



Derrick Chua  
By email

Reference: FOI-2018-639

31 October 2018

Dear Mr Chua,

Your request was received on 4 October 2018 and I am dealing with it under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act').

You asked:

*Please provide the 2017-18 internal and external examiners' reports for the following HSPS Part I subjects: POL1, POL2, SAN1, SOC1.*

The requested information is attached.

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If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request an internal review of this decision, you should contact us quoting the reference number above. The University would normally expect to receive your request for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this letter and reserves the right not to review a decision where there has been undue delay in raising a complaint. If you are not content with the outcome of your review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the University. The Information Commissioner may be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF (<https://ico.org.uk/>).

The Old Schools  
Trinity Lane  
Cambridge, CB2 1TN

Tel: +44 (0) 1223 764142  
Fax: +44 (0) 1223 332332  
Email: [foi@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:foi@admin.cam.ac.uk)  
[www.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cam.ac.uk)



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE  
Registry's Office

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Knapton'.

James Knapton

POL 1  
EXAMINER'S REPORT  
2017-2018

178 undergraduates in HSPS, 38 in History & Politics and 13 in other Triposes were registered to sit this paper. The quality of the scripts was generally good as was their presentation: 38 achieved Firsts and the average was 65. Most were easily legible; 'separation' was the only word that was repeatedly misspelled.

Most candidates chose at least one question from Section 1. The question on Hobbes attracted by far the most responses (86), that on Weber (78), Constant (29), Violence and Power (27), Hayek (22), and Schmitt (9).

In Section 2, Question 9, 'Can the people ever rule in democracy?' was the most popular (53 responses), followed by Question 7, 'Does the American constitution offer an effective means of containing the problem of factions?' (34), Question 12 on the political influence of income and wealth in representative democracy (27), Question 11, 'What does the form of government in modern politics explain about national economic outcomes' (23), Question 8 'Does democracy require a socially united society?' (11), and Question 10, 'Does democracy sacrifice good policy outcomes to partisanship and irrationality' (8).


In Section 3, Question 14, 'How did Gandhi understand the connection between modern politics and modern technology?' dominated (with 50 responses), followed by question 15 'Why did Nietzsche think that democracy was a slavish form of politics?' (28), 13, 'Was Marx right to think that the modern state would eventually face a crisis it could not overcome?' (26), and 16, 'Why is politics so tribal?' (8)

The average mark for each of the questions was between 64 and 68. The most interesting essays genuinely engaged with the questions and the issues they raised, demonstrated careful reading of the primary texts and relevant literature, referred to them succinctly and precisely, and revealed further reading. Those essays provided specific pertinent political examples or illustrations to bolster their argument, which was made clear from the onset. They were well-structured and balanced, flowed well to the end and the argument was evenly sustained throughout.

The attractiveness of questions from Section 1 did not mean that candidates knew the primary texts. All too few candidates seemed to have read them. In some cases, Hobbes or Constant's very own and most famous pronouncements were attributed to the lecturer for POL 1; thus Professor Runciman became the author of the description of life in the state of nature 'as nasty, brutish and short'. Many of the answers on Hobbes consisted of disproportionately long descriptions of his account of the state of nature thereby leaving little time to reflect on life in civil society and its specific character. Only one candidate reflected on Hobbes' view of the relationship between states and violence between states. Too few answers on Weber assessed the relative importance of the qualities of responsible political leadership. Many answers on Hayek lacked specificity. Too many answers to the question of state violence gave what was deemed to be Arendt or Fanon's treatment of the subject rather than answering the question using these or other relevant authors. All too often, it was not clear what controlling the violence of the state might be taken to mean.

Similar comments might be made about many of the answers to the questions in Section B and C. What could be understood by a 'socially united society', 'the people ever rul[ing]', 'good policy' or 'irrationality' was not explained in a number of scripts. Answers to questions 11 and 12 were often little more than a precis of one or two key texts on the subjects, and these were not always accurate. The answer to the question on Gandhi required a specific assessment of his views of modern technology and politics and of his view of their interconnection. That on Nietzsche called for more than a summing up of his view of Christianity and morality. Answers to questions 16 needed to probe the various ways in which politics might seem tribal and the ways in which it might not.

This said, there were some exceptionally good scripts; indeed, some exceeded even the highest expectations one might have of first year undergraduates. Beautifully written, they showed their authors to have benefitted from the lecture series as a platform from which to explore the literature and the issues for themselves, thereby enabling them to respond to the questions in a nuanced and informed manner, but also a personal and distinctive one.



## **Internal Examiner's Report POL2**

There were 177 candidates for the paper in HSPS; marks ranged from a high of 73 to a low of 46, though most marks were between the 60-70 range. The distribution of marks is thus well within Cambridge norms.

The exam was changed last year. This year kept those changes, including the introduction of a cross-cutting question, of which the students selected one of four. Students were specifically directed to draw on material from more than one module in their answers, which they were able to do very effectively. The introduction of a cross-cutting question continues to be a useful way to get the students to draw common themes out of sometimes disparate material across the paper. Last year's examiners reports noted that the students were disproportionately answering some of the cross-cutting questions. Though there has been some improvement in this regard, there is room for more. 24 students answered Q1; 47 answered Q2; 73 answered Q3; and 27 answered Q4. The most popular question (Q3) was the broadest of the cross-cutting questions. Next year's exam setters may want to keep that in mind. Another way to improve the spread would be to write the cross-cutting questions before lectures start and to actively gesture to each of the cross-cutting themes over the course of the year. Some of these answers were excellent; however, it would be hoped that students might take the cross-cutting questions as an opportunity to think and write more creatively about the themes uniting different parts of the course. Indeed, the answers that took risks to draw less obvious connections among diverse material generally scored highly. We also welcome the external examiner's suggestion that the students should also aim to draw from other papers in their answers.

For questions 5-16, there was generally an even spread of answers, except for Q10 ('Are drones effective tools in counterinsurgency?'), which only 5 people answered. This question also had the weakest answers, with a 59.6 average. Though not statistically significant, the unpopularity of this question when coupled with the weakness of answer should be kept in mind during the 2018-9 year both in the design of the lectures and the exam. The second least popular question was Q15 ('Are we undergoing systemic change now?'), which got only 12 answers. This is likely because that module (5) was condensed as a result of the strike. Nevertheless, the two questions from module 5 were answered by 37 students in total (with averages of 62.1 and 65.5), so the strike did not have an inordinate impact.

What distinguished strong and weak answers was similar to last year: those that did best were those essays that explicitly drew on specific authors, texts, or schools of thought from the relevant literature; that framed a clear debate around the question and provided well-reasoned and thoughtful counterarguments; that drew on relevant empirical material in enough depth so as to avoid becoming a "current affairs" essay; and that showed a breadth of readings but were able to focus on a few key texts and critically engage with their ideas and arguments. Some students drew

on material from other papers, in particular POL1, SAN1, or SOC1; those that did so generally scored highly, not because drawing on readings from other papers was rewarded for its own sake, but rather because drawing on texts from outside the paper's core reading required that students develop original approaches to the ideas. Thus, those essays that entailed diverse readings were also generally the essays that showed a particularly thoughtful engagement with the material and so were able to construct insightful arguments of their own as a result.



Internal Examiners' Report, 2018.

SAN1. Social Anthropology: The Comparative Perspective.

Overall, the scripts this year demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the material covered in the course. The better scripts showed breadth of knowledge, and generally tackled questions from different parts of the course.

Answers did tend to bunch on a few topics, often to the disadvantage of candidates who chose them, because they often wrote out pre-prepared answers to questions on those topics, which were not answers to the questions actually asked in the examination. The most conspicuous case here was the economic anthropology question on 'embeddedness'. A large number of candidates wrote an essay on gifts (usually gifts-vs-commodities) which were very poor answers to the question set, and many showed no knowledge of the concept of embeddedness or the literature in which it figures. They generally received poor marks, in consequence. Many of the answers on kinship and gender were similarly disappointing, being reproductions of lecture notes and/or supervision essays on a different question. On politics, there were some good answers on order (Q9), but the question about 'human scale' (Q8) seemed to throw the few candidates who attempted it. In sum, many candidates suffered from over-cautiousness, and would have done better to depart more from their prepared scripts, and think on their feet to answer the questions on the examination paper. The best candidates did this consistently, drawing on material from across the paper, rather than confining themselves to conventional 'topics', as they did so.

Some of the best scripts tackled the questions that were least often attempted: the relatively few answers on theory (Qs 1 and 2) were generally very good, as were answers on the set texts, where several essays were quite original, and most showed thorough knowledge of the texts, so they answered the questions asked in an original and substantive way. In fact, a high proportion of the best essays for this paper were on the set texts.

Although few candidates attempted questions on theory, many did show evidence of a broad understanding of the history of anthropological theory in their answers to other questions; this was given due credit.

A very few scripts displayed exceptionally poor judgement, such as an intemperate attack on an important theorist, based on his physical appearance. This childish, offensive, and fatuous writing did not receive much credit.



Part I, Soc. 1 Examiners Report, 2017-2018

The overall performance on this paper was quite good this year. One hundred fifty five students sat the exam. Forty four students received firsts, one hundred received 2:1s, and eleven received 2:2s. The mean mark was 65. The most popular question on the exam was on Marx which was selected by 79 students. The next most popular questions were those on intersectional feminism (66), Weber (64) and class (64). The least popular questions were those on world culture (5), the state (11) and digital technology and war (14). Other questions were answered by a range of students that stretched from 25 to 40. The best scripts were those that succeeded in: a) synthesizing an exceptionally wide range of the relevant literature into a coherent and methodical answer to the question; b) provided detailed exposition of the arguments of all major figures in a given literature and the array of critiques that have been levied against them; c) took a position such that the essay exhibited both whether and why the candidate agreed or disagreed with the arguments presented.

Some of the more common weaknesses that brought candidates' marks down were: a) reliance on superficial summaries of the literature; b) answers that while exhibiting an acquaintance with the relevant literature, failed to remain consistently on point with respect to the specific question asked; c) omissions of relevant authors, arguments, or critiques, and d) factual errors.





Vice-Chancellor of the University,  
University of Cambridge,  
vcexternalexaminers@admin.cam.ac.uk

26 September 2018

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

**Re: External Examining of HSPS Part 1, Papers POL1 and POL2**

This is my second year as external examiner for the Part One Politics papers. I remain impressed by the organisation of the process, the speed, efficiency and helpfulness of the administrative staff. [REDACTED] in particular is to be commended.

With regard to the material I reviewed I remain confident that the standards are appropriate for the examination and the qualification is most certainly comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions with which I am familiar. The two papers for which I have responsibilities (POL 1 and POL 2) provide first year undergraduates with a strong, broad grounding in the subject on which they can build in the second year. POL1, taking The State as a theme, is able to combine political theory and wider political analysis in interesting ways while also focusing students' attention on aspects of contemporary political change. POL2 provides an excellent introductory combination of conceptual and methodological approaches to IR with study of key issues. In other universities such courses might include more on the study of particular political institutions (parties, legislatures and so on) but I think that these are well-covered in later years and appreciate the original and distinct aims of both papers.

With regard to the material I reviewed I remain confident that the assessment was fair, and that the determination of awards was soundly and fairly conducted. Of the scripts I reviewed quality was often high and the best were truly excellent. I would note, however, that the procedure for selecting scripts for me to see was different on the two papers. It might be sensible to standardise this to some degree to aid comparability between them. That might necessitate a decision on exactly what you want the external examiner to do. It is common today for institutions to ask External Examiners to look at a sampled range of marks in order to comment on standards overall, and for split decisions to be resolved before reference to the examiner. In this case I was asked to adjudicate splits but also, in one paper, to look at all the scripts with a mark of 75 or over, and those which were 68/9 or 58/9 with some marks in the higher class; on the other paper I was asked to look at 68/9 and 58/9 and those below 55. Clarity as to what you want me to do for you would be helpful.

When reviewing marks, and especially split decisions, it was very helpful to see all the marks for the cohort and all the comments made by markers. This gave me a clear sense of the range and of the approach. Moderators are doing a difficult job well, ensuring that there is

commonality across markers. I saw a couple of scripts with short answers for the third question and in one case moved the mark down in line with the criteria provided (which refer to answers that are 'radically incomplete'). Colleagues were, I think, marking on what they thought they could see coming. Some further guidance for examiners here might be helpful.

I did notice that some splits turned on judgements of the importance or quality of the use by candidates of primary texts and of secondary sources. Some also turned on judgements of the appropriateness of candidates applying political theories to contemporary examples. It may be that colleagues have slightly different expectations when marking. I am not convinced that all the students who did quite well are really very familiar with the original texts by Hobbes, Weber or Schmitt to which they referred in their answers. I also noticed that the published criteria don't say anything explicit about the use of sources. It might be worth the Department and the various Directors of Study or relevant supervisors reflecting collectively on – I hesitate to use the phrase – the 'intended learning outcomes' of the first-year papers, and perhaps clarifying the marking criteria which are a teaching as well as a marking tool.

In a similar vein it might be worth reflecting on the breakdown of the questions attempted. On POL 2, of the four questions in Section A, 70 answers were to Q3 (on Global Optimism), the next highest being Q2 (on International Law) with 46. On the second section only 5 answered Question 10 (on domestic and international counterterrorism) with most choosing questions 5, 6, & 11 (9/11, War on Terror and Bolton on the ICC). On POL1 Section A from a choice of six, 151 of 209 answers were to Q1 and Q3 (Hobbes and Weber). There is a clear bunching around certain questions. This may well not matter. It's certainly common for students to focus on a few topics (often those which came earlier in the course). But if we are to be happy with it then it should be because we made the conscious choice to be so.

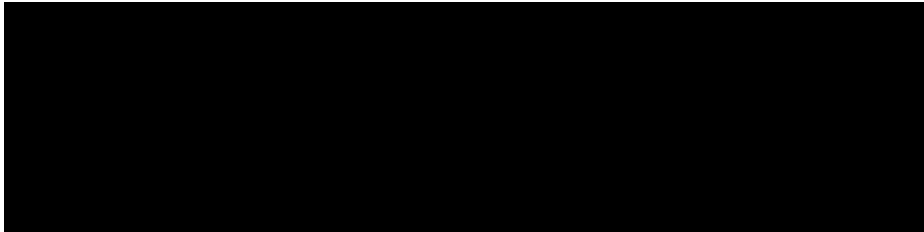
Finally, as last year, I am not convinced that the scripts always show the depth of critical analysis one might like and that one can fairly expect of Cambridge undergraduates in their first year. The bunching of marks at the mid 2.1 level may reflect the fact that a number of students are quite good writers and have learned well how to present in summary form the key ideas and arguments from lectures and supervisions. They are able to prepare for the examination knowing that each core topic has a specific question attached to it (answers which tended not to refer to other material taught on the same paper). The students then produce scripts which deserve their 2.1 but which could have been much better. Of the questions on POL1 only one explicitly asked for an evaluation of a key thinker as opposed to merely explaining them. This is the question on Marx (an odd discrepancy which I remarked upon when reviewing the papers) and it produced some good, interesting, answers. The Department might like to consider: including more questions which invite students to be evaluative or to develop a critical argument; including questions requiring reference to more than one theory or key concept; including open questions which invite the best students to demonstrate their learning from across the paper.

I also noted, as I did last year, that there was little to indicate that students on these courses were also studying Social Anthropology or Sociology. Question 1 on the Sociology paper and Question 13 on POL1 both ask about Marx and crisis so, presumably, there is some overlap in learning here. While we wish to avoid students being able to reproduce answers in different exams we might want them to draw on their wider reading and learning. But one could not tell that students answering the question on Weber had read or been taught anything other than the essay on politics as a vocation. Similarly students on POL2 answering questions about race and international politics or colonialism might have drawn on material from their learning in Social

Anthropology but rarely did so. It would be interesting to know in this context if there is anything different about the scripts for these exams written by candidates for the History and Politics Tripos and which I did not see. Do they apply their historical studies in their answers to questions about politics?

In closing I want to reiterate my conviction that the standards are high. I raise the issues I have raised as things that the Department might like to think about. They are neither requirements nor recommendations on which I insist. The scripts I reviewed were often very impressive and indicative of the great quality of the curriculum, the teaching and the overall organisation.

Yours sincerely,



## FULL REPORT

This is my first year as external examiner for HSPS Part 1 SAN1 paper. Processes for assessment and determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted. I am grateful for the administrator's efficiency.

My comments on overlaps between the draft exam questions were fully taken into account, and the exam questions seemed fair and challenging, although there seems to have been an uneven spread in the exam questions attempted, with a combination of four particular questions attempted in most of the 17 scripts I reviewed, so it might be worth trying to standardise the apparent accessibility of questions.

Students generally appeared to be very well-read, writing well-referenced essays and made good use of ethnographic material. Weaker essays appeared to reflect lectures and/or supervision essays; stronger essays showed originality and insight, reflecting considerable independence of thought.

This year there were fewer disputed scripts in which the two markers had not been able to come to agreement (6 compared to 12 last year). Essay splits were provided in some but not all disputed scripts. Rationales were provided only for unresolved disputes, and some of these were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, implying that they arose out of a discussion at that stage rather than having been copied and pasted from the markers' original notes. As discussed at the exam board, **it would be preferable to provide the SAN1 external examiner with a) marks by essay and b) markers' original rationales.**

This year the three POL1/POL2, SOC1, and SAN1 external examiners were put in the same room together, which was good as it enabled us to compare exam questions and identify some differences in how exams are marked and the data provide to examiners:

1. EXAM QUESTIONS. There were overlaps in similar questions being asked on different papers, which might encourage students to think beyond the unit and across disciplines, but makes it technically possible for students to replicate substantially the same work in two papers, and it seems from marker comments (on a POL script) that candidates might have been marked down for drawing on material prepared for another unit. As discussed at the exam board, **exam convenors from the constituent parts of the HSPS Tripos should feel empowered to alter questions set by lecturers should it transpire during the exam setting meeting that some questions are too similar.**
2. MARKING DATA. We found the following differences in the data that we were asked to look at:
  - SOC1 provides two markers' marks and rationales for each mark, with some evidence of discussion leading to moderation of marks.
  - POL1 and POL2 provide three essay marks from the 1<sup>st</sup> marker and one overall script mark from the 2<sup>nd</sup> marker, who is in effect a moderator rather than a 2<sup>nd</sup> marker.
  - SAN1 provides two markers' marks per script, with essay splits provided in some but not all disputed scripts (see above), and rationales provided only for unresolved disputes (see above).
3. There are two substantive differences between the POL1/POL2/SOC1 and the SAN1 marking criteria. It makes sense to refer specifically to ethnography in the SAN1 marking criteria. However, I am not convinced that it makes sense to refer to "A script (in the SAN1 marking criteria) rather than "An answer" (in the POL1/POL2/SOC1 marking criteria). Indeed, this focus on a 'script' may be what gave rise to at least three examples of inflated marks for scripts in which candidates only attempted one or two rather than all three questions. As discussed at the exam board, **I recommend replacing "A script" with "An answer" in the first sentence for each grade profile, and referring only to "a script" in the final sentence (about use of ethnography across all answers on a script).**

## School for Policy Studies

15th July 2018

Dear Vice Chancellor,

In my first year as an external examiner for this Tripos the procedures were robust and standards high across the board. I have noted below some more detailed comments for reflection by the exam board.

### Questions and Marking Standards

The questions posed for examination were formulated well and encouraged students to analyse critically rather than just describe knowledge: the range of material covered included both classic texts within the discipline and contemporary debates that reference current social issues. This may have been responsible for the good spread of responses. The comments provided by markers were brief, but helpful in explaining why a mark had been awarded. From discussion with externals examining other papers on the same Tripos it seems clear that there are a range of difference practices going on and the Sociology paper had the best examples of good practice. For example, the overview of the internal examiner ensured consistency in style and standard of questions asked. However, not all of the scripts had comments from both markers which made it harder to reconcile when there was large discrepancy and I would ask for this to be checked for next year.

### Marking Process

The current marking process is to use double blind marking which has often been referred to as the gold standard ensuring the fairest and most robust marking. This is becoming increasingly uncommon at other institutions. Partly due to the pressure of time - not a good pedagogic reason for change - but also due to questioning over whether it does produce fairer results (see the research of Susan Bloxham). In the first year papers while all scripts are double marked there are different combinations of pairings. Given the large number of scripts to mark it could be that a moderation system with one or two members of staff having an overview of all the work would ensure consistency. While not arguing for a particular system I would suggest that the programme board considers the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining double marking versus other systems such as moderation or non-blind double marking.

### Quality of Answers

In general candidates were well read and able to reference a good range of literature in their answers: there were very few weak answers. There is strong evidence then that the first year teaching had provided students with a sure foundation for Part 2 papers and the lecturing staff and tutors should be commended for this. The very best really strong answers took a clear position on their response to the question and the very best did so by drawing on different examples and deviating from standard positions. Where there were discrepancies in marks it seemed to be the relative weight given to the clarity and

originality of the argument that made the difference. There were some really outstanding essays that, as would be expected, are some of the best in the country and these could have been awarded higher marks. Nevertheless, sometimes marking on the first class borderline was slightly generous with coverage of debates rather than engagement with them given a lot of credit and some first class marks were awarded that did not go much further than this.

Yours Sincerely,

