



HUMAN, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE TRIPOS

POL PAPERS

PART II EXAMINERS' REPORTS

2016-2017

REPORT FROM THE SENIOR EXAMINER

This was my first year in the role of Senior Examiner for Politics and International Relations. Four things in particular made an otherwise quite daunting role much more straightforward than it might have been. First, there were no further major changes to procedures, after last year's transferral of responsibility for Part II from the HSPS Board to the Politics Examiners, so it was more a matter of supervising the operation of an existing machine, rather than trying to engineer new parts. Second, I was assisted in the closing stages of the Examining process in particular by our two excellent and experienced External Examiners, Professor Louise Fawcett (Oxford) and Professor Matthew Festenstein (York). They have both now come to the end of their three-year stints in the role, and if we can replace them next year with examiners of equal ability, we will be fortunate indeed. Third, I was always able to consult with my predecessor, Dr Glen Rangwala, who was always willing both to explain to me why things were as they were, and to offer judicious advice—I am also grateful to him for serving as Acting Senior Examiner for a few days during the Exam Period when I was out of the country. Finally, I—and all the other Examiners—received exemplary administrative support from Ms Patrycja Koziol and Miss Helen Williams in the POLIS office.

In terms of logistics, the main challenge concerned POL4. This was a paper that was sat on Friday 9 June, leaving just ten days before the deadline for reporting marks to deal with double-marking 140 scripts, which is really not quite long enough. I am grateful to Dr Pieter van Houten and the various Assessors for that paper for coping so efficiently, but we do need to take greater care next year to try to ensure that the larger Part IIA papers (POL3, POL4, POL8) are scheduled earlier rather than later in the Examinations Timetable. The main cock-up was my own: I had travelled all the way from Milwaukee, Wisconsin (being delayed overnight in Canada en route) only to miss the start of the POL7 Examination after turning up at the wrong venue, after having entered the details into my diary from the draft timetable, rather than the final timetable. Fortunately (and to my great relief) no harm was done: the invigilators had my phone number in case of emergency; it was for a paper shared with History, and the relevant History Examiner, who was responsible for setting the paper, was present; and she reported to me in any case that no candidate in either History or Politics raised any queries about the paper.

We continued with last year's practice of having the spreadsheets automatically calculate markers' means and standard deviations. This provides useful feedback to markers as they mark, and it helps to nudge them towards appropriate marks profiles, as well as making re-scaling of individual markers' marks easier, if it proves necessary (although it did not this year). We also repeated last year's practice of sending feedback on POL5 long essays directly to Part IIA students, to provide some guidance for any dissertation or further long essays they might write at Part IIB, and, as last year, this was in general a worthwhile exercise, with most students who reported an opinion back to me welcoming it.

To summarise the overall results. At Part IIA Politics and International Relations, there were 95 candidates: 12 Firsts (13%), 72 Upper Seconds (76%), 10 Lower Seconds (11%), and 1 Fail (1%). At Part IIA Politics and Sociology there were 28 candidates: 3 Firsts (11%), 24 Upper Seconds (86%), and 1 Lower Second (4%). At Part IIB Politics and International Relations there were 106 candidates: 16 Firsts (15%, including one Starred First), 79 Upper Seconds (75%), and 11 Lower Seconds (10%). At Part IIB Politics and Sociology there were 7 candidates: 4 Firsts (57%), and 3 Upper Seconds (43%).

There remain concerns relating to gender: of these 36 Firsts, for example, 22 were for male candidates and 13 for female candidates, when the overall population of those sitting the exams was 51% male, 49% female. Preliminary analysis of the results makes it difficult to work out exactly what it is that is generating the disparity. I am sure that the new POLIS Equality and Diversity Committee will want to explore things further, and I look forward to our conversations.

Dr Christopher Brooke

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**Examiner: Prof. Louise Fawcett
University of Oxford**

This was my third and final year as external examiner for the HSPS Tripos.

Once again, the external examining process ran very smoothly with the able assistance of Patrycja Koziol, Helen Williams and Chair, Christopher Brooke. Our task was facilitated by the reorganization of the degree the previous year such that the examiners for Politics and International Relations were now responsible for the class-list for the full Part II.

Prior to the examiners' meeting we had, as usual, received the appropriate information regarding the examination process for the current academic year, including marking and classing criteria. We reviewed the relevant examination papers well in advance and were kept clearly informed as to the procedures and schedule. I was sent one long essay with discrepant marks to review in advance of our meeting to review scripts on 21 June.

Our main task as external examiners was to read and evaluate borderline cases, taking into consideration the overall marks spread across scripts. We were provided with lists of

discrepant marks for candidates near class boundaries which were updated throughout the day. Examiners' individual marks and comments were also available – a very helpful practice. The number of marks with narrow discrepancies was quite large. One recommendation could be to reconcile internally some of these minor discrepancies prior to the arrival of the externals to reduce the workload on the day.

The overall standard of scripts was generally high, and in line with an excellent degree at a first class institution. Questions were demanding and varied, testing candidates' capabilities. The content of the examinations – which incorporate a combination of timed papers, dissertations and long essays - also allow candidates to draw on different skills. There were very few poor quality scripts; any marks below the 2:2 classification were judiciously given and carefully reviewed by the externals. As in previous years, many marks clustered in the 2:1 range, at the higher or lower ends. In many cases, the externals were adjudicating borderline firsts (or marks on the 2:2/2:1 borderline) and a number of additional firsts were awarded in this way. There appears to have been fuller use of the higher mark range, following last year's recommendations.

The higher marks awarded were invariably well-deserved. We read some excellent dissertations including those considered for prizes. The range of dissertation topics was wide and allowed scope for innovative answers. In the dissertations, as in the examination scripts, the degree continues to demonstrate its pluralist qualities.

Overall, the examiners are to be commended for the evidently robust processes in respect of paper setting and marking. This was another pleasant (if arduous!) examining experience and a very smooth day. My thanks go to the Chair of Examiners and his team for their efficiency and organization.

**Examiner: Prof. Matthew Festenstein
University of York**

This is my third year as an external examiner for this part of the Tripos. I reviewed papers in political thought, including examinations, long essays and dissertations, for this part of the Tripos.

The standards evident in the paper-setting and marking are appropriate for the examination and the level of qualification. The questions in the timed examinations were stretching and tested a wide range of the candidates' expertise in this area. Both the long essay format and the dissertation allowed for the probing of a wider range of candidates' skills, including research skills, and created the conditions for some exceptionally imaginative and thoughtful work.

Marking processes seemed robust and reliable, including second marking, reconciliation and moderation with reference to the standard deviation.

The overall format for assessment – a blend of timed examination and dissertations and long essays – is similar to comparable programmes in this area. The standards are high and the

markers demanded a lot of the candidates, but very reasonably so, and within the range of comparable programmes.

The processes for assessment and the determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted. The examination process combined a scrupulous attention to procedural fairness with a careful consideration of the merits of each case. Special cases were dealt with clearly and appropriately.

The practice of inviting the external examiners to review and discuss particular cases is to be commended: it allows for understanding of relation between the profiles of papers, particular candidate's marks, and classifications, and provides an important opportunity to discuss assessment in the context of the wider teaching and learning goals of POLIS.

The external examiner's general role and particular tasks were explained very clearly. I would recommend continuing the use of summary statistics at parts IIA and IIB, including the mean and standard deviation for each paper (including the dissertation), as this provides a significant element of the background for considering particular cases, both for external examiners and in the examiners' meeting. Throughout the examination process, I found the quality of communication excellent. My own role was clearly outlined, necessary materials made available promptly, and both the Examinations Officer and the wider POLIS administrative team were very responsive to questions and requests. Particularly given the demanding deadlines, the whole process was handled efficiently, clearly and with attention to detail.

Overall, the quality of assessment on display here was very strong: the examinations were demanding and wide-ranging, and the longer written forms allowed for some outstanding students to develop their ideas. There has been some exciting development in the curriculum, with the introduction of a number of new papers. In the area of political thought and political theory, this remains a centre of excellence, which is reflected in the rigorous standards on display, distinctive intellectual agenda, and quality of student achievement.

As in previous years, I would suggest that there is scope to stretch marking at the top of the range. The classification rules, while sensible, provide a significant incentive to consider stretching at the top, since these rules may have the effect of depressing the number of firsts (and starred firsts) awarded: the major role played by the mean has the effect that 'low' first class marks can be easily outweighed by mid-level or even high 2.1 marks. It is commendable that there are criteria for the upper end of the first class range, and markers should be encouraged to use them. As has been discussed before, I believe, colleagues may also find it helpful to consider introducing commonly agreed steps on the marking scale to reduce clustering around the 68-72 range, and to help more candidates achieve a first class degree without the adjudication of the external examiner on (sometimes multiple) borderline or split marks.

However, this is a minor cavil. It has been a pleasure to act as an external examiner for this programme, particularly over the period of its transition to the new structures, and I am happy to confirm that it is excellent and well-managed.

INTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

POL3: International Organisation

Examiner: Dr Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni

104 candidates sat this paper, with 31 agreed firsts, 56 marks in the 2i-range, 16 2iis and one failing mark. Candidates answered two questions (from a list of 12) with no restrictions on what questions they could choose. Questions were broadly thematic, inviting students to draw on knowledge acquired throughout the course as a whole, as opposed to focus narrowly on specific weekly topics. The most popular answers were on the nature of international law (1), the impact of human rights treaties (4), whether international cooperation is more easily achieved on economic and welfare issues than on security matters (7), and whether international organizations constitute a continuation of imperialism (9). With a few exceptions, answers were generally of a high standard and displayed clear evidence of wide-ranging reading around the subject. The marks on individual answers/questions ran from a low of 40 to a high of 82. The average mark was 65.

In the best essays, students took advantage of an exam-format which allowed enough space and time to develop their arguments at length. The strongest essays were well written and clearly structured, demonstrated a clear and detailed understanding of the issues at stake and put forward a distinct argument, supported by relevant examples. Essays in this category clearly addressed the question at hand and framed their answers clearly, so the reader could discern the argument from the outset. Top marks were generally not awarded to the longest essays, but to ones that were clearly structured and that integrated theoretical and empirical content to present an independent, critical argument.

Answers in the lower 2i-range often lacked clear structure and failed to back up arguments with empirical evidence or examples. Often, students whose answers fell in this range appeared to have opted for greater quantity instead of taking time to prepare and construct a considered answer. Students had been warned repeatedly against constructing vague answers which fail to reach a conclusion, along the lines of "perspective A would say this, perspective B would say that, in the end it's a bit of both". While most students heeded this advice, some of the weaker essays fell into the trap of quickly rehashing major schools of thought, then hurriedly concluding that they are all a bit right.

Some general observations: 1) Those who read widely and used their knowledge of theory and empirics to present clearly structured, reflective answers achieved the highest marks. 2) Those who read widely but failed to integrate theoretical ideas and empirical examples or failed to clearly structure their argument received lower marks. 3) Those few who clearly had not done enough reading received the lowest marks.

Students taking this paper in the future should make sure that they take advantage of the exam format to take time to carefully consider what questions to address and to plan their answers carefully. Over the course of the year, students should develop an awareness of what sorts of questions, claims and issues are important in the field of international organizations, and what kinds of evidence scholars tend to cite in defense of their arguments.

POL4: Comparative Politics
Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

This year's POL4 exam was taken by 140 candidates. For the mandatory Section A, the most popular questions were Q3 on non-Western experiences with state formation (35 answers) and Q4 on democratisation and state capacity (30 answers). Q1 on the 'elite politics' theory of state formation (22 answers), Q5 on repression and authoritarian regimes (13 answers) and Q7 on political parties (23 answers) also received a considerable number of answers. Less popular were Q2 on international state-building (3 answers), Q6 on systems of government (no answers), Q8 on economic interests (9 answers) and Q9 on civil society (5 answers). For the other sections, 87 candidates answered questions from Section B (Q10: 61, Q11: 26), 85 candidates answered questions from Section C (Q12: 36, Q13: 49), 45 candidates answered questions from Section D (Q14: 29, Q15: 16), 18 candidates answered questions from Section E (Q16: 16, Q17: 2), and 45 candidates answered questions from F (Q18: 25, Q19: 20).

The candidates generally performed well in the exam and there were relatively few weak scripts. Eighteen candidates achieved First class marks, 107 candidates obtained marks in the 2.1 range (with a significant number in the higher 2.1 range), 14 obtained marks in the 2.2 range, and one candidate got a Fail mark (this candidate left the exam early for medical reasons).

The patterns of strengths and weaknesses showed some similarities to what we have seen in past POL4 exams. Most candidates were able to provide good empirical details in their answers (with relatively few inaccuracies) to questions from Sections B-F. The best answers combined these empirical details with a discussion of more general issues or concepts to place the empirical material in context. Moreover, it is pleasing to see that candidates were generally able to integrate examples in Section A answers (which is something that has clearly improved in recent years). However, there were still some answers who failed to do this (for example, in the questions on political parties and on democratisation), and these answers received lower marks.

Although this happened less frequently than in the past, there were still some essays that provided more a list of possible issues and factors rather than a focused answer on the specific issue the question asked about. Examples included a few answers to Q11 (on the importance of divisions over the status of religion in society in Egypt and Iran) and Q15 (on the role of economic development in democratic consolidation in Zimbabwe and South Africa). Furthermore, some of the weaker essays failed to focus enough on the question or crucial concepts mentioned in the questions. This happened, for example, in a few answers to Q3 (where the concept of 'state capacity' received hardly any attention in some essays), Q12 (where a few essays focused on the impact of revolutions on transformative policies, rather than on the effect of transformative policies on the consolidation of revolutions), Q13 (where some essays made it insufficiently clear how 'status of religion in society' was interpreted), Q14 (where a few essays focused on 'state-building' broadly conceived rather than 'nation-building'), and Q18 (which required some discussion of the interpretation of 'executive power').

Overall, however, the examiners were once again encouraged by the quality of this year's POL4 exam scripts.

POL5: Conceptual Issues in Politics and International Relations

Examiner: Dr Kun-Chin Lin

Pol 5 – The averages and distribution of marks for the 53 students who were marked for two long essays were fairly standard at 65.8 (5.74) and 64.9 (5.05), respectively. One student intermitted in the Lent term, and four essays received deductions for various reasons. The markers were remarkably consistent and student performance over the two essays was largely consistent as well.

Essays scored higher for achieving clarity on definitional issues, situating the case studies in the wider phenomenon in question, and showing contextual sensitivity for historical facts and current events. Several essays suffered from an apparent divergence between the student's views on the scope of the topic and examiners' interpretations, such as an unduly narrow take or an ideological approach to essay questions. Other problematic essays created convoluted arguments in trying to bring together too many concepts and terms in the literature, or in attempted to cover too much ground empirically without providing depth for a line of reasoning. Another common weakness is over-determined argument that neglected the limitations of the analytical approach or alternative arguments. In general, problems with referencing and typographical errors that have been observed in previous years seemed to have been less frequent this year as revealed in examiners' comments.

POL6: Statistics and Methods in Politics and International Relations

Examiner: Dr Pieter van Houten

This year, 33 candidates took the exam: 23 second-year students and 10 third-year students. As in the previous year, the exam consisted of a mandatory Question 1 (which had several parts), and two optional questions of which candidates had to answer one. Of these optional questions, Question 2 (on how to design a quantitative project on the effects of globalisation on the economic situation of countries and/or individual well-being) was clearly the more popular with 29 answers. The performance of the candidates was as follows: 7 candidates received a First class mark, 16 candidates a 2.1 mark (of which three had a mark of 69), and 8 candidates received 2.2 marks. Unfortunately, there were also one Third class mark and one Fail mark.

Many of the scripts were good, and there were some truly impressive answers to each of the questions. On average, the answers to Question 2 were not quite as strong as last year. Most of these answers had a good discussion of some elements of a quantitative research project on one of the themes indicated in the question, but only relatively few were able to do all the things required for an excellent answer: formulate a precise research question, indicate possible hypotheses, discuss the indicators and data required to test these hypotheses, and provide some reflections on the methodological challenges that would be involved in such a project. In particular, several answers did not provide any discussion of what measures might

be used to evaluate the effect of globalisation (the main explanatory variable). Also, and as last year, more discussion of possible methodological challenges (potential issues to discuss here would be the quality of the data, the difficulty to operationalize certain concepts, and the representativeness of samples of individuals) would have improved most answers. The few answers to Question 3 were of mixed quality. The best essay provided an insightful critique and defence of the use of statistics, linking it to a discussion of the nature of the social sciences. The weaker answers made various strong but unsubstantiated claims about the use of statistics, or failed to use examples in the answer.

The quality of the answers to the various parts of Question 1 varied. The best answers showed an excellent understanding of statistical concepts and the models that were used in the question, and provided good and elaborate substantive interpretations of the presented statistical results. A very small number of scripts suggested that the candidates misunderstood the nature of the response variable (although this was explained several times in the question, including in plain language). Particularly noteworthy was the variation in the length of answers between scripts. While some questions (for example, Questions 1.1 and 1.3) could be answered satisfactorily that way, the other questions required longer answers to be fully satisfactory and receive high marks. For example, as explained throughout the paper, 'interpreting regression coefficients' (Question 1.4) involves not only indicating whether variables are statistically significant, but also discussing what the substantive effect is, what conclusions can be derived from this (in relation to earlier formulated hypotheses), and what the reasons for this result might be. Similarly, 'formulating hypotheses' (Question 1.2) involves both indicating hypotheses and discussing possible rationales for them.

Finally, and similarly to last year, the examiners had the impression that some candidates would have benefited from attending more lectures and practical sessions in the course of the year. Overall, however, the examiners were impressed with how much knowledge and understanding of quantitative methods the candidates had been able to develop in this paper.

POL7: The History of Political Thought to c.1700

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Thirty-eight candidates sat the paper. Twelve received an overall First-class mark, there were twenty-one Upper Seconds, and five Lower Seconds. Of the Firsts, eight received a First-class mark from both markers. There was one Upper Second script which received a First-class mark from one marker, and there were five scripts where the two marks straddled the Upper-Lower Second-class boundary.

Only one question attracted no answers—on mediaeval Papalism. Other mediaeval topics attracted only small numbers: two on Aquinas, two on the early Christians, one on the mediaeval reception of classical thought, and one on Roman law in the Middle Ages. Also unpopular were resistance theory, early modern international law, and the English Civil War, which each attracted one answer. Roman political thought attracted two, and toleration three. But the other questions were more popular: Plato (12), Aristotle (6), Augustine (5), More (17), Machiavelli (13), Hobbes (9), Locke (5), critics of Athenian democracy (6), Renaissance humanism (7—fewer than usual), *raison d'état* (13—more popular than usual), and sovereignty (7).

Answers that directly engaged with the set texts were preferred to those which read more like distant textbook overviews. Answers that patiently explored and engaged with the question that had been asked were preferred to those that began by taking steps to wrestle the material onto more familiar terrain. Very few essays indeed read as if they were simply summarising lecture material. Some of the questions were quite challenging, and candidates were quite challenged—which is a useful reminder that students will generally do well to prepare more rather than fewer topics when they revise, in order to maximise the chances of finding three questions they can comfortably answer. The markers were struck by the way in which, with one exception, candidates skirted around the issue of gender, and women were left out of the answers, despite the fact that some of the questions (not least that on Aristotle) afforded the opportunity to bring them into consideration. Some comments on some of the questions follow.

POL7 candidates typically like to run their discussions of Plato's *Republic* through the lens provided by Bernard Williams' argument about the city-soul analogy, and the challenge posed by this question was that it made it quite hard for them to do that. Stronger essays raised the question of what 'the construction of philosophy' might be about early on, and stayed with the theme, rather than being diverted into more familiar pastures. Good answers on Aristotle got to the problem of division straightaway, rather than spending too long building up to it, and made sure to discuss questions of stability as well as questions of justice. Augustine answers were stronger to the extent that candidates wrestled with parts of the text of *The City of God* rather than offering more detached summaries of his theology or of what they took to be his political thought. The Machiavelli essays deployed a useful variety of examples from Agathocles and Pope Julius II to the republics of Venice and Rome, though some answers could have been a bit clearer about whether they were more in the business of defending or criticising Quentin Skinner's interpretations. The strongest essays on More showed good knowledge of the text of Books I and II of *Utopia*, were able to think about them side by side, and showed awareness of some of the problems surrounding the overall interpretation of the book's argument. Answers on Hobbes frequently needed to be more sharply concentrated on the precise question that the Examiners had asked, rather than simply offering a general account of what Hobbes has to say about liberty in *Leviathan*. Locke essays sometimes spent too much time outlining his critique of executive power, when the question was explicitly asking about what he had to say on its behalf.

In Section B, the essays on anti-democratic political thought in Athens pursued a variety of argumentative strategies, most of which worked quite well. The answers on humanism sometimes struggled to move beyond the deployment of historical examples in Renaissance texts to reflect on how history was being used more broadly. The question on reason of state was a popular one, with stronger answers working in themes from Catholic political thought, or Montaigne, or Foucault, in addition to the familiar faces of Lipsius and Botero. The essays on sovereignty needed to stick closer to the 'why' question that had been asked, rather than explain either how they thought mixed government was incoherent, or why they sought to fashion accounts of indivisible sovereignty.

All in all, those who marked POL7 were impressed. This was not an easy paper, the general standard of the answers was commendably high—and they were all pleasingly legible—and the best scripts were really excellent indeed.

POL8: The History of Political Thought from 1700-1890

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

106 candidates sat the paper. Looking at the overall marks for the paper, there were seventeen Firsts, eighty Upper Seconds, eight Lower Seconds, and one Third—though twenty-seven candidates earned a First-class mark from at least one marker, and eighteen a Lower Second. All questions were attempted at least once; though two, on nineteenth-century social science and natural law only attracted one answer, and one, on German Romanticism, attracted only two. The most popular questions were on Rousseau (48 answers), Burke (22 answers), Wollstonecraft (24 answers), Constant (22 answers), the French Revolution (28 answers), gender (43 answers), and empire (25 answers). John Stuart Mill was a lot less popular than usual on this paper, attracting only 16 answers.

As ever, candidates were rewarded for focussed answers to the questions the Examiners had actually posed, rather than for offering answers to versions of previous years' questions, potted versions of supervision essays, or regurgitated but only partially-digested lecture material. In Section A, candidates did well who could show a decent feel for the way their subjects reasoned about political questions, not reducing their thought to a set of fixed 'positions'. Weaker answers to Section B questions ambled through outlines of what the set authors had to say paragraph by paragraph, with little of much interest to say that worked to bind an argument together across the essay as a whole. Stronger answers fashioned the material into a distinctive argument to address the question. Some reflections follow on some of the individual questions that attracted more than a very small number of answers.

In Section A, answers on Montesquieu often offered some connections between his accounts of monarchy and commerce without providing a confident account of how everything fitted together, e.g. gesturing at what false honour might have to do with commercial life but not developing a clear and coherent argument. Too many Rousseau essays read like a summary of one of Professor Robertson's classes, with a bit too much emphasis on the figure of the lawgiver, with sometimes insufficient attention paid to other significant factors in his political thought. Essays on Burke were stronger to the extent that they were not narrowly focused on his critique of the French Revolution. The answers on Wollstonecraft approached the question of the French Revolution in a pleasingly imaginative number of ways. The Kant essays were generally strong, from able candidates well versed in both the primary and the secondary literature. Bentham answers needed to make a tighter link between the critique of Blackstone and his views on politics than they sometimes managed to do. As ever, answers on Constant were stronger to the extent to which they could build on or otherwise escape (rather than merely recapitulate) the Constant that students encountered at Part I. Mill essays were richer to the extent that candidates were familiar with the ways in which he characteristically reasons about things, rather than just plugging in ideas of his utilitarianism, or being committed to the 'harm principle'. Those who wrote on Marx were sometimes not clear enough about just what commodity fetishism was actually held to be.

In Section B, answers on the luxury debate sometimes spent too long on Fénelon himself, rather than on what came afterwards, and were better when they thought carefully about the question rather than merely recapitulating István Hont's survey chapter. When it came to the French Revolution, one rather got the sense that candidates were writing about the Revolutionary figures they happened to know about, rather than about the ones who might best illuminate a discussion of the question. Too many of the essays on gender precisely illustrated the general problem with Section B essays highlighted above—they trotted through the set authors in chronological sequence, rather than organising the material more confidently around a central line of argument that spoke to the question being asked. Essays on nationalism often didn't do quite enough to anchor the discussion in the question of why the French Revolution might be thought to be a significant issue in the first place. Answers on socialism were stronger when candidates had things to say about industrial competition, rather than presenting generic accounts of what Fourier and the gang might have been thought to be up to. The best answers on empire offered accounts that tried to integrate the set texts into a broader account of the changing character of nineteenth-century arguments about empire, rather than just saying, well, here's a thinker who was more interested in the colonies, and here's another who was more interested in the metropole.

POL9: Conceptual Issues and Texts in Politics and International Relations

Examiner: Prof. Helen Thompson

There were 103 candidates for the paper this year. 16 candidates were awarded a first class mark, 55 candidates an upper second, 29 a lower second, and 3 a third. The average mark was 62. There were more answers on the passages than the general questions.

In general, the scripts this year were disappointing with the caveat that there were significantly fewer short answers than in recent years. In the case of the passages, a significant number of students appeared to misread at least one of the claims in the text, attribute arguments to the authors that were not actually there, or were confused about the meaning of individual words. Others showed a good understanding of a passage in the preliminary part of the essay and then developed an argument at a tangent to the relevant claims. Most candidates who tackled the passage on the explanatory value of theory in empirical analysis treated the passage as a set of arguments about normative political theory.

In the case of the general questions, a significant number of candidates struggled with the terms of the questions, in particular with 'foundational political concepts' and 'engage meaningfully with the world'. Others spent too much time setting up the question before embarking upon an argument directed at answering question. Candidates should indeed engage with the terms of the questions but this task can be done considerably more economically than some candidates have come to do so.

For the most part there was considerable uniformity in the material used in developing arguments. In particular, a large number of candidates used examples about conflict in post-colonial countries, especially African ones. Some candidates deployed this material effectively. But others chose to use it in ways that were not well-suited to the passage or question answered.

Across the board there was much less intellectual variety in the answers than there has often been. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this issue was least pervasive on the question about imagination. For the most part seemed determined to use pre-prepared arguments without much thought as to how those arguments pertained to the text or question. There was also a striking unwillingness to subject some ideological arguments to sceptical reflection. Some candidates seemed to assume that the arguments they endorse are self-evidently true and that those they oppose are *a priori* incoherent.

Many candidates also struggled to use examples effectively. Most examples were deployed quickly without depth or nuance. Only a few candidates were willing to engage with an example in both making an argument and dealing with counter-arguments to that position.

Overall, there were enough good answers to suggest that candidates can perform well on this paper, but there may be some need for reflection on why a not insignificant number of students either struggle or perform significantly less well than on other papers. The fact that there has been progress on issues like length suggests that the classes are performing their role of establishing the expectations for the paper. What is less clear, however, is how well POL9 is working in conjunction with other papers, particularly given the rather narrow range of material candidates used this year.

POL10: The History of Political Thought from 1700-1890

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Nine candidates sat the paper, writing 15 answers on Section A authors and 12 answers on Section B topics. Two scripts received first-class marks from both markers, five scripts received upper-second-class marks from both markers, one script received lower-second-class marks from both markers, and one script divided opinion around the 2:1/2:2 borderline.

In general, the scripts were reasonably well done, by candidates who were familiar with the exercise of writing exam-length answers on questions in the history of political thought. With only a small number of candidates sitting the paper, it is hard to offer general reflections about how particular questions were handled, though four questions attracted three answers--on Hume, Rousseau, luxury, and early socialism. With regard to these questions, I think it is fair to say that the Hume essays were a mixed bag; the Rousseau essays evinced a tendency to say a bit too much about the law-giver, though the conceptual side of things was usually treated well; the answers on the luxury debate were not focused nearly sharply enough on the particular question that had been asked, and did not have a tight enough grip on what was going on; and Saint-Simon and Owen were consistently handled better than Fourier when it came to the early socialists, with candidates not quite realising how important Fourier was for the matters under discussion.

POL11: Political Philosophy and the History of Political Thought since c.1890

Examiner: Dr Duncan Kelly

49 students took this paper from Part IIb Politics, and 16 from History. As is customary, a separate report is provided for both constituencies. In Politics, the most popular questions in §A were on Nietzsche (14), Imperialism (13), Rawls (11), and in §B, Ecologism (13). In the next

tier of popularity, a clustering around questions to do with Weber (8) and Hayek (8) in §A and punishment (7) and liberty (7) in §B. Only two questions (political obligation, and utilitarianism/rights) received no takers. The examiners agreed 11 first class average marks, disagreed over another 2, there was one mark of 2ii, with the rest achieving 2i. All told, this was a very impressive overall series of scripts for such a broad-ranging paper.

Once again, and in line with earlier reports, those who achieved highest marks were able to distil a knowledge of the texts (showing they knew clearly how relevant books and arguments were put together), making it appropriate to the particular topic, then expanding on that knowledge (in Section A) to explore the relevance of other texts and historical contexts to the interpretation of work in answering the question. Or (in Section B), by building on a broad base of knowledge those who did best were able to apply historical and conceptual political theory to answer more abstract questions. Equally, all the most successful candidates were able to present a *critical* discussion. This is crucial to reiterate, for it is very important that candidates recognize that what we are looking for is awareness of texts, a sense of their complexity (and where relevant, their contemporary relevance), but also a sense of their weaknesses, problems, and difficulties, and what knowing this might do to the interpretation of claims in political philosophy. This might take the form of adept use of secondary materials, historiographical debates, or political and/or internal critique, to engage with the questions being posed. Those who made it into the first class category were more able to do this, whereas those who remained in the upper (and occasionally lower) second class were less able to deploy their knowledge in such a critical fashion. Some scripts were genuinely brilliant, showing breadth and depth of knowledge at this level of work that was astonishing across the paper. This year, the general spread of answers, although diverse, followed the major topics discussed in the majority of lectures.

POL12: The Politics of the Middle East

Examiner: Dr Glen Rangwala

This year's paper had 36 students. Six of the exam candidates received an average mark of 70+ from both examiners, 23 received an average mark in the 60-69 range, and seven received an average mark in the 50-59 range. No-one received an overall mark lower than 52.

There was a fairly heavy bunching of answers in response to the questions on sectarianism (21 answers), the creation of states in the Middle East (17 answers) and international attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (16 answers). The questions about pluralism in democratisation, US regional leadership and the legacies of the Muslim Brotherhood each drew 7-10 responses, and all remaining questions received 5 or fewer responses. For a course that is taught broadly about the region, and which is designed to stimulate a range of new interests among its students, this bunching was surprising and somewhat disappointing for the examiners.

The relatively low number of firsts – lower as a proportion than in previous years – was primarily a consequence of a large number of candidates not structuring their essays around answering the question. The better answers devised an essay framework that was centrally about the question, and deployed suitable empirical material as part of the process of reasoning towards a conclusion. By contrast, too many students wrote long narratives or explanations that were not directly relevant to the question.

An example is question 1, for which many students wrote a general history of the formation of states in the Middle East, without attention to differences in the circumstances of their creation (which is the starting point for the question) and often with only a few words in the conclusion about how this does or does not explain their varying characteristics today (which is the central issue at stake in it). It would have been much better to think first about what those relevant 'varying characteristics' today are, and then to structure an essay around how state-formation can or cannot explain them.

In general, there were too many students who resorted to long historical narratives which didn't have an underlying argument. These generally began with something along the lines of 'To understand Topic X, we must first appreciate the historical background...', thus beginning a simple chronologically-plotted account which in many cases accounted for over half the essay. The Israeli-Palestinian question (q.9), for instance, drew a number of general histories of the conflict, going back to the 19th Century, even though the question was about the international attention paid to it. These essays were mostly taken as unfocused, and therefore not eligible to receive a mark higher than 59 according to the marking criteria.

It was also rather curious to see many students seem to have learned lots of data – such as percentages who affirmed something in an opinion poll, or where a particular country stands in some league tables (which, incidentally, are of dubious intellectual value). In a number of essays, the structure seemed to have been designed to take us to this factoid, even though its relevance to the question was marginal at best. This is a poor trade-off: the deployment of knowledge only contributes to the essay if it is relevant to the question.

The sectarianism question generally drew essays that were relevant to answering the question, but a number of students took it to demand a critique of 'primordialism' rather than explore whether any sectarian identity existed before the current conflicts in Syria and Iraq. A false contrast was created between those who see an unchanging division from the schism in the 7th Century to the present (a perspective that was readily dismissed) and those who look solely at elite manipulation during the current conflicts.

As always, the best essays didn't stick to some narrow formula for essay writing, but tackled the topic in a focused and often innovative way – aware of the arguments in the literature, but able to think independently of them. Many also put to good use specific and detailed examples of places, periods or political movements. The examiners weren't reluctant to give marks of 80+ to such essays. They would have happily given more if a greater number of students had been willing to be more adventurous in their essays.

POL13: The Politics of Europe

Examiner: Dr Christopher Bickerton

35 students took POL13 this year. They were required to choose questions from at least two of the three sections. Overall, the scripts were decent though there were relatively few excellent scripts. There was a tendency to follow too closely lecture material without demonstrating a capacity for independent reading. The strongest answers were those on the British politics section, where some were outstanding. The weakest were in the EU and the Western European politics sections. With regards these latter sections, on the Western European politics section there was a lack of comparative analysis with arguments often built around too few examples. On the EU section, the contemporary relevance of some of the

questions tended to elicit superficial answers that rarely went beyond lecture material and/or journalist clichés.

Q1. This was well-answered in some cases but the average mark was quite low in comparison to some of the other questions. 9 students answered this question. The better ones acknowledged the dangers of hindsight and tried to look at the 1970s crisis in a way that took account of the context and appreciated that *at the time* the crisis looked challenging in ways that were possibly forgotten in later years.

Q2. This was the most popular question in the exam, with 16 students answering it in total. The best answers took up in detail and in a critical way the idea of a revisionist tradition, identifying what this tradition is exactly and what policy positions it was identified with. The weakest answers, however, said very little or nothing at all about the revisionist tradition, making it very difficult to establish a basis upon which to answer the question and judge the connection of 'New Labour' with the history of the British Labour Party.

Q3. 8 students answered this question and all answers were very similar, emphasizing electoral volatility and the valence model of voting. The weakest answers did not mention party strategy at all and very few provided any definition or reflection on the meaning of this term as a basis for grounding their answers. Overall answers lacked the quality of critical self-reflection, in particular vis-à-vis the terms being used.

Q4. Only 6 students answered this question but those that chose to tackle it generally did rather well, with this question having a high average mark. What distinguished the best answers was their command of empirical detail and their mastery of the administrative structure of the central British state.

Q5. This was, perhaps a little surprisingly, a very unpopular question, with only 3 students choosing to answer it. One of the better answers to this question used it as an opportunity to discuss the tensions between parliamentary and popular sovereignty.

Q6. This was, unsurprisingly, a popular question. 12 students chose to answer it. There were weak and strong answers. The weakest were narrow and one-sided, emphasizing only one aspect of the vote – immigration – with an assertion that this was the most important part but without real justification or argument. The most sophisticated answers grappled with the contingent and more structural aspects of the vote, trying to separate the two and build an argument about the relative importance of these different causal processes.

Q7. This was a popular question (answered by 14 students, making it the second most popular question) but one that failed to generate any really strong answers, though there were plenty of decent answers and somewhat weaker answers. Some dwelt too long on austerity itself and whether it worked or not, when the question was about the persistence of austerity as a policy stance which is not exactly the same thing (a policy that doesn't work can persist, which is indeed Mark Blyth's argument). Most explanations pointed to the structure of the Eurozone; the stronger answers took up the issue raised by Martin Sandbu about whether there is a necessary connection between austerity and the institutional arrangement and rules of the Eurozone.

Q8. 10 students answered this question. Some did so with a decent level of detail but overall the answers were disappointing; few took up the opportunity to explore the balance between economic demand factors (open labour markets etc.) and political push factors (growing disquiet about immigration, rise of radical right parties etc).

Q9. This question was tackled by only 3 students. The strongest answers included a good knowledge of the relevant secondary literature and good case studies. The weakest tended to focus very narrowly on British politics rather than to consider decentralization dynamics from a Western European and comparative perspective.

Q10. There were 5 answers to this question, often taking the same approach. The relevant secondary literature was discussed but what was generally lacking was a sustained engagement with empirical material. Passing references to particular welfare state models and regimes cannot be a substitute for a more detailed and precise use of empirical evidence.

Q11. Only 1 student answered this question and the answer was excellent. Given that question 10 was popular but not very well answered, it seems that there was an opportunity to tackle this question well, using readings on the welfare state but also considering the “post-war consensus state” from a broader perspective.

Q12. 3 students answered this question and generally it was poorly answered, with an average in the 2.2 range. None of the answers properly defined supranationalism and the level of detail provided as part of the answers was very poor. Some answers took a perspective that was only very distantly related to the question itself.

Q13a/b. These two questions on European disintegration and on the impact of populism on European integration were the most popular of section 3 with 8 students answering one or the other. Good answers provided detail and backed up arguments with references to secondary literature. Weak answers tended to be very superficial and picked up on the topicality of the question but without any substance. This was the challenge of these questions: to answer them in a way that recognized their contemporary relevance but went beyond a merely superficial recounting of journalistic platitudes.

On 13a in particular, most answers disagreed with the notion of disintegration and the best answers gave a nuanced account of integration itself, suggesting that what we may think of as disintegration is in fact simply a departure from a particular kind of integration, namely supranational integration of the classical kind. Some of the weakest answers used this question as an opportunity to discuss the future of the EU at a very general level, relying very little or not at all on secondary literature or scholarly writing.

Q14. 3 students answered this question. The weaker answers tended to present a series of reflections on the impact of the Single Market but without any conceptual framework. Some answers failed to distinguish between the Single Market and the Eurozone, though they are obviously analytically quite different and also have quite different distributive effects.

Q15. 4 students answered this question and some of the answers were very decent. Generally though, there was no real attention given to what the threshold for sustainable/unsustainable should be and it was often thought that to show that there was problems with the Eurozone

is *io ipso* to demonstrate that it is unsustainable, which is not the case. For a very open-ended question, there was a lack of conceptual apparatus needed to give an answer some coherence and direction. No answer picked on developments in the last year where Eurozone growth has returned. This gave a slightly dated and occasionally apocalyptic tone to many of the answers.

Q16. No student tackled this question.

POL14: The Politics of Asia

Examiner: Dr Iza Hussin

There were four candidates for Pol14 this year, an unusual number; all exam scripts showed evidence of sustained engagement across the year's topics, wide reading and careful consideration of the broader issues in Asian and comparative politics that the course provides. Candidates answered eight of the sixteen possible questions, with two candidates each answering 3, 7 and 14, and no candidates answering the same questions. This suggests that the combined seminar/lecture format adopted for this year assisted students in exploring their own interests and developing strong material for a range of topics. The overall standard of performance was good, with two candidates receiving agreed first class marks, and two 2.1s.

As in previous years, the best answers provided a clear argument in response to the question, supported that argument with reference to a number of empirical cases, and reflected upon the implications of this data for the larger concepts in play in the question, such as authoritarian durability or electoral competition. The very best of these answers were original, confidently argued, and well structured, with some reference to the debates among scholars of comparative and Asian politics on these larger concepts. The weaker range of answers either provided empirical material without clear argument or analysis, or analysis without evidence from the cases; at times, a candidate would focus on one understanding of a concept - such as globalisation - in a superficial manner and neglect its diverse meanings in the history of the region, or its multiple social and political implications.

Candidates who took time to construct a clear organised answer, articulating their use of evidence in terms of their major arguments, consistently did well.

Pol 15: The Politics of Africa

Examiner: Dr Sharath Srinivasan

This paper demands students use their critical faculties dexterously and with analytical maturity. They are required to raise, and respond to, overarching questions on what and whose politics matters, and how, when approaching the study of such a diverse and historically complex continent (at least all of it south of the Sahara). Covering the breadth of the politics of sub-Saharan Africa from the past to the present and across comparative and international dimensions, selectively picking up themes, topics, multi-disciplinary perspectives and country case studies to knit together an analytical appreciation of similarities and divergences, continuities and discontinuities, this paper is evidently demanding. It challenges students and lecturers alike to be attentive to country- and region-specific particularities whilst also addressing core theoretical and thematic concerns that lend themselves to broader analysis and argumentation. Students who master the core readings and case material included in the classes and lectures, and who can deploy this knowledge in

their examined work with due attention to sources, are able to achieve a low 2.1 with little difficulty.

Students find it challenging to achieve a high 2.1 or a First. Those who do are able to take command of the course as a whole, working from and across texts, debates and case analyses throughout the paper to make their distinctive arguments. They appreciate that nothing is formulaic about the politics of Africa, there is no established canon to work from, but rather independent and critical reasoning can thrive and authentic and original argument, working with and from carefully selected knowledge sources, is highly rewarded. They draw on subtle and well-grounded empirical knowledge, often of individual countries or comparisons across countries relating to discrete issues, to substantiate, qualify or rebut major lines of argument in the broader literature. The best candidates understand what is at stake, theoretically and thematically, in the question, and address this through focused and grounded analysis. Moving beyond rehearsed debates and piecemeal use of country case empirics to prove a point, candidates who make careful choices on country cases throughout the year and who get beyond the core readings and designated case studies will develop their own confidence in tackling the core themes of the paper.

In 2016-17, 18 candidates took the paper. All students sat the end-of-year exam: there was no option of examination by assessed essay this year. The most popular questions were Q4 (on ethnicity and politics, 10 answers), Q1 (on debates about colonial history, 8 scripts) and Q8 (on Africa and the international economic order). The overall performance by candidates was higher than normal; this was an excellent cohort. The average mark obtained was 65.9. Impressively, five students obtained Firsts, which is a much higher proportion than usual. One student was awarded a mark in the 2.11 range. This script showed sparse knowledge of the course material and core themes, the answers were very short and the argumentation was not logically tight. Other scripts which scored lowly marks also tended towards descriptive generality, a lack of engagement with key sources and weaknesses in logical argument. As has been noted in the past, there is a real danger in not working with and from the course readings and lectures. Answers that depend too much on general knowledge or abstract argument are likely to miss the crux of the question or enact precisely the kind of generalisations and framings that the course challenges and critiques. The best answers explicitly referred to and worked with key authors, specific events and core scholarly debates, while developing lines of argument of their own.

POL16: Conflict and Peacebuilding

Examiner: Dr Devon Curtis

POL 16 had a particularly large number of students in 2016-17, and there was greater variation in the marks compared with previous years. There were 62 candidates for this paper. Ten candidates received a first class mark and ten candidates received a 2.2 mark, with the other candidates receiving 2.1 marks. The average mark was 64.8.

The best answers showed intellectual agility, a strong ability to assess different claims and arguments intelligently, and provided convincing evidence. There were some exceptional answers that had elements of originality and careful thought. Strong answers were able to make connections across the course material, and were able to effectively challenge or question some of the assumptions in some of the literature and policy documents. Weaker

answers were polemical or lacked a logical structure, veered from the question, or made unsubstantiated assertions.

No candidate chose to answer Q1, but every other exam question was attempted by at least four candidates. The most popular questions were Q2 and Q12, each attempted by 26 students. Q9 was attempted by 22 students, and Q10 by 21 students. There were some excellent answers to Q2, but weaker answers spent too much time on the debate about whether the concept of state failure was problematic, without addressing the question of why the term is used. Only 5 candidates answered Q3 and marks ranged for this question tended to be lower than average, with one mark of 72 but several marks in the 2.2 range. Weaker answers did not engage with the literature and offered pre-packaged answers on ethnicity and conflict. On the other hand, Q4 tended to be very well done, with several first class marks. Candidates intelligently discussed the multiple connections between gender identities and violence, drawing on a wide range of readings and examples. Several candidates had difficulty with Q5 because they failed to explain what was meant by a 'human security approach'. Students are reminded to answer the specific question being asked, and to reflect on all aspects of the question, rather than producing an essay that resembles previous supervision essay work. Only 4 candidates attempted Q6 and again several of these answers suffered from a lack of precision. Many of the answers to Q7 were much better, with several candidates interrogating the meaning of 'local', and providing thoughtful critiques. Q8-Q9-Q10 were all popular questions. The best answers showed familiarity with a wide set of arguments and were able to refute or support different claims using appropriate evidence from the literature or from case study examples. There were some excellent answers to Q10, which drew upon general debates about causality. Weaker answers did not explain structural violence (in Q9) or were let down by insufficient attention to detail.

We were pleased to see that the case study answers were generally well done, and that students had proficiently deployed the case study material to make convincing arguments. The best scripts on Q11 discussed the relationship between the state and conflict in the Great Lakes, and persuasively argued what this meant for statebuilding and any possible alternatives. Stronger scripts on Q12 used an analytical approach to consider interaction and divergence across Syria and Iraq by considering a range of actors and histories. Weaker scripts retraced a basic descriptive account of the conflict(s). There were several excellent answers to Q13, which showed awareness of different kinds of factors influencing the Colombian conflict, and how these may be related. We were pleased to see that there were several strong answers to the different cases in Q14, but there was also one incomplete answer that received a 3rd class mark.

POL 17: Politics and Gender
Examiner: Dr Lauren Wilcox

This was the second year for the Tripos course POL 17: Politics and Gender. Twenty three candidates took the exam and overall results were strong. Nine candidates earned firsts of 70 or over and the rest of the candidates received a mark between 60 and 69, in the 2.1 range.

All candidates did at least 1 question from the Q1, Q 2 or Q3 (with Q1 being the most popular having been taken by 15 candidates). After these three, the next most popular question was Q 7 (taken by 8 candidates). The highest ranking candidate for example answered Q 1, Q 2 and Q 7. Students that took care to make sure their responses to questions directly addressed terms of the question rather than rehearsing specific arguments prepared in advance tended to score more highly. The examiners also noted that responses that were well structured as well as those that displayed a good mix of theory and empirical examples score more highly.

POL18: The Idea of a European Union

Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Six candidates sat the paper. Although the exam paper itself gave equal attention to the syllabus material presented across Michaelmas and Lent Terms, it was striking that around two thirds of the questions attempted dealt with the earlier part of the course. The more popular questions concerned the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, the Revolutionary period, nineteenth-century republicanism, and Friedrich Hayek, each attracting three or four answers.

The scripts were all of upper second-class quality. Although markers are habitually exhorted to “use the full range of marks” it just was not possible on this occasion, where all of the scripts were solid, but where no candidate was working at a consistently superior level. Individual essays sometimes attracted First- or Lower Second-class marks, but the overall marks for the scripts converged in the middle 60s. One marker marked the scripts overall in the range 63-69, the other in the range 63-67—and their disagreements never exceeded two marks.

If there was a general problem across the scripts, it was that they didn’t press as hard as they might have done on the questions, to tease out what was most interesting or challenging about the issues that they raised. A little too often, description was offered in place of explanation, or gentle survey in place of a focussed argument. Good knowledge of relevant texts was shown, but sometimes the texts could have been worked a bit harder than they were. Thinking about particular questions: the Abbé de Saint-Pierre was both tedious and repetitive, and it was refreshing to see candidates write about his arguments in ways that were neither; answers on republican brotherhood would have done well to consider the fraternity of revolutionary conspirators in addition to the ‘brotherhood of man’; there was some fine knowledge of Hayek’s various contexts on display.

POL19: China in the international order

Examiner: Dr Kun-Chin Lin

Pol 19 – The twenty-two students as a whole performed admirably well for a course that required them to develop regional expertise and apply theories of international relations and political economy. Responding to changes in the syllabus and examination requirements from the first/last year of the course, students averaged 68 on their final exam with six of them scoring over 70. The standard deviation is low at 4.5 reflecting a relatively equally motivated student body and quality of supervision. The examiner and assessor were largely in agreement over marks, which is an encouraging sign that the students are tested on core knowledge that can be validated by non-China specialists. There remains some unevenness

in the distribution of questions answered, with Q6 showing no taker – however, again, it shows an improvement over last year’s distribution.