



Higher
course
specification



Higher Politics, SCQF Level 6 Course Specification

Course code:	C858 76
Course assessment code:	X858 76
SCQF:	level 6 (24 SCQF credit points)
Valid from:	session 2026–27

This document provides detailed information about the course and course assessment to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It describes the structure of the course and the course assessment in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed.

This document is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver the course.

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Course overview

The course consists of 24 SCQF credit points which includes time for preparation for course assessment. The notional length of time for candidates to complete the course is 160 hours.

The course assessment has three components.

Component	Marks	Duration
Component 1: question paper 1	52	1 hour and 45 minutes
Component 2: question paper 2	28	1 hour and 30 minutes
Component 3: assignment	30	1 hour and 30 minutes — see 'Course assessment' section

Recommended entry	Progression
<p>Entry to this course is at the discretion of the centre.</p> <p>Candidates should have achieved a National 5 social subjects or social science course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting this course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Advanced Higher Modern Studies course◆ further study, employment and/or training

Conditions of award

The grade awarded is based on the total marks achieved across all course assessment components.

Course rationale

National Courses reflect Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles. They offer flexibility, provide time for learning, focus on skills and applying learning, and provide scope for personalisation and choice.

Every course provides opportunities for candidates to develop breadth, challenge and application. The focus and balance of assessment is tailored to each subject area.

This course builds upon the principles and practices of the social studies curriculum area. Candidates have opportunities to develop important attitudes, such as respect for the values, beliefs and cultures of others; openness to new thinking and ideas; and a sense of responsibility and global citizenship.

The course contributes to candidates' understanding of society by helping them to develop an understanding of political theory, political systems in the UK and international contexts, and factors affecting the electoral performance of political parties. Candidates develop a critical awareness of the nature of politics and the relationship between political theories, systems and parties.

Candidates build up a framework of political knowledge and understanding through interpreting, evaluating and commenting on political issues. They develop higher-order thinking skills through research and critical-thinking activities carried out individually and in groups. This develops attributes that are important for life and work. Candidates progressively develop skills in literacy and numeracy.

Purpose and aims

Politics makes a distinctive contribution to the curriculum through its study of important political concepts and ideologies, the comparison of different political systems, and the evaluation of factors that impact on the electoral performance of political parties.

Candidates develop knowledge and understanding of key political concepts. The theoretical perspective of the course enables candidates to identify, explore and analyse political issues in order to develop their own views and perspectives. Candidates develop analysing and evaluating skills during the course which help them to interpret and understand political issues.

Candidates develop:

- ◆ knowledge and understanding of:
 - significant political concepts and ideologies
 - political systems through comparative study
 - political parties and elections
- ◆ the ability to analyse and evaluate political ideas, events, issues, systems, parties and electoral performance
- ◆ a range of research, data-handling and evaluating skills

Who is this course for?

The course is appropriate for a range of candidates, from those who wish to achieve a greater understanding of politics in order to engage as active and informed members of society, to those who wish to progress to more specialised training or higher education or employment.

Course content

The course consists of three areas of study: Political theory, Political systems, and Political parties and elections. There is considerable flexibility in the contexts that can be studied within each area to allow for personalisation and choice.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course

The following provides a broad overview of the subject skills, knowledge and understanding developed in the course:

- ◆ researching, analysing, evaluating and synthesising information from a wide range of political sources
- ◆ using a wide range of sources of information to draw detailed and balanced conclusions about political concepts and ideologies
- ◆ comparing and contrasting different political systems, making generalisations, where appropriate, on the political process
- ◆ interpreting and evaluating a wide range of electoral data
- ◆ drawing on factual and conceptual knowledge of political theory, political systems, and political parties and elections

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment

The following provides details of skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment:

Question paper 1

This question paper has three sections: Political theory, Political systems, and Political parties and elections. Candidates demonstrate the application of skills and breadth of knowledge and understanding from across the three sections of the course. This question paper samples from the knowledge and understanding as follows:

Section 1: Political theory

Candidates study the key political concepts of power, authority and legitimacy, with particular reference to the work of Steven Lukes and Max Weber, and analyse the relevance of these concepts today.

They study the nature of democracy and the arguments for and against direct and representative democracy, including the works of relevant theorists.

Candidates study the key ideas of two political ideologies (from Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism, Nationalism, and Fascism) including the works of relevant theorists, and draw balanced conclusions about the chosen ideologies.

Relevant case studies are used from either local, national or international contexts, as well as different historical contexts.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

Power, authority and legitimacy

Power:

- ◆ different definitions of power
- ◆ the conflict view of power and differing interpretations of how power is distributed in society
- ◆ Steven Lukes' 'three faces of power': decision making, non-decision making and manipulating desires

Authority:

- ◆ authority as rightful power which implies an obligation to obey
- ◆ Max Weber's three types of authority: traditional, charismatic and legal-rational

Legitimacy:

- ◆ the sense of rightfulness
- ◆ the relevance of Max Weber's classifications
- ◆ the ways in which legitimacy may be enabled
- ◆ the impact on a political system of the loss of legitimacy

Democracy

Direct and representative democracy:

- ◆ the nature of democracy and different forms of democracy
- ◆ arguments for and against direct democracy
- ◆ arguments for and against representative democracy
- ◆ theorists, for example: Plato, Schumpeter or Dahl

Key political ideologies

Liberalism:

- ◆ theorists, for example: Locke, Mill
- ◆ key ideas, for example: rationalism, individualism, toleration, consent, freedom, rights

Conservatism:

- ◆ theorists, for example: Burke, Disraeli
- ◆ key ideas, for example: human imperfection, tradition, security, authority, organic society, private property

Key political ideologies (continued)

Socialism:

- ◆ theorists, for example: Marx, Lenin
- ◆ key ideas, for example: co-operation, collectivism, equality, class, common ownership

Nationalism:

- ◆ theorists, for example: Mazzini, Herder
- ◆ key ideas, for example: the nation, self-determination, organic community, patriotism, identity

Fascism:

- ◆ theorists, for example: Mussolini, Hitler
- ◆ key ideas, for example: irrationalism, ultra-nationalism, racialism, authoritarian leadership, organicism

Section 2: Political systems

Candidates study the constitutional arrangements in different political systems. The detailed study of the political systems focuses on the roles of the executive and legislative branches within each system. Candidates compare and contrast the respective powers of individual branches of government within the two political systems, and draw balanced conclusions about these.

Candidates study two of the following five political systems: the UK political system; the Scottish political system; the political system of the United States of America; the European Union political system; or the political system of the People's Republic of China.

Candidates take a comparative approach which reaches conclusions about the sources of power within two political systems.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

Constitutional arrangements

Candidates compare the nature and status of the different constitutional approaches within two chosen systems, including:

- ◆ the type and nature of the constitutional approach
- ◆ the origins and development of the constitutional arrangements
- ◆ key underlying principles
- ◆ the flexibility and adaptability in each system
- ◆ the position of the judiciary
- ◆ the role of the constitution in safeguarding individual rights

The legislative branch

Candidates compare the influence of the legislative branch within two chosen systems, including:

- ◆ the passage of legislation
- ◆ the ability to scrutinise the actions of government
- ◆ the role of committees

The executive branch

Candidates compare the influence of the executive branch within two chosen systems, including:

- ◆ the distribution of power
- ◆ the policy-making function
- ◆ the relationship between the executive and other branches of government

Section 3: Political parties and elections

Candidates compare the electoral impact of two different dominant ideas. This can **either** be from within one political party **or** between two different political parties. Candidates can choose from any political party with representation in the Scottish or UK Parliament. These ideas are studied alongside the impact of political campaign management strategies and theoretical analyses of voting behaviour.

Relevant case studies are used from Scotland, the United Kingdom, or both Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

The dominant ideas within or between political parties

Candidates can choose from any political party with representation in the Scottish or UK Parliament.

For example:

Conservative, for example:

- ◆ one-nation conservatism
- ◆ Thatcherism

Labour, for example:

- ◆ democratic socialism
- ◆ new Labour

Liberal Democrat, for example:

- ◆ social liberalism
- ◆ *The Orange Book*

Scottish National Party, for example:

- ◆ civic nationalism
- ◆ left-of-centre social democratic

The impact of political campaign management strategies

Candidates analyse, evaluate and compare the effectiveness of the following:

- ◆ traditional grassroots campaign strategies
- ◆ media strategies
- ◆ use of new technology

Theories of voting behaviour

Candidates analyse, evaluate and compare the effectiveness of the following:

- ◆ rational choice model
- ◆ sociological model
- ◆ party identification model

Question paper 2

This question paper assesses the skills of comparing and contrasting information and interpreting, synthesising and evaluating a wide range of electoral data.

Assignment

Candidates choose any political topic or question to research. Their choice is not constrained by the content of question paper 1.

Skills, knowledge and understanding included in the course are appropriate to the SCQF level of the course. The SCQF level descriptors give further information on characteristics and expected performance at each SCQF level, and can be found on the SCQF website.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

This course helps candidates to develop broad, generic skills. These skills are based on the [Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#) framework and draw from the following main skills areas:

1 Literacy

1.1 Reading

1.2 Writing

2 Numeracy

2.3 Information handling

4 Employability, enterprise and citizenship

4.6 Citizenship

5 Thinking skills

5.3 Applying

5.4 Analysing and evaluating

Teachers and lecturers must build these skills into the course at an appropriate level, where there are suitable opportunities.

Learning for Sustainability

Qualifications Scotland is committed to identifying opportunities to develop the values, skills, knowledge and understanding of Learning for Sustainability within all National Courses.

Course assessment

Course assessment is based on the information provided in this document.

The course assessment meets the key purposes and aims of the course by addressing:

- ◆ breadth — drawing on knowledge and skills from across the course
- ◆ challenge — requiring greater depth or extension of knowledge and/or skills
- ◆ application — requiring application of knowledge and/or skills in practical or theoretical contexts as appropriate

This enables candidates to draw on, extend and apply the skills, knowledge and understanding they have acquired during the course.

Course assessment structure: question paper

Question paper 1

52 marks

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 52 marks. This is 47% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

This question paper enables candidates to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ drawing on knowledge and understanding that is factual, theoretical and conceptual, and adopting a comparative approach where appropriate
- ◆ explaining, analysing and evaluating complex political issues
- ◆ drawing detailed and balanced conclusions about complex political issues
- ◆ comparing information about political theories, systems and parties

In this question paper, candidates answer two 20-mark extended-response questions and one 12-mark extended-response question. The question paper has three sections:

Section 1: Political theory

Section 2: Political systems

Section 3: Political parties and elections

Each of these sections is worth either 12 or 20 marks and requires candidates to draw on the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired during the course. Candidates answer one extended-response question in each section, from a choice of two.

Setting, conducting and marking the question paper

This question paper is set and marked by Qualifications Scotland, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by Qualifications Scotland.

Candidates have 1 hour and 45 minutes to complete this question paper.

Question paper 2

28 marks

This question paper has a total mark allocation of 28 marks. This is 26% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

This question paper enables candidates to demonstrate the following skills:

- ◆ comparing information about political theories, systems and parties
- ◆ interpreting, evaluating and synthesising a wide range of electoral data

In this question paper, candidates answer two source-based, information-handling skills questions. One question is worth 8 marks and consists of two sources, and one question is worth 20 marks and consists of up to seven sources. Sources may be written, numerical, graphical or pictorial.

Setting, conducting and marking the question paper

This question paper is set and marked by Qualifications Scotland and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by Qualifications Scotland.

Candidates have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete this question paper.

Specimen question papers for Higher courses are published on Qualifications Scotland's website. These illustrate the standard, structure and requirements of the question papers candidates sit. The specimen papers also include marking instructions.

Course assessment structure: assignment

Assignment

30 marks

The assignment has a total mark allocation of 30 marks. This is 27% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

Assignment overview

The assignment allows candidates to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ identifying a political issue that invites discussion and debate
- ◆ researching a political issue using a range of sources of information
- ◆ showing detailed factual and theoretical knowledge and understanding of a political issue
- ◆ communicating information from, and referring to, political sources
- ◆ analysing and synthesising information in a structured manner
- ◆ drawing a detailed and reasoned conclusion, showing an awareness of different points of view

Setting, conducting and marking the assignment

The assignment is set by teachers and lecturers within Qualifications Scotland guidelines. Qualifications Scotland provides a brief detailing how candidate evidence is assessed. Candidates choose any political topic or question to research. Evidence is submitted to Qualifications Scotland for external marking. All marking is quality assured by Qualifications Scotland.

The assignment has two stages:

- ◆ research
- ◆ production of evidence

Candidates undertake the research stage at any appropriate point in the course, normally when they have developed the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding.

In the research stage, candidates choose a topic which allows them to analyse and evaluate a political issue which invites discussion and debate. They research the issue, and organise their findings to address it, using the Politics resource sheet to collate their evidence and references.

Assessment conditions

Time

The research stage is designed to be completed over a notional period of 8 hours. Candidates have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete the production of evidence for assessment. This must be done in one sitting. Candidates complete the production of evidence stage in time to meet the submission date set by Qualifications Scotland.

Supervision, control and authentication

The research stage is conducted under some supervision and control. This means that, although candidates may complete part of the work outwith the learning and teaching setting, teachers and lecturers should put in place processes to monitor progress and ensure that the work is the candidate's own, and that plagiarism has not taken place. For example:

- ◆ interim progress meetings with candidates
- ◆ questioning
- ◆ candidate's record of activity/progress
- ◆ teacher or lecturer observation

Group work approaches are acceptable as part of the research stage. However, there must be clear evidence for each candidate to show that they have met the evidence requirements.

The production of evidence stage is conducted under a high degree of supervision and control. This means that candidates must:

- ◆ be in direct sight of the teacher or lecturer or other responsible person during the assessment
- ◆ not communicate with each other
- ◆ have access only to the Politics resource sheet

Resources

During the research stage, there are no restrictions on the resources to which candidates may have access.

During the production of evidence stage, candidates have access only to the Politics resource sheet. The purpose of the resource sheet is to help candidates use their evidence and references, collected during the research stage, to address their chosen topic or question. Resource sheets are not assessed but must be submitted to Qualifications Scotland with candidates' assignments.

Reasonable assistance

Teachers and lecturers must exercise their professional responsibility to ensure that evidence submitted by a candidate is the candidate's own work.

The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. If a candidate requires more than what is thought to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment, or they may have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

Reasonable assistance may be given on a generic basis to a class or group of candidates, for example, advice on how to develop a project plan. It may also be given to candidates on an individual basis. When reasonable assistance is given on a one-to-one basis in the context of something that a candidate has already produced or demonstrated, there is a danger that it becomes support for assessment, and teachers and lecturers need to be aware that this may be going beyond reasonable assistance.

Candidates must work on their research with minimum support from teachers or lecturers. In the research stage, reasonable assistance may include:

- ◆ directing candidates to the instructions for candidates
- ◆ clarifying instructions/requirements of the task
- ◆ advising candidates on the choice of topic or question
- ◆ guiding candidates on the likely availability and accessibility of resources for their chosen topic or question
- ◆ advising candidates on possible sources of information
- ◆ arranging visits to enable gathering of evidence
- ◆ interim progress checks

Candidates must complete the production of evidence independently. However, reasonable assistance may be provided prior to the production of evidence taking place. This may include advising candidates of the nature and volume of specified resources which may be used to support the production of evidence.

At any stage, reasonable assistance does not include:

- ◆ providing the topic or question for the candidate
- ◆ directing candidates to specific resources to be used
- ◆ providing model answers or writing frames specific to the task (such as outlines, paragraph headings or section headings)
- ◆ providing detailed feedback on drafts, including marking

Evidence to be gathered

The following evidence is required for this assessment:

- ◆ candidate assignment evidence
- ◆ Politics resource sheet: this must be a single-side of A4 paper and must contain no more than 250 words

If a candidate does not submit a resource sheet, a penalty of 6 marks out of the total 30 marks is applied.

Volume

There is no word count for the assignment. The resource sheet must contain no more than 250 words.

Grading

Candidates' overall grades are determined by their performance across the course assessment. The course assessment is graded A–D on the basis of the total mark for all course assessment components.

Grade description for C

For the award of grade C, candidates will typically have demonstrated successful performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Grade description for A

For the award of grade A, candidates will typically have demonstrated a consistently high level of performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Equality and inclusion

This course is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible.

Qualifications Scotland's equality of access to qualifications [policy](#) outlines our commitment to:

- ◆ the Equality Act 2010
- ◆ anti-racist education
- ◆ protecting children's rights
- ◆ corporate parenting

You must consider the needs of individual candidates when planning learning experiences, designing learning resources, or choosing texts.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements web page](#).

Further information

- ◆ [Assessment arrangements](#)
- ◆ [Building the Curriculum 3–5](#)
- ◆ [Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework](#)
- ◆ [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ [Recent Qualifications Scotland research](#)
- ◆ [Remote assessment](#)
- ◆ [SCQF Handbook](#)
- ◆ [Know Your SCQF Level — Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#)
- ◆ [Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work framework](#)

Appendix 1: course support notes

Introduction

These support notes are not mandatory. They provide advice and guidance to teachers and lecturers on approaches to delivering the course. Teachers and lecturers should read these in conjunction with this course specification and the specimen question paper and/or coursework.

Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

This section provides further advice and guidance about skills, knowledge and understanding that teachers and lecturers could include in the course. Teachers and lecturers have considerable flexibility to select contexts that will stimulate and challenge candidates, offering both breadth and depth.

Teachers and lecturers should refer to the 'Course content' and 'Course assessment structure' sections of this course specification for the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course and course assessment.

Candidates need support and guidance to develop study skills and learning strategies. Teachers and lecturers should encourage them to participate in and take responsibility for their own learning by finding information and to generally show initiative, wherever appropriate. The benefits of co-operative learning approaches, peer-support and peer-feedback can be substantial and should be encouraged. This can be supported by using information and communication technology (ICT). In addition opportunities can be explored for approaches that stimulate whole class discussion and debate.

The 'Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment' section provides suggested strategies that teachers and lecturers can use in their delivery to develop these skills, knowledge and understanding.

Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment

The Higher Politics course is a study of political theory, comparative political systems, and the electoral performance of political parties. Teachers and lecturers can provide opportunities throughout the course to reinforce and deepen candidates' learning by making links between aspects of knowledge and understanding across sections of the course, depending on the particular topics and issues studied. For example:

- ◆ Study of socialist ideology within the political theory section can relate directly to the study of the dominant ideas within, for example, the Labour Party in the political parties and elections section.
- ◆ Comparing the UK and the USA's political systems could provide opportunities to evaluate the nature of power, authority and legitimacy within these systems, which are key areas of focus within the political theory section.

There is no recommended teaching order for this course. However, candidates should have the opportunity to study a range of topics before they choose a topic or issue for their assignment. The development of skills, particularly analysis, should be a part of teaching and learning from the start to help candidates progressively build up their skills throughout the course.

Assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching. The course should encourage and support independent learning.

Candidates learn best when they:

- ◆ understand clearly what they are trying to learn, and what is expected of them
- ◆ are given feedback about the quality of their work, and what they can do to make it better
- ◆ are given advice about how to make improvements and are fully involved in deciding what needs to be done next
- ◆ know who can give them help if they need it

Teachers and lecturers should:

- ◆ encourage and support independent learning
- ◆ help candidates understand the requirements of the course by sharing learning and/or assessment criteria
- ◆ deliver effective feedback
- ◆ encourage candidates to set their own learning objectives
- ◆ encourage candidates to assess the extent of their existing knowledge
- ◆ encourage self- and peer-evaluation
- ◆ question effectively using higher-order questioning when appropriate

Using assessment for formative purposes can provide an important role in raising attainment by:

- ◆ giving feedback
- ◆ detailing progress
- ◆ identifying candidates' strengths and areas for development

Preparing for course assessment

Question papers

All candidates should be aware of the nature and requirements of the different types of questions in the question papers. These requirements 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 is good practice for teachers and lecturers to share these with candidates, so that 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 have a strong understanding of the different forms that analysis can take, as outlined in the relevant marking instructions and in associated course documentation.

Candidates need to develop their points in order to access the full range of knowledge and understanding (KU) marks by providing examples and/or explanations in addition to their descriptions. Teachers and lecturers should discourage candidates from guessing the content of the question papers. The question papers sample from all aspects of the course content.

For relevant questions in section 1 of question paper 1, candidates should refer to the works and ideas of appropriate theorists. For source-based questions, candidates should understand the key skills being assessed. In relation to the electoral data question, candidates benefit from focusing on key terms in the statement, such as 'overwhelmingly' and 'in every'. An example of the electoral data question is shown in 'Appendix 2'.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates understand the nature and purpose of the assignment and, in particular, the Politics resource sheet. The purpose of the resource sheet is to help candidates use the information and references, collected during their research stage, to address their chosen topic.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates' resource sheets are limited to the function for which they are intended, and are not treated as an extended essay plan. The resource sheets should assist candidates in developing their knowledge and skills in relation to their chosen topic.

Assignments can focus on any political issue that invites discussion and debate. Candidates tend to produce stronger assignments where key principles such as personalisation and choice are evident.

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

As with the question papers, candidates should be familiar with the success criteria for the assignment. For example, an awareness of the allocation of KU marks helps candidates compose a detailed introduction that outlines the issue in detail, the different viewpoints, and its significance within an extended introduction.

Marks are not awarded for any information which is simply copied from the Politics resource sheet, and not used to demonstrate skills, knowledge and understanding. Analytical comments copied from the resource sheet will not gain marks. However, candidates may copy quotations in full.

Exemplification of learning and teaching approaches

Learning and teaching approaches should be learner-focused. The following examples show approaches which may be used.

Example 1 — power, authority and legitimacy

Candidates may study these concepts as an introduction to politics. They could consider the nature of politics as reconciling competing interests generated by different beliefs and scarcity of resources.

Case studies of different types of power can be discussed to illustrate the conflict view of power. Candidates can research different forms of power (political, economic, military, diplomatic) to illustrate power as a form of coercion by using threats, sanctions and rewards to exact compliance. The distribution of power in society could be examined and debated using Pluralist and Marxist perspectives. Candidates would then study Lukes' 'three faces of power' (decision-making, non-decision-making and shaping desires), evaluating their relevance today, and interpreting and analysing complex sources.

Candidates could then be introduced to 'authority' and could investigate a range of case studies to identify and evaluate different sources of authority. Weber's three types of authority (traditional, charismatic and legal-rational) could then be assessed for their relevance today.

Through the study of differing political systems, the significance of legitimacy and its absence can be analysed and evaluated. Candidates can present their findings in different ways, including a written report, to prepare for essay questions.

Example 2 — ideologies

Candidates study the meaning of ideology and develop an understanding of how ideologies are compared using a different political spectrum (for example, linear or horseshoe). Candidates can use websites such as 'Political Compass' to investigate their own and others' positions on the ideological spectrum and develop understanding of the significance of concepts such as equality and freedom.

The key features of the chosen ideologies can be studied independently and then conclusions can be drawn about differences and/or similarities, or they can be studied concurrently where differences and similarities are identified at each stage. For each ideology, candidates should study the historical background to the development of the ideology, along with the contrasting positions on human nature. Candidates can research the work of relevant theorists to evaluate and analyse their impact on the development of each ideology, drawing relevant conclusions. Activities which teachers and lecturers could use to develop candidates' skills include producing a written report, participating in a debate, or giving a digital presentation to a group.

Developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

Teachers and lecturers should identify opportunities throughout the course for candidates to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

Candidates should be aware of the skills they are developing and teachers and lecturers can provide advice on opportunities to practise and improve them.

Qualifications Scotland does not formally assess skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

There may also be opportunities to develop additional skills depending on approaches being used to deliver the course in each centre. This is for individual teachers and lecturers to manage.

1 Literacy

1.1 Reading

1.2 Writing

The Higher Politics course provides candidates with opportunities to develop literacy skills, particularly reading and writing. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to read as widely as possible and produce extended writing where appropriate, in order to facilitate progression to other qualifications in related areas, and the world of work. Candidates are likely to develop listening and talking skills during class discussions and debates.

Candidates may read a variety of texts about the topic or issue they are studying, including a range of newspapers in print or electronic form. They may study these alongside academic research or government reports at an appropriate level. This means that they are able to consider many different types of text and consider their benefits and limitations in terms of providing information to help them complete their assignment.

The assignment provides considerable scope for the development of writing skills. Candidates have the opportunity to develop reading and writing skills as they research their topic and write their assignments. They apply their knowledge to the topic studied, and use analytical and evaluation skills, both in the research process and in preparing their findings for the write-up of their assignment.

2 Numeracy

2.3 Information handling

Candidates develop numeracy skills through the evaluation of a range of numerical, statistical and graphical sources of information during source-based tasks and through research opportunities. They develop information-handling skills as they evaluate and analyse a range of statistical, numerical and graphical information relating to electoral data.

4 Employability, enterprise and citizenship

4.6 Citizenship

By studying political concepts, candidates develop political literacy and an understanding of the key features of democratic society. They develop citizenship through deepening their understanding of political issues facing society.

5 Thinking skills

5.3 Applying

5.4 Analysing and evaluating

Candidates develop their knowledge and understanding of political issues and events and are able to apply their knowledge. The course encourages the retention of information and the skills of analysis and evaluation. Candidates demonstrate these skills through class work, formally-assessed tasks and the course assessment.

The course involves candidates in extensive work to analyse and evaluate different sources of information.

In the assignment, candidates plan, organise, research and develop notes on a topic or issue of their choice.

Appendix 2: electoral data source question

Introduction

This section provides examples of the 20-mark electoral data source question in question paper 2.

Example question

Study **Sources A–F**, then answer the question which follows.

Introduction

Scotland's local councils were elected on 3 May 2007 using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. This new system, which replaced the traditional First Past the Post system, requires voters to rank candidates in order of preference and is intended to produce outcomes in terms of seats that are more proportional to votes than First Past the Post.

The use of a broadly proportional system for local elections, it was claimed, would make Scotland's councils more representative of local views and of the diversity of local society — it would give electors a wider and better choice of candidates and would lead to more voters having a councillor of their choice.

Source A: Scottish local council elections 1999–2007 — control of councils by party

	1999	2003	2007
Conservative	0	0	0
Labour	15	13	2
Liberal Democrats	0	1	0
SNP	1	1	0
No overall control	10	11	27

Source B: Scottish local council elections 1999–2007 — votes and seats

	1999	1999	1999	2003	2003	2003	2007	2007	2007
	Number of seats	% of seats	% of votes	Number of seats	% of seats	% of votes	Number of seats	% of seats	% of votes
Con	108	8.8	13.7	123	10.1	15.2	143	11.7	15.6
Lab	551	45.1	36.6	509	41.7	32.9	348	28.5	28.1
Lib Dem	156	12.8	12.7	175	14.3	14.6	166	13.6	12.7
SNP	204	16.7	28.8	181	14.8	24.3	363	29.7	27.9
Others	203	16.6	8.2	234	19.1	13.0	202	16.5	15.7

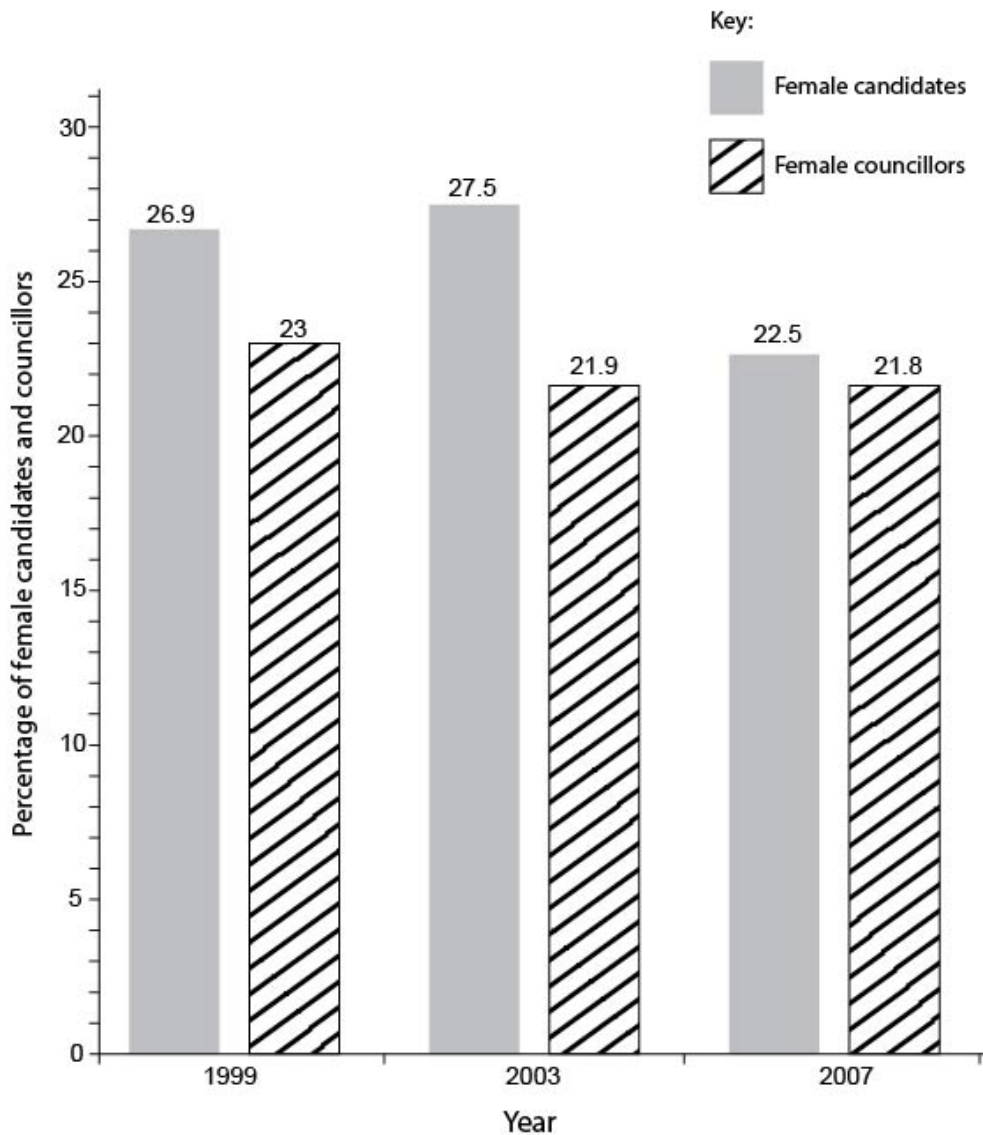
Source C: Turnout and spoilt ballots in council elections, 1999–2007

	1999	2003	2007
Turnout (%)	58.1	49.6	53.8
Number of spoilt ballots	13,597	14,579	38,351

Source D: Number of candidates in council elections, 1999–2007

	1999	2003	2007
Number of candidates	3,934	4,195	2,607
Number of seats	1,222	1,222	1,222

Source E: Percentage of female candidates and councillors, 1999–2007



Source F: Assorted data

The 2012 local government elections took place on 3 May 2012 and were the second set of elections to be held for local councils under the STV voting system. This was five years, rather than the usual four, after the previous elections in 2007. The reason for the delay was to separate the local government elections and the Scottish Parliament elections. The total electorate for the 2012 local government election was 3,983,792 and the turnout on Election Day was 39.1%.

Across Scotland 605,617 postal ballots were issued to voters. Counting for the elections appeared to go smoothly and data indicated that 27,044 ballots were spoilt (1.74% of the total ballots). Candidates in this election were competing for 1,223 available seats. In total 2,496 candidates stood for election, with the SNP having the highest number of candidates from the main parties (613 in total).

In the election 23.4% of the candidates were women and women made up 24.3% of the councillors elected in 2012. From the main parties the Liberal Democrats had the highest number of female candidates standing for election at 27.5% of their total, with the SNP lowest on 23.8%. The Liberal Democrats also had the highest proportion of female candidates elected as women made up 36.6% of Liberal Democrat councillors.

Using only the information in Sources A–F:

The 2007 council elections were a total disaster for the Labour Party. The election saw the SNP replace Labour as the dominant party in Scottish local government. The introduction of the new STV voting system saw both much greater participation all round as well as fairer representation compared to previous elections. However, the 2012 election was disappointing as there was a deterioration in both these areas.

To what extent does the information in these sources support the viewpoint above?

Example question — marking instructions

Question	General marking instructions	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
2	<p>Candidates must demonstrate that they can interpret and evaluate electoral data.</p> <p>For full marks, candidates must refer to all sources and also say to what extent the data supports the statement made.</p> <p>Analysis/evaluation Award up to 3 marks for answers that correctly interpret electoral data that links to an individual component of the viewpoint.</p> <p>Award 1 mark for an evaluation of the validity of each component.</p> <p>For full marks, candidates must address both parts of the viewpoint.</p>	20	<p>Award marks where candidates refer to the following aspects of the question:</p> <p>Interpretation of data</p> <p>First part of the viewpoint — the performance of the parties</p> <p>Component 1 'The 2007 council elections were a total disaster for the Labour Party.'</p> <p>Award 1 mark if a candidate only addresses one aspect of data; award 2 marks if they address all aspects of data.</p> <p>Aspect 1 (control of councils) — Source A: Labour lost control of most of their councils going from 13 to just two, which was a huge loss.</p> <p>Aspect 2 (seats) — Source B: Labour went from over 500 seats in 1999 and 2003 to only 348 in 2007.</p> <p>Aspect 3 (% seats) — Source B: Labour fell from a clear lead in seats — from over 40% in 2003 to only 28.5%, which moved them behind the SNP.</p> <p>Aspect 4 (votes) — Source B: Labour lost a significant share of the vote, dropping over 8% between 1999 and 2007, which was more than any other party.</p>

Question	General marking instructions	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
			<p>Component 2 ‘The election saw the SNP replace Labour as the dominant party in Scottish local government.’</p> <p>Award 1 mark if a candidate only addresses one aspect of data; award 2 marks if they address all aspects of data.</p> <p>Aspect 1 (control of councils) — Source A: the SNP did not gain control of any councils and actually lost their only council; this was behind Labour who controlled two councils.</p> <p>Aspect 2 (seats) — Source B: the SNP doubled the number of seats, gaining over 180 more seats than in 2007.</p> <p>Aspect 3 (% seats) — Source B: the SNP overtook Labour and won the highest proportion of seats with 29.7% as opposed to 28.5% for Labour.</p> <p>Aspect 4 (votes) — Source B: the SNP increased their share of the vote by 3.6% but it was still behind Labour by 0.2%.</p> <p>Second part of the viewpoint — participation and representation</p> <p>Component 1 ‘...much greater participation all round...’</p> <p>Award 1 mark if a candidate only addresses one aspect of data; award 2 marks if they address all three aspects of data.</p>

Question	General marking instructions	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
			<p>Aspect 1 (turnout) — Source C: turnout improved from 49.6% to 53.8% but this was still below 1999 when turnout was 58.1%.</p> <p>Aspect 2 (spoilt ballots) — Source C: the number of spoilt papers rose significantly compared to the previous two elections — they more than doubled from 2003 to 2007.</p> <p>Aspect 3 (number of candidates) — Source D: the number of candidates standing for election fell significantly from over 4,000 to only 2,607.</p> <p>Component 2 ‘...fairer representation...’</p> <p>Award 1 mark if a candidate only addresses one aspect of data; award 2 marks if they address both aspects of data.</p> <p>Aspect 1 (female candidates) — Source E: the number of female candidates fell significantly from nearly 30% of the total to just above 20% — this was also lower than in the 1999 election.</p> <p>Aspect 2 (female councillors) — Source E: the number of female councillors dropped very slightly but again was the lowest for the three elections.</p> <p>Component 3 ‘The 2012 election was disappointing as there was a deterioration in both these areas.’</p> <p>Award 1 mark if a candidate only addresses one aspect of data; award 2 marks if they address both aspects of data.</p>

Question	General marking instructions	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
			<p>Aspect 1 (participation) — Source F: turnout dropped significantly to just below 40% and the number of candidates also dropped slightly to 2,496. The number of spoilt ballots was less than in 2007 but it was still higher than in the other two elections.</p> <p>Aspect 2 (representation) — Source F: the percentage of female councillors improved and is the highest of the three elections. The number of female candidates also increased, rising slightly but still lower than in 1999 and 2003.</p> <p>Synthesis</p> <p>First part of the viewpoint</p> <p>Component 1 synthesis — 1 mark In terms of both seats and control of councils, Labour suffered big losses, however they were the only party to control any councils and also got the most votes.</p> <p>Component 2 synthesis — 1 mark In terms of seats the SNP made huge gains and overtook Labour but it did not control any councils compared to Labour's two, and it actually had fewer votes than Labour.</p> <p>Second part of the viewpoint</p> <p>Component 1 synthesis — 1 mark The number of spoilt ballot papers increased significantly and although the turnout was higher than the previous election, it wasn't as high as in 1999. The number of candidates also fell significantly so more people did vote but</p>

Question	General marking instructions	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
			<p>there were fewer candidates and spoilt papers were a problem.</p> <p>Component 2 synthesis — 1 mark The result was less representative as both the proportion of female councillors and female candidates fell compared to the previous two elections.</p> <p>Component 3 synthesis — 1 mark There was an improvement in the representation of women in the 2012 election with higher proportions of both female candidates and councillors; however, the turnout dropped hugely and there were also fewer candidates. There were fewer spoilt papers but this was still much higher than before STV was introduced.</p> <p>Evaluation of the validity of the viewpoint</p> <p>First part of the viewpoint</p> <p>Evaluation of one component — 1 mark The viewpoint calls the 2007 election a total disaster for Labour. The evidence from the sources supports the viewpoint as Labour lost control of almost all their councils and they also saw a big drop in seats and votes. However, it might not be considered a total disaster as they still got the most votes and were also the only party to control any councils.</p> <p>Evaluation of both components — 2 marks The viewpoint calls the 2007 election a total disaster for Labour. The evidence from the sources supports the viewpoint as Labour lost control of almost all their councils and they also saw a big drop in seats and votes. However, it might not be considered a total disaster as they still got the most votes and</p>

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			<p>were also the only party to control any councils.</p> <p>The SNP did make huge gains in seats and votes but they only just beat Labour in seats and they actually got fewer votes than Labour. The SNP also did not control any councils so they cannot be said to be the dominant party in Scottish local government.</p> <p>Second part of the viewpoint</p> <p>Evaluation of one component — 1 mark The viewpoint states that there was much greater participation all round. While there was greater participation with more people voting, it was not a huge increase and was behind turnout in 1999. There were also fewer candidates and many more spoilt ballots so for both of these factors it was actually worse. Participation only increased slightly for turnout and participation was worse when spoilt papers and candidates are taken into account, so it was not better all round.</p> <p>Evaluation of two components — 2 marks The viewpoint states that there was much greater participation all round. While there was greater participation with more people voting, it was not a huge increase and was behind turnout in 1999. There were also fewer candidates and many more spoilt ballots so for both of these factors it was actually worse. Participation only increased slightly for turnout and participation was worse when spoilt papers and candidates are taken into account, so it was not better all round.</p> <p>The viewpoint also states that there was fairer representation, however the representation of women fell for both candidates and councillors compared to</p>

Question	General marking instructions	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
			<p>the previous election. This was the lowest of the three elections for both and so representation actually was less fair and therefore not fairer at all.</p> <p>Evaluation of all components — 3 marks</p> <p>The viewpoint states that there was much greater participation all round. While there was greater participation with more people voting, it was not a huge increase and was behind turnout in 1999. There were also fewer candidates and many more spoilt ballots so for both of these factors it was actually worse. Participation only increased slightly for turnout and participation was worse when spoilt papers and candidates are taken into account, so it was not better all round.</p> <p>The viewpoint also states that there was fairer representation, however the representation of women fell for both candidates and councillors compared to the previous election. This was the lowest of the three elections for both and so representation actually was less fair and therefore not fairer at all.</p> <p>Finally the last part of the viewpoint indicates that there was a deterioration in both participation and representation in 2012. This is not the case. Representation was actually better with increases in the proportion of female candidates and councillors, which means fairer representation. In addition there were fewer spoilt ballots so more people's votes counted. It was the case that there was a big drop in turnout and a slight drop in the numbers standing for election. Therefore it could be argued that participation was poorer but not representation in 2012 compared to 2007.</p>

Administrative information

Published: June 2026 (version 4.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Course support notes added as appendix. In the 'Course assessment structure: assignment' section, bullet amended slightly to match wording used in the assignment assessment task — 'communicating information from, and referring to, political sources'.	September 2018
3.0	Penalty for non-submission of resource sheet added to 'Evidence to be gathered' section. Reasonable assistance section updated	July 2019
3.1	The political system of the People's Republic of China added as an option for study in 'Section 2: Political systems'.	June 2020
4.0	<p>We've changed the duration of question paper 2 from 1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes.</p> <p>We've updated the description of content in section 3: political parties and elections to reflect that candidates can choose from any political party with representation in the Scottish or UK Parliament.</p> <p>We've changed references to 'SQA' to 'Qualifications Scotland' throughout. We've updated the title to include the SCQF level. We've added a new 'Learning for Sustainability' section and updated the 'Equality and inclusion' and 'Further information' sections.</p> <p>We've made changes to the format and layout of the document to improve accessibility.</p> <p>What you need to do differently Ensure candidates are aware of the political parties that they can choose from for section 3. Advise candidates that they now have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete question paper 2. Ensure that you incorporate the increased timing into prelims and past paper practice.</p>	June 2026

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