



External Assessment Report 2012

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 centres, from 27 to 34, and in presentation, from 302 to 432. (In 2009 only 156 candidates were presented.) This growth continues to reflect the significant increase in school presentations.

Overall, the examination was well received and performance was very good, with clear improvement in the more demanding Paper 2.

Candidates once again tended to perform better in the skill based Paper 1 compared to the essay style of Paper 2. In Paper 2 candidates choose one question from three in each of the three sections. All questions were answered from the range of candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1 Question 1, the vast majority of candidates provided high quality answers. There were, as usual, some outstanding answers for Question 2 in Paper 1, with a large number of candidates showing excellent analytical and evaluative skills. Candidates from an FE background continue to show improvement in Paper 1.

In Paper 2 many answers were of a very high standard, displaying excellent exemplification, particularly Question A1 on power, authority and legitimacy; Question B4 on political assemblies' scrutiny of respective executives; and Question C8 on the long-term and short-term influences on voting behaviour.

It was pleasing to note in Question A3 a decline in the number of candidates who failed to compare and contrast the key features of Locke's liberalism and Marx's socialism.

Again it was pleasing to note that most candidates answered, with appropriate exemplification, the question that was asked.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1 Question 2 a minority of candidates ignored the first part of the quotation, and this weakened the quality of their response.

In Paper 2 Question B4 a minority of candidates concentrated on the powers of the respective executives rather than on the effectiveness of assemblies to scrutinise the respective executives.

Again in Question C9 a minority of candidates concentrated on the advantages of the Additional Member System and failed to fully address the quotation.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

It was pleasing to note that the SQA Politics Understanding Standards day held in 2010 and again in 2012 seems to have ensured that most candidates were well prepared to achieve success in the exam.

In Paper 1 it was disappointing to note that a minority of candidates failed to address all aspects of the quotation in Question 2. Candidates should take their time to ensure that they use all aspects of the quotation and all of the sources. Centres should remind candidates to provide appropriate balance in their answers between Question 1 (6 marks) and Question 2 (14 marks). Centres might wish to advise candidates to answer Question 2 first to ensure that an appropriate amount of time is spent in answering the more demanding question.

In Paper 2, candidates continue to be better prepared in terms of examination technique, eg answering questions directly, referring to quotes and question wording in their answers. It was pleasing to note a decline in candidates who failed to compare and contrast in the appropriate questions. Centres should continue to remind candidates that their essay should answer the question asked. Again, candidates should ensure that appropriate and detailed exemplification is provided.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	302
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	432
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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	46.3%	46.3%	200	56
B	26.4%	72.7%	114	48
C	14.1%	86.8%	61	40
D	3.0%	89.8%	13	36
No award	10.2%	100.0%	44	-

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.