



## Course Report 2017

Subject	Politics
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

## **Section 1: Comments on the assessment**

### **Summary of the course assessment**

An increasing number of centres delivered and presented candidates for Higher Politics in session 2016–17.

Candidate performance was slightly lower than that in session 2015–16. This was most apparent in responses for the question paper.

Alterations to the allocation of marks for the 12-mark essay-style questions had the desired impact by providing greater differentiation for candidates at the top of the ability range.

### **Component 1: question paper**

The question paper was positively received. It was apparent, however, that a number of candidates appeared to be unable to answer either of the questions in the Political Systems section of the question paper. This may be due to candidates or centres attempting to question spot. A number of candidates were disadvantaged as a result. Centres are reminded that the question paper will sample from all aspects of the mandatory course content.

### **Component 2: assignment**

Performance in the assignment was broadly in line with previous years.

A wide range of issues was covered by candidates in their submissions. Where candidates covered generic topics linked to direct course content, their performance tended to be poorer than those candidates who appeared to have a personal interest in the topics they had chosen.

There were some centres where their candidates appeared to be working to criteria more appropriate for other subjects. As indicated in previous reports, the Politics assignment is quite different to those from other subject areas such as Modern Studies.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

#### **Component 1: question paper**

Question 1: Many candidates produced highly structured answers, and the majority were able to identify three relevant points of comparison. Good quality responses then provided conclusions that went beyond mere repetition of points made from within the sources.

Question 2(a): This was the more popular option for candidates, and their responses were very strong. Almost all candidates addressed three aspects to this question and the majority

provided detailed and varied exemplification. Candidates who achieved high marks correctly related their analysis to the relevance of Weber's three classifications of authority. A very small number of candidates appeared unaware of the distinction between 12- and 20-mark essay criteria, and a few candidates attempted to address wider issues such as power and legitimacy, for which no knowledge marks could be attained.

Question 2(b): Candidate responses were generally strong with most respondents dealing with three key features of a related political ideology. Strong candidates provided detailed descriptions with relevant exemplification. Almost all responses mentioned the works of at least one theorist. Candidates achieving high marks tended to focus their analysis on identifying differences or similarities, or implications and consequences. Weaker responses tended to provide descriptive answers that did not offer analysis of the features of the chosen ideology.

Question 4: Candidates who performed strongly in this question covered all the relevant aspects of the question — share of the vote; number of seats; comparisons with other nations; and trends over time. Almost all candidates addressed both parts of the viewpoint, and many correctly interpreted and evaluated the electoral data. Strong candidates addressed both the comparison in participation between states and the trend for participation in the UK. These responses also correctly focused on terms from the viewpoint, such as 'clearly the only', 'significant improvement' and 'has undoubtedly always been' when making their overall evaluative comment on the validity of the viewpoint.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Most candidates produced well-structured assignments. Candidates who performed strongly tended to adopt an essay format for their assignment and, more often than not, formatted the title of their assignment as an essay question (ie 'To what extent...' or a statement followed by 'Discuss.').

Most candidates appeared aware of the success criteria for the assignment, and this was reflected in the structure and content of their responses. This approach appears to help candidates to structure analytical points around the issue identified in their assignment, and in particular to provide detailed conclusions.

Some weaker assignments were limited by poorly-chosen topics that did not allow the candidates to focus on a political topic that invites discussion and debate. This then had the effect of limiting the scope for candidates to analyse their chosen topic, resulting in very descriptive responses.

### **A. Identifying and demonstrating factual and theoretical knowledge and understanding of the issue, showing an awareness of different points of view**

Most candidates identified the issue in detail, providing background to their issue and outlining both alternative points of view on their topic and indicating either the significance of their issue or the links to political concepts. The strongest candidates tended to include these aspects in an extended and structured introduction for their assignment. This addressed a number of the criteria for knowledge and understanding (KU) marks and also proved useful for setting the scene for the main part of the assignment. Candidates generally provided detailed and accurate descriptions with associated explanations or exemplification built around, on average, four to five key aspects.

## **B. Analysing and synthesising information in a structured manner**

There was improvement in both the quantity and quality of analysis provided by candidates. Many appeared to be clear on the different types of analysis and were able to provide additional evidence or justification that enabled them to access the top range of analysis marks. As outlined in the marking instructions, this more detailed analysis is required to access the top range marks. Candidates accessing the highest marks did not record analytical points on their resource sheets. Candidates who do record analytical points on their resource sheets will not receive credit for these in their assignment.

## **C. Communicating and referring to political sources**

Most candidates made explicit reference to at least two sources of information. Many candidates made good use of the resource sheet to support their responses. Strong candidates made explicit reference and linked their sources to the development of the issues in their assignment.

## **D. Drawing a detailed and reasoned conclusion(s) about the issue**

Many candidates provided detailed and well-argued summative conclusions that addressed the central issue identified in their assignment. A limited number of candidates provided very insightful conclusions that went beyond merely restating the points made in their assignment. Strong candidates provided justifications for the side of the issue they had settled on, often examining potential implications of this, and outlining why they rejected the opposing point of view.

# **Areas which candidates found demanding**

## **Component 1: question paper**

A significant number of candidates did not adequately address the questions in the Political Systems section of the question paper. It appeared that some were not sufficiently prepared by their centres for the topics covered in this section. The question paper will sample from all aspects of the course content and centres should prepare candidates accordingly.

Question 1: A number of candidates, after making legitimate comparisons between the sources, then failed to provide any overall conclusion on the cases for Direct and Representative Democracy. Some candidates repeated the points of comparisons from the sources with no additional input or evaluation. A very small number did not address the skills aspect of this question and produced an essay-style answer that compared the key features of Direct and Representative Democracy without reference to the sources.

Question 2(b): Some candidates produced essays that compared two separate ideologies rather than analysing one ideology. Candidates could receive no credit for KU for the second ideology, though they could access marks, where appropriate, for analysis where comparisons were made that indicated differences or similarities. A small number of candidates appeared to confuse this question with one focusing on the dominant idea of a specific political party and produced descriptive answers that merely provided a narrative on a political party's history and policies — for example confusing conservatism as an ideology with the Conservative party.

Question 3(a): A number of candidates did not address the issue in the question, and answers strayed from the focus of the question on legislation and started to address issues such as scrutiny and the role of committees, or made comparisons on the powers of the executive. To access full marks, candidates were required to address both the origin of legislation as well as the passage of legislation in two political systems they had studied. A small number of candidates only addressed one of these parts of the question. Candidates generally attempted to answer with analytical and comparative essays, and there was evidence of some detailed and highly relevant exemplification. The UK and USA contexts were the most popular for this question.

Question 3(b): As with question 3(a), a number of candidates did not address the central issue in the question. Some candidates strayed into a 'check and balances' type of answer as opposed to a focus on the judiciary's ability to limit government power. Candidates who addressed this issue directly often provided detailed and recent exemplification as well as comparative and analytical responses. However, there were a number of very basic answers, which did not cover an adequate range of knowledge and lacked development of the points which were covered.

Question 5(a): The focus of this question was on the impact of the dominant ideas on a political party's performance. A small number of candidates provided a descriptive narrative of the policies for a chosen political party but did not attempt to analyse the impact. Other answers discussed a party's record in office, or aspects such as leadership, and appeared to be treating the question as a 'rational choice' type answer. Where analysis was weak, candidates made general statements regarding a party's performance. Candidates who performed strongly tended to provide well-structured answers that focused on three key ideas associated with a political party, and made explicit and detailed analytical points such as the impact of a particular key idea on a specific segment of the electorate.

Question 5(b): A significant minority of candidates did not address the key issue in the question, namely the media strategies use by political parties, and instead attempted to provide a generic answer that outlined how the media itself affects voting behaviour. A smaller number of candidates provided too great a focus on the role of social media and/or new technology. Candidates who performed strongly attempted to address the strategies used by political parties and provided an analysis of the impact on the electoral performance of a party.

## **Component 2: assignment**

Some candidates appeared to be unaware of some of the success criteria for the assignment and consequently were unable to access the full range of marks.

Some candidates were limited by poorly constructed titles or topics, and this limited the opportunity to analyse the issue they had chosen or come to an adequate conclusion or series of conclusions.

A number of candidates produced reports that did not articulate with the criteria for the assignment (for example by attempting to evaluate sources which is a feature of the Modern Studies assignment) and normally scored poorly as a result.

### **A. Identifying and demonstrating factual and theoretical knowledge and understanding of the issue, showing an awareness of different points of view**

A few candidates produced assignments which had tenuous links to political concepts and may have been more relevant for other subject areas.

### **B. Analysing and synthesising information in a structured manner**

A very small number of candidates produced descriptive reports with little or no analysis.

### **C. Communicating and referring to political sources**

A limited number of candidates did not make satisfactory use of the resource sheet, or their use extended beyond acceptable parameters. Some candidates copied large sections of text from the resource sheet and were therefore unable to show that they could develop knowledge and understanding. Some copied analytical comments from the resource sheet which could not be awarded marks.

There were some candidates who did not make any reference to political sources in their assignments and others who only made a basic reference to the source with no development or indication as to how or what the source contributed to the issues addressed in the assignment.

### **D. Drawing a detailed and reasoned conclusion(s) about the issue**

A limited number of candidates produced conclusions which merely restated some points raised in their assignment with no attempt to link to the wider issue.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

All candidates should be fully aware of the nature and requirements of the different types of question in the question paper. These are featured in the marking grids in the marking instructions. These are, in effect, the success criteria for each type of assessment item, and it would be good practice to share these with candidates. In particular, candidates should clearly be able to differentiate responses and criteria for the 12- and 20-mark essay questions. They should also be aware that 12-mark question will tend to focus on a particular aspect of a wider topic area. Good practice indicates that candidates have a strong understanding of the different forms that analysis can take, as outlined in the relevant marking instructions and in associated course documentation.

Centres are reminded that the question paper will sample from all aspects of the course content.

It may be worthwhile to reinforce that Section 3 of the course focuses on political parties and the factors that affect their electoral performance. In relation to the electoral data question, candidates may benefit from focusing on key terms in the statement such as 'significant improvement' or 'undoubtedly always been'.

## **Component 2: Assignment**

Candidates should be fully aware of the success criteria for the assignment. Candidates and centres should not confuse the criteria for the Politics assignment with those for other subjects such as Modern Studies. Care should be taken when considering suitable topics and titles for assignments to ensure that they are clearly political topics and are not framed in such a way as to narrow the opportunities for analysis and debate.

It is beneficial for candidates to consider topics for the assignment where they have a genuine interest or some attachment to the topic. Candidates tend to produce stronger assignments where key principles such as personalisation and choice are evident.

Centres are also advised to ensure that candidate resource sheets are limited to the function for which they are intended and are not treated as an extended essay plan. Otherwise candidates may be at risk of self-penalising by having too much information on their resource sheet. Analysis and extended copying from the resource sheet will not be credited.

It is good practice to get candidates to frame their assignment as an essay-type question. This has the additional benefit of encouraging a more focused conclusion. An awareness of the allocation of KU marks would help candidates to compose a detailed introduction that outlines the issue in detail, the different viewpoints, and its significance within an extended introduction.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	782
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	982
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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 -				
A	29.3%	29.3%	288	63
B	23.3%	52.6%	229	54
C	20.5%	73.1%	201	45
D	7.9%	81.1%	78	40
No award	18.9%	-	186	-



## 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.