



# **National Qualifications Review Investigation Report**

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***Politics***

***March 2004***

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## Executive summary

The Subject Review Report on Politics, which was published in May 2002, concluded that there is a need for a radical review of the structure and content of Politics Courses at all levels. The report also proposed that, 'before embarking on the review, SQA should establish and substantiate the market demand for likely uptake of the Courses.'

This report is the outcome of the investigation to establish the demand and likely uptake of the Politics Courses. Uptake statistics were gathered, trends were identified, and research was carried out into provision by other awarding bodies. All centres delivering Politics Courses or Units were then consulted, and a number of centres were contacted directly for follow-up discussions.

Uptake is very low and there has been no uptake at all at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher. Uptake of Units at Intermediate 2 is reasonable but there has been virtually no uptake of the Course. Higher is the only Course with some uptake and expectation of an increase in numbers.

There is some evidence that the popularity of Modern Studies is making it difficult to establish Politics Courses.

The Politics Courses have been heavily criticised for being content-heavy, poorly-structured, and over-loaded in assessment. Improvement in uptake is only likely to occur if major changes are made.

The following recommendations are made in this report:

- ◆ Ministers have agreed a policy for dealing with low uptake National Courses. The Courses at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher have had no uptake, and consultation has revealed that there is no market for these Courses. In line with the agreed policy, the Courses at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher will be withdrawn from the catalogue. There will be no changes to the Course structure, and no new NABs will be produced at this level. Care will be taken to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged by the timescale for withdrawal. The component Units of the Course will remain in the catalogue as free-standing Units, and their uptake will be monitored.
- ◆ Uptake figures, and consultation, have revealed that there is no market for a Course in Politics at Intermediate 2, although there is a market for free-standing Units. All Units in Politics at this level will be reviewed, and provision revised and rationalised to create a small suite of Units which meets users' needs. When the revised Units become available, the Course at Intermediate 2 will be withdrawn from the catalogue.
- ◆ The Higher Course will be reviewed and revised to address the Course structure issues. Course component Units at Higher will be reviewed and revised to reduce the volume of assessment and meet users' needs.

# 1 **Terms of reference**

The Scottish Executive initiated a review of all National Courses in June 2001 with the purpose of considering how best to reduce the complexity, variety and total volume of assessment in each subject. Following the review process, Subject Review Reports were published between February and June 2002. The reports identified a number of actions to be taken forward for each subject. These agreed actions received Ministerial approval.

The Subject Review Report on Politics Courses concluded that there is a need for a radical review of the structure and content of the Courses at all levels. The report also proposed that, 'before embarking on the review, SQA should establish and substantiate the market demand for likely uptake of the Courses.'

This report is the result of an investigation into the uptake, trends and the likely market demand for the Politics Courses.

## 2 Methodology

In order to establish the demand and the likely uptake, the following steps were taken.

### Desk research

Statistics were collated on:

- ◆ current uptake
- ◆ trends in uptake over the last two or three years in Courses, Units of Courses, free-standing Units (formerly National Certificate Modules), and Higher National Units

A review of provision by other awarding bodies was carried out.

### Consultation

Centres were consulted to find out:

- ◆ reasons for current low uptake
- ◆ future plans for offering the various Courses and Units
- ◆ progression routes

The number of centres delivering Politics Courses and Units is very small (18). The consultation exercise involved:

- ◆ developing and distributing a questionnaire (customised for schools and colleges)
- ◆ contacting centres to discuss/clarify issues and encourage responses
- ◆ collating responses

Seventeen of the eighteen centres responded to the questionnaire.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Uptake of Courses and Units in Politics

In session 2002–03, 18 centres offered Courses or Units in Politics — 13 colleges and five schools. See Tables 1–4 for detailed uptake statistics for Politics Courses and free-standing Units.

The figures show that there has been no uptake of the Courses at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher since the introduction of National Qualifications in 1999–2000. Intermediate 2 has not fared much better, with 8 candidates in session 1999–2000, and none since then.

The Higher Course has done better, showing a steady increase from 8 candidates in the first year to around 80 for session 2002–03. However, it has not yet reached 100 candidates, which has been suggested as the minimum for a viable Course.

The uptake of Units shows a similar pattern to the Courses, except at Intermediate 2. At Intermediate 2, while the Course uptake is extremely low, there has been uptake of the component Units (see Table 2). There were a total of 228 entries in session 2002–03, and in 2001–02 there were a final total of 310 Unit entries for Intermediate 2 Course component Units.

Some colleges use other free-standing Units in Politics (these were previously National Certificate Modules). Although there has been a decrease in the uptake of these, they continue to be used in college-based access programmes (see Table 3). The evidence from the consultation suggests that most of the uptake of both Course component Units and free-standing Units comes from a number of colleges who are using Units as part of college-designed programmes. However, the reasonable uptake of Units at Intermediate 2 might suggest a potential demand for a Course at this level. Centres' comments suggested that the current Arrangements are discouraging them from offering the Course. Typical comments referred to 'a punishing and inappropriate external assessment demand' and the fact that 'an increase in the Intermediate 2 Politics Course would only be likely if the Arrangements Documents are re-written and the Course is re-structured'.

It may be worth noting for any future stage of the Review process that the uptake of Units at Intermediate 2 is not evenly spread across all Course component Units. *Political Theory: an Introduction* has the highest uptake, while *Political Behaviour* has the lowest.

Comparison of figures in Tables 2 and 3 shows that the decrease in uptake of free-standing Units (previously National Certificate Modules) is not quite matched by the increase in uptake of new component Units from the Politics Courses. This means there is an overall decrease in candidates taking Units in Politics. Again, it could be argued that the problem lies with the format and assessment demands of the new Units.

**Table 1:** uptake of National Courses in Politics

Course	2000	2001	2002	2003 (to date)
Intermediate 1	0	0	0	0
Intermediate 2	8	0	0	0
Higher	6	8	27	77
Advanced Higher	N/A	0	0	0

**Table 2:** uptake of Course component Units

Unit	2000	2001	2002	2003 (to date)
All Units at Intermediate 1	0	0	0	15
Political Theory: An Introduction (Int 2)	43	94	138	111
Political Structures: An Introduction (Int 2)	16	64	92	78
Political Behaviour: An Introduction (Int 2)	26	47	80	39
The Theoretical Context (H)	8	7	47	114
The Structural Context (H)	7	7	46	99
The Social Context (H)	6	7	92	186
All Units at Advanced Higher	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>642</b>

**Table 3:** uptake of free-standing Units (previously National Certificate Modules)

Unit	2000	2001	2002	2003 (to date)
Practical Investigation in the Social Sciences (H)	137	99	14	39
Introduction to People and Politics (Int 1)	158	131	39	96
People and Politics: British Society (Int 2)	243	109	4	59
People and Politics: European/EU Society (Int 2)	68	46	26	10
People and Politics: Global Society (Int 2)	32	28	1	0
People and Politics: Optional Society (Int 2)	38	9	17	0
People and Politics: Scottish Society (Int 2)	30	18	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>205</b>

**Table 4:** uptake of Higher National Units in Politics

Unit	2003 (to date)
Politics A: Analysing Concepts of the State	562
Politics B: Analysing The British Political System	442

### 3.2 Uptake patterns in schools and colleges

Of the 77 candidates entered for Higher in session 2002–03, 57 come from colleges and 20 from schools. In session 2001-02, 21 came from colleges and six from schools.

Schools have used only the Higher Course, and are not offering individual Units. Colleges are offering the Higher Course, but some are also using Units as part of college-designed programmes. For example, the uptake for *The Social Context* Unit at Higher is 186, but the number of entries for the Higher Course in colleges is 57. Three

colleges said that they were using the Higher Units as part of a college-designed access programme.

All uptake of Intermediate 2 Units is in colleges. Given that there are no entries for the Intermediate 2 Course, it seems clear that colleges are using the Units as part of college-designed programmes. In the consultation, six colleges said that they were using the Units as part of a college-designed programme such as access programmes or an NQ Social Science programme.

### 3.3 Trends and projections

From the consultation responses, it is clear that there is unlikely to be any uptake of Courses at Intermediate 1 or Advanced Higher in the near future. None of the colleges and schools currently presenting candidates plan to offer Units or Courses at these levels in the next two or three years (although one college which previously had not offered Politics Units or Courses did present candidates for one of the Intermediate 1 Units in session 2002–03.) Centres gave reasons such as ‘likelihood of insufficient candidate numbers’, ‘limited interest by candidates’ and ‘competition with HN Social Sciences’.

In schools, the uptake of the Higher Course is almost entirely in S6 (19 of the 20 entries), which suggests that in the near future there is little chance of Advanced Higher being picked up by any schools. In further education, anyone proceeding beyond Higher is likely to move into HN Social Sciences, which is one of the more popular HN programmes.

The consultation responses were not very encouraging for Intermediate 2 and Higher. There is no indication that centres expect any increase in uptake at Intermediate 2, and only modest increases are expected at Higher. Six colleges which were using Intermediate 2 Units as part of college-designed programmes did not require the external assessment at this level. One college predicted an increase in uptake of Intermediate 2 Units as part of an access programme.

It should be noted that these projections are based on the Politics Courses as they are currently structured. It might be expected that uptake will increase if Courses or Units are revised.

### 3.4 Progression routes

In order to provide more information about possible trends in uptake, the consultation questionnaire asked about existing and possible progression routes into and out of Politics Courses.

Of the 13 colleges responding to the consultation, a majority felt that study of National Courses in Politics would be an advantage when progressing to HN but would not insist on it for entry. Some said that students would be more likely to cope with HN Politics if they had a background in NQ Politics than in Modern Studies. However, the majority also felt that those who did not have a National Course in Politics would not be seriously disadvantaged, with only three centres suggesting otherwise.

There were comments to the effect that the current National Course in Politics is too theoretical and conceptual, and that only *Political Theory* in the National Course is related to HN Politics. Seven centres said that an improved Politics Course should help with progression to HN, but made comments such as ‘improvements need to be made to assessment for this to happen’; ‘articulation would require careful monitoring’; and ‘too much ground is covered due to the “two context” approach in the existing Courses’.

Colleges were asked if they offered any programmes which identified qualifications in Politics as an entry requirement. Eleven colleges said that there were no progression

routes that required this. Two colleges had programmes which did, but both of these addressed the issue via access programmes (and presumably through Politics Units, rather than Courses).

Eight colleges said that students had to take Politics as part of their HN Social Sciences programme. It is worth noting that at HN level, the uptake of Politics Units is healthy, and the Social Sciences HN is one of the most popular HN qualifications.

### **3.5 Effect of Course structures on uptake**

The questionnaire and follow-up discussions invited centres to highlight major reasons for low uptake.

Five centres said that a reduction in the internal assessment would have a positive effect on uptake. Nine centres said that it would not, suggesting that the concerns about Politics Courses are not just about the volume of assessment.

While some respondents felt that the Courses were pitched at the right level, these responses were qualified by comments such as ‘the Course [is] too prescriptive and poorly set’.

Those who felt that the Courses were not pitched at appropriate levels made comments such as:

- ◆ there is far too much content, all of which is heavily over-assessed
- ◆ the whole syllabus needs to be redrafted
- ◆ no real clarity about ‘two contexts’
- ◆ Unit assessments are badly worded, and this, along with too many assessments, discourages students
- ◆ the Unit assessment is not linked closely enough to external assessment
- ◆ external assessment is too demanding
- ◆ Advanced Higher is ... too specialised and too difficult for level 7 of the SCQF

Interestingly, schools thought that the level of demand was appropriate. However, since the school sample is very small, no conclusions can be drawn from this.

There are major concerns about both the structure of the Courses and over-assessment. While there can be no certainty that improving Course structures would enhance uptake, a number of colleges said that this would be the case. Eight colleges thought that the current Course at Higher did not prepare candidates well for HN provision. This will have to be borne in mind in any future revision of Higher Politics.

### **3.6 Politics and Modern Studies**

One of the reasons suggested for the low uptake in Politics is that Modern Studies is seen by a number of centres as being in direct competition for the same candidates. Seven centres, including one school, said that the uptake of National Courses in Politics is affected by the delivery of Modern Studies in their centre. Modern Studies is mainly delivered in schools, but current entry figures show that Modern Studies is also more popular than Politics in colleges. In session 2001–02, there were 342 entries for Higher Modern Studies in colleges, compared to 27 for Higher Politics. One comment was that ‘Modern Studies is generally levelled better, and is more user-friendly, though not perhaps the most appropriate introduction to Politics’. This might provide a pointer to any possible revision of the Politics Courses.

The Politics Courses were designed to avoid overlap with Modern Studies, but may have taken an approach which is too theoretical. Comments included ‘the NQ Politics Course is too theoretical and conceptual’; and ‘a direct comparative analysis of politics is not appropriate at this level (Intermediate 2)’.

### 3.7 Approaches in other awarding bodies

Four awarding bodies in other parts of the UK offer a *Government and Politics* course. This is a fairly close match to SQA’s Politics Courses, but also contains elements found in Modern Studies Courses in Scotland. (See Appendix 4 for further details.)

Some of the main differences between these courses and National Course in Politics are:

- ◆ Political theories and ideologies are an integral part of the National Course in Politics at Higher. This topic is not covered until the second year of the A-level.
- ◆ The comparative approach that is used throughout the National Course in Politics at Higher is only introduced in the second year of the A-level.
- ◆ The Higher Politics Course must be taught using local, national or international contexts. No definition of this is given. The A-level makes the task clearer by naming the context, for example comparing government and politics in the UK and the USA.
- ◆ The *Government and Politics* courses cover issues such as electoral systems and voting behaviour which appear in National Courses in Modern Studies.

This suggests that in Scotland we have two subjects (NQ Politics and Modern Studies) addressing areas which are covered by one subject in the rest of the UK (the AS and A2 courses in *Government and Politics*). It could also be argued that Higher Politics is more demanding than the AS level, and has more in common with the A2 level.

## **4 Conclusions**

### **4.1 Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher**

It would not seem reasonable in current circumstances to attempt to re-develop Intermediate 1 or Advanced Higher Politics. In fact, given that there has been no uptake for the Courses and that both schools and colleges are saying that there is no real prospect of any uptake, these two courses should be removed from the catalogue. The Units could remain as free-standing Units, but could be withdrawn if there is still no significant uptake in the next few years.

### **4.2 Intermediate 2**

Again it would seem appropriate that there should be no development work on this Course, and that the Course should be removed from the catalogue. However, given that there is a reasonable uptake of Course component and free-standing Units at this level, and the fact that a number of colleges use these Units as part of locally-devised NC programmes and access programmes, there is a strong argument for looking at the overall provision of Units at Intermediate 2 and reviewing and rationalising these to meet users' needs.

### **4.3 Higher**

At Higher, uptake is rising (from 27 to 77 in the last year), despite the serious criticisms of the current Course, but has still not reached a figure considered to be viable. Responses to consultation suggest that this may reflect the poor Course structure and content and heavy assessment load.

Politics at HN has a healthy uptake, and progression into HN could be enhanced by an improved Higher Course — eight of the 13 colleges who are presenting in Politics said that this would be the case, while the remainder reserved judgement until they see the nature of any changes.

Centres have expressed serious reservations about the structure of the existing Units and Course. As an interim measure, the Units at Higher should be revised to reduce the volume of assessment and to meet the needs of users. The focus, level of demand, volume of assessment, and relevance to candidates must be a matter of priority in such a review. When the policy on low uptake Courses has been agreed, and the impact of the revisions to Units is clear, a business case will be made for review and revision of the Higher to address the Course structure issues.

## 5 Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

- ◆ Ministers have agreed a policy for dealing with low uptake National Courses. The Courses at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher have had no uptake, and consultation has revealed that there is no market for these Courses. In line with the agreed policy, the Courses at Intermediate 1 and Advanced Higher will be withdrawn from the catalogue. There will be no changes to the Course structure, and no new NABs will be produced at this level. Care will be taken to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged by the timescale for withdrawal. The component Units of the Course will remain in the catalogue as free-standing Units, and their uptake will be monitored.
- ◆ Uptake figures, and consultation, have revealed that there is no market for a Course in Politics at Intermediate 2, although there is a market for free-standing Units. All Units in Politics at this level will be reviewed, and provision revised and rationalised to create a small suite of Units which meets users' needs. When the revised Units become available, the Course at Intermediate 2 will be withdrawn from the catalogue.
- ◆ The Higher Course will be reviewed and revised to address the Course structure issues. Course component Units at Higher will be reviewed and revised to reduce the volume of assessment and meet users' needs.

## Appendix 1: Questionnaire Part 1 and responses

Responses were received from 13 colleges and four schools ie from 17 of the 18 centres currently offering the Courses.

The first ten questions in the questionnaire were common to schools and colleges.

- 1 Does your centre have any plans to offer Intermediate 1 and/or the Advanced Higher in the next two to three years?

Yes	0
No	17
Don't know	0

- 2 If your centre is delivering Units at Intermediate 2 but *not* the Intermediate 2 Course, please indicate why.

The external assessment is too demanding for this level	1
The Units form part of a specific course	7
Not applicable	9

(Respondents could give more than one answer)

- 3 If your centre is delivering Units at Higher but *not* the Higher Course, please indicate why.

The external assessment is too demanding for this level	1
The Units form part of a specific course	3
Not applicable	14

(Respondents could give more than one answer)

- 4 Do you see your centre experiencing any substantial increase in presentations at Intermediate 2 in the next year or two?

Yes	1
No	14
Don't know	1
Not applicable	1

- 5 Do you see your centre experiencing any substantial increase in presentations at Higher in the next year or two?

Yes	3
No	10
Don't know	4

- 6 Please indicate whether you think that the teaching and learning, including Unit assessment, requirements set out in the *Arrangements Documents* for Intermediate 1 and/or Intermediate 2 are pitched at the appropriate level.

Yes	7
No	3

Don't know	6
Not applicable	1

- 7 Please indicate whether you think that the teaching and learning, including Unit assessment, requirements set out in the *Arrangements Documents* for Higher and/or Advanced Higher are pitched at the appropriate level.

Yes	10
No	4
Don't know	3

- 8 If the volume of assessment were to be reduced, would this have much influence on your centre increasing the uptake of enrolments onto NQ Politics Courses?

Yes	5
No	9
Don't know	3

- 9 Is the uptake of NQ Politics affected by the delivery of Modern Studies at your centre?

Yes	7
No	9

(One respondent provided a comment only)

- 10 Is the downward trend in the use of free-standing Units (formerly modules) likely to continue?

Yes	4
No	5
Don't know	6
Not applicable	1

(One respondent provided a comment only)

### Evaluation of responses to the first ten questions

- 1 Both in terms of the number of responses, and further qualification of these responses by ten of the 16 centres, it is clear there are no plans to introduce either Intermediate 1 or Advanced Higher Politics over the next two-three years, either in colleges or schools. Comments gave a range of reasons, such as the likelihood of insufficient candidate numbers; inappropriate nature of either/both levels to centre provision; and limited interest by candidates.
- 2 Two centres said one of the reasons for not delivering the Intermediate 2 Politics Course is because of what is perceived to be a punishing and inappropriate external assessment demand for that level. Also, seven of 16 centres said the Intermediate 2 Units formed part of a specific award, such as an NQ Social Sciences or SWAP Access programme, ie the National Course award was not required. No schools said they would be offering Intermediate 2.
- 3 Three centres said the external assessment was too demanding at this level. Three centres said individual Higher Units formed part of a specific course of study, the SWAP Access programme, ie the Course award was not required. Most centres said they were not delivering individual Units as free-standing Units, but were delivering the Higher Course (see Appendix 6), including all five schools.

- 4 Only one centre said they foresaw a substantial increase in presentations at Intermediate 2 over the next couple of years. However, this centre qualified this by indicating they would be running a new access programme where individual Intermediate 2 Politics Units would be used. Fourteen centres said they did not foresee an increased uptake, though one centre qualified this by indicating that any increase in uptake was not expected to be substantial. One centre was unsure — this related to possible numbers continuing to undertake their access programme. Other comments suggested that candidates would be expected to pick up Modern Studies at this level; and an increase in Intermediate 2 Politics would be unlikely unless the Course Arrangements are re-written and the Course restructured. All schools said this was not applicable to them ie they would not be offering Intermediate 2 Units or the Course.
- 5 Only three centres said they expected a substantial increase in the number of candidates undertaking Politics at Higher. One such centre said this would be through provision of individual Units as part of an access programme. The other two suggested they would try to increase provision, though, apart from one centre suggesting this would be done through offering provision at different times, it is not clear how this would be achieved. Those centres that said they did not see any substantial increase gave a number of reasons: some suggested there would be only a marginal increase; others thought the increase would fluctuate over the next couple of years; one centre was trying to facilitate delivery to S6 level in schools; and it would depend on numbers enrolling onto an access programme. There were also responses suggesting that the Course would require to be revamped; expressions of interest were too small to justify a projected increase; and this would be unlikely unless the Course Arrangements are re-written and the Course restructured.
- 6 The response was mixed. Seven centres felt the teaching and learning arrangements, including Unit assessment, as set out in the Course Arrangements, were pitched at the right level for Intermediate 1 and/or Intermediate 2. One such centre added that as its provision of NQ Politics was to 20-30 year-olds, it was unable to comment on how 16–17 year-olds would be able to cope with such provision. Six centres also said they ‘Didn’t know’, though only one qualified this by indicating it was not something they would necessarily need to consider. One centre said the question was not applicable to them. Three centres, however, said the Arrangements were far too demanding, poorly written, and inappropriate for the expected levels of attainment. Additionally, it was suggested the assessment demands were unmanageable.
- 7 At Higher and Advanced Higher, there appeared to be a far clearer confirmation that the Course Arrangements are pitched at the appropriate level. Of these, four centres made it clear they were referring to Higher only. It is likely many of the others were also referring mainly to Higher. Comments included references to the Course being too prescriptive; poorly set; but that the AH Course is challenging enough to provide a good link with university study. Three centres replied ‘Don’t know’, one of which justified this by identifying that things appeared to be okay, but this was their first delivery (Higher) and results were not yet available. Of the three centres that said ‘No’, this was qualified by the following suggestions: Higher was okay but there was far too much content, all of which is heavily over-assessed; Unit assessments are badly worded, and this, along with too many assessments, discourages students; the Unit assessment is not linked closely enough to external assessment; and Advanced Higher is too specialised and too difficult for level 7 of the SCQF. All the schools thought the level was appropriate, which may provide some useful insights into differences in perception between the different sectors. However, with such a small schools sample, this could not be conclusive.
- 8 Only five centres thought a reduction in assessment would bring about a likely increase in entries, with only one school included in that response. These responses were qualified with a range of opinions, such as, this being the case for Higher only; a reduction in the number of assessments needed to be matched by a reduction in the number of individual components required for each assessment (ie the requirement of

two contexts being unrealistic, as well as no real clarity as to what ‘two contexts’ actually meant); a comparative approach was seen as unnecessary at these levels; and the assessment load for Intermediate 2 (and perhaps Higher) should be similar to that of Modern Studies. There were three ‘Don’t knows’, one of which was qualified with the suggestion that an assessment reduction might not affect uptake but would be likely to improve retention rates, and in other subjects candidates experienced clearer assessment requirements more closely related to the external exam. Of those nine centres that answered ‘No’, four added the following comments: it is the nature not the volume of assessment that is the problem; the whole syllabus requires to be redrafted; there is too much assessment; and the subject suffers from a lack of marketing by the SQA.

- 9 Seven centres, including three schools, said the uptake of National Courses in Politics is affected by the delivery of Modern Studies in their centres. The qualifications to these responses include: the inability to make provision for both due to insufficient demand; HEIs being unlikely to accept both Modern Studies and Politics Highers (because of too much overlap); Modern Studies is more generalist and therefore more relevant to the more limited knowledge candidates at that level would have; and also if significant changes occurred in Politics then both subjects would be offered. Of the nine centres that answered ‘No’, one centre mentioned that candidates taking Modern Studies also generally take Politics. Other responses indicating ‘No’ were that the Politics Units would be used for Intermediate 2 and Higher, once they were adequately sorted-out; and there will be a move away from Politics to Modern Studies next session. The latter comment is clearly one for concern, as other centres may follow suit if the Courses are not revised.
- 10 There was a little uncertainty regarding the meaning of the question. One centre answered the question was not applicable to their centre, whilst six centres answered they ‘Didn’t know’ whether the downward trend in the use of free-standing Units was likely to continue. One centre thought this trend would continue, highlighting the point that both teaching staff and students would choose more manageable and relevant subjects. Five centres answered ‘No’, providing the following reasons for such a response: there was no downward trend; the Units would be used as long as numbers for SWAP programmes held up, clusters of free-standing Units would be offered as full-time programmes; there was an expectation of an increase in their use.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire Part 2 and responses

The following three questions were posed to schools only.

- 1 How many, if any, of your pupils undertaking Politics, go on to study the subject at higher education level?

This question solicited a qualitative response only. One centre said that 25–50% of pupils undertaking National Courses in Politics generally went on to study the discipline in higher education. Another centre stated that approximately two or three pupils per year go on to do so, though the study of Higher Politics may not be the spur behind that. This centre did suggest, however, that those who studied the subject at university have found, retrospectively, that Higher Politics was valuable. One centre, with two candidates at Higher, indicated that one was intending to study Politics at university. One school seemed to suggest that their candidates would take A/AS level Politics suggesting they saw this as possibly a better preparation than Higher/Advanced Higher Politics for university study.

- 2 Is the pattern of uptake in your centre (particularly at S6) likely to change in the near future, and at which level(s)?

Yes	0
No	2
Don't know	2

The 'don't knows' did not qualify their responses, which makes it difficult to draw any conclusions from them. This may be likely to be affected by subject options provided and relative demand for them. There were no suggestions that schools would be likely to offer Politics below S6.

- 3 Please comment on any specific reasons why your centre has not entered any candidates for the Intermediate 2 Course and/or Units.

This question solicited a qualitative response only. Reasons provided for not entering any candidates onto Intermediate 2 Politics include: staffing constraints; interested candidates are generally solid Higher candidates; and no demand.

## Appendix 3: Questionnaire Part 3 and responses

The following ten questions were posed to colleges only.

- 1 Do you deliver NQ Politics Units taken specifically to make up a programme of study without the requirement of an external assessment credit?

Yes	8
No	4
Not applicable	1

- 2 Do you think that Intermediate 2 Politics provides a reasonable starting level for adult returners?

Yes	8
No	4
Don't know	1

- 3 What does your centre ask for as 'recommended entry' onto HNC/HND Social Sciences courses?

(Respondents made comments only)

- 4 Does your centre see NQ Politics (Course or Units) as a requirement for HN, a distinct advantage, or is it not seen as being of any particular help?

Requirement	1
Distinct advantage	10
No particular help	1
Not applicable	1

(One respondent gave only a comment)

- 5 In your centre, is Modern Studies taught as part of preparation for HN Social Sciences?

Yes	3
No	10

- 6 If your centre delivers a SWAP course in Humanities/Social Sciences, does it include Politics or Modern Studies?

Politics	6
Modern Studies	1
Not applicable	3

(Three respondents provided comment only)

- 7 Do you feel that students are currently disadvantaged by not having a prior qualification in Politics when they progress to an HNC/HND in Social Sciences?

Yes	3
No	8
Don't know	1

(One respondent gave a comment only)

- 8 Would an improved NQ Politics qualification have any more value in terms of access to HN and subsequent progress in HN?

Yes	7
No	0
Don't know	5

(One respondent provided a comment only)

- 9 Do all students on your HN Social Science programme have to take Politics as part of the programme?

Yes	8
No	3
Not applicable	2

- 10 In your centre, are there any progression routes that require the study of Politics as a discrete subject, at HN level or otherwise?

Yes	2
No	11

## Evaluation of responses to college questions

- 1 Eight centres said that NQ Politics was delivered specifically to make up a programme of study without the external assessment. Some of these centres qualified this: they formed part of an access programme, mainly SWAP (some consisted of Intermediate 2 and Higher Units); and they formed part of a Scottish Group Award for one centre. Four centres noted that NQ Politics Units did not form a specific programme, but rather were used to fulfil specific purposes and routes to development. They did not specify, however, what these purposes and routes were.
- 2 Four centres said they felt that Intermediate 2 does not provide an appropriate starting level for adult returners. These responses were qualified with the following comments: the assessment volume and requirements are overwhelming for such students; there is too much crammed into the Units, largely due to the 'two context' model; there is no logical design to the Units and no progression of ideas or concepts; a direct comparative analysis of politics is not appropriate at this level. Eight centres answered 'Yes', and they provided the following clarification: as such students usually know only a little about British politics at this stage, a comparative approach is ambitious; assessments could be improved; it is probably at about the right level but cannot be fitted into the centre's timetable; and the Intermediate 2 is just about pitched at the appropriate entry point.
- 3 One centre answered that the HN Social Sciences was not on offer at present. The other 12 centres gave passing two Highers as their requirement for entry into HN, with some offering this and alternatives, such as successful completion of an access programme (SWAP or otherwise), a Scottish Group Award Intermediate 2 Social Science programme, and accumulated credit at Intermediate 2 for internal candidates.
- 4 One centre answered 'Not applicable' as it does not deliver HN Social Sciences at present. One centre gave a comment only, indicating that due to this year being their first for presentation of National Courses in Politics, it was not necessarily appropriate to respond to this question. However, they felt that the NQ Politics course would be neither an advantage nor disadvantage to those progressing from Higher, as HN Politics did not follow on from the National Course. One centre answered '(a)', it would be a requirement, and also answered '(b)', it would also be a distinct advantage. This centre suggested there was a problem with NQ, as candidates are assessed more in National

Courses in Politics than in HN Politics Units. The ten centres indicating that NQ Politics would be a distinct advantage qualified this with the following statements: though an advantage, it would not be insisted upon; and it would be an advantage, as access students who undertake NQ Politics find that they benefit when moving onto higher education (HN or degree). One centre answered '(c)' they did not have an HN, but the Higher overlapped with HN.

- 5 In response to this question, three centres answered that National Courses in Modern Studies are taught as part of the preparation for HN Social Sciences. This was followed by statements such as this only being until the National Course in Politics is changed; Politics would be a preferential option, implying there are problems with National Courses in Politics at present; and provision is made to meet demand, thus, if Modern Studies is demanded then that is run, and likewise if Politics is demanded. The other ten centres said that Modern Studies is not taught as part of a preparation for HN Social Sciences. Modern Studies is part of a General Education 'open options' programme; many students enrolling onto the HN programme from schools often have Modern Studies; Modern Studies will be added in the next session; and Modern Studies is an 'appropriate Higher'.
- 6 This question was 'Not applicable' to three centres. Two centres provided comments only, such as: the SWAP programme would begin next session and Politics would be preferable; and Higher Politics or Modern Studies can be taken, though Modern Studies is the default option. One centre indicated the use of Modern Studies Units at Intermediate 2. Out of the six centres that said Politics Units were part of such a programme, these generally include a mixture of Intermediate 2 and Higher Units, with *Introduction to Political Theory* (D389 11) and *Introduction to Political Behaviour* (D391 11) being the favoured Units. The level of demand from the Intermediate 2 to the Higher Unit was seen as problematic in terms of progression, particularly in terms of the heavy assessment burden of Intermediate 2.
- 7 Three centres said they felt students were placed at a disadvantage when progressing to an HN, if they did not have a prior qualification in Politics. One such centre argued this would also be the case if students did not have a background in Sociology, Philosophy, etc. One centre answered they 'Didn't know'. Eight centres pointed out students would not be disadvantaged when progressing to an HN, and provided the following justifications: as Politics A and B are taught in the HN, students would not be disadvantaged by lack of a prior qualification; the NQ Politics Course is too theoretical and conceptual; only Political Theory in the National Course is related to HN Politics; and though students would not be disadvantaged, they would be more likely to cope with HN Politics with a background in NQ Politics than in Modern Studies.
- 8 Asked whether an improved National Course in Politics would be more valuable in terms of access to and progress in HN Social Sciences, five centres answered that they 'Didn't know'. Of those centres that answered 'Yes', the following comments were made: improvements needed to be made to assessment for this to happen; articulation would require careful monitoring; too much ground is covered due to the 'two context' approach; 'improved' assumed it would be user friendly; Politics Units were better preparation than Modern Studies for such progression; and a redesigned syllabus would provide for a good, but not essential grounding for progression.
- 9 This question allowed for, and required, no qualification to responses. Two centres said this question was not applicable to their provision, one of which was because they do not deliver HN Social Sciences. Three centres said students on their HN programme do not have to take Politics as one of the disciplines. Eight centres said Politics was an integral part of their HN programme.
- 10 Eleven centres stated there existed no progression routes that required the study of Politics as a discrete option. Two centres did suggest that there were. Both centres indicated this was addressed in access courses.

## Final comments

Many of the respondents took the opportunity to make some further comments at the end of the Questionnaire. These included:

‘Politics is not of interest to many teenagers at present . . . Other new NQs such as Psychology and Philosophy are ‘sexier’.’

‘It is left to an individual who may want to introduce the Course. Few people have been on Higher Still training courses for the subject.’

‘In general terms we are very keen to see the Politics Units . . . continued . . .’

‘It is essential that NQ Politics is maintained and promoted as part of the new set of Social Science/Humanities topics.’

‘The language of the Course is inappropriate for the target group.’

‘Far too much content, little relevance in much of it. Assessment material poor. [...] The stress of a comparative approach is counterproductive and unnecessary in most cases.’

‘The whole Course seems to lack focus, assessments are often unclear, and too frequent. Paperwork is far too extensive. The Course has good features, providing a basic grounding in political science, but is not attractive as it stands.’

‘[...] Is it worth the effort involved when Modern Studies exists? [...] The actual Course content makes heavy demands for teaching and learning. [...] NAB assessment is 100% comprehensive, covers everything. Quite inappropriate when there is so much to cover.’

‘The original design was really quite interesting and imaginative, but feels like it was maybe constrained a little by the need to avoid overlap with Modern Studies . . .’

‘Students think it is dull!’

# Appendix 4: Politics courses offered by other UK awarding bodies

In other parts of the UK, the course which matches most closely to National Courses in Politics is called 'Government and Politics'.

## 1 EDEXCEL

At AS level candidates study the following mandatory units:

- ◆ People and Politics
- ◆ Governing the UK
- ◆ The Changing UK System

Total assessment time is three hours.

At A2 level candidates follow one of four routes. Candidates must achieve three units.

- ◆ Route A covers UK political issues, the EU and policy making.
- ◆ Route B introduces political ideologies and includes ideological development in the UK.
- ◆ Route C covers politics in the USA and includes a comparative approach to UK and US politics.
- ◆ Route D introduces international politics and includes a comparative approach with the UK.

Total assessment time is four hours.

## 2 CCEA

At AS level candidates study the following mandatory units:

- ◆ Government and Politics of Northern Ireland
- ◆ The Inter-relationships of the UK Executive, Legislature and Judiciary
- ◆ Political Behaviour

Total assessment time is 3 hours.

At A2 level candidates can follow different routes. Candidates must achieve three units from the following:

- ◆ Government and Politics of the US; or Government and Politics of the Republic of Ireland
- ◆ Government and Politics of the UK and the USA (Comparative Study); or Government and Politics of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (Comparative Study)
- ◆ Political Power; or Contemporary Relevance of Political Ideologies

Total assessment time is three hours 30 minutes.

### 3

#### **OCR**

At AS level candidates study the following mandatory units:

- ◆ Elections, Electoral Systems and Voting Behaviour in the UK
- ◆ Politics of the UK
- ◆ Government of the UK

Total assessment time is three hours 15 minutes.

At A2 level candidates follow different routes. Candidates must achieve three units from the following:

- ◆ US Government and Politics; or Political Ideas and Concepts
- ◆ Government and Politics Research Essay (Coursework); or Government and Politics Research Essay (Written Paper)
- ◆ Government and Politics (US Option); or Government and Politics (Political Ideas and Concepts Option)

Total assessment time is four hours 30 minutes.

### 4

#### **AQA**

At AS level candidates study the following mandatory units:

- ◆ Electoral Systems and Voting Behaviour
- ◆ Parties and Pressure Groups
- ◆ Features of a Representative Democracy

Total Assessment time is three hours.

At A2 level candidates follow different routes. Candidates must achieve three units from the following:

- ◆ Comparative UK/US Government
- ◆ The Politics of the USA
- or
- ◆ The Politics of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- or
- ◆ Ideas in Contemporary British Politics
- ◆ Government and Politics

Total assessment time is five hours.