



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Politics
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The Higher Politics Course has once again experienced an increase in the number of centres from 16 to 21 and in presentation from 156 to 202 (in 2007 only 97 candidates were presented). This growth reflects the significant increase in S6 school presentations.

Overall the examination was well received and performance was very good with clear improvement in the more demanding Paper 2. There was no adverse external feedback and no mistakes in the paper or instructions.

Candidates once again tended to perform better in the skill-based Paper 1 compared to the essay style of Paper 2. In Paper 2, candidates choose one question from three in each of the three sections. All questions were answered from the range of candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

There were, as usual, some outstanding answers for Question 2 in Paper 1, with a significant number of candidates showing excellent analytical and evaluative skills. Candidates from a further education background continue to show improvement in Paper 1.

In Paper 2, many answers were of a very high standard with some excellent exemplification, particularly for Question A2 — Weber and Lukes, Question B6 — powers of the respective executives, and Question C8 — electoral systems.

Areas which candidates found demanding

A minority of candidates tackling Question A2 found it difficult to answer the question set and attempted rather to answer the question they had prepared for instead. This meant they did not refer to the quote and immediately used Max Weber and Steven Lukes' work and examples without saying if they were still relevant.

Again, a minority of candidates tackling Question C9 found it difficult to answer the question set and attempted rather to answer the question they had prepared for instead. They provided coverage of the theories of voting behaviour with limited discussion of the Sociological model being the dominant influence.

It was pleasing to note a decline in the number of candidates who failed to compare and contrast the key features of, for example, Burke's Conservatism with those of Marx's Socialism. Some weaker candidates tended to concentrate on the developments of Conservatism and Socialism in modern states and tended to ignore the role of Burke, Marx, and especially Lenin.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

It was pleasing to note that the SQA Politics Understanding Standards day held in February 2010 seems to have ensured that most candidates were well prepared to achieve success in the exam.

In Paper 1, candidate performance has improved with far fewer candidates writing as much for the six marks answer as they do for the 14 marks. In a growing number of centres students are answering the 14 mark question first to ensure that this question is not rushed.

In Paper 2, candidates seemed to be better prepared in terms of examination technique eg answering questions directly, referring to quotes and the wording of the question in their answers. As stated, candidates must develop analytical skills to ensure their answer provides a compare and contrast approach in those types of questions.

The following advice given in the 2009 Report is still relevant: Please ensure that if compulsory theorists are involved, the candidates must refer to each of those mentioned in the question.

Again, it was pleasing to note that fewer candidates had time management issues in Paper 2.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	163
Number of resulted entries in 2010	202

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark — 80				
A	53.0%	53.0%	107	58
B	22.8%	75.7%	46	50
C	12.9%	88.6%	26	42
D	1.0%	89.6%	2	38
No award	10.4%	100.0%	21	—

General commentary on grade boundaries

While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Head of Service and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.