



Course report 2024

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 2,137

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 2,050

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	565	Percentage	27.6	Cumulative percentage	27.6	Minimum mark required	77
B	Number of candidates	462	Percentage	22.5	Cumulative percentage	50.1	Minimum mark required	66
C	Number of candidates	426	Percentage	20.8	Cumulative percentage	70.9	Minimum mark required	55
D	Number of candidates	282	Percentage	13.8	Cumulative percentage	84.6	Minimum mark required	44
No award	Number of candidates	315	Percentage	15.4	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1

Overall, the question paper was positively received.

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

Centres are reminded that the question paper samples from all aspects of the course content and candidates should avoid attempting to identify patterns based on previous question papers.

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 assignment was re-introduced this year, having last been assessed in 2019. Overall performance in the assignment was the same as in previous years.

A few candidates chose topics that were not specifically political in nature. Having social and/or economic factors in the assignment is acceptable however, the main focus of the assignment should be a political issue that invites discussion and debate. Some candidates had poorly-constructed titles for their assignments, which resulted in descriptive assignments that lacked analysis and provided limited conclusions.

Candidates covered a wide range of issues, with most candidates focusing on appropriate political topics. Candidates chose a selection of national and international topics from a range of historical time periods. Popular topics included the US political system, voting behaviour and political theory. In the assignment candidates have opportunities for personalisation and choice.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

Most candidates addressed the three aspects of this question (power, authority and legitimacy) and provided detailed and varied exemplification. Most candidates also referenced the appropriate political theorists. Candidates who achieved high marks correctly related their analysis to the relevance of each aspect of the question.

Question 1(b)

Most 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 and representative democracy or examined implications of some of these key features.

Question 2(a)

Most 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 (limits 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 exemplification of the constraints on the executives. These examples came from both contemporary and historical eras.

Question 2(b)

Most 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 (role and influence of committees) and provided well-structured comparative responses. This approach supported candidates in providing relevant analytical comments. Some candidates gave relevant and accurate explanations and exemplification of the role and influence of different types of committees. A few candidates accurately compared the Scottish legislative system with the US or UK system.

Question 3(a)

Most candidates covered at least one aspect of the focus of the question (media strategies). Good-quality responses were supported with detailed exemplification and analytical comments that examined the relative importance and/or effectiveness of media strategies. Many candidates provided highly analytical comments that identified the interrelationship between the uses of different campaign management strategies.

Question 3(b)

Most candidates covered at least one aspect of the focus of the question (rational choice). Good-quality responses were supported with detailed exemplification and analytical comments that examined the relative importance and/or effectiveness of the rational choice model in Scotland, the United Kingdom, or both Scotland and the United Kingdom. Many candidates provided highly analytical comments that identified the interrelationship or relative importance between different theories of voting behaviour.

Question paper 2

Question 1

Most candidates accurately identified three points of comparison between sources A and B, with many candidates providing 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. Most candidates provided an overall conclusion with many providing a detailed overall conclusion. These often focused on a specific area, for example a conclusion about the extent of changes between traditional Labour and New Labour.

Question 2

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

Many candidates attempted 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 the viewpoint.

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

Assignment

Many candidates produced high-quality, detailed and well-structured assignments that indicated familiarity with marking guidance and focused on topics that invited discussion and debate. High-achieving candidates tended to frame their assignment topics in an essay format (for example, 'To what extent...' or a statement followed by 'Discuss'). The framing of the title in this way supported candidates to produce assignments that were able to access a range of analytical marks and then produce detailed and relevant conclusions on their issue. This enabled candidates to address the central issue and evaluate different viewpoints in their conclusions.

Candidates who achieved high marks produced well-structured responses and made explicit reference to the resource sheet and the resources they used. Effective use of the resource sheet enables candidates to develop their knowledge and understanding and therefore provide the basis for then developing analytical comments based on this knowledge and understanding. Most candidates followed the advice on the word limit on the resource sheet.

Candidates who achieved the highest marks provided developed analytical points that gave additional justification or evidence. Many candidates produced responses that were highly analytical. Candidates who achieved high marks appeared to be aware of the success criteria for the assignment, and this was clearly reflected in the structure and content of their responses.

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

Most candidates identified the issue, providing background in detail and outlining alternative points of view on their issue. Some candidates reduced their ability to do this due to poorly chosen titles. High-performing candidates identified the significance of their issue or related it to relevant political concepts such as representation. Candidates who achieved high marks included these aspects in a structured and extended introduction. A number of candidates structured this in two introductory paragraphs, the first framing the issue and providing detailed background information, and the second explicitly identifying different viewpoints and the significance of the issue or relating the issue to relevant political concepts.

Overall, candidates provided detailed and accurate descriptions, with relevant exemplification or explanations on a suitable number of aspects for their assignment. High-achieving candidates made effective use of the resource sheet. These candidates tended to use tabular data, key headings, bullet points or spider diagrams on their resource sheet. This enabled them to expand upon these in their assignment to display the development of their knowledge and understanding.

B Analysing information in a structured manner

High-achieving candidates produced assignments that included both a breadth of analysis and also depth in the form of developed analytical comments. These candidates appeared to be clear on the different types of analysis that gain marks. As outlined in the marking grid, developed analysis is required for candidates seeking to access the full range of marks. Candidates who achieved high marks did not record analytical comments on their resource sheet. Candidates who did record analytical comments on their resource sheet received 0 marks for these in their assignment. Candidates who were familiar with the different forms of analysis (as outlined in the Higher Politics coursework assessment task document) were more able to provide a wider range of analytical comments and a greater depth of analysis.

C Communicating information from, and referring to, political sources

Most candidates made explicit reference to at least two political sources of information. Many candidates made good use of their resource sheet, however, centres should be clear on the rationale and use of the resource sheet. Strong candidates made explicit reference to, and clearly communicated information gained from, their political sources.

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

Many candidates made detailed and well-argued conclusions that addressed the central issue in their assignment. Many candidates provided very detailed and insightful conclusions that evaluated the different points of view related to their issue. Strong candidates provided justifications for the side of the issue they had settled on (often providing implications of this),

and outlined why they had rejected the opposing point of view. The highest attaining candidates achieved the conclusion marks at the end of their assignment.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1

Question 1(a)

A few candidates did not provide adequate focus on all aspects of the question. Often legitimacy was mentioned but not covered in enough detail to meet the criteria in the marking instructions. A few candidates made limited reference to the focus of the question (relevance in the 21st century), which limited the marks available to these candidates. This was seen mostly within the available conclusion marks.

Question 1(b)

A few candidates did not address both direct and representative democracy in adequate detail. A few candidates made reference to political theorists but did not make adequate reference to the works of relevant theorists. These candidates were unable to access the full range of marks available for this question.

Question 2(a)

A few candidates did not focus on the limits of the executive branch and a few focused on the power and policy-making functions of the executive branch. A few candidates did not compare two political executives and gave an overly descriptive response for two political systems. 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 limits, which limited the marks they could receive.

Question 2(b)

Some candidates gave responses that focused on committees as part of a scrutiny procedures response while some did not give adequate detail on both the role and influence of committees in two political systems. Some candidates had limited exemplification for one or both political systems.

Question 3(a)

A few candidates attempted to address wider issues such as traditional campaign methods and new technological campaign management strategies, for which they could attain no knowledge marks, however where appropriate the candidates received analysis marks within their responses. Some candidates did not give analytical points that were extended and/or justified or exemplified. This limited the number of marks they could receive.

Question 3(b)

A few candidates attempted to address wider issues such as the sociological model of voting behaviour, for which they could attain no knowledge marks, however where appropriate the candidates received analysis marks within their responses. Some candidates did not give

analytical points that were extended and/or justified or exemplified. This limited the number of marks they could receive.

Question paper 2

Question 1

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

A few candidates did not provide an analytical comment related to their comparisons or did not address three areas for comparison.

A few candidates provided conclusions that repeated each of the comparisons rather than identifying a conclusion based on the information, while a few did not attempt to give an overall conclusion.

A few candidates referenced information that was not contained within the sources. Candidates cannot gain any marks for referencing information that is not contained within the sources.

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 'large margins' and 'increased significantly'. This affected the ability of these candidates to gain marks for evaluation.

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.

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

Assignment

Some candidates were constrained by poorly-chosen titles that limited their ability to access marks for analysis or conclusions. Centres should be clear on the nature of the Politics assignment and guidance on choice of topics — any political issue that invites discussion or debate. A few candidates chose a topic that would not be considered political in nature, which limited the marks available to those candidates.

Where candidates opted for titles that had similarities to some previous extended-response questions, they tended to perform less well in comparison to candidates who did not. This may be because they did not satisfy the criteria for the assignment, which has a different mark distribution than a 20-mark extended-response question, such as a significantly higher mark allocation for analysis.

Some candidates did not make full or adequate use of the resource sheet. Some candidates used the resource sheet as a plan that they copied large parts from or included analytical comments, which achieved 0 marks. A few candidates did not submit a resource sheet for which they received a penalty of 6 marks.

A few candidates included information across two pages despite clear guidance that the resource sheet should be one page only. Some candidates provided resource sheets that did not appear to support their assignment write-up, for example lists of URLs. Centres are strongly advised that they should be familiar with the guidance on the use of the resource sheet and on what does and does not constitute acceptable support and guidance for candidates. The resource sheet should support candidates and provide them with an opportunity to show what evidence they have collected that they can then expand upon in their assignment. This enables candidates to display their knowledge and understanding by developing information from their resource sheet with additional description, exemplification and explanation. Candidates should not copy large sections of text from their resource sheet and should not have analytical comments on their resource sheet.

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

Some candidates chose titles such as ‘What are the main factors.....’, and these tended to result in descriptive responses that lacked analysis. A few candidates also had one-word topics such as ‘Democracy’. A few candidates appeared to lack understanding of the mark allocation for knowledge and understanding, and as a result failed to address the significance of their issue or link it to political concepts. Many candidates did not clearly identify a minimum of two points of view on the topic. A very small number of candidates, often as a result of poorly-worded titles, failed to clearly identify the issue in their assignment.

B Analysing information in a structured manner

Although many candidates produced highly-analytical responses, there were candidates who produced descriptive assignments. Some candidates attempted to analyse information in their assignment but did not seem to understand what analysis is. Many candidates were not able access more than 10 marks for analysis. To do so candidates are required to provide at least two developed analytical comments.

C Communicating information from, and referring to, political sources

Some candidates did not make satisfactory use of the resource sheet. Some candidates did not make reference to political sources contained on their resource sheet. A few candidates copied large sections of text from their resource sheet and were therefore unable to show that they had developed their knowledge and understanding of their issue. Some candidates, as a result of using the resource sheet as a plan, copied analytical comments

from their sheet, which could not achieve marks. Many candidates had resources listed on their resource sheet that would not be considered political sources.

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

Many candidates restated points without linking these to the wider issues in their assignments. Some candidates produced insightful conclusions with detailed reference to the evidence but limited this to only one side of the issue in their assignment.

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. If the question asks about one factor from the mandatory course content, this should be the main focus of the response. Other factors will not receive knowledge and understanding marks. Analysis marks will be available for any response that meets the criteria for analysis.

Centres should be clear on the mark allocation in the 20-mark electoral data question 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. Pre-prepared answers would not meet the requirements for full marks if the question changes focus.

Markers this year identified that some responses lacked detailed analytical comments. Markers also noted some responses lacked basic analysis. Exemplification of detailed and basic analysis can be found in the Understanding Standards section of SQA's website, where candidate exemplars and commentaries are available.

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. If no theorist is mentioned in the question, candidates may refer to any suitable 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.

Candidates should be prepared to 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 the following: the Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats or Scottish National Party. Candidates should be made aware that for section 3, relevant case studies and examples are to be used from Scotland, the United Kingdom, or both Scotland and the United Kingdom. Examples from other nations, such as the USA and EU, will not achieve knowledge and understanding marks. Analysis marks will be available for any response that meets the criteria for analysis.

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.

The use of ellipses will not achieve marks. Candidates must write in full the text they are referring to. This is for both question 1, the comparison question, and question 2, the electoral data question.

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

In question 1 for the 2-mark conclusion, candidates must present a detailed overall conclusion about the comparison based on analysis of evidence.

In question 2, centres should ensure that candidates know what the second interpretation mark is awarded for. They should also ensure that candidates are able to evaluate whole components with appropriate supporting justification. Stating that the component is accurate or inaccurate alone will not achieve any marks.

Assignment

Candidates should be familiar with the success criteria for the assignment. Guidance for candidates is available in the coursework assessment task on the [Higher politics subject page](#).

Candidates are advised to frame their assignments as an essay-type question. This approach has been shown to support candidates in producing analytical responses and in encouraging more focused conclusions that address different viewpoints. Candidates should also ensure that their choice of assignment topic invites discussion and debate. This will support analysis and the development of conclusions.

Centres should ensure clarity over the nature and purpose of the assignment and the resource sheet. Centres should be clear on the use of the resource sheet. It should enable

candidates to identify information collected during the research stage of their assignment that can then assist in developing their knowledge and skills in relation to the chosen topic. The resource sheet must contain a minimum of two political sources to gain maximum marks. Political sources must be primarily political in nature. Surveys of peers on a non-political issue would not necessarily be considered an appropriate political source.

The resource sheet is not intended as an essay plan, nor is simply recording a number of URLs likely to support a candidate during the write-up of their assignment. Analytical comments copied from the resource sheet will not gain marks. Candidates should be clear on the nature of analysis as related to the Higher Politics course. Guidance on the different types of analysis is available in, for example, marking instructions, or in commentaries provided on SQA's Understanding Standards website.

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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).