EXAMINERS' REPORTS
HSPS TRIPOS PART II; 2022-2023

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Department of Politics and
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HUMAN, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE TRIPOS
POLITICS

PART II EXAMINERS' REPORTS

2022-2023

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR EXAMINER

This was a challenging year for examinations in HSPS for a number of reasons, but the process and result turned out well. I am pleased that both external examiners noted the high quality of our students' work, and that the examining process was fair and efficient. In particular, one of the examiners pointed out that the Department made less frequent use of externals to adjudicate between discrepant marks than had been the case in previous years. This strikes me as a definite step in the right direction as we work to streamline the examination process.

The external examiners also noted a number of areas in which we might consider reforms. They both suggested that markers might be encouraged to use the full range of marks – as opposed to largely restricting themselves to the area between 60 and 75 or so. The external examiners suggested in particular that markers should be more willing to award marks of 80 or above, and that the reluctance to do so may disadvantage our best students as they compete for spaces in post-graduate programs, and for funding. This point is well worth taking on board, though it is also worth noting that part of the issue may lie with the double-marking system.

One of the examiners also suggested that we might consider diversifying the ways in which we approach assessment by adding additional options beyond traditional examinations. This is certainly worth considering, though it will need serious reflection in light of the advance of generative AI.

I would like to thank the examiners for all their work and for their thorough reports.

Dr Steven Ward

Gender Breakdown of Results

In the exam results for both 2020-21 and 2021-22, we have observed a somewhat unexplained difference in the gender gap between students in their second and third years. In both years, there was a significant gap in the proportion of students who obtained first class results in favour of male students in the second year, which cancelled out or was even reversed in favour of female students in the third year. This appears again in the results for 2022-23, but to a lesser extent in the second year. There is however a concerning and distinctive number of male students who receive marks lower than a 2.1 in both years.

As mentioned in last year's report, the results largely use a binary classification which is the only data the university provides to the department about gender. Two students, both in their second year, identify as non-binary in the supplied data; both received 2.1s, but with such small numbers it is difficult to draw broader conclusions.

Out of those who are recorded in university-level data as identifying as either male or female, the numbers are much larger across both years: 96 identify as male, 146 as female. Out of those who identify as male, 25 obtained first class results (26% of male students); out of those who identify as female, 42 obtained first class results (29% of female students).

Breaking it down by year group though we see:
2nd year students:
% Male students with 1sts = 26%. % Female students with 1sts = 24%.
3rd year students:
 % Male students with 1sts = 26%. % Female students with 1sts = 33%.
For second year students, the average marks for male students taking POL3 (66.5), POL4 (65.7) and POL5 (68.5) are slightly higher than female students (65.6, 64.4 and 67.2 respectively); for POL7 and POL8, it is reversed, with female students receiving an average of 67.3 for POL8 and male students an average of 65.4.

With third year students, the averages are all slightly higher for female students in the larger papers. For POL9, the average mark for female students is 66.5, and for male students it is 66.2. For dissertations, female students received an average mark of 66.9; for male students, 66.1. The differences are generally small but this same difference is seen across all larger papers.

More concerning perhaps is the gender gap in the number of students who do not achieve a 2.1. Across both years, there are 6 students with a 2.2 or lower; 5 of those 6 are male, and this includes 2 thirds and one fail mark. This seems to be reflected in university-wide data, where over the last few years it has been noted that the proportion of male students who receive 3rds or fail results in their exams has been going up, whereas a similar pattern is not seen for female students.

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORT

Examiner: Professor Juanita Elias (University of Warwick)

This is my third and final year as external examiner at POLIS. As mentioned in my previous examiner reports it is always a pleasure to read the high-quality work produced by POLIS students – especially when it comes to reading for the dissertation and essay prizes.

This year, I am pleased to note that it was a very straightforward exam process. I would like to thank all staff involved with the administrative work involved – in particular to Rosalie and to Steven. I would also like to note that I was impressed by the ability of all academic staff to process their marking so quickly following the end of the marking and assessment boycott. I note also that there has been a marked improvement in the quantity and quality of feedback from examiners. Having more extensive feedback, and also, in the case of marking discrepancies, providing the feedback to examiners in the form of a single spreadsheet was incredibly useful. This is something that significantly improved the experience of external examining as I was able to follow the examiners' justifications for marks and also didn't have to go looking for specific pieces of feedback.

One thing that I did not receive this year were benchmark essays. This was not an issue per se since this is my third year as external examiner and I already have a good understanding of departmental marking norms. However, it may be useful to provide this next year for the new set of external examiners who will have less familiarity with POLIS expectations.

A big difference this year compared to previous years was that there were far less scripts that required my attention. In part this seemed to be because there was less disagreement between markers. As I

mentioned in my comments at the exam board, it is often far better for markers to seek to resolve marks themselves rather than sending marks to an external examiner who may not have specialist knowledge of specific topic areas.

In my comments to the exam board, I noted the following:

First, many staff continue to award the mark of 69 and I would encourage markers to think carefully about whether or not this is a grade they wish to use extensively. I would ask markers to think very carefully about whether a piece of work graded at 69 might be better classified at 70. Markers might be encouraged to reflect on why they did not award a grade of 70 (e.g. out of fear of awarding 'too many' first class marks) and consider what a student would need to do to get that extra mark that would take them into the first class category?

Second, I noted that there remains an unwillingness to award the highest possible marks. The POLSIS examination criteria specify what an essay/exam script in awarded over 80% would look like, and it was clear to me that some of the best pieces of work that I looked at (in particular, the essays and dissertations read for the prizes) should have been awarded grades in the 80s. Perhaps some work needs to be done within the department around what an essay in the 80% + category would look like so that academic staff have the confidence to award these marks. It strikes me that there is an unjustifiable level of discomfort within POLSIS to awarding marks in the 80s and as one member of staff noted at the exam board this is doing your very best students a disservice when it comes to competing for postgraduate funding.

Finally, I would reiterate the comment that I made at last year's exam board regarding the lack of diversity in assessment. The assessment regime at POLSIS (essays and exams) is exceptionally conservative compared to other UK politics departments. It is certainly worth exploring the potential pedagogical benefits of other forms of assessment which may serve to challenge your students to develop a wider skill set and to engage with course materials and topics in different ways.

As with previous years, I felt very confident that the examination process was robust and fair and the process well managed throughout. As this is my final year as external examiner, I would like to thank all staff involved – it is a shame that COVID, train strikes, and the MAB meant that I never got to visit Cambridge during my term as external examiner. However, these events have certainly led to improvements in various processes that make many aspects of the job much easier for external examiners such as the use of the virtual learning environment to access scripts, and the hybrid set-up for the examiners' meeting.

Examiner: Dr Matt Sleat (University of Sheffield)

Let me start by thanking Rosalie and Steven for their work over the past few days in making sure that I had remote access to the papers I needed to look at via Moodle, and in responding to my almost hourly email requests. Everything ran very smoothly as ever, and I enjoyed my work with them.

This is my third and final year as external examiner and, in truth, I have little to say that I haven't said in my previous two reports. This year has, of course, been greatly affected by the Marking Assessment Boycott, but I saw no evidence in the work I was asked to look at that this has affected any part of the process other than, of course, the timing. The policy decisions and failed essays I was asked to look at were straightforward and I agreed with those.

One thing I have said in previous years is that I felt markers could often be more generous in their grading. This issue usually arose in relation to work at the 2:1/1st border I had been asked to adjudicate, and which very often struck me as quite obviously deserving of a distinction. I saw little of that work this year, though the same issue did arise in relation to two other sets of essays. The first were those where I was asked to adjudicate between markers, either because of a significant discrepancy between grades or because a higher grade would materially affect the students' overall outcomes. In both cases I almost always found myself in agreement with the higher grade. The second were those essays we were asked to consider for prizes. These pieces were judged by the markers to be excellent, potentially publishable, and recommended for recognition, but were scoring in the mid-70s. I very much shared the markers' judgements on those papers, though believe they were of such quality that they warranted marks of 80%+.

Not awarding marks in that range has the effect of bunching the vast majority of distinction marks into

the 70-75% range, even where significant differences in papers' quality are being noted. Hence I do think it is worth reflecting on how you might stretch your marking across that higher range, making more regular and consistent use of grades of 75% upwards to distinguish more clearly the work judged to be of the highest merit.

Where there still is some inconsistency, though not as much as I have witnessed in previous years, is in terms of the comments markers provide on papers. For instance, on POL8 papers where students have to answer three questions - one examiner would give very short general and generic comments that applied to all three answers; the other give more detailed comments on each individual answer. It might be worth considering whether there should be some guidelines put in place to determine which of those models markers apply so there is some consistency in what is expected of them. I do not know if these comments are seen by students but if they were I would strongly suspect that it is the second slightly more detailed format that will be significantly more informative for them in helping understand why they were got the grade they did. Certainly they tended to be the most helpful for myself as an external examiner.

As ever, I was struck by the high quality of much of the work that I looked at, and the best work was characterised by that intellectual confidence and willingness to take risks in developing arguments that has characterised the best work I have seen over these three years. Likewise, the highlight of the work I have undertaken was reading the papers under consideration for the prizes, which were exemplary (indeed, I found it harder this year than in any previous year to decide a winner). Maybe nothing better highlighted the confidence of your students than one of your second-year students whose long essay we were asked to consider for the Schmidt prize, who boldly argued that 'the charges that political studies is replete with bullshit are justified and well-founded'. The best work your students produce really is of the very highest quality and I am sure you are very proud of them.

And to end I would just like to say that I have very much enjoyed my time as external examiner at Cambridge, enjoyed working with the various colleagues over the three years, and wish you all the best.

INTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

POL3: International Organisation
Examiner: Dr Giovanni Mantilla

One hundred and eighteen scripts were received from students taking the POL3 exam this year, requiring 2 answers to be written in response to 13 possible question choices. This resulted in 27 Firsts, 83 2:1s, 7 2:2s, and 1 3rd. The average mark was 63.1 and the standard deviation 7.5.

With 93.2% of students doing excellently or very well in the exam (earning a 2:1 or above, compared to 85% last year), student results for POL3 this year are outstanding. While the proportion of Firsts dipped slightly (22.8 vs. 24.4% for the previous year), we saw a marked increase (70.3 vs. 60% in 2020-21) in the proportion of students who produced persuasive, well-argued and well-written essays earning them 2:1 marks. Far fewer students received marks below a 2:1 this year (6.7%) compared to last year (15.5%).

POL3 Examiners are deeply heartened and extremely satisfied by these results. Hearty congratulations to our students and the POL3 teaching alike!

Some of the highlights and lowlights mentioned last year merit renewed underscoring. Most importantly, we again welcomed students' effort to make arguments in response to the questions prompts, rather than to rely on summaries. Conversely, we again noticed again traces of the use of pre-written text from supervision or mock exam essays to construct examination answers. Generally, we continue to strongly discourage the use of recycling pre-written text; this is a risky practice that tends to hinder students more than to help them.

Responses to questions were, as is usual, unevenly distributed. Whether the question was more explicitly

theoretical or explicitly thematic/empirical however did not seem to matter in terms of results: both types of questions elicited very good as well weaker answers. The average individual scores for ranged from 62.6 to 63.8, except for questions 2, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11 were each answered by fewer than 10 students. No student answered question 12.

There were 3 outstanding exams receiving marks of 75 and above. These exams featured essays that made clear, consistent, and compelling arguments showing a sophisticated understanding of diverse readings, also combining theoretical and empirical points to level original critiques of the literature. The twenty-four exams in the 70-74 range also had clear, consistent and compelling arguments showing deep understanding of a reasonably wide range of readings.

Exams in this upper (70+) range generally include a roadmap section indicating the steps to be taken by the essay, and generally followed them. They featured a strong authorial voice, announced and defended an argument throughout the essays, and demonstrated analytical nuance by considering counterarguments, or by referring to scope conditions, whether historical or theoretical.

Among those in the 60s range, those towards the top of the range made clear and consistent -- if mostly conventional – arguments, using a reasonable number of readings. Some faults included perhaps an odd mishandled or misinterpreted text, briefly lapsing into summarizing, a slightly narrow analytical focus, and/or some flaws in the organisation and structure of the answer. The lower 2:1s tended to have more of a combination of these faults.

The exams in the 50-59 range -- despite having some discernable argument – tended to feature one or more of the following flaws: an inability to sustain the argument, long unstructured sections, reliance on a very narrow range of readings, or reasonably serious misunderstandings of the readings.

The only exam below 50 had only one full essay, with the second one ending abruptly. Of these, the former did not have a clear argument, and presented an unstructured and confused exposition.

POL4: Comparative Politics
Examiner: Dr Chris Bickerton

The POL4 exam was conducted as an online five-hour exam, typed by students and uploaded onto the university system. It continued the tradition of the open book exam.

147 scripts in total were marked. The format was the same as in previous years: a general section with 9 questions, and then sections made up of two questions based on the modules covered by students in Michaelmas term. Students were asked to answer one question from the general section and then two questions from two different module sections. Each student therefore answered 3 questions in total. Scripts were double-blind marked.

The distribution of marks was as follows: 35 students obtained a first-class mark; 101 students obtained a 2:1 mark. 8 students obtained a 2:2 mark and 3 obtained a third-class mark. One student failed the paper. The average mark for the paper was 65.

There was an even spread of questions attempted reflecting the balance of choices made by students in their selection of modules. In Section 1, there was a strong tendency towards answering a question on state formation, in particular a question looking at theories of state formation (question 1). This question was not answered particularly well: rather than taking it as an occasion to explore the nuances in the relationship between war and state formation, many answers rehearsed debates about the advantages and disadvantages of Tilly's theory. A similar problem was faced in answers to question 4. Rather than answering the question directly, answers often described Gerschewski's model without paying enough attention to the problem of the collapse of authoritarian regimes. By contrast, Gerschewski's model is about the sources of stability in authoritarian regimes.

The best answers in the POL4 were able to combine precise and clear conceptual arguments with detailed, relevant and complex examples. Some of the best scripts focused on a small number of examples and discussed them in great depth. Others ranged more widely but contained, overall, a very high and sophisticated level of empirical material. Most importantly, the better scripts developed

examples in depth, going beyond references to events or places that cover only a couple of lines before moving on. The weakest scripts were those containing almost no empirical material whatsoever. Students should remember that POL4 is not a political theory paper. There is some conceptual discussion in the paper but it is predominantly an empirical paper and the ability to present empirical material within a convincing analytical framework will continue to be rewarded with higher marks than those scripts that remain at a high level of conceptual generality, discussing theories or concepts without any real reference to concrete country cases.

POL5 & POL19: Themes and Issues in Politics and International Relations Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

85 candidates took the long essay paper, which is POL5 for second-year students and POL19 for third-year students. 340 individual marks were awarded, ranging from 50 to 80, with a median mark of 67 and a mean of 66.9. If we look at the overall marks for the paper, 5 candidates received Lower Second marks, 51 Upper Seconds, and 29 Firsts.

It is difficult to offer general comments about student performance on the long essays, insofar as there are almost a hundred questions to choose from, with the marking divided up among a number of markers, and only a small number of candidates writing on each question. But here are some of the things the markers found to criticise in the essays they considered, in case it is a useful check-list of things to try to avoid—or, at least, to think about.

Markers liked it when candidates focused precisely on the question that had been asked: "More critical engagement with the actual question set would have been good"; "Engages with the question in a slightly superficial way"; "Not sharply enough focused on a keyword in the question"; "Much of the discussion orthogonal to the actual question"; "Fails to cohere as an answer to the question"; "This essay does not really provide a cogent argument addressing the question set"; "Only loose connection to the overall topic"; and "Rather misses the question, getting lost".

Markers had opinions about essay structure: "Somewhat rambling presentation that lacks clear structure and focus"; "Confusing, poorly structured"; "Poorly organised and structured"; "Unfortunately, the essay suffers from some conceptual muddles leading to a poorly structured and organized essay"; "Fundamentally, what would have improved the essay was a clear statement at the start about its major argument, the literatures it wished to engage and/or debate, and the evidence it used to support those - alongside a clear sense of the structure of the essay to follow".

There were other thoughts about the introduction, too: "Unclear introduction and imprecise argument"; "Not a strong clear statement of the argument in the introduction"; "The essay would have been well served by a stronger statement of its argument from the start".

There were some very general thoughts about arguments: "Lack of a clear overall argument"; "No sufficiently strong line of argument running through it"; "Insufficiently tight argument"; "Slightly unambitious"; "The essay's core argument is not convincing"; "The central thesis just isn't credible"; "Its chief failure is to provide a clear, identifiable argument throughout"; and on one occasion this last thought was expanded to note that "It does not produce a clear, identifiable argument, instead balancing different positions uneasily".

There were some more specific criticisms of how candidates were making their arguments: watch out for "The desire to dispose of counter-arguments without giving them due weight"; "Draws too much on the author's personal views, assertion rather than argument"; "Flow of arguments from one paragraph to another is not always self-evident"; there was a call for "Arguments that can be assessed in light of evidence"; candidates should be "Critical of the assumptions in the literature"; they should avoid "Limited engagement with counter-arguments"; the essay should not become "Too much of a dump of a whole bunch of literature and relatively disconnected discussion points"; there were "Tendencies towards rhetorical assertion and description"; there was "One big error in the argument (and some smaller ones)"; the exposition could be "confusing and scattered"; an essay might "Throw around important concepts without defining them"; or it might "Overstate the case; it was a problem when the essay "Just doesn't engage deeply enough with the critical core of the literature, focusing too quickly on certain niches"; there could be "Multiple, often bold, assertions without supporting evidence"; or it could

be "Too general, not enough on specifics"; or it "Often presents uncritical points and fails to go beyond mirroring conventional claims"; or "There is also a tendency to lump different [things] together without considering possible differences between them".

In particular, markers noticed when things were insufficiently analytical: "Not always marked by analytical depth"; "Analytical framework a bit muddled"; "The essay somehow lacks a conceptual and analytical framework"; "The essay could perhaps have benefitted from a more explicit articulation of a conceptual and analytical framework". And there were some thoughts about the use of theory: "Weak knowledge of theory"; "The largely theoretical discussion would have benefitted from more sustained empirical engagement"; "The main weakness is that the author throws in rather too many concepts and authorities, in the process losing theoretical clarity".

In terms of style, markers noticed that "Ideas are in no clear order; incoherent and difficult to follow"; that something was a "Poorly-drafted essay"; that "writing was very dense, with extremely long sentences that made the points made much harder to follow and the text considerably difficult to read"; that it "Would benefit from clearer signposting"; or was "Not very well written"; "A bit too journalistic at times"; "A bit breezy and shallow at points"; "meanders too much"; or that it "proceeds in a largely descriptive fashion, such that the central conceptual and analytical challenge posed by the question rather faded from view". They complained when an "essay also engages in some straw-manning"; or when there was "Far too much repetition, which makes the essay read rather simplistically".

Sometimes, markers had comments about the sources that were being used: "Relies very heavily on a few readings"; "Draws on a rather limited number of scholarly sources"; "The essay depends a little too much on the views of one key author"; "A range of questionable (and sometimes clearly inaccurate) claims that are either unsupported or very thinly supported by relevant sources"; "A tendency to rely a bit too closely on the readings rather than make independent arguments"; "Extremely lightly sourced and not very sophisticated in its arguments"; and "Very lightly sourced".

And, finally, markers appreciated a cleanly-constructed bibliography: "Bibliography is a mess"; "The bibliography should be in alphabetical order by surname, not first name"; "Bibliography sloppy".

POL6: Statistics and Methods in Politics and International Relations Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

The assessment for this paper consisted of a coursework element (a report of maximally 5000 words on a data analysis project) and an online exam (to be taken in a five-hour window). Both elements counted for 50% of the overall mark. After some students intermitting, in the end 14 candidates submitted the coursework assignment and took the exam (5 HSPS Part IIA students, 4 HSPS Part IIB, 4 History & Politics Part 1B, 1 History & Politics Part 2).

There was some variation in the results:
- For the *overall marks*, the average mark was 66.1, with 4 candidates receiving a First class mark, 9 candidates a 2.1 mark, and 1 candidate a 2.2 mark.
- For the *coursework element*, the average mark was 64.1, with 3 candidates receiving a First class mark, 7 candidates a 2.1 mark, and 4 candidates a 2.2 mark.
- For the *exam*, the average mark was 67.7, with 5 candidates receiving a First class mark (the highest mark was 77), 8 candidates a 2.1 mark, and 1 candidate a 2.2.

Two candidates obtained First class marks for both the coursework and exam elements.

For the coursework, candidates had to choose a topic from a provided list. The choices of topics were as follows: 6 candidates investigated voting behaviour in elections, 2 candidates focused on patterns of conflict, 2 candidates undertook a project on Sustainable Development Goals, 2 candidates chose the topic of the political dynamics of the COVID-pandemic, 1 candidate focused on patterns of corruption, and 1 candidate looked at attitudes towards globalisation.

As in previous years, there was some very good work done for the data analyses and reports. Most reports presented a clear research question and a quantitative analysis to address it. The best reports conducted an appropriate analysis for the chosen question and data, and presented convincing interpretations of the statistical results. It was a bit disappointing that several reports were only of 2.2

quality. Among the reasons for this were: lack of clarity about what different models were trying to do (including in some cases unclarity about what the units of analysis and the response variable were), lack of discussion of links between theoretical arguments and statistical results, a poor balance between different aspects of the report, some mistakes in the interpretation of model results. As in previous years, the best reports typically had a relatively narrow but well specified focus.

All exam scripts provided essentially competent answers to the questions this year and no scripts received very low or Fail marks (as happened in previous years), which was good to see. As in the past, some candidates were let down by not reading the questions carefully enough and failing to answer some parts of them. The scripts that received low 2.1 or 2.2 marks usually made some mistakes in the statistical interpretation of results and included limited detail on the substantive interpretation of these results. Specific problems in several scripts were failing to recognise the relevance of the interaction variables in Model 2 for the interpretation of the effect of 'Perceived income inequality' variable in question 1.4, asserting the possibility of high levels of correlation between certain individual-level and country-level variables in question 1.5 (it is highly unlikely that such variables are strongly correlated with each other, as individual-level variables tend to vary widely within a country, while country-level variables – by definition – do not), and failing to take scale/range of variables into account in answers to question 1.8.

POL7: The History of Political Thought to c. 1700
Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Forty-two candidates sat the paper. Fourteen received a first-class mark (including one very impressive 83); there were nineteen Upper Seconds; six Lower Seconds; and two Thirds; and one Fail. If we exclude the Fail and the 82 as obvious outliers, the median mark was 65 and the mean was 64.6. One script's mark suffered because the candidate ignored the instruction to write answers from both Section A and Section B.

Markers commented that the vast majority of scripts were consistent in quality over their three answers, and that most—though not all—kept to the word limit, and that the stronger answers were impressively well presented and supported. These were careful to introduce their answers and engage with the questions that had been set rather than simply listing a set of pronouncements by the primary authors or by scholars. The best answers contextualised judiciously and succinctly, they engaged with the scholarship rather than merely cite it, and—perhaps most gratifying of all—they seemed genuinely interested in what the authors had to say.

If we turn to the questions that had more than a handful of answers, good answers on Plato dwelt on the cave, or the guardians (especially their education), or the Forms; weaker answers spent too long on the city/soul analogy. Strong answers on Aristotle focused closely on the keywords "equality" and "virtue" in the question, sometimes discussing them in relation to the different forms of government, rather than distracted by other issues, such as the distinction between rich and poor or Aristotle's views about women. Good essays on Augustine dealt with questions of peace, coercion, and the obligation to serve as a solider. Candidates did well on Machiavelli to the extent that they were able to address the issues raised by the title quotation more precisely, rather than offering general thoughts about principalities versus republics. Candidates answering on More sometimes used Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty, but not always to strong effect; the richer answers were those that showed detailed knowledge of the text (and could discuss, where appropriate, More on women or slavery). Decent answers on Hobbes drew on Malcolm and Dunn, but there were some surprising misunderstandings in play here (e.g. that the covenant is with the sovereign, or that the quote was about restraining the sovereign). Essays on Locke sometimes made good use of commentators such as Laslett, Dunn, Tuck, Marshall, or Runciman.

Turning to Section B, stronger answers on the critics of Athenian democracy discussed the relevant texts, and considered a variety of them (answers sometimes focused too much on an individual author, such as Thucydides or Aristotle). On Renaissance humanism, candidates could get a long way by focusing on the question and showing knowledge of relevant texts: too many people discussed republics vs principalities instead, or offered bland summaries of what some humanists were sating, or showed

they had been reading Quentin Skinner without linking things up especially sharply to the question. And questions on tolerations did well to the extent that they dealt effectively with the word "inversion" in the question.

Please note of course that the POL7 syllabus has changed a great deal for 2023-24, so this Examiner's Report may be less directly useful for candidates preparing for the exam in future years—though Section A remains largely unchanged.

POL8: The History of Political Thought from 1700-1890
Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Ninety-one candidates sat the paper. There were sixteen Firsts, sixty-nine Upper Seconds, five Lower Seconds, and one Fail.

The usual points are the usual points: candidates did better to the extent to which they directly addressed the question on the exam paper, showed relevant knowledge of the key texts under consideration, drew where appropriate on the secondary scholarship and on any material from their lectures—but always engaging with the material rather than blandly summarising.

Turning to the individual questions—with the number of essays on each indicated in parentheses, most candidates could say something about the different kinds of parties discussed by Hume (6). Better answers contextualised discussion of the Essays with reference British party politics in Hume's time. On Montesquieu (8), most answers made some general points about the typology of governments, and the stronger answers were more textually-focused, with some candidates taking note of the particular role of moderation in aristocratic republics. The question on Rousseau was popular, as ever (31), and answers ranged in quality. The stronger answers were closely focused on the text and exhibited in some cases striking conceptual depth. Weaker answers often struggled with the distinction between sovereignty and government. There was an unusually high number of answers for the question on Smith (17) and some very knowledgeable responses that explored the role of ambition and emulation across both set texts. Weaker answers often focused exclusively on Smith's discussion of the dangers posed by emulation of wealth and fortune. The best answers on Burke (8) showed a good understanding of his argument and used the question as a jumping off point for exploring his thinking about manners, customs and social institutions. Weaker answers struggled to explain what 'the age of chivalry' might refer to. There were lots of answers on Wollstonecraft (31), as is common these days, and in general the strong answers were at home in discussing both texts and the relationship between them, while weaker answers hedged their bets rather than providing a direct answer to the question. Only one candidate answered on Kant (1) and did so well. The question on Bentham (6) was a straightforward one that was easily answerable if one consulted the Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, and the fact that dew did suggests weak textual knowledge on the part of candidates. Only a few answers on Constant (3), but good knowledge of the Principles of Politics was in evidence, though candidates did not appear to be familiar with the fact that the 1819 lecture was part of a series of lectures devoted to the English constitution. On Hegel (3) the essays were pitched at a high level. Both answers on Tocqueville (2) were broadly plausible, if not at the highest conceptual level. On Mill, popular as ever (21), most candidates could connect the quotation with broader themes in his thought, such as progress, the treatment of women, the role of class, empire, etc., but there were only a few standout responses. The question on Marx (13) was not so well answered: some candidates were able to say something about Marx's criticisms of the Young Hegelians, but 'Idealists' seemed to flummox many, and few drew the line between the connection and 'materialism'.

In Section B, there was just one answer on natural law and history (1). The question on luxury and commercial society (5) was not so popular this year. Better candidates made some reference to Fénelon as a critic of Louis XIV, but most floundered. On both the American Revolution (4) and the French Revolution (12) there were some strong, highly contextualised answers, though it would have been nice to see a bit more direct engagement with the primary texts. On the German Romantics (8) there was a good range of answers, mostly making plausible but not very exciting points about Herder. The question on women attracted a large number of answers (40): 'ultimate horizon' seems to have caused some candidates problems, while others were not able to distinguish what it might mean to think about 'civil and political rights' from what it might mean to think about other things (e.g. character, virtue, freedom, etc, etc.) There were some thoughtful answers to the question on early socialism (6) that engaged with

the texts and made creative arguments. With the question on nationality (12), weaker answers gave potted summaries of individual thinkers without fashioning an argument that responded to the question with any conceptual depth. Answers to the question on empire (26) were mostly underwhelming. Most candidates neglected one or other term in the phrase 'liberal nationalism', with only a few thinking about how the two might go together and how the resulting compound might relate to empire. Again, there was a tendency to give potted summaries of individual thinkers in evidence. Finally, on social science (2), there were only two answers.

POL8 will take on a different aspect from 2023-24, so this Examiner's Report will not be as directly relevant to future iterations of the exam paper as it has been over the last decade. But this should still nevertheless remain a reasonably useful document for candidates to consult.

POL9: Conceptual Issues and Texts in Politics and International Relations
Examiner: Professor Jeremy Green

The POL9 exam consisted of twelve essay questions that reflected the broad range of subjects and research interests covered by the Tripos' politics papers. 101 candidates sat the POL9 exam in this year. 21 of them achieved Firsts. A number of these were very high Firsts. Only 1 candidate scored below a Lower Second. On average, candidates were awarded a grade in the upper half of the Higher Second category.

The overall quality of the scripts was very high, with some really original and brilliantly executed answers that scored above 75. In general, answers were logically structured, consistently argued, and well supported by use of relevant examples. The best candidates developed highly original and insightful arguments, showing independence of thought and the outlines of a mature intellectual identity in answering the question. Those essays awarded marks at the top end of the range were very well-evidenced, highly accurate, and logically and persuasively argued. Stronger essays also made effective use of counter-arguments to reinforce the validity of their arguments. An appropriate range of academic literature was engaged in a perceptive, critical, and detailed manner.

Candidates scoring in the lower range in the exam tended to be deficient either in the provision of supporting examples, or substantive engagement with reasonable counter-arguments. In some scripts, marks were lost due to a failure to define or analyse key concepts. Maintaining a consistent and logically progressive argument was a challenge for other candidates. Weaker answers exhibited a tendency to deviate from the question in the development of their essay and to leverage knowledge and academic material that was not effectively matched with the question that they had chosen. As with any exam, answering the question and making use of appropriate academic material and examples is very important to performing well on this paper.

Four questions (2,5,9,12) were particularly popular, each drawing around double the number of answers compared to questions outside of this group. Some questions attracted very few responses (3&10). Once again this year, the ingenuity, insight and intellectual rigour of the answers was often extremely impressive. Candidates who managed to avoid the pitfalls of insubstantial evidence and argumentative inconsistency/incoherence generally performed very well and this was borne out by the strong average performance across the paper. Whether or not candidates had attended the classes and heeded the counsel provided was very immediately discernible within the quality of the answers.

POL10: The History of Political Thought from 1700-1890
Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

There were only six candidates for POL10, who between them received two Firsts, three Upper Seconds, and one Lower Second. One remarkable feature of the scripts, however, was that no question was attempted by more than two candidates, making it difficult to offer generalisations beyond the blandest of all bland platitudes, that it helps to answer the question.

POL11: Political Philosophy and the History of Political Thought since c.1890
Examiner: Professor Duncan Kelly

This year, 22 students took this paper from Part IIb HSPS, and 31 took it as a History paper, whether through the History Tripos specifically, or History & Politics, and two from History & Modern Languages. This year, History students and HSPS students took the paper online, in an open book, five-hour period, with a firm word limit of 4500 words total per script.

For a question paper with so many options, it was good to see that most questions received at least one answer (though there were some with none). This suggests students are revising on a wide set of topics – it remains good practice to be prepared for more than 3 answers only. There were some really excellent answers this year, pushing over the starred first category, and a great many very strong answers, in the high 2i to low 1st class band.

Overall then, these were an impressive set of scripts, especially for having been written in yet another unusual year of online open book exams. Successful scripts provided clear and direct answers to the questions asked, showing good textual knowledge, often challenging the question, and arguing a point that took historical and normative contexts seriously. Indeed, the most successful scripts managed to open up, rather than close down, the question, taking the examination as an opportunity to consider the wider conceptual stakes of what was being asked, and showing attention to the nuance behind a seemingly straightforward answer. Weaker scripts often interpreted the question reductively, so that it would read in line with previous examination questions, with the risk (especially high again for remote assessment) of appearing to rely on previous supervision material. Work that just re-packages supervision essays to answer differently focused questions, is unlikely to be able to do justice to the question. Again, and in line with earlier reports, and all the more important for remote assessment, the best answers combined conceptual sophistication and nimbleness with a deep base of historical knowledge and keen selection of relevant sources.

Also as noted last year, questions with a "two or more of the following" structure, or that otherwise invited a discussion of a subset from a list of authors, pose a particular kind of challenge. Here, offering a paragraph-by-paragraph summary of several authors in turn could produce some interesting essays, but in general did not generate first-class results. The strongest essays selected authors based on relevance to the question asked; even if the reasons for the selection were not initially obvious, the essay generated a justification for its selection through the argument about the authors' interconnections and the insights those connections might yield on the question as posed. In some cases, the best essays could still move author by author, yet would do so in a way that remained anchored in the question asked, avoiding irrelevant summary, and that was structured around a running argument, rather than appearing as a list of similarities and differences (or, in the lower II.1 range, a list of authors).

Making use of your own knowledge to do well on this exam requires close attention to texts, in a manner that goes beyond lecture material, and the best responses were able to treat texts for nuance, shifting views across time, and to highlight ambiguities, while also taking a stance on how we understand their status as both philosophical projects and political interventions.

POL12: The Politics of the Middle East

Examiner: Dr Glen Rangwala

The quality of scripts for this paper remains high, with the large majority of students writing accurate essays that drew upon a good range of literature and examples. This year it was especially encouraging to see that the essays were mostly well-focused; there were only a relatively small number of essays that were weighted towards providing general background information instead of providing an answer, or which seemed to be missing the point of the question.

This generally high standard is demonstrated by the marks awarded, in which 6 of the 26 scripts were given marks of 70+ by the examiners, and a further 12 scripts had marks in the 65-69 range. Out of the 8 remaining scripts, 6 were in the range of 60 to 64, with only 2 scripts below 60, both with marks of 58. There was no apparent variation between the different tracks and Triposes; out of the 6 students with marks of 70+, three were on the HSPS Politics single track, one was on the joint track with Sociology, one was in the History & Politics Tripos and one was in the Asian & Middle Eastern Studies Tripos. Each question was taken by at least one student. By far the most popular question was the one on the mini-subject, in which 19 students answered either the question on the Gaza Strip in the Israel-Palestine conflict or the one on China's role in the Middle East. Out of the other questions, the ones on the legacy of the mode of independence (q.1) and on Middle Eastern diasporas (q.10) were the most popular, each drawing 10 answers.

There were few common problems across the scripts. A few scripts included a detailed account of a specific case, often with a good focus on relevant material, but didn't relate the case-based material to more general arguments. Others gave lots of short examples, again usually accurately, but resulting in a somewhat superficial argument. These essays generally ended up with marks in the mid-60s. A few essays to the questions that asked 'why' (qq.9 and 12b) gave answers that did not appreciate that this was requiring a causal explanation, but instead answered the question as if it had been asking 'how'. Two scripts contained unfinished last essays, which was somewhat surprising to see in a 5-hour open book exam; one of the scripts, that otherwise contained two fairly high-quality answers, fell below 60 in its final mark because of this.

Overall, the standard of writing and analysis remains encouragingly high on this paper, and its students are generally fluent and knowledgeable across a wide range of subjects concerning the modern Middle East.

POL13: British and European Politics
Examiner: Dr Julie Smith

POL13 was assessed for the fourth year running through an online open-book exam, this time with a five-hour window in which students were required to answer three questions. 40 students took the exam: 27 from HSPS, 9 from History and Politics, and 4 from Economics. 30 students answered three questions on British Politics, 5 students answered three questions on the European Union, and 5 drew on questions from both modules.

As in 2022, the overall standard of work was mostly competent, but only a few scripts showed the sustained fluency and independence of thought required to secure a mark in the mid 70s. On the British Politics side there was a reasonably broad spread of answers, with the questions on New Labour (23 answers) and Thatcherism (14 answers) attracting the most takers, but also considerable interest in constitutional reform, immigration policy, and politics since 2010 (10 answers each) and the 1945-64 period (7 answers). On the EU side, questions 15 ('Do "no" votes in referendums on EU issues show the strength or weakness of democracy in Europe?) and 12 ('Does the "Franco-German couple" still matter?') were the most popular. The strongest answers were invariably distinguished by the fact that candidates knew the literature deeply and broadly enough to be able to offer a really precise and well-justified answer to the question. Weaker scripts were often held back by a tendency to reproduce supervision material and/or by a lack of detailed knowledge: for instance, many candidates knew quite a lot about Margaret Thatcher's leadership and policy impact but relatively little about the elections she fought, particularly 1987.

POL14: US Foreign Policy

Examiner: Dr Steven Ward

40 students attempted the POL 14 exam in 2022-23. Of these, there were 9 1sts, 26 2.1s, 5 2.2s, and 0 3rds. The highest overall score was 75; the lowest overall score was 51; the average score was 65; the median score was 66; the standard deviation was 8.77. In general, I was quite impressed with the quality of the exam scripts.

The exam's format asked student to choose one question from each of three sections. These were designed to provide comprehensive coverage of all the material covered in the paper. Each section included five questions from which the students could choose one.

Students clearly gravitated toward some questions more than others. In Part I of the exam (covering theory and concepts), 12 students answered question 1 (on realism and US foreign policy), 4 students answered question 2 (on public opinion and foreign policy), 3 students answered question 3 (on polarization), 8 students answered question 4 (on the 2024 election), and 13 students answered question 5 (on whiteness and US foreign policy). In Part II of the exam (covering the evolution of US foreign policy), 10 students answered question 6 (on shifts in US grand strategy), 5 students answered question 7 (on the balance of power between Congress and the Executive), 14 students answered question 8 (on status, economic concerns, and security), 9 students answered question 9 (on the similarities and differences between major US military interventions), and 2 students answered question 10 (on the relationship between power and security). In Part III of the exam (covering contemporary issues and debates), 17 students answered question 11 (on NATO enlargement), 7 students answered question 12 (on the relationship between the Russia-Ukraine War and the US commitment to Taiwan), 8 students answered question 13 (on nuclear weapons), 1 student answered question 14 (on climate change), and 7 students answered question 15 (on the United States' position in the world). Some of this variation likely represents variation in how much emphasis different topics received in lectures and supervisions; some may also represent variation in the perceived complexity of questions.

Essays that scored exceptionally well shared some common characteristics. They 1) offered a clear answer to the question; 2) demonstrated mastery of relevant material from the paper (both readings and lectures); 3) clearly defined all terms and concepts; 4) exhibited a significant degree of originality, in the sense that the argument developed went well beyond simply summarizing readings or lectures; 5) were well-structured, well-organized, and clearly-written.

Essays that scored poorly also shared some common characteristics. They often 1) failed to answer the question asked, or offered an answer to a question that had not been asked; 2) failed to demonstrate mastery of relevant material from the paper, due to a combination of sins of omission (ignoring obviously relevant material) or commission (interpreting or summarizing material from the paper incorrectly or ineffectively); 3) failed to define key terms and concepts; 4) failed to demonstrate originality, by declining to go beyond summarizing material from readings and lectures; 5) were poorly organized, poorly structured, poorly written, and generally difficult to follow.

A final note is in order on the relationship between supervisions and exams. Students sometimes express anxiety about whether the questions on the exam would match questions on which they had prepared supervision essays. The implication is that some students expect to use supervision essays as, essentially, templates for or drafts of exam essays. This view is misguided and is an obstacle to success on the exam. The objective of the exam is to incentivize students to master material across the entire paper, in a way that allows them to synthesize ideas from different parts of the class. To that end, the construction of exam questions is aimed at 1) offering students the opportunity to demonstrate that ability; and 2) rewarding students who read and learn broadly across the paper guide, rather than restricting themselves to preparing to answer only specific questions related to a small handful of topics. The latter approach was sometimes reflected in unsuccessful answers that appeared to rely heavily on recycled material from supervision essays. This is an understandably tempting practice given recent changes in the administration of exams, but it results in essays that are disjointed, poorly directed, and that do not provide full, coherent answers to questions posed in the prompt. It is, in short, not an effective path to a first-class exam script.

POL15: The Politics of Africa
Examiner: Dr Sharath Srinivasan

Twenty three scripts were received from students taking POL15 exam this year. Six of these were from History and Politics and the rest were HSPS. Students selected three questions to respond to from a list of sixteen possible question choices (corresponding roughly with each lecture topic over the course of the year). The questions were designed to be nuanced and specific enough to encourage students to address the question posed rather than drawing on pre-prepared content. The majority of the scripts received marks distributed across the 60-69 range (18). Five students achieved marks in the 70-79 range while the highest mark received was a 75. No students performed below a mark of 60. The lowest mark was a 61 (and on this the last question was less developed and seemed to have run out of time). The average mark was 67.1 and the standard deviation 4.5. Students had a five-hour window to respond to their chosen three questions and a word limit of not more than 4500 words.

Students who did especially well offered clear argument(s) in their answers rather than summaries of course readings evidencing and anchoring these arguments with at least one example. Questions 13 (international humanitarian aid/peacebuilding), 1 (what ways the study of 'African' politics is the student of world politics) and 3 (sovereignty versus self-determination) were the most popular. Only two people answered question 7 (on 'neopatrimonialism' and political authority) though this resulted in a the highest average mark on a question (72). The rest ranged from an average of 63-69.5. Only one question, 9 (on the working class in Africa), had no attempts. The exams in the upper (70+) range demonstrated a strong authorial voice, made clear the scope of their arguments, engaged with diverse readings in a consistent and compelling manner clearly distinguishing their own theoretical and empirical points. The best answers demonstrated an agility with conceptual or theoretical arguments by grounding them in their knowledge of empirical case studies. The strongest answers drew from across the paper and developed a distinctive perspective on key debates to draw out their relevance in specific contexts. Some of the weaker answers either did not directly address the terms of the question, used evidence more superficially, for instance with a passing reference to a country, or made relatively unnuanced conceptual arguments without developing them.

Overall, the POL15 Examiners were very pleased with the students' results and the way they engaged with the questions in insightful and convincing ways. In general, there was an impressive breadth of knowledge and agility with the key debates, theoretical and conceptual material from the course that students harnessed to engage with the questions of African politics that most concern them.

POL16: Conflict and Peacebuilding
Examiner: Dr Devon Curtis

There were 39 candidates for this paper. We were very pleased to see the quality of the exam scripts. It is clear that many candidates engaged extensively with the material and were able to sustain powerful arguments and insights.

Of the 39 candidates, 12 candidates received first class marks. Out of these, 8 candidates received first class marks from both examiners and 4 candidates received a first class mark from one examiner and a high 2.1 mark from the other examiner. There were 26 candidates with 2.1 marks from both examiners. Only one candidate received a 2.2 mark.

We were impressed with the way in which most candidates were able to critically assess the arguments and ideas found in the literature. The best answers successfully evaluated different perspectives and developed effective arguments. There was a skilful use of both primary and secondary sources and we were pleased to see the range of empirical examples that were drawn on by candidates to provide evidence. Weaker responses at the lower 2.1 range did not always manage to sustain an argument or presented vague evidence. A few scripts did not contain enough references to existing literature/ sources.

Every exam question was attempted by at least one candidate. The most popular questions were Q5 on humanitarian aid (answered by 19 candidates), Q11 on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (answered by 13 candidates) and Q9 on alternatives to state-building. There were a number of very interesting answers to Q1 and we were pleased to see how candidates were able to connect a number of different course themes and examples. Other answers to this question were not a strong due to vague assertions and a lack of evidence for arguments. Answers to Q2 (on state 'fragility' and health/ environment) and Q4 (peace negotiations and gender) were consistently strong, with some of the best answers providing

interesting critiques of the notion of state fragility. Q3 (on Cambridge and conflict) had the highest average mark. Several candidates provided innovative and sophisticated answers to the question and showed a good understanding of the complexities surrounding violence. Q5 was also very well done, with most candidates paying attention to the question on consequences. A couple of candidates, however, unfortunately veered from the question and provided more general accounts of humanitarian assistance. Some candidates struggled with Q6 (on power-sharing) and this ended up being the question with the lowest average mark. Mostly, this was due to the fact that some candidates disregarded one part of the question, and instead provided a balance sheet of the advantages and disadvantages of power-sharing.

The answers to Q7 (on technology) tended to be strong, although those on the lower end were not fully coherent and/ or strayed from the question, while the best answer discussed technological rationalities. Q8 (justice and economic reform) was a difficult question but candidates coped well, with several strong answers that made good use of the readings and examples. Likewise, Q9 (state-building) and Q10 (ddr) showed that many candidates had the ability to answer questions by drawing on material from across the course. We were impressed by candidates' fluency and ability to make interesting connections. Both case study questions on the DR Congo and the Rohingya crisis were well done. We were pleased to see that candidates had acquired strong knowledge of these cases and were able to relate these cases to wider themes and material from the rest of the course.

Overall, the examiners were very pleased with the scripts, and the ability of candidates to produce thoughtful, coherent and well-argued answers.

POL17: Politics and Gender
Examiner: Dr Lauren Wilcox

The 2022-2023 exam for POL 17 was sat by 38 candidates in an open note, typed exam administered via Moodle. Candidates choose three questions to answer out of a choice of eleven, with a word limit of 4500 total. Overall candidates did well, with an average mark of 67.5 (which would round to a 68) with a standard deviation of 4.4. There were thirteen average marks of 70 and over for a first, about 1/3 of the class. The rest of the candidates scored at 60 to 69.4, for a 2.1.

The most popular question was #6, on problems related to gender/sexuality in humanitarianism and/or development, with 21 attempts, and the average here was close to the overall average, at 68.3. One of the less popular questions, #7, a different framing of the question of humanitarian action in relation to the possibility of inaction was only attempted by five candidates but the average was the highest for any question at 70.4, which suggests this was a rewarding question for particularly confident candidates. On the other hand, the question with the lowest overall mark was #1, on gender inequality and democratic politics, in which 13 candidates attempted, one of the most popular, to an average of 64.5.

Regardless of question attempted, the best essays went well beyond a recitation of lectures and points from core readings to produce creative interpretations of events and situations that used a variety of material include multiple perspectives from across the course, while also maintaining a strong argument and structure. The strongest essays also considered alternatives to their arguments and incorporated reasonable critiques into the structure of their arguments to strengthen them, while also using a variety of examples.

Some of the weaker answers skirted the actual question that was asked (suggesting some copy/pasting of supervision material), had vague or muddled arguments that lacked a clear throughline, or lacked examples to illustrate their points. Some also did not stray far from basic points made in the lectures.

POL18: The Politics of the International Economy
Examiner: Dr Jeremy Green

32 candidates sat the POL18 exam this year. 6 candidates received a 1st class mark, 24 received a 2:1, 2 candidates received a 2:2.

The quality of the scripts was high again this year, with nearly all candidates demonstrating extensive knowledge and keen understanding across the topics examined. Answers at the 1st and upper 2:1 level were characterised by stronger and more consistent argument, the ability to develop and apply a more analytical framework, greater empirical knowledge and accuracy, and a deeper level of insight and originality. Wider reading was reflected in a more distinctive and intellectually creative responses to the questions. Students that develop their own framework for thinking about topics, going beyond the core readings, tended to produce more insightful and original arguments.

Weaker answers tended to exhibit a strong command of the relevant and knowledge alongside understanding of the topic, but they sometimes erred too much towards a descriptive account of the topic and failed to develop and mobilise a forceful thesis. Some of the answers were too deferential to the existing scholarship, recapping arguments without developing any critical engagement. The weakest answers were characterised by their descriptive nature, a tendency to lose focus on answering the question, and too much ambiguity surrounding the thesis.

The most popular topics were the rise of the West, China's rise, and green transition. More candidates engaged with green transition this year, but the average quality of the responses was a little lower than for the other two popular topics. There were very few answers to the questions on the breakdown of Bretton Woods, the 1970s crisis, and the creation of the euro.

POL20: Religion and Politics
Examiner: Dr Iza Hussin

14 students took the POL20 exam this year. The average mark was 67, with three students receiving a first, ten a 2.1, and one a 2.2.

Every question had at least one attempt, with the most popular questions being 10, with 9 answers, 2 with 7 answers, and 7, with 6 answers.

In general, it remains clear that students who had independently considered the course readings and supervision questions, and placed them in the context provided by lectures and seminars, performed well across the board. Strong answers addressed the questions with clarity from their introductions, providing clear empirical support of the arguments, a clear structure, a consideration of counter-arguments, and a firm grasp of the conceptual issues at stake in debates over "religion," "secularization," "modernity," etc. They combined this with engagement and critique of the major relevant theoretical perspectives, placing them in conversation with each other, but without simply summarising the theories. They explicitly considered which empirical cases worked best to illustrate their arguments, and made clear how the cases demonstrated variation, critical junctures, or similarities which elaborated upon the analysis presented.

Less successful answers typically did not address the actual question, showed a more limited grasp of key concepts, made unfounded assertions, summarised readings without providing arguments in response to the questions, and/or leaned heavily on a limited range of readings. At times, these showed evidence of having been drawn without further careful thought from supervision essays or notes, and needed to have been better deployed to directly answer the questions posed.

POL21: The Politics of the Future
Examiner: Prof Duncan Bell

There were 14 candidates for Pol 21. As usual, assessment was via two Long Essays. The average mark for the course was 68, with the highest scoring candidate achieving 78, the lowest, 62. The overall standard of the scripts was pleasingly high.

Candidates chose a wide range of essays. For Essay 1, the most popular questions clustered around eugenics and the biological sciences (divided between answers on the utopian dimensions of eugenics and the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman), but other students answers on political realism, on H. G.

Wells, and on pre-WWI invasion scare literature. For Essay 2, the transhumanism and longtermism topics proved the most popular. The strongest answers were those that pushed beyond the material covered in the lectures and seminars.

POL22: Politics and Public Policy
Examiner: Margarita Gelepithis

Number of candidates for the paper: 29. The overall quality of answers was very good. The average mark was 68, with a standard deviation of 5.4. The lowest agreed mark for a script was 52. The highest agreed mark for a script was 75.

Does it make a difference what party is in power, as to whose preferences are represented in policymaking?
Most answers successfully contrasted theories of partisan adaptation to theories of partisan selection and maintained a focus on preferences rather than interests. In weaker answers, discussion of the median voter was superficial or inaccurate. The strongest answers drew accurately on theories from across the first term of the module.
Does public policy disproportionately reflect business interests?
Most strong answers centred on the concepts of structural and/or organisational power. Weaker answers did not acknowledge/critique the theoretical and empirical basis for the premise of the question. The strongest answers departed from Culpepper/Lohmann.
"The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." Does this statement by John Maynard Keynes overstate the importance of ideas in public policy?
This question produced the lowest average mark (65) compared to other questions on the paper, but also two of the highest marks on the paper. The strongest answers were highly original, while also showing understanding of the relevant theoretical debates and of their supporting evidence.
How can the construction of normative arguments change the path of policy?
Weaker answers here tended to describe normative arguments associated with policy change. Stronger answers a) engaged with the social/political construction of these normative arguments, or b) engaged with the concept of path dependence. This was the most commonly answered question.
Would electoral reform improve public policymaking in majoritarian political systems?
The strongest answers a) engaged in counterfactual reasoning to unpack the expected effect of electoral reform, critically assessing the causal links between electoral systems and the policy outcomes with which they are associated; b) clearly set out what was meant by 'improved' public policymaking.
To what extent are policy makers constrained by previous policy choices?
The strongest answers were explicit about the mechanisms of path-dependence in the examples discussed.
Is public policy inherently political?
The strongest answers here a) clearly set out what was meant by 'political' and b) went beyond electoral politics to acknowledge the political aspects of policy preference formation and policy expertise. This was the least commonly answered question.
Why are some policy problems intractable?
Most answers drew on the 'wicked problems' literature to answer this question. The strongest answers were those that went further, linking this literature to the 'three I's' introduced in the first term of the module.