



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Politics
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 presentations, from 475 to 531, and an increase in the number of centres, from 45 to 51. This growth has been driven overall by an increase in the number of school presentations. However, there have also been a number of new presentations from the FE sector.

Overall, the exam was well received, with particularly good performances by candidates in Paper 1. There was no adverse external feedback for both Paper 1 and Paper 2.

Overall, candidates performed more strongly in the skills-based Paper 1, though there were many candidates who produced well-structured and highly analytical essays with detailed exemplification. Some candidates did not perform as well as others as they did not adopt a structured approach to dealing with the questions in Paper 1.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1, most candidates were able to produce high quality responses. Candidates from an FE background continued to show an improvement in Paper 1. In response to Question 2, many candidates produced very well-structured answers, displaying excellent analytical and evaluative skills. Most candidates were able to identify the two distinct components in the statement and were able to make very good use of the data provided to evaluate the validity of both components in a highly structured manner.

In Paper 2, there were many outstanding responses from candidates who produced highly accurate, well-structured and very analytical answers that addressed the key issues in the questions.

In Question A1, many candidates produced high quality answers that compared and contrasted the key elements of Conservatism and Liberalism. Almost all candidates made reference to the works of Burke and Locke in their answers. High quality answers were very well-structured and tended to compare and contrast the key features throughout.

In Question B6, many candidates produced excellent analytical and highly structured answers. Many candidates provided very relevant and detailed exemplification to illustrate their points, and compared and contrasted the checks and balances on the executive throughout their answer. However, some candidates did not address the question by attempting to compare and contrast the powers of the Prime Minister with either the First Minister or the US President rather than the checks and balances.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1 Question 1, some candidates did not link the evidence accurately to 'clearly the best ever for both Labour and the Conservatives'.

In Paper 1 Question 2, some candidates did not identify keywords or terms in the statement such as 'lagged slightly' or 'very significant'. This affected their ability to fully make use of the data in the sources. Some candidates did not make full use of the information in Source F.

Candidates from some centres did not do as well as others as they produced less structured answers which often attempted to deal with each source sequentially rather than dealing with the distinct components in the statement provided and then dealing with this sequentially.

A significant proportion of the candidates who attempted Paper 2 Question C7 did not provide illustrations to exemplify the key advantages and disadvantages of using AMS in Scottish Parliamentary elections.

In Paper 2 Question C9, some candidates did not focus their answers on the main theories of voting behaviour and merely covered individual elements such as class, race, age and the media.

In Paper 2 Question B5, a very small number of candidates attempted to address the issue of methods of scrutiny of the executive in general, rather than focus on the role of committees.

In Paper 2 Question A3, the majority of candidates produced high quality answers with detailed exemplification. However, it was apparent to the marking team that some candidates did not deal with the question that was asked but tried instead to anticipate the nature of the question that would come up by producing what appeared to be formulaic model answers that did not address the central issue in the question.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

No assumptions should be made about the content of future papers based on past exam papers. There are no topics or content areas that will be guaranteed to come up in future exam papers. These exam papers will sample from across the full range of the course content.

In Paper 1 in response to Question 2, good quality candidates structure their answers around the specific parts of the statement provided. Candidates who attempt to structure their answer by dealing with each of the sources sequentially invariably produce poorer quality responses.

In Paper 2, many candidates seemed well prepared in terms of exam technique, and almost all candidates appeared to finish the questions within the time provided. The majority of candidates are answering questions directly, referring to the wording of the question or quotes provided. Again it was pleasing to note the strength of responses to 'compare and contrast' questions, and many centres appear to be reinforcing the importance of producing well structure analytical responses to these questions.

Candidates should be reminded that high quality answers contain appropriate and detailed exemplification. Candidates should also be reminded to make accurate use of terminology. Some candidates, in response to Question A1, employed terms such as 'liberalist' instead of 'liberalism', for example.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	475
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	531
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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	39.5%	39.5%	210	56
B	24.3%	63.8%	129	48
C	19.8%	83.6%	105	40
D	4.0%	87.6%	21	36
No award	12.4%	-	66	-

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.