

## National Unit Specification: general information

**UNIT** Political Structures

**CODE** DV4T 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 the political structures of the UK and either Scotland or the USA — the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. Comparison is the foundation of any systematic branch of knowledge. It provides context. It alerts candidates to similarities and differences in institutions and processes. It improves our classification of Politics.

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 topics related to the UK and Scotland and some new topics involving the USA and it will promote development of more in-depth knowledge and understanding.

As part of Higher Politics, 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 topics and the political contexts chosen for study in this Unit are likely to be of relevance and interest to candidates personally and socially.

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### Administrative Information

**Superclass:** EA

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## National Unit Specification: general information (cont)

### UNIT Political Structures (Higher)

#### OUTCOMES

- 1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the legislative and judicial branches of government in the UK and either Scotland or the USA.
- 2 Analyse and evaluate the political executives of the UK and either Scotland or the USA.

#### 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 Structures (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 the legislative and judicial branches of government in the UK and either Scotland or the USA.

##### **Performance Criteria**

- (a) The role and structure of political assemblies is described accurately.
- (b) The relationship between the legislative and judicial branches of government is explained accurately.

#### **OUTCOME 2**

Analyse and evaluate the political executives of the UK and either Scotland or the USA.

##### **Performance Criteria**

- (a) The roles, powers and functions of the Prime Minister of the UK with those of the First Minister in Scotland or the President of the USA are compared and contrasted accurately.
- (b) The relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government in the UK and either Scotland or the USA is evaluated accurately.

### **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 Structures (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**

Candidates should be introduced to this Unit by looking at the key features of the UK constitution and either how these relate to and involve Scotland or how they compare with the key features of the American constitution. The UK's constitution is conservative compared with the liberal nature of the American constitution. How devolved power in Scotland is accomplished within the UK constitution needs to be examined. Many liberal ideas and principles are fixed in the American constitution — limited government, government by consent, the separation of powers, the desire to safeguard individual rights and the need to establish legal and political equality. The conservative traditions in the UK have demanded that the system should be more flexible; the constitution should be allowed to grow with the system and therefore cannot be a fixed set of ideas and principles. The Scottish Parliamentary powers and those policy areas “reserved” for Westminster provides a good source of examples of how flexible the UK constitution is.

Candidates should explore how these approaches affect the status of the constitutions; the distinction between “written” and “unwritten”, flexible and rigid constitutions; a very brief look at constitutional amendments and judicial reviews is required.

#### **GUIDANCE ON APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT FOR THIS UNIT**

While teachers/lecturers may devise their own assessment tasks 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 more Outcomes, comprising a mixture of short-answer and 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.

## **National Unit Specification: support notes (cont)**

### **UNIT**      Political Structures (Higher)

#### **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 Structures (Higher)

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

**Content and Context**

**Constitutions** — candidates should be introduced to this Unit by looking at the key features of the UK constitution and either how these relate to and involve Scotland or how they compare with the American constitution. The UK’s constitution is conservative compared with the liberal nature of the American constitution. How devolved power in Scotland is accomplished within the UK constitution should be examined. Many liberal ideas and principles are fixed in the American constitution — limited government, government by consent, the separation of powers, the desire to safeguard individual rights and the need to establish legal and political equality. The conservative traditions in the UK have demanded that the system should be more flexible; the constitution should be allowed to grow with the system and therefore cannot be a fixed set of ideas and principles. The Scottish Parliamentary powers and those policy areas “reserved” for Westminster provides a good source of examples of how flexible the UK constitution is.

Candidates should explore how these approaches affect the status of the constitutions; the distinction between “written” and “unwritten”, flexible and rigid constitutions; a very brief look at constitutional amendments and judicial reviews is required.

**Political Assemblies** — there is a need to clarify the definition and role of assemblies; Heywood uses the term assemblies to refer to both houses or chambers and points out that it is also used interchangeably with the terms legislature and parliament; use the principle of the separation of powers to identify the three branches of government before comparing and contrasting the role and structure of assemblies in the UK and either Scotland or the USA.

Candidates should appreciate that the role of assemblies is much more than simply a debating and representative body. Assemblies cover a number of functions — legislation, representation of interests, finance, and scrutiny of the government. Underpinning all of these is a system of checks and balances and a party system in each country.

**Legislation** — Congress may initiate, draft, amend or reject legislation whereas very little legislation originates in Parliament (Private Members’ Bills are mostly rejected); government legislation is virtually guaranteed success in the UK and to a large extent in Scotland but this is not always so in the USA; the influence of lobby groups is extensive in the USA but weaker in Scotland and the UK.

**Representation of interests** — candidates need to be able to describe, discuss and exemplify the differences and/or similarities for lobbyists in the chosen countries in terms of access, sponsorship of representatives and the workings of the committee system; the link between representatives and their constituencies and how they support or oppose legislation that affects their constituencies.

**Finance** – a very brief review of the role of finance is required in the chosen countries.

**Scrutiny of Government** — the differences and similarities in the committee systems of the UK and either Scotland or the USA in terms of openness, profile and publicity should be looked at; the differences on the appointment of government members and opportunities open to representatives to question the executive are important.

## National Unit Specification: statement of standards (cont)

### UNIT Political Structures (Higher)

**Structure of assemblies in the UK and either Scotland or the USA** — candidates should be aware of the distinction between bicameral and unicameral legislatures and the advantages and disadvantages of each, with examples from the UK and the chosen country for comparison; they should be able to discuss and comment on how members are selected in these chambers and the strengths and weaknesses of the committee system in the UK and Scotland or the USA.

**Relationship between the legislature and Judiciary** — this topic should be at an introductory level. It is expected that in looking at constitutions the importance of the judiciary and its independence will be explored; its place in the separation of powers debate will also be explored, depending on the country chosen for comparison; the constitutional importance of the Supreme Court in the USA and the creation of such a body in the UK could be covered. The unusual position of Scotland and the UK parliament and judiciary could be covered.

#### Political Executives

Historically, executives predated the emergence of separate legislatures, judiciaries and bureaucracies. These bodies developed to aid, advise and later to constrain executive rulers. Our concern here is with core executives, defined as the ‘commanding heights’ of the state apparatus. At the core is the top leader and his or her ministers and key officials. The major task of the political executive is leadership and this involves several functions — making policy; mobilising support for policies; supervising the implementation of policy and ceremonial and crisis leadership.

The study of political executives in the UK and Scotland or the USA involves looking at how the executives are aided and constrained by political assemblies and judiciaries. A brief comparison of constitutional and authoritarian executives will aid understanding of how more democratic states have reasonably effective restraints on the exercise of power and succession to executive office. With authoritarian executives constitutional and electoral controls may be either unacknowledged or ineffective.

Comparing the UK’s Prime Ministerial executive with either Scotland’s First Minister or the American President will lead to some similarities and differences and interpretations/conclusions about which is more or less “powerful” in one area or another — if Scotland is chosen it should be clear the First Minister lacks power in several critical areas.

Their relationship with their respective political parties, cabinets and the administrations of each of the countries are very different — the doctrine of collective responsibility is a useful comparative device here; the method of election and constitutional position regarding removal from office are other areas for comparison.

**Relationship between the Executive and the Legislative branches of government in the UK and either Scotland or the USA** — generally the relationship can be described as one of executive dominance in the UK and Scotland but a more balanced relationship in the USA. Candidates should examine the relationship and evaluate where the power lies and why; the checks and balances that operate and their effectiveness.