



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Politics
Level(s)	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

The Higher Politics Course has once again experienced an increase in the number of presentations, from 432 to 475, and an increase in the number of centres from 34 to 45.

This growth is driven by an increase in the number of school presentations. There was a particular increase in the number of S6 pupils presented compared to the last few years.

Overall the examination was well received with very good performances by candidates in both Paper 1 and Paper 2. There was no adverse external feedback.

A noticeable area of improvement was in the quality of answers in Paper 2. A greater number of candidates provided well-structured answers with detailed exemplification and analysis which explicitly addressed the key issues in the essay questions. However, overall, candidates still performed more strongly in the skills based Paper 1.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1, the majority of candidates produced high quality responses. Candidates from an FE background continued to show improvement in Paper 1. In response to question 2 many candidates produced well-structured answers and displayed excellent analytical and evaluative skills. Candidates scored highly where they addressed the specific parts of the main statement.

In Paper 2, there were some outstanding responses from candidates, and there was an increase in the number of candidates achieving full marks.

In Question A3 (ideologies), many candidates produced high quality answers which compared and contrasted the key features of conservatism and socialism. High quality responses were very well structured and tended to compare and contrast throughout. Good quality answers provided relevant exemplification and referred to the views and works of Marx and Burke.

Candidates also produced high quality answers in particular for questions A2 (power, authority and legitimacy), B4 (powers of the executive) and C7 (voting behaviour).

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1 Question 1, a minority of candidates attempted to use data on the raw number of votes, and ended up with invalid conclusions. In Question 2, some candidates misinterpreted the data on the difference between the percentage of votes and seats in Source B, and some candidates did not identify the scale of losses for the Liberal Democrats.

In Paper 2 Question C8 (electoral systems), a minority of candidates found it difficult to answer the question set and attempted to answer the question they had prepared for. Some candidates did not attempt to make reference to the 2010 General election in their response.

In Question C9 (political parties and pressure groups), some candidates did not provide any exemplification.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

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 source sequentially invariably produce poorer quality responses.

In Paper 2 many candidates again seemed well prepared in terms of exam technique. Increasing numbers of candidates are answering questions directly, referring to the wording of questions or quotes. It was particularly pleasing to note the strength of 'compare and contrast' responses, and many centres appear to have reinforced the importance of producing well-structured analytical responses to these questions. Candidates could be reminded that they should provide appropriate and detailed exemplification.

It did, however, appear that a small minority of centres had over prepared candidates who produced formulaic model answers. Centres should be reminded that assumptions should not be made on the possible content of Paper 2 based on past exam papers.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	432
Number of resulted entries in 2013	475

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	54.5%	54.5%	259	58
B	21.9%	76.4%	104	50
C	12.8%	89.3%	61	42
D	2.7%	92.0%	13	38
No award	8.0%	100.0%	38	-

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.