

Response to Feedback, 2022-23

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10th October 2023

POL1

In general the paper is in a good shape: the 59 responses received were from students who were in general satisfied with the paper: apart from five who were “somewhat dissatisfied” with the content of the paper, the only other dissatisfaction recorded was one student who was “very dissatisfied” with the content, and one who was “somewhat dissatisfied” with the lectures. For 2023/24 there are a few changes to report. Professor Runciman is on leave, so not delivering his usual lectures, and so lecturing is now shared out between Professor Helen Thompson (12 lectures), Dr Glen Rangwala (10 lectures), and Dr Christopher Brooke (10 lectures). Unusually, all three lecturers will be contributing to all three Sections of the paper, A, B, and C. Two topics have been dropped from Section B: Parties & Voters, and the Class Distribution of Wealth (popularly referred to as “oligarchy”), replaced by a topic on Carl Schmitt’s *Concept of the Political* and one on arguments around the idea of a “liberal democratic peace”. There has also been a bit of reorganisation: Section A will be Hobbes, Weber, Constant, Hayek, and Arendt; Section B will be the US Founding, Tocqueville, Schumpeter, material prosperity, the liberal peace, and the end of representative democracy; and Section C will be Marx, Gandhi, Schmitt, Fanon, and MacKinnon.

POL2

POL2 received a major overhaul and update in 2022/23, we expect 2023/24 to be a period of consolidating these changes and adapting to student feedback on the new structure and content. Students will now have a past exam paper in the new two-question thematic format to assist with their revisions, an absence that created some anxiety in 2022/23. There is a slightly reduced workload on the paper in terms of lectures and readings compared with last year. The fact that the core readings are the essential resource for lectures, supervision essays and especially the exam now receives even more emphasis than before to further clarify expectations right from the outset of the academic year.

POL3

It is nice to see that the majority of students are highly satisfied with the lectures for POL3 and the vast majority satisfied with both the lectures, content, and course guide. In response to concerns about student workload the number of essay-based supervisions were cut from six to five in 2021/22, and the assigned readings reduced. This seems to have worked very well, and we will continue to keep an eye on workload this year, making more of the readings listed on the course guide ‘recommended’ rather than ‘required’.

POL4

Feedback for POL4 for the academic year 2022/2023 was generally positive though there is always room for improvement. POL4 is a very large paper with a complex structure, including modules taught by multiple individuals in Michaelmas Term and a general section

in Lent term, also taught by a large number of supervisors. In response to feedback about the complex structure of the course, part of the introductory lecture was devoted to explaining the course. At the same time, stress was placed on the nature of the comparative approach in order to help tie the modules together with the later part of the course. Feedback has been varied across the large number of supervisors and specific concerns will be taken up with individual supervisors. POL4 is challenging in terms of workload and the approach to supervision essays is flexible, where the requirements for one supervision can be an essay plan rather than a finished essay.

Africa: Kenya and Tanzania

We only received a limited number of responses for the Africa module. Next year, the module will revert back to a comparison of Rwanda and Burundi

Eastern Europe: Poland and Russia

It was good to see that most of the students were quite satisfied with both the lectures and the delivery of supervisions. I have passed on the criticism regarding written feedback to my other supervisor and will make sure that the new supervisors on this paper are instructed accordingly.

Western Europe: Germany and France

It is good to see that the large majority of the students who provided feedback were satisfied with the module. It will run in a similar format and with very similar content (although updated for some recent events). There were some issues with providing timely feedback on essays by one of the supervisors this past year, and we will make sure to avoid such issues next year. The core reading lists for the supervision essays consist of a relatively small number of articles and book chapters, and the workload for the supervisions seems reasonable.

Middle East: Syria and Iraq

The POL4 option on Syria and Iraq was new this year, replacing the option on Iran and Saudi Arabia. Feedback was generally positive, if a little bit less so than the previous pairing. While comments were mostly positive, a few responses mentioned that the lectures were quite dense. For 2023/24, more effort will be put into scene-setting at the start, and into encouraging students to read some of the background histories before the lectures start, which will help greatly in grounding students' understanding. The comments on the supervisions were very encouraging, so even if the lectures are sometimes a bit content-heavy, the students seem to have come away from the course with a good understanding of the politics of these two countries.

South-East Asia: Thailand and Myanmar

The module will not be offered in 2023/24. For any future iterations, a special effort will be made to address workload-related concerns, for example by pruning the reading list and providing stronger guidance to students.

POL5 / POL19

Student satisfaction with POL5 and POL19 was high last year—just one student reported being somewhat dissatisfied with the choice of essay questions, and one was dissatisfied with the organisation of supervisions—and students repeatedly express satisfaction at being able to work in greater depth than they are able to do for supervision essays. Comments on individual supervisors were generally positive. There was one complaint about there being few questions on China in Lent Term; that was regrettable, but owed to factors outside the control of the course organiser. For 2023/24 we have a completely new list of eighty-nine questions.

POL6

The student feedback was limited, but the course organiser had the impression (based on interactions in the practical sessions for the paper) that the students were generally satisfied with the paper. The structure and content of the paper will be similar next year, and it will be emphasised more strongly than before that students should start with their project as soon as possible in Lent Term. The supervision exercises for Part I of the paper will be slightly reduced in length to keep the workload for this part of the paper manageable.

POL7

There were only nine responses to the survey, which is not many for a large Part IIA paper, and only a small amount of dissatisfaction reported (one somewhat dissatisfied with the content of the paper, one somewhat dissatisfied with the lectures, and one dissatisfied). The paper has been completely reorganised for 2023/24, now that the History Faculty's programme of Tripos reform has reached the second-year papers. The change to Section A is that Marsilius of Padua is replacing Thomas Aquinas as a set author. The changes to Section B are more far-reaching, with a broad reorganisation of topics, some of which are designated "themes" that can be studied across the whole sweep of the period. Subjects that are new to the syllabus include gender, animals, and Islamic political thought. The way lectures work—itsself the object of criticism in some of the comments—will also change, with fewer lectures in all, occupying fewer slots in the timetable: there will now be 32 lectures for POL7, 16 in each of Michaelmas and Lent Terms. In general also reading lists are now shorter (also the subject of complaint in the qualitative section of the feedback we received).

POL8 / 10

This was the last year in which the existing syllabus for POL8 and POL10 would run. For next year, as the History Tripos reforms enter their second year, both the syllabus and the course guide have been comprehensively rewritten with substantial input from POLIS. It is fair to say that feedback for this year was more mixed than in previous years. Twenty students responded to the survey, which did not distinguish between POL8 and POL10, and which appears also to have included some students taking History and Politics, notwithstanding that they take the History version of the paper. 55% of students reported themselves very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the content of the paper; 20% were neutral and 25% somewhat or very dissatisfied. The chief complaint on this score was of the 'Eurocentric' focus of the paper and we received an interesting and constructive proposal for a comparative political thought paper, modelled after POL4. The question of wider global coverage has been a matter given deep consideration in the course of the reform of the paper. In its new incarnation, students will encounter a range of texts from India, from the

Transatlantic African diaspora, and from the Americas as part of Section B topics. Topics on the Atlantic Revolutions (including Haiti), on slavery, and the revised topic on Empire will encourage a wider perspective on the transformation of global politics in the period. Additionally, though this issue was not raised in feedback this year, many more women political thinkers will appear in a range of Section B topics. Nevertheless, the focus of Section A of the paper will remain on the established canonical thinkers (less Constant and Bentham, who move into Section B topics). The formative influence of these thinkers on the development of political theory across the globe over the last century and a half is unavoidable, and it is for that reason that they remain a crucial focal point for study and research in leading universities on every continent. It is not possible to understand the development of twentieth and early twenty-first century political thought, including anti-colonial and postcolonial political thought, without reference to them and the ways in which their ideas have been used, appropriated and criticised.

On the question of the course guide and reading lists, the responses were again mixed. 60% reported themselves very satisfied or satisfied; 10% neutral; and 30% somewhat or very dissatisfied. The main complaint was that reading lists were excessively long and not well enough signposted. On this, we are in complete agreement with those students who reported themselves dissatisfied. The reading lists have, in the past, been produced by the History Faculty, and it has long been a bone of contention that, over time, they have expanded with little attempt to exercise some discipline in length. The POLIS guide has previously tried to address this by breaking up the lists into 'suggested reading' and 'further reading' sections, but this could not address the root of the problem. For the new guide, the reading lists have been entirely rewritten in collaboration with the History Faculty. All now begin with a short general reading section, in which will be found introductory and general works appropriate for supervision reading. Following this there are thematically-organised further reading sections, designed for post-supervision follow-up and revision reading. Set text lists have also been streamlined, and clearer guidance is provided on what is expected for Section B readings where the choice of primary texts to cover is left to the discretion of supervisors. Two points should, however, be noted. Firstly, it has always been the case that supervisors were expected to provide students with further guidance on managing reading lists. This has not changed. Secondly, as is emphasised each year in the introductory lecture, the focus of the paper is on the set texts, not on covering a wide range of secondary readings. The secondary reading lists are not checklists to be worked through, but a resource for students who wish to pursue further reading in relation to areas of the topic that interest them. Turning to lectures, which are organised by the History Faculty, 40% reported themselves satisfied or very satisfied, 25 % neutral; and 35% somewhat or very dissatisfied. Some of the issues related to poor timetabling, and to this complaint we would like to add our own voice. Timetabling was unusually poor this year, with multiple versions of the lecture timetable, differing substantially in detail, circulating online. Further problems were caused by the History Faculty scheduling lectures across town, forcing HSPS and H&P students with Politics lectures on the Sidgwick Site to arrive late. Communication between the Departmental offices over lecture timetabling must improve, and the History Faculty should be strongly encouraged to abandon the recently-adopted practice of finalising lecture timetables so late. Beyond this, one student noted that they would prefer a fixed order for lectures that tracked the course of supervision study. Given that there is no fixed combination of topics studied by students taking the paper, and possible combinations are very varied, this is not possible. We encourage the History convenors to think about moving to a more regular ordering of lectures in line with the chronology of topics; or else to concentrate Section A lectures in Michaelmas, and Section B in Lent. The principal

constraint on this is the need to accommodate lecturers on academic leave, something that will again be an issue next year. We are promised that they will revisit the issue. Finally, one student taking POL10 objected to a lecturer reading a scripted lecture. I cannot share their view that this is unacceptable practice unworthy of this university. Where complex conceptual distinctions are being made, lecturers may well prefer not to extemporise. Equally, for a text-based paper, discussion of the texts in detail is not incidental to the exercise of lecturing, but central.

On a much more positive note, the supervisions organised by POLIS received almost unanimously positive feedback, with the vast majority of students reporting themselves very satisfied with the supervision they had received, and only one negative comment on feedback for a supervisor supplied independently by one of the colleges. Students continue to feel well supported by supervisors for this paper. This is a strong foundation on which to build and it is to be hoped that with the launch of the new syllabus and course guide, many of the issues raised above will have been addressed.

POL9

For a paper taken by several dozen Part IIB Politics students, we received very little substantive feedback, so we would not want to lean too hard on what it said, and owing to the delayed Examining operation this year, we cannot (yet?) make the traditional comment that although students worry about POL9, because it is unlike papers they have taken before, they do just as well on this paper as on the others for which they are being assessed. But the paper does seem to have settled down now around having a dozen essay titles, and that does provide a decent level of choice.

POL11

From a small sampling, it is difficult to determine a general trend, but on the basis of this data, the majority of respondents were satisfied or better about all aspects of the course, from paper guide to supervision and lectures. Only a couple of people seemed dissatisfied with lectures overall. In response to the positive and constructive comments provided, for next year, colleagues will be asked (as they were last year) to flag the topics and focus of their lectures in advance for students, and it is worth noting that we are in the process of drawing up proposed revisions to several of the topics and thinkers on the paper, to put forward for consideration to the History Faculty and POLIS.

POL12

The feedback on POL12 was very encouraging this year, and it was very good to see how much respondents to the survey appreciated both the lectures and the supervisions. The only element that drew some critical comments was the 'mini-subjects' in Lent Term. In 2023/24, we are putting on three mini-subjects (expanding from two in the previous year), so students have some more choice. There will also be work put into improving the quality of feedback from the supervisions on one of the mini-subjects.

POL13

The lecture course continues to be popular. In general the response rate is so low that it is hard to draw robust conclusions. In order to deliver this course to so many students,

supervisions are delivered by a mixture of experienced academics and PhD students; we are pleased that the vast majority of students have been satisfied with supervision arrangements, but if anyone encounters problems, they should flag them up with the paper organiser as soon as possible. Comments about individual supervisors are being considered with care.

POL14

POL14 has been heavily revised for the 2023/24 academic year. The paper is now focused more broadly on ‘international security’, rather than on US foreign policy and makes two key changes to the mode of teaching. First, while the POL14 exam previously contained three sections and required students to answer one question from each, the new version of the paper will have an exam broken into only two sections, and will require students to answer *at least one* question from each. This is directly responsive to feedback from the 2021/22 version of the paper from students who were uncomfortable with the three section organization. Second, POL14 now requires students to compose full essays for only four of the six supervisions – the other supervisions can be devoted to other activities (such as in-depth discussions of readings).

POL15

Although there was regrettably no formal feedback from students in 2022/23, in response to valuable informal feedback received in recent years, and to align with departmental standardisation of third year papers, the paper has been restructured. Substantively, the core themes of the paper are now all covered in Michaelmas Term. In Lent Term, there are three new modules covering contemporary themes and debates in greater depth. The delivery model has also changed, with more lectures than previous (25 versus 17) and fewer classes (two versus six). This will reduce the reading workload for the paper. For 2023-24, the supervisions remain three per term, with a revision supervision in Easter Term.

POL16

We were very pleased with the feedback for POL 16, with all respondents indicating that they were satisfied with all aspects of the course. We were particularly happy to see the positive comments about several of our supervisors. The paper will be replaced by POL16 The Politics of Global China in 2023/24.

POL17

We received relatively little feedback but what we did was mostly very positive about both the lectures and supervision. Students had mixed views on the practice of having different supervisors for each supervision; some desire more continuity, others appreciate learning from different supervisors with diverse areas of expertise. Due to the challenges of locating sufficient supervisors for this popular course, the practice of having some supervisors concentrate on particular themes on the course will likely continue.

In response to concerns over workload, in 2023/24 POL 17 will allow students to substitute one supervision essay per term (so up to two overall) with an outline and brief presentation, as long as the supervision this is chosen for is indicated well ahead of time. In 2023/24, POL17 will lecture on the theme of Power and the Body earlier in the year, and will condense the theme of Gender and Representation into the broader category of Gender and Inequality.

We will also add two lecture hours on the theme of Gender, Climate, and the Environment without a corresponding supervision option: students will be given the option to incorporate this material into supervisions on Development or Social Movements as well as in their broad ranging practice exam essays in Easter Term.

POL18

The feedback for the paper for last year was encouraging. In light of Jeremy Green's leave, the need to keep refreshing the content of the paper in view of a changing economic and political world, and the chance to offer more teaching on the Global South, there are some revisions to the lecture content for this coming academic year. Pedro Mendes Loureiro will give four lectures in Lent Term on the Global South on Liberalisation and Development, the Financialisation of Development, Resource Nationalism and Extractivism, and Polycrisis and the Global South. The other revised topics—either new or reframed—will be: The Chimerican International Economic Order, After the Crash: the political economy of debt in an age of QE, After the Crash: the political economy of democratic rebellion, Uncoupling Chimerica: the US-China tech war, the Energy Transition: the new world of resource competition, the Energy Transition: the return of industrial policy, degrowth, and western democratic stability, Global Financial Hierarchy, and the Polycrisis?

POL20

Feedback indicates that the readings and course structure are positive features of the course and support learning well; new themes will be introduced and area coverage altered in order to cover a diverse area of the field in future iterations of the paper. But Politics and Religion will be replaced by Politics of Latin America in 2023/24.

POL21

POL21 remains largely unchanged from last year. We have updated the reading list slightly, to accommodate recently-published work. We have also changed the wording of the course description slightly to clarify expectations about reading.

POL22

The response rate was low (16%), and only three students left comments. All respondents were satisfied with the lectures, the content of the paper, and the paper guide/reading list. Respondents were also generally satisfied with the supervisions, although some variation in supervisor responsiveness and in the quality of essay feedback is apparent in the comments. This variation is noted, and informs the organisation of supervisions in 2023/24. In response to other student comments, changes to the 2023/24 paper guide clarifies how students are expected to answer the Lent Term supervision essay questions, and how the Lent Term lectures/seminars/readings relate to the paper's objectives and assessment. These clarifications should also help POL22 students identify the flexibility they have to manage their workload for this paper over the course of the year.