



External Assessment Report 2009

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

This is the third year of the new Higher Politics Course which has settled in well.

Overall the examination was well received. Performance was very good with marks slightly up in the more demanding Paper 2.

A slightly different approach was used in Q1 in Paper 1 - this entailed a statistical and a textual source with a question. 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.

There was a further increase in candidates - up from 142 to 163 and a modest increase in centres from 15 to 16.

Areas in which candidates performed well

There were - as usual - some outstanding answers for Q2 in Paper 1 with a significant number of candidates showing excellent analytical and evaluative skills. Candidates from an FE background continue to show improvement in Paper 1

In Paper 2 many answers were of a very high standard with some excellent exemplification in Paper 2 - particularly for QA2, qB4 and QC8.

Areas which candidates found demanding

A number of candidates tackling QA3 found it difficult to compare and contrast the key features of John Locke's Liberalism with those of Karl Marx's Socialism. They tended to concentrate on the developments of Liberalism and Socialism in modern States and tended to ignore the role of Locke and Marx.

QB8 asked about the executive function of policy making, and some candidates tended to deal with their chosen countries in isolation and thus failed to compare and contrast. The following advice was given in the 2008 Report and it once again applies:

Some candidates still find compare and contrast questions difficult to handle. This has to be addressed for future examinations. These candidates usually described two separate countries (Section B questions) without comparing them at all; similarly describing liberalism and conservatism/Socialism features without comparing and contrasting them.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

In Paper 1, candidate performance has improved with far fewer candidates writing as much for the six mark 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 Two, candidates must be better prepared in terms of examination technique e.g. answering questions directly, referring to quotes and question wording in their answers. As stated, candidates must develop the analytical skills to ensure their answer provides a compare and contrast approach in those types of questions.

The following advice given in the 2008 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 time management is an issue for some candidates in Paper 2 where there is evidence that some candidates struggle to complete their last essay.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	142
Number of resulted entries in 2009	163

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	35.0%	35.0%	57	56
B	24.5%	59.5%	40	48
C	22.1%	81.6%	36	40
D	4.9%	86.5%	8	36
No award	13.5%	100.0%	22	-

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 SQA therefore 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 Business Manager 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.