 1.3 How devolution works in the UK, specifically 1.3.1 How government works in Wales, the sections on ‘The roles, powers and resources of the First Minister of Wales’ and ‘The Cabinet system in Wales: composition; roles and functions’.

1. In what way is it true to say that the First Minister is the Prime Minister of Wales?

Answer points: Tutors should note that the role of the First Minister is shown on pages 76–7. These pages indicate that amongst other factors many of the First Minister’s roles and even their appointment by the Crown are similar to those of the Prime Minister.
The main way they are different is that they have a much smaller portfolio than the UK Prime Minister, most notably over Foreign Affairs, taxation, defence, social security and law and order. Their role in government, the legislature, political party and Cabinet, however, are very similar to those of the Prime Minister. In fact, in Welsh the title of First Minister (Prif Weinidog) can also be translated as Prime Minister. It was thought, however, as with other posts of First Minister across the UK and Northern Ireland, that also calling them Prime Minister would cause confusion with the UK Prime Minister.

2. The First Minister’s post gives them unbridled power – discuss.

*Answer points:* The First Minister’s powers are determined by statute, and kept in check by their party, Cabinet, actions of Westminster and Whitehall, votes of the Welsh Assembly including their own nomination, rulings of the Presiding Officer and legal challenge through the UK Supreme Court. They are also answerable to the electorate, personally through their own election and at Welsh General Elections by ensuring that their party remains in power.

3. To what extent is the Welsh Cabinet merely an extension of the office of the First Minister?

*Answer points:* The tutor needs to make the students are aware that the First Minister determines who attends Cabinet and those who are selected as ministers. The First Minister is the most powerful position in Cabinet; however, they are subject to collective responsibility and can be overruled by the Cabinet on decisions or policy.

Box 4.4 determines what the role of the Welsh Cabinet is. Due to the fact that what happens in Cabinet remains mainly secret (minutes kept are very vague) and the Welsh media’s role in researching what goes on is limited, we do not really know the extent to which Cabinet acts as a brake on the powers of the First Minister or vice versa.

4. To what extent is it true to say that the Civil Service in Wales can provide all of the support any minister needs, therefore there is no need for SPADs?

*Answer points:* The tutor should note that this question refers to Box 4.9 on pages 91–2, which provides a full answer to this question. In class these answers can also be used as a debate between two sides, answering the question set above.
Case study: collective and ministerial responsibility

This case study covers the WJEC AS Government and Politics Specification Element 1.3.1 How the Government Works in Wales – Collective and Ministerial Responsibility.

Read the text in Boxes 4.5 and 4.8, and also the material in Chapter 4 that explores ministerial and collective responsibility. When you have done this address the questions below:

1. **What is the difference between collective and ministerial responsibility?**

The tutor can note that Box 4.5 highlights the case of the former cabinet member, Leighton Andrews, who resigned due to collective responsibility. This is where a minister cannot publicly go against the policy of their own government. Ministerial responsibility is where a minister takes responsibility for either their own or their departmental failings. There are two cases studies of this in Boxes 4.7 and 4.8.

2. **Why do you think that Leighton Andrews may have campaigned against his own government’s policy?**

Students should be aware of the fact that Mr Andrews may have had a number of reasons for going against his own department’s and government’s policy. These may have included the desire to be seen as a constituency AM separate from the government, the notion that this policy should not apply to his own constituents (the ‘having it both ways’ argument), a hope that in a nation with a small media presence this breach of collective responsibility would not be noticed and finally that he felt his constituency loyalties were greater than those to his own government.

3. **Why did Rhodri Glyn Thomas resign when no civil servant in his department had been at fault?**

The answer should reflect on the issue that as the Minister for Heritage at the time responsible for the introduction of the smoking ban, Thomas took personal responsibility for publicly breaching it. He felt his actions had damaged his own department and the government.

4. **Examine the subsequent careers of Leighton Andrews, Rhodri Glyn Thomas and Alun Davies (Box 4.7) and determine whether ministerial resignation or sacking is ever really that detrimental to a politician’s career.**

Students will note that both Andrews and Davies returned to the Cabinet. Andrews later lost his Assembly Seat and was made a professor at Cardiff University, and Thomas went on to a number of posts including President of the National Library of Wales.
The tutor may then wish to reflect on reasons why ministerial careers do not seem to be blighted by resignation. Factors such as low media profile of the Welsh Assembly, very few people reading newspapers that cover the events of the Welsh Assembly, lack of talent in Wales for government posts, short political memories of fellow AMs and the electorate, the power of political parties to support their own elected members through patronage, and a host of other factors, may be relevant.

**Summary – Reflective learning questions**

These should be used either at the end or between the questions for discussion and the case studies to reflect on what has been learned. The students should be given sufficient time to discuss their answers.

1. What knowledge have you gained this lesson?
2. How might you use the knowledge you have gained this lesson, in the future?

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