



Course report 2023

Higher Politics

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 1,934

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 2,137

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	751	Percentage	35.1	Cumulative percentage	35.1	Minimum mark required	55
B	Number of candidates	536	Percentage	25.1	Cumulative percentage	60.2	Minimum mark required	46
C	Number of candidates	379	Percentage	17.7	Cumulative percentage	78	Minimum mark required	37
D	Number of candidates	252	Percentage	11.8	Cumulative percentage	89.8	Minimum mark required	28
No award	Number of candidates	219	Percentage	10.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1

Overall, the question paper was positively received.

As part of the modifications to assessment for session 2022–23, Section 1: Political theory sampled all three content areas.

Some candidates did not address all parts of the questions set, particularly in Section 2: Political systems and Section 3: Political parties and elections.

Question paper 2

Overall, the question paper performed as expected, however, some candidates did not provide a full evaluation of the components of the viewpoint in question 2.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022–23.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

Almost all candidates addressed three aspects to this question and most provided detailed and varied exemplification.

Candidates who achieved high marks correctly related their analysis to Weber's three classifications of authority.

Question 1(b)

Almost all candidates referred to the work of relevant theorists.

Good quality responses used relevant terminology well to provide detailed responses with supporting detailed exemplification.

Many candidates provided analytical comments that either compared the key features of direct democracy or examined implications of some of these key features.

Question 1(c)

Many candidates provided detailed descriptions of the key features of a chosen ideology, developed with supporting exemplification or explanations.

Many candidates benefited from well-structured responses that supported further analytical comments focusing on either implications of ideological positions or identifying similarities and differences between their chosen ideology and another ideology.

Many candidates made reference to the works of an appropriate theorist. A few candidates made reference to more than one relevant theorist and were awarded marks accordingly.

Almost all candidates focused on an ideology listed in the course specification.

Question 2(a)

Almost all candidates who provided responses to this question chose the UK and the USA as the context for their responses.

Many candidates provided well-structured responses that clearly addressed the issue of the nature and status of the constitutional arrangements in the political systems they had studied.

Good quality responses provided detailed descriptions that were supported by explanations or exemplification and tended to provide analytical comments about both the nature and the status of their chosen context's constitution.

Question 2(b)

Almost all candidates who responded to this question chose the UK and the USA as the context for their responses.

Good quality responses focused accurately on the issue outlined in the question (constraints on the power of the executive) and provided well-structured comparative responses. This approach supported candidates in providing relevant analytical comments.

Many candidates gave relevant and accurate explanations and exemplifications of the constraints on the executives.

Question 3(a)

Almost all candidates who responded to this question focused on the Conservative Party, the Labour Party or the Scottish National Party.

Some candidates provided detailed descriptions on three or more aspects of the question (dominant ideas associated with their chosen political party or parties) along with relevant explanation or exemplification. These candidates provided relevant analytical comments on the impact of these dominant ideas on the electoral performance of the party or parties chosen.

Candidates who scored highly provided detail on the impact on specific voter groups or other specific aspects of electoral performance.

Question 3(b)

Most candidates who performed strongly in this question addressed the three mandatory campaign management strategies (grassroots, new technology, and media strategies).

Good-quality responses were supported with detailed exemplification and analytical comments that examined the relative importance of different strategies.

Many candidates provided highly analytical comments and/or conclusions that identified the interrelationship between the uses of different campaign strategies.

Question paper 2

Question 1

Most candidates accurately identified three points of comparison between sources A and B. Many candidates provided some supporting analytical comments based on the identified comparisons.

Many candidates provided well-structured responses that attempted to identify three comparisons, provided an analytical comment based on each comparison, and then tried to provide an overall conclusion.

Many candidates provided a detailed overall conclusion. These often focused on a specific area, for example a conclusion about which Prime Minister had more power, authority, and/or legitimacy.

Question 2

Many candidates provided highly-structured responses that sought to address all components of the viewpoint.

Many candidates sought to make evaluations of the viewpoint as they examined each of the components of the viewpoint in turn. These candidates often addressed all relevant aspects of the viewpoint.

Most candidates identified each of the components of both parts of the viewpoint.

Some candidates were able to provide synthesis of aspects either as an independent statement or combined with their evaluation.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

A few candidates attempted to address wider issues such as power and legitimacy, for which no knowledge marks could be attained, however where appropriate the candidates received analysis marks within their responses.

A few candidates made limited reference to authority and focused on power in their responses. These candidates did not address the key points so were limited in their mark allocation.

A few candidates referenced other political theorists in addition to Weber. These candidates were awarded knowledge marks.

Question 1(b)

A few candidates did not refer to relevant theorists or they only named theorists without referring to their works. These candidates were unable to access the full range of marks available for this question.

Question 1(c)

A few candidates focused on an ideology, such as capitalism and communism, which is not in the course specification and, as a result, were limited in the number of knowledge and understanding marks that could be awarded.

Question 2(a)

Many candidates focused on key constitutional principles (such as federalism, separation of powers, parliamentary supremacy, unitary state) as separate aspects. These are taken as one aspect. This limited the marks that could be awarded to some candidates.

A few candidates focused on one political system or made limited reference to another. This section requires candidates to take a comparative approach, which reaches conclusions about the sources of power within two political systems.

A few candidates did not focus on both parts of the question in their response — this limited marks in some areas including marks available for conclusions. For full conclusion marks a developed and well-argued conclusion with justifications that directly address and evaluate the central issues in the question is required.

Question 2(b)

Many candidates focused largely on the powers of the executives. The question directly references the constraints on the powers of the executives. Some candidates made no or limited reference to the constraints and focused mainly on the powers.

Some candidates had limited exemplification for one or both political systems.

Some candidates' conclusions focused on the powers of the executive instead of on the constraints, which limited the marks they could receive.

Question 3(a)

Some candidates provided a narrative description of the policies for a chosen political party. These candidates were unable to either identify the dominant ideas of a party or link these to the impact on the electoral performance of a political party.

Some candidates provided answers that included aspects such as leadership or the record in government of a party, which are not within the scope of the question. Where analysis was weak, candidates made general comments on a party's overall performance with very limited linkage to the impact of a specific dominant idea on the electoral performance of a party.

A few candidates made no attempt at comparing between or within political parties, which limited their responses when awarding analysis and conclusion marks.

Question 3(b)

A few candidates did not cover the mandatory content for this question, usually by making a comparison between two of the three content areas. Although some candidates provided detailed exemplification for different campaign strategies, descriptions and explanations provided by a few candidates were weak and lacked detail, occasionally including very simplistic explanations for the use of these strategies.

A few candidates did not specify which campaign management strategy they were referring to and it was not clear due to merging of strategies.

Question paper 2

Question 1

A few candidates made inaccurate comparisons, which attempted to link unrelated information from the sources.

Some candidates provided weak points that repeated information from the sources or provided a very general comment that identified if a comparison was similar or different. They did not attempt to identify the nature and extent of the difference or similarity.

Some candidates provided simplistic and straightforward conclusions. A few candidates provided conclusions that merely repeated each of the comparisons rather than identifying a conclusion based on the information.

A few candidates did not attempt to give an overall conclusion.

Question 2

Although most candidates provided well-structured responses, many candidates did not refer fully to the different sources and aspects of data. As a result, they did not access a second mark for interpreting the information from each source.

A few candidates did not identify the five components, splitting the statement into more than five components.

Some candidates did not identify relevant terms in the viewpoint that may or may not have been supported in the evidence such as 'significant losses' and 'every part of the country'. This affected the ability of these candidates to gain marks for evaluation. Some candidates did not refer to data from Scotland and from the UK in the relevant component.

Some candidates did not synthesise information across or within sources. They either stated what each of the sources showed in isolation or attempted to link information without outlining how this information might have linked, supported, or opposed other data from the sources. Where this occurred, candidates did not fully evaluate the viewpoint with justification.

A few candidates provided evaluations for elements of the viewpoint but did not provide justifications for these evaluations, so could not access marks.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres should be clear about the allocation of marks for the course assessment and ensure candidates understand this. This applies particularly to the 12-mark extended-response question in question paper 1 and the 20-mark electoral data question (question 2) in question paper 2.

Mark allocations are in the marking grids included in the marking instructions. Candidates may also find these grids helpful.

Centres should note that Higher Politics is a course that is independent from other SQA courses and as result the national standard and marking of the course assessment is different from other subject areas. Marking guidance from other areas should not be applied to the Higher Politics course.

Centres should note that the question papers can sample from all aspects of the course content. Centres and candidates should avoid attempting to identify patterns or making assumptions based on previous question papers. Centres should discourage candidates from attempting to use pre-prepared answers.

Markers this year identified that some responses lacked detailed analytical comments. Exemplification of detailed analysis is provided on the Understanding Standards website.

Centres should encourage candidates to pay greater attention to the time allocation for each question paper. Candidates should not spend a disproportionate amount of time on one question. This focus should be applied to both question papers.

Centres and candidates should be aware that the assignment will be reintroduced as part of the course assessment for session 2023–24. There will be no change to the structure, marking or assessment conditions for the assignment.

Further information to support centres can be found in the Understanding Standards section of SQA's website, where exemplar materials and audio presentations are available. Additional candidate exemplars and commentaries from the 2023 question paper will be made available during this session.

Understanding Standards events will be held during session 2023–24.

Question paper 1

Centres should make it clear to candidates that their responses for section 1 must refer to the works of relevant political theorists. Merely mentioning the name of relevant theorists without reference to their works or ideas is not adequate to meet the criteria outlined in the detailed marking instructions.

Candidates should be reminded of the five key political ideologies, which are listed in the course specification: liberalism, conservatism, socialism, nationalism, and fascism.

Candidates should be reminded that Section 2: Political systems requires two political systems to be covered. 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 are required to take a comparative approach, which reaches conclusions about the sources of power within two political systems. Candidates should be able to deal with both their chosen political systems in similar depth.

Centres should ensure that candidates are aware of the coverage expected for questions in section 3. A particular focus should be on the requirement for all course content to be covered in the impact of political campaign management strategies and theories of voting behaviour.

Question paper 2

Centres should remind candidates that sources can feature content not included in the 'Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment' section of the course specification.

Only content from the sources should be used to respond to questions in question paper 2. Candidates require no additional knowledge.

In question 2, centres should ensure that candidates know what the second interpretation mark for question 2 is awarded for. They should also ensure that candidates are able to evaluate whole components.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).