

National Unit Specification: general information

UNIT	Political Theory
CODE	DV4R 12
COURSE	Politics (Higher)

SUMMARY

This Unit is a mandatory Unit in the Higher Politics Course although it can also be taken as a free-standing Unit.

This Unit will enable candidates to gain an understanding of political theory with reference to the work of relevant modern and/or classical political theorists. The Unit is intended to develop knowledge and understanding of general political concepts and ideologies and to explore the work of particular political theorists in detail. The Unit should provide practical illustrations and applications in a range of different historical and contemporary political contexts.

For those new to the subject, the Unit should stimulate interest and enjoyment, and may serve as an introduction to the discipline of Politics. For candidates progressing from Units at Intermediate 2 the Unit provides the opportunity to study some familiar as well as new concepts and ideologies and it will promote development of more in-depth knowledge and understanding.

The Unit provides suitable preparation for entry to higher education courses in Politics or further study in other subjects. Whether as part of a Course or on a free-standing basis, the Unit may offer preparation for employment or career advancement. The concepts and ideologies chosen for study in this Unit are likely to be of relevance and interest to candidates personally and socially.

Administrative Information

Superclass:	EA
Publication date:	March 2006
Source:	Scottish Qualifications Authority
Version:	01

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2005

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational purposes provided that no profit is derived from reproduction and that, if reproduced in part, the source is acknowledged.

Additional copies of this Unit specification can be purchased from the Scottish Qualifications Authority. The cost for each Unit specification is £2.50 (minimum order £5).

National Unit Specification: general information (cont)

UNIT Political Theory (Higher)

OUTCOMES

- 1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political concepts.
- 2 Analyse and evaluate political ideologies.

RECOMMENDED ENTRY

While entry is at the discretion of the centre, candidates would normally be expected to have attained one of the following, or equivalent:

- ◆ A Standard Grade Social Subject at Credit level or an equivalent Intermediate 2 Course or Units
or
- ◆ Intermediate 2 Politics Units

and Standard Grade English at Credit level or Communication at Intermediate 2.

CREDIT VALUE

1 credit(s) at Higher (6 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 6*)

**SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.*

CORE SKILLS

Achievement of this Unit gives automatic certification of the following:

Complete Core Skill	None
Core Skills component	Critical Thinking at SCQF Level 6

National Unit Specification: statement of standards

UNIT Political Theory (Higher)

Acceptable performance in this Unit will be the satisfactory achievement of the standards set out in this part of the Unit Specification. All sections of the statement of standards are mandatory and cannot be altered without reference to the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

OUTCOME 1

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political concepts.

Performance Criteria

- (a) The key features of political concepts are described accurately.
- (b) The contribution of at least one political theorist to each political concept is explained accurately.

OUTCOME 2

Analyse and evaluate political ideologies.

Performance Criteria

- (a) The key elements of political ideologies are compared and contrasted accurately.
- (b) The impact of these ideologies is evaluated accurately in an appropriate historical or contemporary political context.

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS UNIT

The content and context for this Unit is specified in Appendix 1 — Statement of Standards.

Evidence Requirements apply to the Unit as a whole, and therefore, apply holistically to all Outcomes of the Unit. To demonstrate satisfactory attainment of all Outcomes of the Unit, candidates must produce written or recorded oral responses to items that cover Performance Criteria from all Outcomes. These will typically be produced in response to specific questions in an assessment comprising a mixture of short-answer, restricted response and more extended response items; questions may be structured, and may be based on stimulus material. This will take the form of a closed-book, supervised test, with a time limit of one hour and will be holistic, covering all Outcomes and Performance Criteria.

Each assessment will sample the range of possible content. The sample will be unpredictable in order that the complete Unit is covered in learning and teaching. The sampling will be balanced so that no assessment is any easier or more difficult than any other in terms of the spread of content covered or the nature of the items. If the candidate is able to demonstrate attainment in a random selection of items, it can be inferred that attainment in the areas not sampled would also be satisfactory.

If reassessment is required, it should consist of a fresh assessment instrument. This should sample different areas from the range of content.

Achievement can be determined by a cut-off score. The standard to be applied and the breadth of coverage are illustrated in the National Assessment Bank items available for this Unit. If a centre wishes to design its own assessments for this Unit, they should be of a comparable standard. It is recommended that such an instrument of assessment should be submitted to SQA for prior moderation.

National Unit Specification: support notes

UNIT Political Theory (Higher)

This part of the Unit Specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

GUIDANCE ON THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT FOR THIS UNIT

The content of this Unit is detailed under Course Content in the Course details. An expanded description of the content for this Unit is attached as an appendix to this Unit Specification.

GUIDANCE ON LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACHES FOR THIS UNIT

Political Concepts

Ponton and Gill in “Introduction to Politics” (1993), suggest that a concept is “an idea defined in the mind as an aid to understanding; it is not a given — we do not search for some “objective meaning”. The Collins dictionary defines a concept as “something formed in the mind; a thought; a general idea”.

It is this sense that we use the term concept. There is no one correct objective definition with which everyone agrees. Andrew Heywood’s “Political Theory: An Introduction” (2004) examines political theory “by exploring the use and significance of key political concepts, clustered into related groups”. He also points out the difficulty of agreeing to one particular definition and/or explanation of a political concept. He cites concepts such as power, democracy and freedom as cases where “controversy runs so deep that no neutral or settled definition can ever be developed”. These concepts (and some others) are “essentially contested concepts” ie each term encompasses a range of competing versions of the concept which may be equally valid.

A political concept therefore should be regarded as a tool which has a broad purpose but can be adapted and refined for particular and specialised needs. The approach should be to examine what each concept means to recognised authorities and then attempt to discover a core of meaning common to all or most of these authorities. Concepts are therefore the building blocks of political knowledge.

Particular political ideas like freedom, equality and rights are not explicitly mentioned in the mandatory content nor will they be assessed but they could be introduced as underpinning relevant concepts like the state, power, authority, legitimacy and democracy. Candidates coming to the Higher Course from the Intermediate 2 Units in Politics will have covered rights and obligations already.

Political ideologies tend to be defined as “a more or less coherent set of ideas that provide the basis for organised political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power relationships.” Looked at from this point of view ideologies:

- ◆ offer an account of the existing order
- ◆ provide a model of a desired future
- ◆ outline how political change can and should be brought about.

This becomes the blueprint for the approach to the main ideologies of liberalism, conservatism and socialism. It should be possible to teach these using both a historical and contextual approach and so reflect changes and factions within each ideology.

National Unit Specification: support notes (cont)

UNIT Political Theory (Higher)

Where this Unit is being delivered as part of a Course, Units can be taught in any order or in an integrated manner. An integrated approach would enable the teaching and learning process to emphasise the holistic and integrative nature of the subject. It is also possible to teach Units in parallel with each other eg exploring several political concepts like the state, power, authority and legitimacy from the *Political Theory* Unit while applying them in the UK, Scottish and USA political contexts of the *Political Structures* Unit or the concept of democracy while teaching the electoral systems and electoral reforms in the *Political Representation* Unit. If Units are taught separately it is important that the concepts and ideologies within this Unit are taught first because they underpin many of the topics within the *Political Structures* and *Political Representation* Units.

GUIDANCE ON APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT FOR THIS UNIT

Teachers/lecturers may devise their own assessment tasks while the National Assessment Bank will provide assessment instruments and guidance on implementation. The most appropriate means of obtaining evidence of attainment of the Outcomes of this Unit will be an assessment covering both Outcomes, comprising a mixture of short-answer and more extended response items, where questions may be structured, and may be based on stimulus material; to be conducted under supervised test conditions and lasting no more than 60 minutes.

The marking scheme should reflect the standard embodied in the Performance Criteria. This will allow the evidence to be considered as a whole. The level of attainment required for successful completion of the Unit should represent satisfactory attainment of the Outcomes and, by inference, satisfactory coverage of all Performance Criteria.

Care should be taken to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for support and reassessment of candidates if required.

Where suitable tasks can be set which allow candidates to demonstrate competence beyond the minimum standard required, evidence gathered for Unit assessment may also be used for grade prediction and for appeals for the Course assessment. For details of the grade descriptions for Grade C and Grade A in the Course assessment, refer to the Politics Higher Course Specification.

CANDIDATES WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

This Unit Specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering alternative Outcomes for Units. For information on these, please refer to the SQA document *Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs* (SQA, 2004).

UNIT Political Theory (Higher)

NB: This Appendix is within the statement of standards, ie the mandatory requirements of the Unit.

Content and Context

This Unit involves the teaching of political theory with reference to the work of relevant modern and/or classical political theorists. The Unit is intended to develop knowledge and understanding of general political ideas and to explore the work of particular political theorists in detail. The Unit should provide practical illustrations and applications in a range of different historical and contemporary political contexts.

All political concepts and ideologies below should be covered and will be subject to sampling in the Unit NAB and Course assessment. Political Theorists mentioned in connection with the concepts and ideologies must be covered but it is expected that centres will choose other theorists to compare and contrast with the views of the mandatory theorist.

The State

This requires an understanding of what is meant by the term the state; the origins of the state; the link to sovereignty; its principal features and forms; the Pluralist and Marxist views/theories of the role of the state. Political theorists to be covered for this concept must include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Marx/Lenin.

Power, Authority and Legitimacy

Power — different definitions of power eg the ability to get what we want — power to — the capacity to achieve objectives rather than to exercise control over other people; this consensus view of power should be contrasted with the conflict view — power is getting people to do what they would not have done otherwise ie power over others. This allows candidates to distinguish between different dimensions of power using the work of Steven Lukes (1974) — power as decision-making — the open face of power that can be seen to be exercised when a decision is taken. Power as agenda setting — the secret face of power – exercised behind closed doors. Those who have power to set the political agenda have the power to determine not only what can be discussed but, more importantly, what cannot be discussed. Power is also therefore about preventing decisions being taken ie ‘non-decision making’. Power by manipulating desires — people with such power can persuade others that what is being offered is desired — the ability to shape what someone thinks.

Authority — closely connected with power — additional factor that those over whom power is exercised must believe the power holder has the moral right to exercise power and to employ sanctions if they wish — ‘legitimate power’. Using Max Weber’s work the candidate should be able to describe different types of authority and give relevant examples to illustrate them ie traditional authority — rooted in history; charismatic authority which stems from personality and legal-rational authority which is grounded in a set of impersonal rules.

Legitimacy — linked to authority and rightful power. The term legitimacy is frequently used in discussing an entire system of government rather than specific positions within a government. The most common legitimising procedure is free elections — Gorbachev’s power and authority was seriously undermined in Russia by the fact that he had never submitted himself to popular election whereas Yeltsin made sure he had popular electoral support. Some would argue that it is possible to exercise power without authority but it is unstable; rulers without legitimacy are obliged to rely on coercion. It is also possible to retain authority without power — overthrown leaders in exile are often seen as legitimate rulers. Max Weber’s work is clearly relevant here.

National Unit Specification: statement of standards (cont)

UNIT Political Theory (Higher)

Democracy — the identification of criteria for defining democracy; models of democracy – direct, representative, liberal and people’s democracies — should be described and explained using appropriate historical and/or contemporary examples. The advantages and disadvantages of democracy must be covered from different viewpoints.

Political Ideologies

Liberalism — key elements: Individualism is the core principle of liberalism — a belief in the supreme importance of the human individual as opposed to any social group. Individual freedom or liberty is a core value of liberalism; this arises naturally from a belief in the individual. Reason — the world has a rational structure and humans have ability to reason — they believe in progress and the capacity of individuals to resolve their differences through debate not war. Equality — ‘born equal’ — liberals have a commitment to equal rights especially before the law and in politics ie one person, one vote, favour equality of opportunity — meritocracy — rather than equality of Outcome. Toleration — to think, act and speak freely (within some limits) can lead to social enrichment; they believe pluralism is healthy; natural balance and harmony — no such thing as irreconcilable conflict. Consent — willing agreement — ‘consent of the governed’ — favour democracy and representation although need a ‘constitution’ as vital to guarantee order and stability in society — aware of dangers of tyranny — need for a bill of rights and written constitution. Distinguish between classical and modern liberalism.

Major theorist — John Locke.

Conservatism — key elements: Tradition — ‘desire to conserve’; respect for established customs and institutions. This promotes stability, security and sense of belonging. Human imperfection — they have a pessimistic view of human nature; humans are limited, dependent, need stable/orderly life. Individuals may be morally corrupt, selfish and greedy. For these reasons they believe we need a strong state and laws. Property — ownership vital – it gives independence, security; it also gives rights and duties and ensures respect for the law and property of others. Authority — exercised from above, provides strong leadership, guidance and support; a source of social cohesion, which leads to a willingness to accept obligations and duties. Hierarchy — gradations of social position and status are natural and inevitable. They reflect different roles and responsibilities; do not necessarily give rise to conflict due to mutual obligations and ‘knowing one’s place’. Distinguish between traditional conservatism and the New Right in the UK.

Major theorist — Edmund Burke.

Socialism — key elements: Community — the core of socialism is the importance of community — human beings are social creatures and have a common humanity. Fraternity or comradeship — socialists prefer co-operation to competition and collectivism over individualism. Cooperation enables people to harness their collective energies — competition pits individuals against individuals, may breed resentment, conflict. Social equality — a central value of socialism — equality of Outcome (not opportunity) — this is the basis for the exercise of legal and political rights. Material benefits should be distributed on the basis of need rather than merit or work. Karl Marx’s “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” This requires people to be motivated by moral incentives rather than material ones. Socialism analyses society in terms of the distribution of income or wealth and social class is significant in this. Socialism is usually associated with the interests of an oppressed and exploited class and that class is the agent of change, even social revolution. Common ownership — a controversial feature with some socialists seeing it as an end of socialism itself, others as a means of generating broader equality. Material resources can be harnessed for the common good. Private property promotes social division and selfishness.

Major theorist — Karl Marx.