

National Unit Specification: general information

UNIT Political Theory (Intermediate 2)

CODE DV4R 11

SUMMARY

This Unit offers an introduction to political theory and provides knowledge and understanding of political concepts and models. It also develops skills of analysis and interpretation of political information, and the ability to think critically and construct logical arguments.

Successful candidates will have gained knowledge and understanding of a range of political concepts and models which they can use selectively to interpret and make accurate judgements about political developments and events. By examining the UK as the main political context candidates can make more sense of their world and interpret new experiences.

The Unit is designed to meet the needs of:

- ◆ candidates who seek an introduction to Politics and who wish to undertake a free-standing Unit in the subject
- ◆ candidates who seek an introduction to Politics as preparation for studying Unit(s) and/or the Course in Higher Politics.

OUTCOMES

- 1 Describe key political concepts.
- 2 Evaluate political models.

Administrative Information

Superclass: EA

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National Unit Specification: general information (cont)

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RECOMMENDED ENTRY

While entry is at the discretion of the centre, it would be beneficial if candidates had attained one of the following, or equivalent:

- ◆ a Standard Grade Social Subject at General level or an equivalent Intermediate 1 Course or Units
or
- ◆ Intermediate 1 or equivalent Units in a social science

and Standard Grade English at General level or Communication at Intermediate 1.

CREDIT VALUE

1 credit at Intermediate 2 (6 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 5*)

**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 Skill component	Critical Thinking at Intermediate 2 (SCQF level 5)

National Unit Specification: statement of standards

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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

Describe key political concepts.

Performance criteria

- (a) The main features of key political concepts are described clearly.
- (b) Examples of these concepts in use in the UK are described clearly.

OUTCOME 2

Evaluate political models.

Performance criteria

- (a) The key features of political models are compared clearly.
- (b) The impact of these models on the UK is explained clearly.

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 both 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 both 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 (Intermediate 2)

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

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

This Unit involves introducing each of the concepts and models using the UK as the main political context. Where possible it is expected that candidates will be introduced to the work of relevant political theorists. The candidates will not be assessed on their knowledge of political theorists but where it makes sense to introduce one to illustrate how the concept works in a particular historical or contemporary context, the opportunity should be taken. In the same way the candidates will be assessed on how the political concepts and models work and are applied in the UK but there will be an expectation that they will be introduced to other political contexts where it makes sense to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills.

The Collins dictionary defines a concept as “something formed in the mind; a thought; a general idea”. Political concepts are therefore ideas that we use as aids to understanding. It is this sense that we use the term concept. There is no one correct objective definition with which everyone agrees but concepts are the building blocks of political knowledge. Because of the overlap between political concepts they have been “paired” to indicate that such concepts should be taught together and also that in the assessment there will be an expectation of reference to each concept in the pairing in candidate answers. All the concepts listed should be covered and will be subject to sampling in the assessment.

Political models 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 political models:

- ◆ 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 models 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 model.

National Unit Specification: support notes (cont)

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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 last no longer 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.

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).

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

Content and Context

The State and Constitutions — candidates should focus on what a constitution is; what functions does it perform; what types are there — written/unwritten, flexible/rigid, unitary/federal; how constitutions embody political principles eg separation of powers, rule of law, sovereignty of parliament. The concept of the state could flow from the unitary/federal distinction, but it must look at examples of states being legal, political and geographical entities. The distinction between a nation and a state and the issue of sovereignty should also be covered.

Power and Authority — these are related concepts and are best taught together. In studying power, candidates should appreciate that it involves having your decisions carried out by coercion, influence and by authority. It involves rewards and punishment and the notion of legitimacy, with authority linked to respect and the right to wield power. An exploration of people/groups with a lot of power but little authority or a lot of authority but little power introduces types of authority and power in a basic way; a brief look at the distribution of power in the UK is a must with perhaps other contexts eg the USA used as examples — this would be useful, particularly for those candidates going on to study at Higher later.

Rights and Obligations — candidates covering rights should be introduced to the idea of basic liberties. Many legal and political rights are based on natural rights — entitlements associated with being human. The notion of obligations is associated with rights so that there are bound to be constraints to freedom if rights are universalised. Rights included in a Bill of Rights; the difficulties associated with agreeing such a list; the issue of who should be able to restrict rights.

Democracy and Representation — the main aim is to show that democracy may exist in more than one form, and that all societies, including the UK (and perhaps America as another example), have some flaws in their claims to being democratic.

Some historical development of the concept and discussion of direct democracy and participation should lead to representative democracy and the principles associated with it. Democracy can be viewed as being involved in decision making and/or a way of selecting a government. The first view sees democracy as dynamic, an ideal to be aimed for, whereas the second sees it as static, achieved when people have the vote.

There is a natural link here between democracy and the other related concept of representation. This concept is of crucial importance in the history of political thought and in the way it is applied within many political systems today. Candidates should explore different definitions of representation eg, representative in the sense of being typical of a larger group and representative as an agent or delegate. Such an approach introduces the ideas of consent and accountability, particularly when applied to **responsibility** in that representatives should be sensitive to the needs and wishes of their constituents and need to seek re-election.

National Unit Specification: statement of standards (cont)

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A comparative approach would assist in the understanding of the following political models. However assessment will focus only on their impact on the UK.

Liberalism — the candidate should look at liberal ideas and values concerning the individual, capitalism and welfare. Political toleration, views on censorship, freedom of speech, minority interests; equality of opportunity; rule of law; individualistic, decentralist.

Conservatism — the candidate should look at conservatism as a tradition and as an ideology. Views on the value of tradition, human nature, authority and private property underpin the model. The conservative view of government and other areas like the free market, nationhood, patriotism and unity are also important. The need for social control and order — deference, collectivism, centralism — are also important.

Socialism — the candidate should look at the socialist view of human nature with socialism building a society in which individuals can cooperate; how individuals are influenced by their environment; economic equality; public ownership of the means of production; collectivist, centralist.