



Course Report 2015

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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question Paper

The new Higher Politics Course was presented by 13 centres, accounting for 190 candidates. This number (combined with candidate presentations for the existing Higher Politics Course) shows a significant increase in total candidates taking Higher Politics in session 2014–15.

As in previous years, this growth has been driven by an increase in the overall number of school presentations. Ninety-five percent of candidates were from S5/6, with 5% from the Further Education (FE) sector. Eighty percent of the candidates in 2014–15 were from S6. Overall the exam paper was well received with no adverse external feedback.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates performed particularly strongly in the Politics Assignment. Many candidates produced very analytical and well-structured responses.

There was a very wide range of topics chosen by candidates.

Members of the marking team noted that candidates performed particularly strongly on topics that they clearly had a genuine interest in.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Candidate performance was not as strong in the question paper as in the assignment. It appeared that the attainment of a number of candidates was limited.

Many candidates were not prepared for the difference between responding to the specific requirements of 12-mark and 20-mark extended response questions. A number of candidates appeared to attempt questions as per the existing Higher Question Paper without taking account of the greater focus on skills in the new Higher Politics Course.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates performed particularly strongly in the Politics Assignment. Many candidates produced very analytical and well-structured responses.

Candidates chose a very wide range of topics.

Members of the marking team noted that candidates performed particularly strongly on topics that they clearly had a genuine interest in. For example, a number of candidates appeared motivated by the recent independence referendum.

However, a small number of candidates appeared to have been poorly prepared regarding the criteria for the Politics Assignment, confusing this with the criteria for other subjects such as Modern Studies. This limited the marks that candidates could achieve as a result.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1: Most candidates were able to identify three different points of comparison.

Question 2 (a): Many candidates produced detailed descriptions and explanations and/or exemplification on Lukes's three faces of power.

Question 2 (b): Many candidates produced detailed descriptions and explanations and/or exemplification on the key features of direct democracy. Some candidates provided exemplification from a range of contexts. Candidates who performed well on this question provided detailed descriptions and exemplification or explanations and also made analytical or evaluative comments on the features of direct democracy they had outlined. Candidates also made very explicit reference to at least one relevant theorist.

Question 3 (a): Many candidates performed well in this question. Almost all candidates chose the UK and USA as their two political systems. Candidates who performed strongly provided analytical answers that compared both the nature and the status of the constitutions in both systems. Very good answers also produced detailed and insightful conclusions on both aspects of this question. Good quality answers provided high levels of exemplification.

Question 3 (b): Many candidates performed well in this 20-mark question. Most candidate answers focused on the UK and USA as their chosen contexts. Strong answers made analytical comments throughout their responses and also provided a high level of exemplification. Very good responses were notable for their developed and/or insightful conclusions.

Question 4: Candidates usually made full use of the different sources and attempted to address both aspects of the viewpoint.

Question 5 (a): Candidates who scored highly provided detailed exemplification on relevant examples of modern technology and made relevant analytical and evaluative comments on the effectiveness of these.

Question 5 (b): A minority of candidates produced answers which focused on the relevance of the Rational Choice model of voting behaviour. Candidates who did this were also credited for analytical comments that compared this model with other models as part of their approach to analysing the relevance of the Rational Choice model. These candidates also provided detailed exemplification or evidence.

Component 2: Assignment

The overall quality of candidate response was very high. Many candidates produced detailed and well-structured answers that articulated closely to the marking guidance.

Candidates who achieved high marks made explicit reference to the sources they had used in their 'write up' and made appropriate use of the Politics Resource Sheet. Very few candidates misused the resource sheet and almost all operated within the previously issued guidance for centres and candidates.

Many candidates displayed high levels of analysis both in the quantity and quality of their analytical comments.

Candidates who framed their Assignment topic in an essay format (ie 'to what extent does...', or 'statement ... discuss') tended to perform well.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Question 1: Some candidates failed to make analytical/ evaluative comments on the areas of comparison and merely identified points of comparison. A significant number of candidates did not provide an overall comment linking the information from the sources to make an overall conclusion about the Socialist and Conservative views of the role of the State.

Question 2 (a): Some candidates produced descriptive answers that outlined in detail and with good exemplification Lukes's three faces of power, but failed to make analytical or evaluative comments. A minority of candidates produced answers that covered the concepts of authority and legitimacy in detail. Where this was descriptive, and did not contribute to the analysis of Lukes's views on power, no credit could be given.

Question 2 (b): As with Question 2 (a) (above), some candidates strayed from the question and attempted to answer this question as a detailed comparison between direct and representative democracy. Where candidates introduced representative democracy without using this to provide analysis on the key features of direct democracy, they could not be awarded marks.

Question 3 (a): Some candidates did not address both aspects of the question (nature and status). A minority of candidates did not make attempts to compare constitutions in the two political systems. Some candidates did not focus on the issue in the question and evaluate the overall statement to come to a conclusion about both the extent of differences in the nature and status of the constitutions in the two systems.

Question 3 (b): Some candidates did not focus on the issue in the question and provided descriptive answers that outlined the powers of the Prime Minister and President rather than attempting to address the issue of the executive having few limits on their powers. Candidates who performed poorly tended to fail to make comparisons and, as a result, their opportunities to make analytical points were limited. A number of candidates produced weak and very limited conclusions.

Question 4: Some candidates did not focus on key terms such as 'significantly greater' or 'no other party'. Some candidates did not make the link between the evidence in the sources and the viewpoint explicitly.

Question 5 (a): A significant number of candidates did not focus on the issue in the question and produced 'media' answers to this question. A number of candidates also produced descriptive answers, which may have described and exemplified or explained the use of modern technology by political parties but provided no evaluation of their effectiveness.

Question 5 (b): A significant number of candidates did not answer the question that was set, but appeared to try and provide information on the four models of voting behaviour. Candidates could receive no credit where information was provided on other models but did not attempt to link this to the relevance of the rational choice model. Some candidates appeared to have been prepared for voting behaviour questions from the existing Higher Question Paper. Many candidates were not prepared for the difference between responding to the specific requirements of 12-mark and 20-mark extended response questions.

Component 2: Assignment

Some candidates did not refer to sources in their Assignment and a minority of candidates appeared to have based their 'write up' on inaccurate criteria, for example evaluating the sources of information, which is not required in the Politics Assignment.

Some candidates attempted to produce a report for their Assignment and this limited their ability to access the full range of marks.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Centres should be clear about the Course content and the criteria for the different types of questions that could be used in the Question Paper. Staff delivering courses should in particular note the marking guidelines and grids as outlined in relevant marking instructions, Course Assessment Specifications and Exemplar and Specimen Question Papers.

Candidates should understand the differing requirements of the 12 and 20-mark 'essay' style questions and how marks are allocated for both of these questions. Centres should also consider the significance of the conclusion in the 20-mark essay question. For the 20-mark essay there is a need to evaluate the statement for this type of question as well as providing an analysis of the issue identified in the question.

Candidates should be familiar with the nature of analysis and evaluation as outlined in relevant documentation. The greater emphasis on these skills is a key part of the new Higher Politics Course. Centres may like to consider using the definitions and exemplification of analysis, as provided in relevant documentation, with candidates.

Component 2: Assignment

Centres should familiarise themselves with the criteria for the Politics Assignment. For example, there is no need to make evaluative comments on the reliability of sources.

An essay-style approach to the Assignment write-up enables candidates to access the full range of marks better than a report-style approach.

Centres should also consider the significance of the conclusion in the Assignment.

Candidates should be made aware of the criteria for the allocation of marks in the Assignment write-up. It should be noted that the Assignment marking criteria will be updated for 2015–16.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	186

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark – 90				
A	37.6%	37.6%	70	66
B	24.2%	61.8%	45	48
C	18.3%	80.1%	34	40
D	3.8%	83.9%	7	36
No award	16.1%	-	30	-

Overall the course assessment (Assignment) proved to be less demanding than intended. Grade Boundaries were raised accordingly by 3 marks at each grade boundary.

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.