



Course Report 2016

Subject	Politics
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the Course assessment

Component 1: Question paper

In 2016 the Higher Politics course was presented by 63 centres, accounting for just over 760 candidates.

Candidate performance was slightly above expectations compared to previous years. This was most apparent at the top range of marks.

The question paper was positively received, with only one query on the use of sources. Centres should note that sources for the comparison and interpreting and evaluating electoral data questions are not restricted to the mandatory content for the course, as this question is assessing skills that should be applicable in any context. Centres should not expect that these sources will necessarily align with content related to options they have chosen from the course assessment specification. This is fully in line with previous questions in both the current and previous Higher.

Feedback from centres and the extended marking team indicated a broad spread of questions. Responses to questions did, however, indicate that some candidates provided generic answers on a topic that did not address the specific issue identified in the question. These responses were most apparent in section 3 of the question paper.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidate performance in this element of the course assessment was strong. Changes made to the allocations of marks for the assignment (as identified in changes made to the marking grid) have had the desired impact in terms of providing differentiation for the most able candidates. As was the case last year, a very wide range of topics were chosen for the assignment. There appears to be benefits of personalisation and choice for candidates in terms of the quality of responses they have generated. However, some centres appeared to encourage candidates to opt for a limited range of topics, and this seems to have a detrimental impact on the quality of responses generated.

Candidates appeared to have performed strongly where they were aware of the success criteria for the assignment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Candidate responses to the 20-mark essay were relatively stronger than those for other types of questions. This may be reflective of the familiarity of this type of question for centres who have presented Higher Politics previously.

There was an improved performance from candidates to the comparison of sources question. Many candidates produced well-structured answers and addressed the overall conclusion required for the issue identified in the question.

Question 1(a): Many candidates produced detailed and very analytical responses that compared the benefits of direct and representative democracy. Very few candidates provided descriptive answers. Candidates who performed most strongly provided excellent exemplification and highly structured answers. Candidates also tended to provide detailed descriptions and explanations, along with analytical comments that tended to focus on comparisons and implications. Some candidates also identified the relative importance of key benefits of either option. Most (but not all candidates) referred to the work of at least one appropriate theorist.

Question 1(b): This was the most popular option for candidates. Responses again tended to be highly analytical and comparative. Strong candidates provided detailed descriptions and exemplification. Very few candidates produced limited, descriptive answers. Most responses focused on two ideologies from Liberalism, Conservative or Socialism; however there were candidates who produced very strong answers dealing with Nationalism or Fascism. Again, strong candidates made explicit reference to the works and ideas of appropriate theorists.

Question 2: Most candidates were able to identify three valid points of comparison. Candidates also provided an overall conclusion that directly addressed and compared the issue of the status of the Supreme Courts.

Question 3(a): Candidates who performed well in this question were aware of the nature of the 12-mark essay question and the difference between this and the 20-mark essay question. These candidates tended to provide analysis centred around three aspects. Strong candidates provided detailed descriptions along with exemplification and/or explanations. Analytical comments, by and large, focused on comparative comments, and those candidates who performed well linked their answers very specifically to the role of the constitution in protecting rights. The 12-mark question will invariably have a more narrow or specific focus than the 20-mark essay questions.

Question 3(b): Strong candidates again were aware of the nature of the 12-mark questions and focused on three areas of comparison. Again, those candidates provided detailed descriptions along with exemplification and/or explanations. Candidates who were able to access the full range of marks provided analytical comments, some of which were detailed and were accompanied by additional justification.

Question 4: Candidates, by and large, focused on both of the different parts of the statement rather than attempting to structure their answer around each of the sources in sequence. Candidates who achieved high marks made full use of the information in the sources as well as providing an evaluation of the statement.

Question 5(b): Many candidates provided detailed descriptions and explanation/exemplification related to the key ideas of the political party they had chosen. Candidates who gave strong answers made explicit and detailed reference to the impact of these ideas on the electoral performance of the chosen party and their analysis was built around this.

Component 2: Assignment

Most candidates produced well-structured assignments. Candidates who performed most strongly tended to adopt an essay format for their assignment and more often than not formatted the title of their assignment as an essay question (ie 'to what extent...' or a statement followed by 'Discuss'). This approach appeared to help candidates to structure analytical points around the issue identified in their assignment, and in particular to provide detailed conclusions.

Most candidates appeared aware of the success criteria for the assignment and this was reflected in the structure and content of their responses. Many (but not all) candidates made good use of the resource sheet to support their responses.

Knowledge and Understanding:

Most candidates identified the issue in detail, providing background to their issue and outlining both alternative points of view on their topic as well as indicating either the significance of their issue or the links to political concepts. Candidates generally provided detailed and accurate descriptions with associated explanations or exemplification built around, on average, four to five key aspects.

Analysis:

Responses tended to be very analytical, with candidates covering all aspects of analysis. Very strong candidates provided more detailed analysis based additional evidence or justifications for their analytical comments. As outlined in the marking grid, this more detailed analysis is required to access the top range marks.

Sources:

Most (but not all) candidates made explicit reference to at least two sources of information. Candidates do not have to evaluate the usefulness of sources.

Conclusions:

Many candidates provided detailed and well-argued conclusions that addressed the central issue identified in their assignment. Some candidates provided very insightful conclusions that went beyond merely restating the points made in their assignment. Strong candidates in particular provided justifications for the side of the issue they had settled on, often examining potential implications of this and also outlined why they rejected the opposing point of view. A number of candidates provided very insightful conclusions on the issue of membership of the European Union ahead of the result of the referendum.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Data on candidate performance indicates that some candidates gave a weaker response for the 12-mark questions than the 20-mark questions. The marking team felt that candidates from some centres were not aware of the differences between the nature of the 12- and 20-mark questions. As a result, some candidates produced in effect, mini 20-mark essay responses that did not address the issues identified in these questions or provide the requisite focus. For example, in response to question 5(a), some candidates provided responses that examined four models of voting behaviour rather than focus on the relevance of the sociological model.

It was also apparent from the response of some candidates that they had approached the question paper with responses to particular questions in mind. When these questions did not materialise, these candidates often merely regurgitated these as responses to an alternative question. This was most notable in the Political Theory section where some candidates provided responses based on Power, Authority and Legitimacy to either the Democracy or Ideologies questions.

There were a very small number of candidates who appeared ill-prepared or ill-suited to the demand of a Higher level examination and who produced very restricted responses.

Question 1(a): Some candidates did not make reference to the ideas of relevant theorists. This impacted on their attainment for this question. In addition, some candidates provided descriptions of the how a system of direct and representative democracy works rather than focus on comparing the benefits. Others failed to access marks by not offering explanations or providing exemplifications for the points they may have made. Occasionally the marking team identified scripts that did not provide conclusions that addressed the issue in the question.

Question 1(b): Candidates who achieved lower marks often provided limited, vague or inaccurate descriptions of the key features of relevant ideologies. In some cases, only one or two aspects of the question were dealt with. Occasionally an aspect was dealt with either inaccurately or vaguely. These candidates often failed to provide exemplification of any points made. A small number of candidates failed to make reference to the work of an appropriate theorist. Again, some weaker candidates did not address the issue in a conclusion. There were a very few candidates who also provided descriptions of the key features (sometimes accurately) but offered no analysis at all.

Question 2: Candidates who recorded weaker marks for this question either did not identify three areas for comparison, or where they did, merely restated the information from the sources without any evaluative or analytical comment responses, and often did not provide an overall conclusion.

Question 3(a): Many weaker responses were characterised by a lack of understanding of the nature of the question. These responses tended to focus on generic answers that compared the nature and status of constitutions rather than focus on the role in protecting rights. This may also be due to a lack of awareness of the success criteria for these types of question.

Question 3(b): As with question 3(a), weaker candidates appeared to lack understanding of the question itself. Some candidates produced responses that effectively focused mainly on describing the passage of legislation as opposed to the role of the legislature in scrutinising.

Question 4: Some candidates did not make full use of the sources for this question. Candidates should have been able to identify that neither victor won overwhelmingly in each of the five boroughs of New York, and that that only one of the two (De Blasio) won overwhelmingly across the city as a whole. Some candidates identified part of these but not all. Another feature of weaker responses was that candidates did not take the different parts of the statement in turn, but attempted to structure their answer around the sources in sequence.

Question 5(a): As with question 3, a number of candidates did not appear to be aware of the difference between the 12- and 20-mark questions. In relation to the content, some candidates attempted to provide a comparison on the four models of voting behaviour rather than analysing the relevance of the sociological model.

Question 5(b): Some responses did not address the impact on electoral performance of the chosen political party. These tended to outline accurately the key ideas of political parties, and were often backed up with good exemplification but were unable to access marks as a result. Some other candidates provided weak analysis that did not link some of the aspects they had identified in their answer, or provided very superficial or repetitive points regarding the electoral impact. Some appeared to focus their answer on the actions of the political party in power rather than on the dominant ideas as outlined in the course assessment specification.

Component 2: Assignment

Some of the weaker responses to the assignment were, like last year, affected by a clear misunderstanding of the criteria for this task. In some cases candidates adopted an approach that appears to be linked to the Modern Studies assignment and produced structured reports that included, for example, evaluations of sources which are not features of the Higher Politics assignment. Centres are advised to ensure that they access the information on the Higher Politics assignment. Although most candidates made effective use of the resource sheet, it was also apparent that some candidates had produced an effective essay plan rather than evidence of information collected. These candidates ran the risk of including analytical comments in their resource sheet and these points were not credited.

Knowledge and Understanding:

Weaker candidates may have lacked adequate content or provided vague descriptions and explanations. Some candidates appeared to be unaware of the need to identify and provide background to the issue along with indicating differing viewpoints. Some candidates lost marks by not referring to at least two political sources in their write-up.

Analysis:

Although the vast majority of assignments were very analytical, there were a small number of candidates who were not able to access full marks as they did not provide more detailed analysis backed up with evidence or justification. In addition, the marking team felt that some candidates were not fully aware of the different aspects of analysis and felt that they may

have benefited from awareness of the different forms of analysis as provided in Marking Instructions

Sources:

A small but noticeable number of candidates did not make reference to two political sources in their answers.

Conclusions:

Weaker conclusions tended to restate the finding(s) from the body of the assignment.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

All candidates should be fully aware of the nature and requirements of the different types of question in the question paper. These are featured in the marking grids included in the Marking Instructions. These are, in effect, the success criteria for each type of assessment item, and it would be good practice to share these with candidates. In particular, candidates should clearly be able to differentiate responses for the 12- and 20-mark essay questions. They should also be aware that the 12-mark question will invariably tend to focus on a particular aspect of a topic area.

Candidates should be discouraged from attempting to guess the content of the question paper. It should be reinforced that the question paper will sample from all aspects of the course content. Some candidates also appeared to run out of time and may have benefitted from timed assessments in school.

It should be reinforced that candidates must make reference to political theorists where indicated in the question.

In relation to the electoral data question, candidates may benefit from focusing on key terms in the statement, such as 'overwhelmingly' and 'in every'.

Component 2: Assignment

As with the question paper, candidates should be fully aware of the success criteria for the Higher Politics Assignment. Candidates and centres should not confuse the Politics assignment with those for other subjects such as Modern Studies.

It would be beneficial to get candidates to consider topics for the assignment where they have a genuine interest or some attachment to the topic. Candidates have tended to produce stronger assignments where this appears to have been the case.

Centres are also advised to ensure that candidate resource sheets are limited to the function for which they are intended, and not treated as an extended essay plan. Analysis and extended copying from the resource sheet will not be credited.

It would be good practice to get candidates to frame their assignment as an essay-type question, as candidates who did this tended to perform better. This has the additional benefit of encouraging a more focused conclusion.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	186
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2016	782
------------------------------------	-----

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	35.4%	35.4%	277	66
B	27.1%	62.5%	212	56
C	17.5%	80.1%	137	46
D	6.5%	86.6%	51	41
No award	13.4%	-	105	0

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.