



Course Report 2018

Subject	Politics
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

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

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 2017–18. In total there were 23 new centres with total presentations increasing by 221.

Candidate performance was overall on par with that of session 2016–17. There was a very slight improvement in overall performance in the question paper and a slight decrease in the assignment.

There were no changes to the allocation of marks in either the question paper or the assignment.

Component 1: question paper

The question paper was positively received. It was noted by the marking team that there were some candidates who were unable to directly address one of the questions in the 'Political parties and elections' section of the question paper. This may be due to candidates attempting to question spot. Centres are again reminded that the question paper samples from all aspects of the course content and that candidates should refrain from attempting to identify patterns based on previous question papers. Candidates by and large appeared to be clear on the differences in nature of the 12- and 20-mark essay-style questions.

Component 2: assignment

Overall performance in the assignment was slightly below that of previous years. Markers indicated there were a number of candidates that had poorly-chosen titles for their assignments. This had the impact of limiting the ability of candidates to access marks for analysis.

There was a wide range of issues covered by candidates in their submissions. Where candidates covered topics linked directly to course content, performance tended to be poorer than for those who appeared to have a personal interest in the topics they had chosen. The assignment remains an opportunity for personalisation and choice for candidates. Where candidates could only opt for a limited range of topics, markers noted that this seemed to have had a detrimental impact on the quality of responses generated. This was also the case where candidates appeared to be working to criteria that was more appropriate for assignments from other subjects. As indicated in previous reports, the Higher Politics assignment is quite different to other subjects, such as Higher Modern Studies.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 1(a): many candidates produced highly-structured answers with detailed exemplification and/or explanations. Most candidates provided detailed descriptions of power and authority with very detailed understanding of Lukes' three faces of power and Weber's three types of authority. Candidates who accessed high marks were able to show similar understanding and exemplification of legitimacy. Most candidates provided analytical comments which focused on the relevance and relative importance of these concepts.

Question 1(b): candidate responses were generally strong. Most candidates produced highly-structured answers, which compared direct and representative democracy. Many candidates provided detailed descriptions, with many also providing highly-relevant exemplification or explanations with references to appropriate theorists. Candidates achieving high marks tended to focus their analysis on identifying differences or similarities, or focusing on implications or consequences. High-attaining candidates also specifically addressed the issue of which form of democracy could be considered superior in their conclusions. Most candidates produced summative conclusions at the end of their essays, but a few candidates provided mini-conclusions throughout their response.

Question 2: candidate responses for this question were strong. High-achieving candidates identified three relevant points of comparison and provided a detailed conclusion, focusing on and comparing the flexibility of constitutional arrangements in the two political systems. Very few candidates did not go on to make an overall conclusion on the issue of flexibility.

Question 3(a): almost all candidates chose the UK/USA as the contexts for their responses. Many candidates provided structured responses which compared the executive's ability to make policy in the two political systems.

Question 3(b): almost all candidates also chose the UK/USA as the contexts for their responses. Many candidates provided structured responses which compared the passage of legislation in the two political systems.

Question 4: candidates who performed strongly covered both parts of the viewpoint in a structured response and addressed all aspects of the data. High-performing candidates addressed the electoral college and popular votes from source A, the differences in performance across the differing social groups in source B, and both the performance in the primaries and endorsements in source C. Strong candidates used the data to address key terms from the viewpoint such as 'by every measure', 'comprehensively won' or 'overwhelming support'. Candidates who accessed full marks provided explicit links between the data and the viewpoint to provide justified evaluations of the viewpoint.

Question 5(a): candidates who performed well provided answers which focused on three aspects of the rational choice model (for example, issue voting, leadership and campaigns), and provided relevant explanations or exemplification. High-scoring candidates focused their analytical comments on the relevance and importance of each of the aspects on electoral performance.

Question 5(b): candidates who scored highly provided detailed descriptions on three aspects of the question (dominant ideas associated with the chosen political party) and provided explanation or exemplification. These candidates provided relevant analytical comments on the impact of these key ideas on the electoral performance of parties. Candidates who scored highly provided detail on the impact on specific voter groups or other specific aspects of electoral performance.

Component 2: assignment

The overall performance of candidates was slightly below previous years. Many candidates produced detailed and well-structured assignments that articulated with the marking guidance and focused on topics which invited discussion and debate. High-scoring candidates tended to frame their assignment topics in an essay format (for example, 'to what extent...' or a statement followed by 'Discuss'). These candidates produced assignments which enabled them to access a range of analytical marks and come to relevant conclusions on their issues.

Candidates who achieved high marks made explicit reference to the resource sheet and the sources they had used. These candidates made use of the resource sheet to develop their knowledge and understanding or to provide the basis for developing analytical comments. High-scoring candidates provided developed analytical points that provided additional evidence, explanation or justification.

Many candidates produced responses which were highly analytical. Candidates who achieved high marks appeared to be aware of the success criteria for the assignment, and this was reflected in the structure and content of their 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 and outlining alternative points of view on their issue. Some candidates were limited in their ability to do this due to poorly-chosen titles. High-performing candidates identified the significance of their issue or related it to relevant political concepts. They also usually included these aspects in a structured and extended introduction. Candidates generally provided detailed and accurate descriptions, with associated exemplification or explanation on a suitable number of aspects for their assignment.

B Analysing and synthesising information in a structured manner.

Many candidates produced assignments that included both a breadth of analysis and also depth. Candidates appeared to be clear on the different types of analysis, and good quality responses included analysis with additional justification or evidence. As outlined in the marking grid, developed analysis is required for candidates seeking to access the full range of marks. Candidates who scored highly did not record analytical comments on their resource sheet. Candidates who did record analytical comments on their resource sheet, received 0 marks 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 their resource sheet, however, centres should be clear on the rationale and use of the resource sheet itself. Strong candidates made explicit reference to, and communicated information gained from, their sources.

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

Many candidates made detailed and well-argued conclusions that addressed the central issue in their assignment. A limited number provided very insightful conclusions. Strong candidates often provided justifications for the side of the issue they had settled on (often providing implications of this) and also outlined why they had rejected the opposing point of view.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Question 1(a): a number of candidates failed to provide adequate coverage of the concept of legitimacy, either failing to address this directly or lacking development of this concept through detailed description, explanations or exemplification. This limited their scope for both knowledge and understanding (KU) and analysis marks.

Question 1(b): a few candidates were limited by either poor structure which constrained their ability to compare direct and representative democracy, or by failing to address the works of appropriate theorists.

Question 2: a limited number of candidates did not make legitimate comparisons linked to the nature of the question.

Question 3(a) and 3(b): some candidates appeared unprepared for these questions, while a number missed out responding at all. Weaker candidates also failed to focus on the context of the question and a number produced responses which addressed aspects of both question 3(a) and question 3(b) in the same response. A limited number of candidates failed to provide exemplification or explanation. A very small number of candidates were unable to access the full range of marks as they could not provide at least one analytical comment with additional evidence or justification.

Question 4: some candidates did not make full use of the sources, for example, by failing to identify the significance of endorsements for the second part of the viewpoint. A limited number of candidates failed to address key terms in the viewpoint and explain the extent to which the information supported the viewpoint or not.

Question 5(a): many candidates failed to address the key issue in the question with a number going onto provide descriptions of the sociological model. Overall, there was also poorer exemplification than may have been expected. A number of candidates did not provide analytical comments which related to the importance or relevance of the rational choice model.

Question 5(b): a number of candidates provided a narrative description of the policies for a chosen political party. These candidates failed to either identify the dominant ideas of a party or failed to link these to the impact on the electoral performance of a political party. A number of candidates provided answers that included aspects such as leadership or the record in government of a party which are not within the scope of the question. Where analysis was weak, candidates made general comments on a party's overall performance with very limited linkage to the impact of a specific dominant idea on the electoral performance of a party. Responses could have been improved by identifying the impact on, for example, specific sections of the electorate.

Component 2: assignment

Some candidates had poorly-chosen titles that limited their ability to access marks for analysis or conclusions. Centres should be clear on the nature of the politics assignment and guidance on choice of topic (that is, any political issue that invites discussion or debate).

Some candidates produced responses which appeared to show all candidates from a centre choosing the same topic. Although there is no barrier to this, the quality of these responses appeared to be poorer. The assignment remains one of the key ways to offer candidates the benefits of personalisation and choice.

A number of candidates did not make full or adequate use of the resource sheet. Some candidates used the resource sheet as a plan which they copied from or included analytical comments, which achieved 0 marks. In addition, some candidates appeared to have created their own codes which limited the ability of markers to adequately identify if sources were being used and communicated effectively. A limited number of candidates included information across two pages despite clear guidance that the resource sheet should be one page only.

Centres are strongly advised that they should be familiar with the guidance on the use of the resource sheet and also on what constitutes acceptable support and guidance for candidates. The politics assignment is different in significant ways to other subjects such as modern studies. Some centres (though fewer than previously) appeared to provide guidance to candidates that applied to the modern studies assignment. For instance, there is no need for candidates to evaluate the reliability of sources for the politics assignment.

Candidates should be made aware of the marking grid for the politics assignment as it provides an outline of the success criteria.

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

A number of candidates chose poorly-worded titles for their assignment which limited their ability to analyse an issue and come to relevant conclusions. Some candidates chose titles such as 'What are the factors.....' or even 'Jeremy Corbyn'. As a result these responses tended to be descriptive or narrative in nature and lacked analysis.

A number of candidates also appeared to lack understanding of the mark allocation for KU and as a result failed to outline the significance of their issue or link it to political concepts.

B Analysing and synthesising information in a structured manner.

Although many candidates produced highly analytical responses, there were candidates who produced descriptive assignments. This was often linked to poor choices of titles. Only a limited number of candidates were able to access more than 10 marks for analysis as they only provided basic analytical comments.

C Communicating and referring to political sources.

An increased number of candidates did not make satisfactory use of the resource sheet. Some candidates copied large sections of text from their resource sheet and were therefore unable to show that they could develop their knowledge and understanding of their issue. Some candidates, as a result of using the resource sheet as a plan, copied analytical comments from their sheet which could not be awarded marks.

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

A limited number of candidates merely restated points without linking these to the wider issues in their assignments.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Centres should be fully aware of the key politics documentation relating to the question paper and the assignment. Centres should be aware of support available and in particular, scripts on the Understanding Standards website.

Centres should refer to the new course specification for Higher Politics and the impact of the changes that have been introduced for session 2018–19.

Component 1: question paper

All candidates should be aware of the nature and requirements of the different types of questions in the question paper. These are featured in the marking grids which are included in the marking instructions. These are, in effect, the success criteria for each type of assessment instrument and it would be good practice to share these with candidates, so they are clear on the requirements for each type of question. In particular, candidates should be able to differentiate their responses for 12- and 20-mark questions.

Candidates should be clear on the need to develop points to access the full range of KU marks by providing exemplification or explanation in addition to their descriptions.

Candidates should be discouraged from guessing the content of the question paper. The question paper can sample from all aspects of the course content.

For relevant questions in section 1 of the question paper, candidates should clearly recognise the importance of referring to the works and ideas of appropriate theorists.

For source-based questions candidates should understand the key skills being assessed.

Component 2: assignment

As with the question paper, candidates should be familiar with the success criteria for the assignment. Centres should also ensure clarity over the nature and purpose of the politics assignment and the resource sheet. Centres should, in particular, be clear on the use of the resource sheet. It should enable candidates to identify information collected during the research stage of their assignment that can then assist in developing their knowledge and skills in relation to the chosen topic. The resource sheet is not intended as an essay plan, nor conversely is simply recording a number of URLs likely to support a candidate during the write-up of their assignment. Analytical comments copied from the resource sheet are not awarded marks.

Candidates are advised to frame their assignments as an essay-type question. This approach has been shown to support candidates in producing analytical responses and in encouraging more focused conclusions.

It remains the case that when candidates can take advantage of the scope for personalisation and choice in their assignment then performance tends to be stronger.

Candidates are expected to use the resource sheet to generate the evidence under controlled conditions, and they **must** submit it with their evidence. The resource sheet is not assessed formally. However it is important that teachers/lecturers ensure that candidates know how to use and submit resource sheet(s) which are reviewed during the marking process.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	982
Number of resulted entries in 2018	1214

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	30.0%	30.0%	364	63
B	21.8%	51.8%	265	54
C	20.0%	71.8%	243	45
D	8.6%	80.4%	104	40
No award	19.6%	-	238	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.