Source-based question: Constitutional Reform

This question is in the format of Edexcel Politics Paper 1 questions but it has not been endorsed by the examination board.

This source has been adapted from an article in the Financial Times entitled ‘Making UK governance fit for the future’. The article discusses the incomplete nature of constitutional reform in the UK.

For a nation that prides itself on being the mother of parliaments, the UK’s democracy is looking troublingly outmoded. There is a need to share more power with the nations and regions of the UK. Constitutional change has seen major reforms simply placed on top of the existing structure like a game of Jenga. Unsurprisingly, the settlement is highly unstable.

Many experts advocate a codified constitution, though this brings its own problems and might increase the politicisation of judges. Others advocate electoral reform or review of the royal prerogative powers, which allow the executive to bypass parliament.

The most pressing issue is devolution. It is doubtful any further reforms would satisfy the Scottish nationalists but Scots are likely to show their support for another referendum and the UK needs to offer an alternative vision. Though the devolved parliaments have substantial income tax freedoms their financial powers are severely limited. In England too many areas lack a directly elected mayor and those mayors must be given more powers.

The House of Lords is unelected and outdated, and despite the good work it does it has been undermined by its undemocratic appointments system. One option would be a chamber comprising elected members of the UK nations and regions, with more power to block decisions affecting the entire nation. If the union is to hold, Westminster must give adequate voice to the other nations.


Using the source, evaluate the view that the UK Constitution is in need of major reform. [30]

In your response you must:

• compare and contrast different opinions in the source
• examine and debate these views in a balanced way
• analyse and evaluate only the information presented in the source.
In answering a question of this kind you must base your response clearly on the source. You must identify competing arguments within the source and compare them. Remember that you are expected to evaluate the relative strength of different arguments.

In this case the author makes a strong case for a radical overhaul of the UK Constitution, focusing in particular on the need to extend devolution and make the House of Lords a more democratic body. But he does make some points in favour of the current constitutional settlement – he concedes that the devolved bodies already possess significant powers, and that the Lords does some good work. He also suggests that creating a codified constitution would raise new problems.