Next Generation Higher National Unit Specification

Politics: Themes from a Political Perspective (SCQF level 8)

Unit code: J7D7 48

SCQF level: 8 (24 SCQF credit points)

This unit is available in a restricted delivery model from academic session 2025

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It is for lecturers and assessors, and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver and assess the unit.

Contents

Unit purpose

This unit builds on learners' knowledge and understanding of political thinking, by introducing comparative political contexts and their structures. Learners develop knowledge and skills to critically analyse different political contexts and critically evaluate key political approaches. They apply their knowledge and understanding to selected themes.

The unit is aimed at learners who want to further their knowledge and skills in politics.

Entry to the unit is at your centre's discretion. However, we recommend that learners have one or more of the following:

- good communication skills
- previous study of politics, for example, relevant National Qualifications at SCQF level 7, or Higher National Qualifications at SCQF level 7, PDA in Politics at SCQF level 7, or other similar qualifications
- other knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the unit

Learners normally study this unit as part of Higher National Diploma (HND) Social Sciences. They can also study it on a stand-alone basis.

If learners study the unit as part of HND Social Sciences, they may be able to progress to a degree programme in a related subject.

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. critically analyse comparative political contexts and their structures in relation to a theme
2. critically evaluate key political approaches to a theme

Evidence requirements

Learners should provide written and/or oral evidence covering all unit outcomes, produced under open-book conditions. You should give the task at an appropriate point in the unit. Learners should submit their work for marking on a date that you have provided or agreed with them.

Learners must produce a written response of between 2,500 and 3,000 words, or an oral response that is 18 to 22 minutes in duration.

Learners study four themes in total: two themes from the approved course list, and a further two from the subject-specific list. Learners taking the unit as a stand-alone unit also study these four themes.

Learners must study two from this list of approved course themes:

- History and social change
- Power and control
- Our changing world
- Deviance
- Inequalities
- Globalisation
- Culture and identity
- Human environments
- Ethics

- Origins of behaviour

Learners must study a further two from this list of subject-specific themes:

- Welfare reform
- International political governance
- Political representation
- Political economy

You assess learners on one theme from the four they study in the unit.

Learners' responses must include:

- critical analysis of two comparative contemporary political contexts and their structures related to a chosen theme
- critical evaluation of political approaches to the chosen theme
- a clear conclusion that evaluates the contributions of different political structures and approaches to the chosen theme

You can choose to use a mix of methods of assessment across a cohort, depending on what is most suitable for each learner; for example, some could give a written response, others could give an oral response and others could respond in the form of a blog.

Learners must fully reference their assessment, using reliable sources appropriate for SCQF level 8. They must list all sources in a bibliography or reference list, in a recognised standard format such as Harvard or APA.

The standard of evidence produced for the unit must be consistent with SCQF level 8.

The SCQF level of the unit provides additional context relating to the quality of evidence.

Learners must:

- contribute information that is complex, accurate and relevant to its purpose and audience
- integrate knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of opposing viewpoints to present evidence and arguments in a logical and coherent way
- use a structure that is appropriate to the purpose
- select the most appropriate sources of information and accurately reference source materials

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 1 Learners should understand: • different contemporary political contexts • contemporary political structures, including the role and functions of branches of government in their historical context • the influences and interests that have an impact on political decision-making related to a chosen theme	**Outcome 1** Learners can: • provide background information on contemporary political contexts • explain contemporary political structures, including the role and branches of government within each context • critically analyse and explain political information to form arguments and make judgements • relate the political information, arguments and judgements to a chosen theme

Outcome 2
 	
Learners should understand:
 	
• the changing nature of politics, and the relationships between political ideas, institutions and processes
 	
• how political approaches are shaped by:
 	
   o political structures
 	
   o ideologies and interests
	Outcome 2
	
	Learners can:
	
	• critically evaluate how the following shape political approaches to a chosen theme:
	
	   o political structures
	
	   o ideologies and interests

Meta-skills

You must give learners opportunities to develop their meta-skills throughout this unit. We have suggested how to incorporate the most relevant ones into the unit content, but you may find other opportunities.

Throughout this unit, learners develop meta-skills to enhance their employability in the social sciences sector.

The unit helps learners develop the meta-skills of self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Learners should develop meta-skills naturally throughout the unit. You should encourage learners to develop a minimum of one area in each of the three categories, but they do not need to cover all suggested subsections. The following suggestions may help shape delivery and assessment, and vary depending on the chosen topics and assessment method.

Self-management

This includes focusing, integrity, adapting and initiative. The most relevant are:

- focusing:

    o completing the assessment and project work to clear deadlines; being proactive in planning and developing assessment responses

- integrity:

    o acting in an ethical way to complete assessments and carry out work for projects; developing good working relationships with peers; including citations and referencing for assessments

- adapting:

  - acquiring new knowledge and skills; using different technologies to communicate and complete assessments; using a virtual learning environment (VLE); reflecting on performance to improve approach

- initiative:

  - starting work as early as possible; making informed decisions; motivating themselves; using library facilities; setting own deadlines

Social intelligence

This includes communicating, feeling, collaborating and leading. The most relevant are:

- communicating:

  - listening to and discussing information on political structures, approaches and contexts; explaining ideas; producing suitable, understandable assessment responses; sharing opinions on political themes and topics covered in the unit, in writing or orally

- feeling:

  - discussing political approaches and expressing opinions; understanding other perspectives, respecting other viewpoints in discussions

- collaborating:

  - working together on formative presentations; taking account of others in planning and conducting tasks; building relationships with peers

- leading:

  - taking responsibility; taking account of others; sharing information

Innovation

This includes curiosity, creativity, sense-making and critical thinking. The most relevant are:

- curiosity:

    - seeking knowledge about comparative political contexts; making the most of library research time; taking part in class discussion and debates; questioning motives, ideas, information and evidence

- creativity:

    - developing new ways of working and approaching tasks; providing novel and individual analysis of case studies

- sense-making:

    - participating in discussion, blending a range of ideas; considering and evaluating ideas

- critical thinking:

    - making logical connections and reasoned judgements; drawing conclusions based on evidence; reviewing and evaluating research evidence

Learners could also develop other meta-skills in the unit depending on the learning and teaching activities you carry out.

You can find more information on how to develop these in the HND Social Sciences Educator Guide.

Literacies

This unit provides opportunities to develop the following literacies.

Numeracy

Learners develop numeracy skills by investigating comparative political data. This could relate to, for example: election outcomes; voting patterns; and policy areas such as income, poverty and foreign investment.

Communication

Learners develop communication skills in formative and summative assessment. It is part of the evidence requirements for the unit to ensure learners convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with academic references where appropriate. You can give learners opportunities to carry out oral presentations and engage in discussions or debates.

Digital

Learners develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to produce evidence for assessments, and internet sources to research information on comparative political structures and thinking. You can give them guidance on appropriate sources. Using a VLE also supports digital skills. Learners can research how formal and informal representations of a political context differ through contrasting media, such as TV, film, policy and legal approaches. They can also source comparative data online; for example, using Eurostat, Eurobarometer or YouGov.

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you should encourage learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

This includes:

- a general understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability
- a general understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- a deeper understanding of subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the skills, knowledge, understanding and values they develop in the next stage of their life

In this unit, there are opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of social sustainability and institutional decision-making while studying themes such as globalisation, inequalities, welfare reform and international political governance, with links to the UN SDGs.

The unit fits with the following UN SDGS:

1 No poverty: end poverty in all its forms everywhere. This fits in well with course themes such as welfare reform and political representation.

10 Reduced inequalities: reduce inequalities within and among countries. This fits in with themes such as welfare reform, inequalities and international political governance.

16 Peace, justice and strong institutions: promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This fits in well with themes such as political representation and international political governance.

Delivery of unit

This unit is in the 'named social sciences' section of HND Social Sciences. You can deliver it as part of the HND or offer it as a stand-alone unit.

The unit works well if delivered alongside Social Sciences: Social Policy, the mandatory unit from HND Social Sciences.

The overall unit delivery time is a notional 120 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment. We expect learners to commit a further 120 hours of self-directed study.

The amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion; however, you should consider all outcomes together when you deliver the unit.

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

This unit aims to develop learners' skills in critical analysis of different political contexts in relation to chosen themes. Learners also critically evaluate political approaches to the selected themes.

The unit provides an overview of four themes. Whether you are delivering the unit as a freestanding unit or as part of the HND, you should deliver two themes from the approved course themes list and two from the subject-specific list. Where possible, learners should influence the topics you choose to deliver. You must select one of the four themes for summative assessment purposes.

You can find further details of the course themes in the HND Social Sciences Educator Guide.

Political contexts and structures are part of the overall political system, influenced by theoretical ideologies and political interests. Political contexts are dynamic and can change over time, impacting on the way political systems operate. Economic crises, international relations and advancements in technology can contribute to changes in political context. Political contexts provide the backdrop against which political decisions are made and political structures operate. The political systems create the formal political structures through which political authority and power are organised. Formal political structures, such as the branches of government and the electoral system, or the governance of a political organisation, are embedded within political contexts. The stability of political systems is often influenced by external factors in the wider political environment.

You can link political contexts and structures to themes by exemplifying a theme through a specific world event within a political system.

Learners should consider how two comparative political contexts approach the theme being studied. Comparative political contexts can be different countries or states; for example, USA or China. You can compare a context to the UK or Scotland, or you can compare two other contexts; for example, Turkey to the EU, or USA to the UK. You can also consider different time periods as political contexts, such as pre- and post-apartheid in South Africa. You could highlight the differences between democratic, theocratic or autocratic contexts. You should ensure there are sufficient differences between the contexts to allow for a comparison between them in terms of structures and approaches.

You can choose themes that intersect well, or choose themes that are independent of each other. Areas of study within themes could include the following suggestions. This is an indicative list. You are not expected to cover all aspects suggested under each theme and you can introduce other appropriate political information as you think appropriate. You can vary how much time you use to study each theme, dependent on the depth of content you wish to cover in each of the four themes.

Approved course themes

Learners must study two from this list:

History and social change

Politics is an essential factor in shaping history and social change. Political actions and government decisions can have a profound effect on society and the course of history. Social change is those developments in the political or economic context of societies that affect and have an impact on populations and groups, often in an unequitable way. Politics is essential in understanding the extent to which political institutions, elites and decision-makers have influenced that change, for example, the impact of some of the EU's decisions.

Historical examples of social change often result from social movements, such as the activist groups fighting for female suffrage, civil rights, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. The political classes have both challenged and championed these. But these movements have been relatively successful and, as a consequence, social relationships have changed; institutions have changed; and cultural norms, values and behaviours have changed. Learners can consider other areas, including changes in foreign policy, such as the Cold War, military intervention and trade agreements. Learners can see how politics addresses and explains such changes in two comparative political contexts.

Power and control

Approaches to power and control differ across political contexts. The narrative of power and control is central to politics, and tends to shape how a society looks or operates as well as determining how groups divide into 'winners' or 'losers' (insiders and outsiders). Broadly speaking, power and control refers to the ability of some individuals, groups, societies and nations to pursue their own agenda, or to achieve their goals despite challenges and resistance. Some forms of power and control are coercive and some have authority and are rooted in legitimacy. The extent of legitimacy can often be linked to particular political contexts and approaches.

The theme of power and control is central to the political sciences. It is either something people can hold, give away or take from others, or is a product of the social relations running through societies and mediated by political institutions. Learners can study different types of power, including social, political and economic. They can consider who holds power, who loses out and who contests control. Learners can form their own opinions through the study of power and control across politics.

Our changing world

In contemporary society, politics is central to change. It mediates the degree of change possible, has the power to legitimate (or not) any drivers of change — be they individual actors or institutions, or more abstract forces, such as globalisation and capitalism.

Politics is central in addressing any contemporary or future issues; for example, technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence or advances in biotechnologies, or issues concerning sex and gender. You can address the idea that many groups and societies are resistant to change.

Political contexts and approaches determine the winners and losers of any future change, strongly influenced by the insiders and outsiders. This is evident in which groups lack resources and power, and who are typically marginalised and often disenfranchised. For example, why women are increasingly empowered in some contexts while many are still subordinate to men in so much of the world, even as women continue to press for full equality in their societies.

Deviance

Often related to criminality, deviance refers to actions that do not conform to society's widely accepted norms or values. Deviance is much broader than crime, however, which only accounts for non-conformist conduct that breaks a law. Politically deviant behaviour, while not viewed by society as fully legitimate, is often exempt from the usual stigma attached other groups' and individuals' illegitimate behaviour. Moreover, political contexts and approaches can inform and even dictate attitudes to deviance.

To a large extent, politics determines who is deviant, what is deviant and to what extent this deviance poses a threat to social order and society. This is considered legitimate by some and not by others. Looking at deviance in a political context forces us to consider the roles of many social actors, including politicians, security forces and the justice system, as well as opinion formers and so-called moral entrepreneurs. Learners can look at how political parties create moral panics concerning, for example, migration and people arriving illegally by small boats. They may do this often to support a particular constituency or to maintain power, and to distract from those structural issues that politicians are unable or unwilling to tackle. As such, deviance is an important theme, which links 'bad' or transgressive and subversive behaviour to the political context in which it takes place, and to the political approaches devised to limit or control deviance.

Studying deviance forces us to think differently about society's current values and standards of 'normality'. Learners see how politics addresses these questions, and how it seeks to define what is deviant.

Inequalities

Inequality is a concept central to social sciences, determined to a significant extent by political contexts and approaches. It is the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, wealth and opportunities. It is explicit in Kate Pickett's and Richard G. Wilkinson's research, which is summarised in their hugely influential book *The Spirit Level*. This work demonstrates how inequality linked to political contexts and approaches is detrimental to all groups in unequal societies. Politics is central to all aspects and types of inequality. Many authors differentiate between economic inequalities, such as inequalities in wealth and incomes or, more generally, inequalities in living conditions or access to resources and opportunities. Others further distinguish a rights-based, legalistic approach to inequality, that is to say when people are not equal before the law, or when people have unequal political power.

Typically, inequalities may be seen as a product of the material dimensions of an individual or group's life course. The result of environment and circumstances beyond one's control (ethnicity, family background, gender, and so on) known as ascribed statuses. Or, alternatively, circumstances beyond one's control that affect an individual's or group's prospective outcomes. These could be standards of living, such as inequalities in income or wealth, education, skills, health, and nutrition. Political structures and approaches determine how wealth, healthcare and welfare resources are allocated. The unequal distribution of such resources leads to inequality, and can be linked directly to the policy choices of political parties; for example, freezing benefits but lowering tax for working families. Learners can form an understanding of how inequalities change over time, what factors contribute to inequalities, and the impact they have on both societies and individuals as a result of political contexts and approaches.

Globalisation

Globalisation describes the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures and populations, and how this creates a global society. This growing interdependence comes about through cross-border trade in goods and services, and technology; and flows of investment, people and information. Politics can determine how and why this happens. Different political contexts and approaches are open or resistant to globalisation, along with different groups and interests within those contexts. This is evident in political approaches, types of trade policies or protection, and engagement with institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Political parties and interest groups have different views on globalisation. They disagree on the underlying causes of globalisation, and whether it is a positive or negative development. Globalisation is a historical process and has economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Contemporary debates stem from a perceived acceleration of globalisation from the 1970s. There is a range of reasons for this, including the growth and power of multinational corporations, concerns about the decline of the nation state, the rise of supranational trading blocs, regional economic and political entities (such as the EU), cheaper travel leading to more accessible foreign tourism and migration, and the development of the internet and other technologies that facilitate rapid global communication. Learners can consider the extent to which political contexts and approaches are aligned with globalisation, and able to manage or resist the associated forces, as well as the consequences of globalisation.

Culture and identity

In many ways culture and identity has become a central theme of politics. So-called culture wars often centre around issues of identity. Identity politics is one of the most divisive issues of our time. The 1980s brought the study of culture into the mainstream, and much of this work is insightful, exploring the roles of cultural production or reproduction, and consumption in shaping culture in the form of life chances, social

relations, and norms and values. Across the globe, a new politics demanding recognition and rights for forms of collective identity is asserting itself. To some degree, some politicians use this to meet their own, often unrelated, agendas or just to maintain or secure power.

Collective identity is a great source of conflict currently. Every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not. Identity politics is always, and necessarily, a politics of the creation of difference. Sometimes, there is even a belief that identities can be maintained and secured only by eliminating difference and otherness. Negotiating this conflict is primarily a political question and one that many political contexts are facing. Politics influences aspects of national identity, multi-culturalism and political ideologies. Learners can form their own opinions through the study of this theme, and how political contexts and approaches deal with questions of culture and identity.

Human environments

Increasing pressures on the human environment have seen issues, such as environmental degradation, become an increasing priority in politics. Issues concerning the human environment are now an established and distinct area of policy, and all aspects of policy and planning consider impacts on the human environment. In a political context, attitudes to the challenges that the human environment faces do not always follow political ideologies or traditional political fault lines.

As global warming makes explicit, many issues facing the environment are the product of human activity, such as industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation. These are determined by political context and approach. The human environment is one of the new 'central problems' that include risk, terrorism and globalisation that political approaches have to manage. For example, in planning alone, people must comply with urban and rural policies and regulations, environmental policies affecting health, international relations, global environmental policies and agreements. This is evident when we consider oil and air pollution, the genetic modification of foods, and global

warming. Learners can form their own opinions on the political approaches concerning human environments.

Ethics

Politics is closely related to ethics in that the decisions made within it govern all our lives. The term 'ethics' generally refers to concepts of moral right and wrong, and moral good and bad; and to any system or code of moral rules, principles, or values. As such, our morals and personal ethics, at the personal and collective level, can inform our voting and political groups. Ethics and the accountability of politicians and institutions inform political contexts and approaches. If unchecked, this lack of accountability can lead to a variety of ethical problems.

Historically, the trauma and outrage after the discovery of the concentration camps and experiments conducted by the Nazis during World War II led to the creation and agreement of the Nuremberg Code (1947), which laid out ethical research guidelines to help prevent similar atrocities from happening ever again. This in turn led to both domestic and international laws, and institutions scrutinising the ethical nature of political actors and approaches to stop similar horrors happening.

Ethics is still central in terms of the conduct of our representatives and institutions. Ethical breaches, such as the UK government's 1994 'cash-for-questions' scandal, the justifications for going to war against Iraq in 2003 and Partygate in 2022 continue in politics. Learners can develop their understanding of political approaches to ethics.

Origins of behaviour

Human behaviour is the latent and manifest capacity — mentally, physically, and socially — of human individuals or groups to react to both internal and external stimuli throughout their life course. Human behaviour is driven by genetic and environmental factors that tend to shape individuals. As such, these factors shape our identity, attitudes and values, all of which shape and characterise politics. Politics also drives human behaviour. Political contexts and approaches mediate the ways and degrees to

which power, interests and institutions shape individual and collective actions. Political scientists are interested in understanding why people behave the way they do in political contexts, such as voting, participating in social movements, identifying stakeholders, and determining which groups engage or are represented in public policy debates. Origins of behaviour informs the rules and conventions of institutions within political contexts, and determines how power can be used; for example, how values and beliefs can influence voting patterns and lead to the creation of pressure groups and lobbyists.

Subject-specific themes

Learners must study two from this list:

Welfare reform

This theme intersects well with many others, including history and social change, ideologies and ideas, and inequalities. Learners can critically evaluate political approaches to welfare and critically analyse welfare in a comparative political context. They should consider what shapes those responses. For example, what is the level and type of social protection involved, and what interests and forces, both external and internal, should they take into consideration.

The notion of changing welfare states as a theme for comparative political research is not new. The emergence and expansion of social protection until the 1970s led to a large amount of analysis into the causes for welfare state growth, as well as processes of cross-national variation.

The configurations, and political coalitions and institutions that enabled the significant expansion of the welfare state in the 20th century are being dismantled, however, and contemporary analysis is often concerned with how governments can impose losses without losing political power.

The reasons for governments to engage in welfare reform vary across contexts. Typically, they include political ideology and fiscal pressures, such as 'austerity'; projected increased burdens in terms of social security spending and users; and health care, social services and public pension systems. Economic globalisation and associated shifts in production and employment patterns have led to 'new social risks' (NSRs) and problems of long-term unemployment or labour market inactivity.

International political governance

This theme intersects well with many others, including globalisation, sovereignty, and power and control. Learners can critically evaluate political approaches to international governance in a comparative political context. Learners should consider to what extent states are aligned with international bodies, treaties and conventions; to what extent they are able to assert influence; what interests and influences determine that relationship; and what impact this has on policy and political approaches. This is a relatively rich area of research, with established theoretical approaches in international relations. Learners may be familiar with issues, given the discourse around Brexit or sovereignty more broadly.

The emergence of international governance began with a dissatisfaction with the state-centred models of economic and social development, which were prevalent in analyses of the socialist bloc and much of the global majority countries in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. At the international level, 'global governance' developed as a political concept and field of study in response to the so-called realist and liberal institutionalist theories that dominated the study of international and comparative politics. These models could not account for or explain the proliferation, in both numbers and influence, of non-state and international actors and agencies, and the implications of technology and capital in an age of globalisation.

Several areas of analysis exist at this level for comparison. For example, to what degree do countries influence these processes and institutions? Also, to what degree are populism or other forces undermining the fabric of multilateralism and international

governance? In many contexts, learners can study how powerful political forces are re-asserting the national sovereignty principle. Some political scientists may believe this is inevitable, given the lack of a powerful international order to foster inter-country co-operation. Others, however, point to the continued globalisation of certain norms of governing states and societies.

Political representation

This theme intersects well with many others, including sovereignty, power and control, and history and social change. Learners can evaluate political approaches to political representation in a comparative context. They can consider to what extent populations can affect political approaches; to what extent the form of representation reflects the society it represents both domestically and internationally; and to what degree political representation and its approaches are considered legitimate, both domestically and internationally?

Every democracy has a legislature that performs a number of key functions, most obviously representation and scrutiny and, in the case of parliamentary systems, the formation, maintenance and possibly the dismissal of governments. Theorists are concerned with how systems of political representation shape political approaches. They focus on how interests and political parties align in that regard.

Another debate in this area is the extent to which governments and representatives are obliged to respond to a population's needs and be accountable for their actions, even when the population is apathetic, uninformed, and easily influenced by populists and misinformation. This balance determines how learners consider political and policy approaches to themes.

Political economy

This theme intersects well with many others, including inequalities, welfare reform, and power and control. Theorists such as Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill could not conceive of the economic and political worlds as separate, and referred to themselves

as political economists. This view changed as governments began to reduce their direct control over the economy, and different political forms emerged. By the 20th century politics and economics became increasingly separate. However, economic issues became increasingly political with the great depression and ongoing issues around development. The political issues of the era, such as two world wars and the rise of fascism and communism, became increasingly economic. By the 1970s, it was clear that the separation between the economic and political spheres was false. That decade witnessed the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, OPEC oil crises and stagflation — all emphasising the indivisibility of economic and political challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the intersection of politics and economics.

Every government faces difficult decisions about appropriate political approaches, such as what restrictions to impose and when to loosen them; what groups and individuals are exempt; what the socioeconomic priorities are; how to finance the response; and what domestic agendas can be limited to favour international co-operation, aid or assistance. These approaches could consider public health recommendations, economic factors and political constraints.

Just as the policy approaches to the 2007–08 financial crisis varied from country to country in line with local political economy conditions, so national policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic varied for health, economic and political reasons.

Approaches to delivery

You should structure the learning and teaching programme to allow time for learners to develop meta-skills, and academic and other transferable skills. You should also allow for assessment practice within the notional hours suggested. You do not need to spend an equal time on each of the four themes. You can choose to focus more on some of the themes.

You can shape delivery and assessment to support learners to develop their academic skills, such as time management, multi-tasking ability, digital skills, essay-writing skills

and questioning ability. You can design formative and summative activities and assessments that encourage learners to practise the skills they need to progress to the next level of study.

The themes are designed to be broad and inclusive, and able to accommodate you and your learners' interests or specialities. They can accommodate future developments in politics and provide a lens through which to critically analyse and evaluate political structures, influences and approaches within a selected context.

Critically analyse comparative political contexts and their structures in relation to a theme (outcome 1)

In this outcome, you can introduce learners to any relevant political context; for example, the USA and/or the EU.

You should show learners how to critically analyse the political structures in place, forms of governance, separation of powers, and systems of checks and balances. You can discuss what articles and legislation provide the basis for formal rules of governance, and the relationship with international forms of governance. You can do this using an example from comparative politics; for example:

- the 2008 international financial crisis (globalisation, welfare reform, political economy, and so on)
- the UK separation from the EU (international political governance, representation, and so on)
- COVID-19 (political economy, globalisation, and so on)

Learners should critically analyse the role, power and functions of each branch of government. The themes provide a good lens through which to examine those contemporary issues that promote debate about related areas, such as executive overreach and the marginalisation of the legislature. They can also look at evidence of judicial decisions in the selected contexts related to selected themes, and that have an impact on the political structures and approaches. You should introduce learners to

examples related to a theme, and encourage them to research and develop their own examples for analysis.

Learners can discuss what different groups and interests can influence political structures and approaches, and the impact they can have on political decision-making. They can discuss how specific groups access decision-makers and the decision-making process, and what methods decision-makers use. They can also consider the role of mass and social media, social movements, and global capital and multinational corporations.

Critically evaluate key political approaches to a theme (outcome 2)

You should introduce learners to the relationships between political ideas, institutions and processes, and consider how political structures, ideologies and interests shape political approaches. As with outcome 1, you can do this through the lens of a selected theme.

Learners should critically evaluate how political structures shape approaches. They can consider how checks and balances influence the effectiveness of the relationship between branches of government. They can also consider how effective these structures are in terms of accountability and representation, and if there are external influences. You can discuss what complexities and allegiances exist. Outcomes in terms of economic growth, inequalities or any other indicators can also lead to good discussion.

Learners should critically evaluate how political approaches are shaped by ideologies and interests. Ideologies and interests are linked to political structures. Politicians seek power. Their context and ideology, and their socioeconomic and party interests influence what they do with that power when they have achieved it. You could discuss what ideologies and interests are dominant, and which are ones of resistance.

You can ask other questions, such as:

- Are the terms 'left', 'right' and 'centre' still useful ways of categorising ideological positions?
- Have the collapse of communism and the ever-flourishing interests of global capital and multinational media and corporations brought about the 'end of ideology'?

Learners can benefit from a varied and active learning approach, where they engage in supported, independent and collaborative learning. You should encourage learners to take a participative and practical approach. Delivery methods could include:

- demonstration
- tutorial question and answer sessions
- debate
- individual and group research tasks
- presenting findings
- VLE
- digital tools and social media
- film and visual images
- close reading of sources

You should deliver the unit in a learner-centred manner and always encourage a questioning approach. In doing so, you engage learners and encourage them to think like social scientists and be analytical and enquiring, rather than passively accepting facts. Developing essential transferable skills also helps learners access further study and employment.

The section on meta-skills provides further guidance on incorporating different skills into delivery and evidence.

It would be useful for learners to have access to a laptop or other digital device.

Approaches to assessment

Although learners study four themes, you must assess them on only one. You can generate evidence using different types of assessment. The following are suggestions only. There may be other methods that would be more suitable for learners.

We recommend that you assess the unit holistically, as that is best to reduce the learners' assessment burden. You can decide to use a portfolio approach with two or more assessment tasks issued at different times in the unit delivery, if that is better for your learners. Learners can choose to submit their assessment evidence in any format that meets each outcome.

The assessment could take the form of an open-book essay question, set of structured questions, case study or portfolio approach. Learners must provide a written response of 2,500 to 3,000 words, or an individual oral presentation or poster exhibition of 18 to 22 minutes in duration, or any other method that appropriately meets the evidence requirements. For example, learners could provide the evidence in the form of an individual blog or website, potentially involving a mixed approach (perhaps a written response of 1,500 words and a 10 to 12 minute oral presentation).

You can choose to use a mix of methods across a group, as it may be more suitable for some learners to give a written response and for others to use an oral method. Whichever method learners choose, they must be able to access notes, textbooks and other materials, as it is an open-book assessment.

If learners choose an oral method, we recommend that you record this in some form or provide assessor notes on the presentation for external verification purposes. Learners must show evidence of meeting all evidence requirements. Ideally, they would complete oral presentations or poster exhibitions individually. If a group presentation is used, individual learners must show coverage of all evidence requirements. To do this, they may need to provide additional responses to structured questions or an essay. Learners should submit their work for marking on one submission date that you have provided or agreed with them.

Learners can combine a poster exhibition with an oral presentation. For example, a learner could produce a detailed poster on outcome 1 and cover outcome 2 in an oral presentation. In this case, the total time across both outcomes and all evidence requirements would be 18 to 22 minutes. So, the learner would spend 10 to 15 minutes orally presenting the poster content and 8 to 12 minutes orally presenting information on outcome 2.

Learners could develop a case study approach over the unit, comparing political contexts and political approaches to a theme.

You should make learners aware of the importance of good judgement in selecting appropriate academic sources. You should encourage them to choose academic sources rather than generic search engines, to enable them to be more confident of information and better equipped to progress to SCQF level 9 study.

If learners are creating a blog or website for their assessment, it should not be in the public domain. Rather, it should be on an intranet or private area of your VLE to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism.

Authenticating learners' work is essential. You could collect notes or visual presentation materials from learners as further evidence of meeting SCQF level 8. You should monitor learners' progress throughout to authenticate submitted work. Where possible, you should use plagiarism-detection software.

You should encourage learners to engage with debates, research and coverage of political approaches in different contexts and in relation to different themes. They should base their assessment response on appropriate literature — both academic, and news or commentary, citing theorists, authors, evidence and dates. They should demonstrate SCQF level 8 skills of critical analysis and evaluation.

The assessment methods you choose should encourage learners to discuss the selected themes in the context of contrasting political contexts. The learner has some flexibility in determining the political perspectives and area of focus within the theme. Learners could collaborate with each other and you to devise their own focus of study.

They could develop this in either an essay, or an oral presentation using software or a poster. This should be a substantive piece of work that allows learners to demonstrate their understanding of political themes and approaches in different contexts.

It is important that learners' responses to the assessment are at SCQF level 8.

Equality and inclusion

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You must consider the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

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

Information for learners

Politics: Themes from a Political Perspective (SCQF level 8)

This information explains:

- what the unit is about
- what you should know or be able to do before you start
- what you need to do during the unit
- opportunities for further learning and employment

Unit information

This unit introduces you to different political contexts and builds on your understanding of political thinking. You develop knowledge and skills to critically analyse comparative political contexts and their structures, and critically evaluate political approaches in relation to four themes.

During the unit, you learn about a variety of contemporary political structures and the relationships between political ideas, institutions and processes. You consider how political contexts or structures differ, why they differ and what outcomes they produce.

On completing the unit, you are able to:

1. critically analyse comparative political contexts and their structures in relation to a theme
2. critically evaluate key political approaches to a theme

You should aim to develop an interest in, and engage with, contemporary politics. You should also develop an enquiring and critical mind in relation to aspects such as:

- political institutions
- multi-party versus one- or two-party systems
- political structures
- democracy versus dictatorships

You are assessed using an open-book assessment covering both unit outcomes. This means that you have access to materials such as textbooks, notes and your virtual learning environment (VLE). You can give your assessment response in writing or orally. If your assessment response is written, it must be between 2,500 and 3,000 words, and if it is oral, it must be between 18 to 22 minutes long.

During the unit, you develop academic skills, such as critical analysis and evaluation, academic writing skills, information gathering and time management.

You also develop key literacies such as communication. You learn to convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent way, with references where appropriate. Your lecturer may also use oral presentations and discussions to help you improve your communication skills.

You develop digital skills and computer literacy by using digital packages to complete assessments, and internet sources to research information, such as political and policy responses to globalisation and inequalities in different political contexts.

You may be able to study a degree programme in a related subject if you study this unit as part of Higher National Diploma (HND) Social Sciences.

Meta-skills

Throughout this unit, you develop meta-skills that are useful for the social sciences sector.

Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities that help you adapt and succeed in life, study and work. There are three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

You develop these naturally as you take part in the learning and teaching activities and produce assessment responses. Improving meta-skills, such as organising your time (self-management) and communicating ideas clearly (social intelligence), is useful for current and future study, and employment.

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you develop skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

You learn about social, economic and environmental sustainability principles and how they relate to the social sciences sector. You also develop an understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Administrative information

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Superclass: EA

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Please check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this unit.