Course report 2025

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 2025 appeals process.

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Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   2,050

Number of resulted entries in 2025:   2,104

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	609	28.9	28.9	75
B	553	26.3	55.2	63
C	393	18.7	73.9	52
D	290	13.8	87.7	40
No award	259	12.3	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

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In this report:

- 'most' means greater than or equal to 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.

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1

Overall, the question paper was positively received.

A range of question items were completed by candidates with questions 1(b), 2(a) and 3(a) being the most popular with candidates.

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

Question paper 2

Overall, the question paper was slightly more demanding than anticipated.

Assignment

Overall, performance in the assignment was similar as in previous years.

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, constitutional arrangements, voting behaviour and political theory. In the assignment, candidates have opportunities for personalisation and choice and this was evident in most candidates' responses.

A few candidates selected political issues that would also have been acceptable choices in the History coursework assessment task. While this can be acceptable, the marking guidance for the Higher Politics assignment should be followed.

A few candidates chose topics that were not specifically political in nature. Including 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 opportunity for developed or insightful conclusions.

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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 (three faces of power) and provided some detail with 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 or another acceptable analytical comment.

Question 1(b)

Most candidates referred to the work of relevant theorists for their chosen ideology. 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 an ideology with an alternative ideology or another acceptable analytical comment.

Question 2(a)

Most candidates who responded to this question chose the UK and the USA as the context for their responses. A few candidates chose China and/or Scotland. Good-quality responses focused accurately on the issue outlined in the question (constitution's role in protecting individual rights of citizens) 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 features of constitutions and their role in

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protecting individual rights. 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 and provided well-structured comparative responses. This approach supported candidates in providing relevant analytical comments for both political systems studied. Many candidates gave relevant and accurate explanations and exemplification of features and effectiveness of legislative scrutiny. These examples came from both contemporary and historical eras.

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 along with relevant explanation or exemplification. These candidates provided relevant analytical comments on the impact of 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. Most candidates were able to give some detail on the mandatory content. 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.

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Question paper 2

Question 1

Many 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 candidates providing a detailed overall conclusion. These often focused on a specific area, for example, a conclusion about the case for participatory or parliamentary democracy.

Question 2

Most candidates identified each of the components of the viewpoint, with many candidates providing 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.

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

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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 introductions and/or conclusions.

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

Overall, candidates provided detailed and accurate descriptions, with relevant exemplification or explanations on a suitable number of aspects for their assignment. Most candidates identified the issue and provided background information in detail. Many candidates outlined 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, power, democracy and legitimacy. Candidates who achieved high marks included these aspects in a structured and extended introduction. A few 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.

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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 to enable candidates 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 on our subject page) were able to provide a wider range of analytical comments and a greater depth of analysis. Some candidates received all their analytical marks from using the same form of analysis, such as consequences, repeatedly.

C Communicating information from, and referring to, political sources

Many 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.

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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, at least one face of power was mentioned but not covered in enough detail to meet the criteria in the marking instructions. This was evident particularly in the 4-mark scope section. Candidates should be aware that knowledge and understanding marks in a 12-mark extended-response question are only awarded for the political concept given. As a result, candidates who referenced authority and/or legitimacy were not awarded knowledge and understanding marks for this question. Analysis marks could be awarded.

Question 1(b)

Some candidates were limited by their knowledge and understanding of one ideology. Some candidates answered this question in the style of a 20-mark extended-response question covering more than one ideology in their response and attempting to draw similarities and/or differences to these ideologies. Candidates could achieve analysis marks using this style of response.

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.

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Question 2(a)

Many candidates focused on key constitutional principles, codification and the role of the judiciary, but did not relate these to protecting rights. This limited the marks that they could be awarded. 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 constitutions within two political systems. For full conclusion marks, a developed and well-argued conclusion with justifications that directly address and evaluates the central issues in the question is required.

Question 2(b)

A few candidates attempted to outline opportunities for scrutiny of the executive that were not within the realm of the question. For example, some of these candidates included reference to the media in scrutinising the executive, but this was not within the scope of the question (which focused on the actions of the legislature in scrutinising the executive). In a similar vein, a few candidates referred to the judiciary and its role in scrutinising the executive. Where candidates made analytical comments, they often did not extend to developed analysis. As a result, this prevented some candidates from achieving full knowledge and understanding marks.

Question 3(a)

Some candidates provided a narrative description of the policies for a chosen political party such as the Conservative policy on national service in 2024. 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 referred to multiple elections for multiple parties — this limited their ability to gain knowledge and understanding

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

Question 3(b)

A few candidates did not cover the mandatory content for this question, usually by only making a comparison between two of the three content areas. A few candidates only focused on the area given in the question with no reference to the other areas in the mandatory content listed in the course specification. 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 the merging of strategies.

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.

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Question 2

Although most candidates provided well-structured responses, many 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 and split 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 'biggest improvement' and 'all elections'. 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. 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

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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.

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' or 'Independence'. 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.

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 refer 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

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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. Marks are awarded for referring to political sources and some candidates did not explicitly refer to the sources listed on the resource sheet.

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.

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Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

You 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 questions 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.

You 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.

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. You should not apply marking guidance from other areas to the Higher Politics course.

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. You 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 that some responses lacked detailed description in the knowledge and understanding scope category and basic analysis. Exemplification of detailed and basic analysis with candidate evidence and commentaries can be found on our Understanding Standards website.

Question paper 1

You 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 can refer to any suitable theorist for these ideologies.

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 of their chosen political systems in similar depth.

You 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 sets 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. It is important that candidates are aware of the dominant idea of the political party being referenced. To gain analysis marks in this section, candidates must refer to the electoral success or failure of the political 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

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achieve knowledge and understanding marks. Analysis marks will be available for any response that meets the criteria for analysis.

Question paper 2

You should ensure candidates know 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 to achieve marks.

In question 1 for the 2-mark conclusion, candidates must present a detailed overall conclusion about the comparison based on analysis of evidence. This should be a conclusion with evidence and not an overview of points already mentioned.

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

Candidates should be aware that the components can deal with data from multiple or single sources. Candidates should be aware that components can contain two, three or four aspects. These components can appear in any order within the statement.

Assignment

Candidates should be familiar with the success criteria for the assignment. Guidance is available in the Higher Politics coursework assessment task on the Higher Politics subject page.

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Candidates are advised to frame their assignments in response to an essay-style question. This approach has been shown to support the production of analytical responses and to encourage more focused conclusions that address a range of different viewpoints.

Candidates should also ensure that their chosen topic invites discussion and debate, as this will support the development of analysis and well-reasoned conclusions. You should be clear on the nature of the Politics assignment and the guidance on the choice of topics — any political issue that invites discussion or debate.

You should ensure that candidates clearly understand the nature and purpose of both the assignment and the resource sheet. The purpose of the resource sheet is to help candidates identify and organise information gathered during the research stage. This information should support the development of their knowledge and analytical skills in relation to their chosen topic.

You must 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.

You should ensure that candidates are aware of what constitutes a political source. To access the highest marks, the resource sheet must include a minimum of two political sources. These sources must be explicitly political in nature. For example, surveys of peers on non-political issues would not normally be considered suitable political sources. The resource sheet is not intended to be used as an essay plan, and simply listing URLs is unlikely to support the candidate during the write-up. Analytical comments copied directly from the resource sheet will not be credited.

Candidates must have a clear understanding of what constitutes analysis within the context of the Higher Politics course. Further guidance on different types of analysis

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can be found in the marking instructions on our website, or in the commentaries provided on the Understanding Standards website.

Candidates may draw on knowledge gained from other subjects, such as History, however, they must ensure that any such knowledge is applied within the framework of the Higher Politics assignment marking criteria. This will ensure that they are eligible for the full range of marks and are not disadvantaged during assessment.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy.