

**Preliminary Examination in Philosophy, Politics and Economics
Trinity Term and Long Vacation 2013
Report of Chair of Examiners**

BASIC STATISTICS

250 candidates sat the examination in Trinity Term 2013. One additional candidate re-sat the Economics paper only and another sat the Politics and Economics papers only with permission to take the Philosophy paper in the Long Vacation.

The results (not including the two additional candidates above) were as follows:

Category	Number					Percentage				
	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Distinction	46	61	43	47	63	18.4	24.6	18.0	19.2	28.0
Pass	198	179	193	183	155	79.2	72.2	80.8	75.0	68.9
Fail 1 paper	4	7	2	12	6	1.6	2.8	0.8	4.9	2.7
Fail 2 or 3 papers	2	1	1	2	1	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.4
Total	250	248	239	244	225	100	100	100	100	100

*The figures in this table and the tables below do not include these additional candidates or the candidate re-sitting the Economics paper in June 2012).

6 candidates failed one or more papers: 2 failed Politics and 6 failed Economics, and 2 failed both Politics and Economics. The number of failures decreased from last year, when 8 candidates failed one or more papers: 2 failed Philosophy, 7 failed Economics, and 1 failed both Philosophy and Economics.

Of the 6 failing candidates who retook one or more papers in September, 5 passed the examination and 1 failed. A candidate who took the Politics and Economics papers but withdrew from the Philosophy examination in Trinity Term 2013 for personal reasons, sat the Philosophy paper for the first time in the Long Vacation and was awarded a Distinction.

ADMINISTRATION

Excellent administrative support was provided by the PPE Administrator, Wendy Wilkin, and in general the examination process ran smoothly. There was a technical problem however with the spread sheets. When the final results data was transferred from the administrator's computer to the central exam computer in the Politics department, changes were introduced which resulted in the award of distinctions to 4 candidates whose marks fell short of the threshold. The Proctors were informed as soon as the mistakes were discovered, and advised the Chair as to the correct procedure for revision. The Chair is very grateful to Margaret Stevens and Wendy Wilkin who worked hard to double-check the data and to ensure that the spreadsheet had not generated further errors.

Presumably for timetabling reasons, the Politics Prelims paper was sat on Wednesday afternoon this year rather than, as has normally been the case, Wednesday morning. This placed the politics examiners under more pressure than normal to meet the final

marks deadline the following Thursday. This is an issue beyond the Examiners control but it is worth noting that the Wednesday morning slot is preferable.

The timetable for marking and reporting was extended this year in line with last year's recommendation. It removed considerable pressure from the PPE Administrator who was entering both FHS and Prelims marks. It was also the first year of having an extra assessor for the Theory section of the Politics Prelim. This removed a considerable burden from the Theory examiner (who was also Chair) particularly in the light of the extra marking and exam setting that has arisen with the new Theorizing the Democratic State paper in the History and Politics prelim. There are no recommendations for next year.

Prof Lois McNay (Chair, PPE Prelims Examiners)

PPE Prelims Examination Board Members:

Dr Nicholas Owen, Dr Timothy Power, Prof Margaret Stevens, Dr Brian A'Hearn, Prof Cecile Fabre, Dr Paul Lodge

DISTRIBUTION OF MARKS

Distribution of Marks for June 2013 [2012 figures in brackets]			
	Politics	Philosophy	Economics
Average	61.0 [61.3]	62.0 [63.2]	60.7 [59.8]
Standard Deviation	5.8 [5.9]	6.8 [9.2]	10.6 [10.7]
75+	0.0% [1%]	2.8% [10.7%]	7.2% [10.5%]
70-74	3.2% [6.5%]	9.6% [22.2%]	11.2% [16%]
60-69	62.8% [64.3%]	54.4% [40.9%]	41.6% [33.5%]
50-59	30.8% [26.0%]	28.8% [21.0%]	26.4% [25.9%]
40-49	2.4% [2.2%]	4.5% [4.7%]	11.2% [12.6%]
37-39	0.0% [0%]	0.0% [0.5%]	0.0% [0.5%]
Less than 37	0.8% [0%]	0.0% [0%]	2.4% [1%]
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The average marks for Economics were higher, and the average mark for Politics and Philosophy was lower than in 2012. Economics had the lowest mean score.

GENDER BREAKDOWN

Category	Female June 2013 [2012 figures in brackets]		Male June 2013 [2012 figures in brackets]	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Distinction	10 [15]	11.6% [18.5%]	36 [46]	22.0% [27.5%]
Pass	73 [63]	84.9% [77.8%]	125 [116]	76.2% [69.5%]
Fail 1 paper	2 [3]	2.3% [3.7%]	2 [4]	1.2% [2.4%]
Fail 2 or 3 papers	1 [0]	1.2% [0%]	1 [1]	0.6% [0.6%]
TOTAL	86 [81]	100%	164 [168]	100%

Gender distribution of Marks June 2013 [2012 figures in brackets]			
	Politics	Philosophy	Economics
Female Average	60.9 [62.0]	61.3 [63.6]	58.5 [57.6]
Male Average	61.0 [61.1]	62.3 [63.1]	61.9 [60.8]
Overall Average	61.0 [61.4]	62.0 [63.2]	60.7 [59.8]
Female Standard Deviation	5.6 [5.0]	5.6 [8.4]	10.3 [10.9]
Male Standard Deviation	5.9 [6.3]	7.4 [9.6]	10.6 [10.6]
% of Female Cohort achieving ≥ 70	2.3% [6.3%]	3.5% [25.0%]	14.0% [16.3%]
% of Male Cohort achieving ≥ 70	3.7% [6.5%]	17.1% [29.8%]	20.7% [23.8%]

PAPER REPORTS

1. Report on INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY (June 2013)

SECTION A: LOGIC

Unsurprisingly, the two "elementary and straightforward" questions were overwhelmingly the two most popular questions, and generally attracted answers of a good standard, with well over a third of attempts receiving first-class scores and a very low proportion of failing scores.

(1) (148 answers; average: 16.0) A number of candidates mistakenly attempted to formalize "because" in (b.ii) with a conditional. The formalization in part (c) was generally well done, although some candidates became unstuck by the occurrence of "unless" in the first premiss. Genuine points of interest were not always forthcoming. A small minority of candidates displayed clear confusion over the correct use of truth table methods to establish validity. Translation from predicate logic into English was usually well done.

(2) (103 answers; average: 16.3) The part of the question concerning syntax attracted answers of varying quality: part (a) on the Bracketing Conventions was usually answered correctly, but part (b) on metavariables caused more trouble, and attracted a few very confused answers. Surprisingly few candidates were able to reproduce the definitions asked for in part (c) with complete accuracy. Part (d) on functions was usually well done. Part (e) was less well done; only the strongest candidates observed that the subject-specific set-theoretic vocabulary in the conclusion is open to reinterpretation.

(3) (33 answers; average: 13.8) This question was the least well done. Most candidates were able to offer a partially correct answer to part (b) on the semantics of the language of predicate logic, but few candidates gave completely correct answers. Part (c) often appeared to prove difficult, and attracted a few highly incomplete answers.

(4) (19 answers; average: 15.0) The application of Russell's theory of descriptions in part (a) attracted answers of mixed quality. But most candidates were able to correctly formalize the argument in part (b) and correctly supplied the tacit premiss that nothing is both a cat and a dog.

(5) (41 answers; average: 15.8) The question on Natural Deduction was the most popular and best answered of the non-"elementary and straightforward" questions. Many candidates had little difficulty with the first proof, and were able to give at least partially correct proofs in the second and third case, with a small number of perfect solutions to part (b). Most candidates gave correct answers to parts (c) and (d); the accompanying explanations varied in quality.

SECTION B: GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

General comments

Overall the standard of answers was reasonably good, given the fact that the majority of students would have had little formal exposure to material of this kind. Most showed an understanding consistent with 2.1 marks in the FHS, and some were clearly indicative of 1st class potential. There was relatively little difference in the mean score (ranging between 60.88 and 64) or standard deviation (ranging between 1.0 and 1.4) for each of the questions that was answered by more than 5 candidates.

The most frequent weaknesses that were found were the perennial ones: failure to engage with the details of the question asked; the tendency to try to include superficial discussion of as much material as possible rather than selecting material that would help with the particular foci of the questions; and failure to display a firm grasp of key concepts. Another common negative feature of answers was candidates' unwillingness to come down on one side of the argument or another, preferring instead conclusions which had the form: if one thinks approach x is correct then yes, if one thinks approach y is correct then no. Whilst it is clearly possible to reach the well-argued conclusion that one was not in a position to provide a determinate answer, it was rarely the case that candidates did this.

It is also worth noting, given recent syllabus changes, that few students chose to answer questions in ways that displayed any significant acquaintance with historical material. However, since the questions that were explicitly concerned with historical figures were answered by a very small number of candidates, this did not seem to have a serious impact on performance.

Comments on particular questions

Please note that, to ensure anonymity, comments are not provided where the number of candidates answering the question was 5 or fewer.

6a (46 answers)

Do you know that you are now sitting a philosophy exam? Are you certain?

The better answers used this question as an opportunity to consider different accounts of knowledge and their relationship to the question asked in light of skeptical challenges. However, many candidates simply considered standard skeptical scenarios and possible responses to the challenges provided by them. The very best answers were sensitive to the difference between knowledge and certainty. However, many candidates failed to engage with the second sentence in the question to any great degree, if at all. Very few candidates made any mention of historical material, despite the fact that the question invited those who had studied Descartes' 1st Meditation to engage with it in this way.

6b (11 answers)

If it was 20 degrees Celsius in a room and there was a thermometer in the room that believed that it was 20 degrees Celsius in the room, would that thermometer know that it was 20 degrees Celsius in the room?

Most, though not all, answers to this question appreciated the direct allusion to David Armstrong's conception of knowledge, or, at least the fact that this question was an invitation to consider the viability of externalist accounts of knowledge. Those that

did appreciate this fact generally produced good answers. Some candidates did not pick up on this at all and answered with reference to their understanding of the concept of knowledge in ways that did not engage at all well with the question.

7a (5 answers)

What appeal does Hume make to custom in his discussion of induction, and does he appeal to it in an appropriate way?

7b (43 answers)

Should we be disturbed by the claim that our beliefs about the future cannot be established deductively?

Most candidates were able to provide good to very good discussions of a range of positions addressing the ways in which one might justify induction, given the view that it cannot be justified deductively. However, explanations of the problems surrounding deductive justification were typically quite weak, often making reference to Hume's distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact, but without explaining the connection between these notions and deduction.

8a (14 answers)

'I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it.' (DESCARTES) How does Descartes rely on this claim to try to establish that he is really distinct from his body, and can exist without it', and does he succeed?

Candidates fared poorest in general on this question, with answers often showing a superficial understanding of Descartes' argument and lapsing into discussion of whether one could establish dualism using an argument from conceivability. The poorest answers were also marred by including irrelevant discussion of the standard problems with substance dualism (e.g., the problem of mind-body interaction).

8b (29 answers)

Does Frank Jackson's thought experiment concerning Mary show us anything about the relationship between the mental and the physical?

Candidates who answered this question typically had a good understanding of Jackson's thought experiment. However, problems arose when candidates tried to articulate the standard responses clearly, and only the very best were able to use the material to provide a focused answer to the actual question.

9a (16 answers)

'But is not a man drunk and sober the same person? Why else is he punished for the act he commits when drunk, though he be never afterwards conscious of it?' (LOCKE) Discuss.

Many of the answers to this question made very little reference to Locke's own answer and drifted into discussions of the responses that different approaches to personal identity might sustain along with critiques of those approaches. Whilst this did not prevent candidates from achieving reasonable marks, the very best answers were sensitive to the original context and the way in which Locke navigated this *prima facie* objection to his own account.

9b (57 answers)

Could you survive having half of your brain transplanted into one body and half into another?

Most candidates were able to provide adequate discussion of the ways in which different accounts of personal identity might accommodate fission and the problems that it poses for the numerical identity of persons. However, a significant number of candidates seemed unaware of the way in which the notion of survival has taken on a technical meaning in these debates and answered by relying on their own understanding of the term.

10a (42 answers)

Could there be freedom in a world where everything was necessary?

Answers to this question generally consisted of a discussion of the viability of compatibilist accounts of freedom, often starting with an account of Van Inwagen's argument for incompatibilism. Only some of the answers were attentive to the relationship between determinism and the claim that everything is necessary, and even then almost all of these assumed that the former reduces to the latter without further consideration. Despite the allusion to Hume's discussion of the relationship between liberty and necessity, very few candidates mentioned Hume's views at all.

10b (65 answers)

Is a person free only if she can do otherwise?

The weaker answers to this question degenerated into discussions of the relative merits of compatibilist and incompatibilist approaches to freedom. However, most candidates were able to bring in Frankfurt's thought experiment and the main differences consisted in accuracy of presentation of Frankfurt's ideas and the sophistication of the discussion of how they bore on the question.

11a (1 answer)

Was Descartes right to think that his understanding that existence belongs to the nature of God was no less clear and distinct than his understanding that having three sides belongs to the nature of triangles?

11b (23 answers)

Is the existence of horrendous evil inconsistent with the existence of God

Candidates fared best in general on this question. Most were able to state the problem of evil clearly and to survey a number of responses in a critical way. In the best answers, candidates also considered whether there might be a difference between evil and horrendous evil, but even where this was lacking answers were generally well-constructed and contained relevant discussion.

SECTION C: MORAL PHILOSOPHY

General remarks

Overall, the scripts were of reasonably high quality for the most – both with respect to content, and with respect to style. It is worth stressing, in fact, that there were no fails this year; moreover, some of the scripts were of extremely high quality.

In last year's report, four complaints were made regarding candidates' writing style: (a) overlong introductions; (b) excessive use of rhetorical questions; (c) overuse of the verb 'to feel' in lieu of 'to think'; (d) an overly familiar writing style. The examiner is

pleased to report that the overwhelming majority of candidates wrote good introductions, avoided rhetorical questions, perceived themselves as *thinking* about philosophy as opposed to having feelings about, e.g., the importance of saving lives, and generally wrote in a suitably academic way. Candidates made an effort to develop their own (sometimes idiosyncratic) examples, thereby displaying a firmer grasp of the material.

On more substantive matters: weaker candidates made the following common mistakes

- failing to analyse the questions properly, in their own terms (see e.g. my final comment on q.12 and q. 18).
- failing to define terms properly, or at all (see, e.g., comments on q. 15 and q. 16).

Stronger candidates did not make either mistake. The most impressive scripts were those which not only displayed a very good grasp of familiar material, but also perceived and explored (deliberate) ambiguities in the question titles (e.g., q. 17), and/or drew interesting distinctions between different possible cases (e.g., q. 13, q. 18).

q. 12. ‘Can the fulfilment of his sadistic impulses make a sadist genuinely happy?’ (31 answers. 10.2%.¹)

The question invited candidates to reflect on the constitutive components of a happy life, from a utilitarian and non utilitarian perspective. The word ‘genuinely’ warranted attention, which the best scripts did. Generally, good answers examined different theories of happiness, and made some interesting points about first order and second order desires. Competent scripts examined the question in the light of Mill’s distinction between higher and lower pleasures, but did not go much further beyond that. Too few scripts focused on *sadism* and averted to the perceived immoral nature (by common sense morality) of this particular preference: the question was not asking about the satisfaction of, for example, a preference for eating chocolate. A couple of scripts confused the sadist with the masochist, which resulted in very muddled argumentation.

q. 13. ‘Can a utilitarian account of the badness of death?’ (13 answers. 4.2%).

The least popular question by far. Too many of those who attempted it engaged in a long discussion to the effect that death is not necessarily a bad thing (e.g. the long suffering terminally ill might think, plausibly, that death is preferable to life.) True, but they would have been better inspired to accept, for the sake of argument, the common sense intuition that death is bad, and to scrutinise utilitarianism’s ability to account for that intuition. Another mistake consisted in conflating the question of whether death is bad and the question of whether killing is wrong. The very best answers distinguished between death and the process of dying, between death being bad for the person who dies versus death being bad for that person’s relatives and friends, versus death being bad impersonally.

q. 14. ‘Is it possible to prove a moral theory?’ (25 answers. 8.2%)

A relatively difficult question, which invited candidates to think beyond the details of Mill’s ‘proof’ and consider what the latter tells us about how to do moral philosophy. The weakest answers went through Mill’s moves and standard objections to those

¹ Rounded percentage of the total number of answers in moral philosophy (303).

moves, without giving much thought to what can or cannot be regarded as a proof. The very best answers used Mill's proof and its various claims as 'heuristic devices' to do precisely that. All candidates averred that a moral theory, unlike theoretic scientific arguments, cannot be proved deductively since it rests on first principles which can only be discerned by intuition or observed empirically. It would have been useful to say something about mathematical proofs in this context, since the latter also rest, it seems, on nondeductively provable assumptions (e.g. Euclid's' axiom of parallels.)

q. 15. 'Does rule-utilitarianism provide a good alternative to act-utilitarianism?' (134 answers. 44.2%).

The most popular question by a very long shot. On the whole it was done competently enough. Weaker answers did not define act-U and rule-U properly and/or did not clearly explain why rule-U is thought by some to remedy some of the flaws of act-U. The best answers set the problem clearly, identified several of those flaws well, engaged in a thorough study of the extent to which, if at all, rule-U succeeds where act-U fails, *and* addressed weaknesses of rule-U. The question of what constitutes a 'good alternative' was discussed by the better scripts, as was the distinction between rule-U and multilevel act-U. Competent scripts went through familiar moves and counter-moves, which they illustrated with equally familiar examples (e.g. the sheriff and the innocent man.)

q. 16. 'Can a utilitarian be genuinely committed to promoting justice?' (25 answers. 8.2%).

Far too few candidates made the effort of defining justice, which considerably weakened their answers. The best scripts distinguished between distributive justice and retributive justice, and examined utilitarians' putative commitment to both. On the whole, candidates who chose to focus their answer on justice in *Utilitarianism* displayed a good understanding of Mill's own conception of justice and its connection with rights.

q. 17. 'If you see a person drowning, what matters is that you save her life; it does not matter what your intentions for doing so are.' (37 answers. 12.2%).

The question focused explicitly on the view that only consequences matter, not intentions. Yet, some scripts (the weakest) spent a considerable amount of time defending the view that, for consequentialists, it is important to save people's life generally but not always: candidates should be aware that a two-statement question should be read carefully, to establish whether it is apposite to analyse each statement in isolation from each other, or (as was the case here) whether the two statements taken together yields a contrastive view.

The best scripts distinguished between several different interpretations of 'it matters', and two meanings of the word 'intentions' – in this case, the intention to save the person's life, versus one's deeper intentions (or motives) for doing so. Interesting points included: the view that motives and intentions matter not for establishing the rightness or wrongness of actions but for assessing agents' characters; the view that they do matter for the rightness and wrongness of actions (a couple of candidates deployed the doctrine of double effect intelligently); the view that they matter as a predictor of one's tendency to do the (consequentially) right thing.

q. 18. ‘If the only way to save a human being is by killing a cat, a utilitarian is committed to the view that one must kill the cat.’ Do you agree? (38 answers. 12.5%).

This question enabled candidates to use both what they had learned about utilitarianism as an account of happiness (is a human being necessarily happier than a cat) and what they had learned about it as an account of the rightness and wrongness of actions. The very best scripts managed to do both, to very good effect. They also noted that the question does not give any indication as to (inter alia) (a) whether the human being is nearing the end of her life, (b) whether the cat is a source of happiness for very many people. Whether the integrity objection works in this context exercised quite a few candidates. The weaker scripts deployed Mill’s distinction between higher and lower pleasures to argue that, from a Millian point of view, one should prima facie kill the cat – but they spent so much time discussing the distinction that they lost sight of the specific conflict between those two lives. Similarly, a common mistake was to discuss the integrity objection at some length in its own right (with long disquisitions on Jim and the Indians) without relating that discussion clearly to the specific issue at hand.

**Cecile Fabre
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James Studd**

2. Report on INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS: The Theory and Practice of Democracy (June 2013)

There were a number of impressive scripts which showed an ability to combine comparative analysis with detailed empirical knowledge of particular institutions and political processes. Most candidates were able to display a reasonable knowledge of aspects of the political systems they were studying and to apply some of the insights of comparative politics.

As in previous years, students were notably conservative in their question choices, gravitating toward a small number of popular options. Question 9 (John Stuart Mill) and Question 23 (UK party politics) were each answered by approximately half of all candidates. Question 11 (freedoms and poverty) and Question 27 (US Supreme Court) were also answered by further 36-37% of all candidates each, meaning that there was relatively little diversity beyond these four.

Overall, there were few really poor performances, with only two failures among the 251 candidates in June 2013. The average mark for the Politics exam was 60.8, fully in line with the typical mean of 61 over the past few years.

On Section A, as in previous years, the standard of answers for the theory questions was satisfactory if a little disappointing. Apart from a few notable exceptions, most candidates showed little direct knowledge of the primary texts, stuck to a narrow range of secondary sources and tended to rely on rehearsed and predictable answers. In general, the theory assessors felt that students could improve their performance dramatically by thinking harder about what the question is asking, by setting out their answers more carefully and analytically, and by having read the primary texts and explored some of the interpretative disagreements.

On Section B, our impression was that candidates took the new rubric very seriously. The best answers tried to introduce insights drawn from comparative work even when answering ostensibly 'single-country questions'. By contrast we were concerned about the ability of students to use any other country examples beyond the UK, US, France and Germany when answering the 'thematic' questions on presidentialism, on federalism and on democratic consolidation in the developing world. To be answered satisfactorily, these questions required other country cases to be considered. We suggest that the course providers consider whether (i) the value of comparative perspectives in addressing the 'single country questions', and (ii) the value of *appropriate* case studies in the thematic questions are indicated sufficiently clearly in the reading-lists and lectures. As in previous years, we also found the answers to the specific methodological questions rather thin.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A (Questions 1-12)

1. *'Political theory is concerned with how the world ought to be rather than how it is'*. Discuss. (10 takers; popularity rank 22/28).

There were very few takers for this question but the answers were of a good standard. One was outstanding. The question was dealt with thoughtfully and in an imaginative fashion. Rather than answer in general terms, candidates drew on knowledge of particular thinkers and extrapolated outwards to discuss the nature of political thinking with regard to the relation of fact and norm. Textual detail gave the answers focus and depth.

2. *Is the law-giver consistent with Rousseau's idea of popular sovereignty?* (48 takers; popularity rank 7/28).

As ever, this was one of the most popular questions. Answers fell into two opposed camps, arguing either that the lawgiver was an anomalous figure or that it was consistent with Rousseau's general republican logic. On the whole, perhaps because of the way the question was formulated, answers seemed to be more thoughtful and less descriptive than those of last year. The best answers showed detailed knowledge of *The Social Contract* and of a range of secondary texts. Weaker answers relied on standard secondary interpretations only.

3. *'Deliberative democracy is a nice idea in principle, but unfeasible in practice'*. Discuss. (19 takers; popularity rank 16/28)

Answers were thoughtful and even-handed. Some even made connections between the set reading on deliberative democracy and the primary classical texts, notably Rousseau and Mill. Thinking across reading list topics in this way is to be encouraged.

4. *Why does De Tocqueville regard equality as a threat to democracy? What, in his view, can be done to counteract this threat?* (7 takers; popularity rank 24/28).

Of the four classical thinkers, De Tocqueville has obviously been the least studied this year, judging from the number of answers. This is a shame because his work offers an introduction to the important ideas of civil society, associational life and intermediate institutions. This might also explain why there were so few takers for question 7. On the whole, answers were of a good standard but mainly descriptive in nature. Few took the opportunity to evaluate whether De Tocqueville's views on equality and its detrimental effects on liberty were warranted.

5. *Should the representatives in a democracy represent the gender balance in a population?* (12 takers; popularity rank 20/28)

Few candidates answered this question but in general they were of a good standard. There was a tendency to answer this through empirical material about gender participation rather than focus more sharply on the theoretical issues involved in representation. It is not that such material is not relevant, but rather it is important for candidates to bear in mind the general orientation of the question.

6. *'What the bourgeoisie...produces, above all, are its own gravediggers'* (*Communist Manifesto*). *Why did Marx and Engels believe this? Were they right?* (29 takers; popularity rank 11/28).

As in previous years, one of the most popular questions. The best answers were those that showed a nuanced understanding both of Marx's theory of exploitation and of the continuing relevance of this thought for a contemporary audience. The best scripts referred both to his political economy and also to his theories of ideology and alienation. Stronger candidates also showed knowledge of both functionalist and dialectical interpretations of Marx rather than just the former (e.g. Cohen). Weaker answers relied on loose, at points, inaccurate renditions of Marx's claims and simplistic assessments of the overall value of his thought.

7. *What is civil society and why is it important for democracy?* (11 takers; popularity rank 21/28).

This question drew few answers — and the standard of those was mixed. Candidates tended to treat 'democracy' as unproblematic and failed to identify what components of democracy were likely to be most affected by the quality of civil society. And few candidates showed much knowledge of the literature on civil society or social capital, or their relationship.

8. *Is it sufficient to define power as the ability of some individuals to make others act in ways that they would not otherwise do?* (17 takers; popularity rank 18/28).

Unsurprisingly, answers focused mainly on Lukes' three-dimensional analysis of power with reference to Dahl's pluralism and the mobilization of bias critique. Few candidates considered other important approaches to the issue of power such as Arendt's idea of collective empowerment or Foucault's idea of normalizing disciplinary power. This is disappointing because, after Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty, Lukes' work on power must be one of the most frequently regurgitated texts in exams. Inevitably, credit is given to those candidates who do not confine their answers to just rehearsing its key points. There is a lot that can be said about power without going through Lukes at all although he is valuable as an initial starting point.

9. *Is Mill's defence of individual liberty compatible with his utilitarian beliefs?* (128 takers; popularity rank 1/28).

As ever, extremely popular. Most candidates argued that liberty and utility were compatible if one took account of Mill's understanding of man as a progressive being. John Gray was a heavily cited secondary text. Pleasingly, many candidates also showed a detailed knowledge of *On Liberty*.

10. *Is there a case for elites in democracy?* (20 takers; popularity rank 14/28).

Answers were nuanced, in general, most making a qualified case for the functional necessity of elite rule. There were one or two Schumpeterian answers which were refreshing insofar as they made a bold case for absolute superiority of elite rule over rule by the people. One candidate used Rousseau's idea of participatory democracy to answer the question in the negative. Again, such thinking across reading list topics is to be welcomed.

11. *If I am so poor that I cannot afford to travel, is my freedom to travel of any value to me?* (93 takers; popularity rank 4/28).

As is always the case with questions on liberty, very popular. Overall, answers were of a satisfactory standard, including several outstanding ones. Rather refreshingly, Berlin and MacCallum was mentioned very little, candidates drawing instead on Swift's distinction between effective and formal freedoms and citing also Waldron's discussion of the putative freedom to sleep under the bridges of Paris. Most candidates took a sensible middle course, arguing along the lines that the formal freedom to travel had a certain value in itself but that it only became truly meaningful in the absence of poverty. However, the more unorthodox answers (either a defense of the formal freedom in itself or a denunciation of it as illusory) were also good and sometimes more original.

12. *Given that it makes unrealistic assumptions about individual motivation, what, if anything, can rational choice theory tell us about politics?* (4 takers; popularity rank 27/28).

The few answers to this question were of a high standard. They displayed detailed knowledge of rational choice theory and arguments ranged between strong defences of its analytical power to conceding that, beyond explicitly instrumental types of political behaviour, it has limited purchase.

Section B (i) (Questions 13-20)

13. *Is presidentialism inherently more unstable than parliamentarism?* (48 takers; popularity rank 8/28).

Answers to this question were rather weak. Many candidates interpreted the question as being about governmental instability rather than regime instability, which would have been fine had they chosen obvious cases of frequent cabinet collapse (e.g. postwar Italy) to illustrate the concept of instability at work. However, it was puzzling to see many candidates use the USA and the UK in their answers. This USA-UK strategy suggests a fundamental misreading of what instability is, both absolutely and relatively to other political systems. It is also a missed opportunity, by failing to engage with the classic critique of presidentialism by Linz.

14. *What factors best explain democratic consolidation in developing countries?* (7 takers; popularity rank 25/28).

The handful of takers here showed some promise in contrasting economic and cultural explanations of democratic diffusion in the developing world. However, almost all of the answers were very abstract, with no application to concrete cases.

15. *'To understand political institutions, it is necessary to compare across countries'. Discuss.* (10 takers; popularity rank 23/28).

The better answers developed critiques of the question. They focused on ways to exploit within-case political change over time or to engage in rich contextual understanding of countries and polities.

16. *'In any given political system, the number of political parties is simply a reflection of prevailing electoral laws'. Discuss.* (79 takers; popularity rank 5/28).

The answers to this question were routinely competent, comparing sociological (cleavage structures) and institutional (electoral law) explanations of the number of parties. At the same time, this approach was so common that the answers were among the most formulaic we encountered. In discussing cleavages, candidates tended to stick to the classic 19th-century dimensions proposed by Lipset and Rokkan, failing to note new cleavages that have emerged in recent decades.

17. *Why do countries adopt federalism?* (17 takers; popularity rank 19/28).

Some candidates opted for a descriptive inventory of federal structures, and others mixed in some consequences of federalism. However, the question itself was about causes of federalism. The stronger answers approached the question as one of institutional design and carefully considered the alternative (unitarism).

18. *'A democratic legislature can be either representative or efficient, but not both'. Discuss.* (37 takers; popularity rank 9/28).

The best answers here took some time to offer working definitions of efficiency and representativeness before applying the question to concrete cases. Weaker answers

tended to read ‘democratic legislature’ as a synonym for ‘democracy’, thus avoiding the specific institutional terrain of legislatures. Some candidates seemed to be holding this question in reserve as an opportunity to discuss a country case that they had not yet covered elsewhere, with predictably superficial results.

19. *Is judicial review a prerequisite for a functioning democracy?* (29 takers; popularity rank 12/28).

This question produced some rather good discussions of whether unelected judges are compatible with liberal democracy. Some candidates reviewed only positive cases (countries where judicial review is established) and failed to include any negative cases, which would have strengthened their argumentation concerning ‘prerequisite’.

20. *What accounts for the varying policy influence of different bureaucratic structures?* (4 takers; popularity rank 28/28).

As in previous years, bureaucracy and administrative structures were avoided by the candidates.

Section B (ii) (Questions 21-28)

21. *What can political scientists learn from studying the failure of the French Fourth Republic?* (19 takers; popularity rank 17/28)

A few weaker answers focused narrowly on the death spiral of 1958 rather than on underlying problems plaguing the regime during the previous 12 years. Stronger answers catalogued these problems and went on to show how the constitution of the Fifth Republic ‘corrected’ them. It was gratifying to see some examples of vivid historical writing here.

22. *‘The variable that matters most in determining presidential power in France is the presence or absence of a supportive legislative majority’. Do you agree?* (58 takers; popularity rank 6/28).

Virtually all answers used this question as an opportunity to describe how French semipresidentialism worked in practice. The descriptive material was competent, but the best answers went beyond the institutional mechanics of cohabitation to discuss a few concrete historical episodes featuring real personalities (presidents and prime ministers in their various configurations). Some candidates were unaware of recent developments, such as changes to the electoral cycle, and their implications for the presence or absence of supportive legislative majorities.

23. *How much have constitutional reforms since 1997 dispersed political power in the UK?* (121 takers; popularity rank 2/28)

This was a very popular question. Better answers defined ‘dispersion’ clearly, considered how it might be measured, and used it as the test of the various reforms. Weaker answers tended to describe the various reforms, usually accurately, and offered views of their merits according to less well-defined criteria.

24. *Are there significant ideological differences in UK party politics?* (22 takers; popularity rank 13/28).

There was some confusion about what ‘ideological differences’ were, and only a few candidates focused their answers sufficiently closely on them. Many answers simply traced policy differences between the Conservative and Labour parties, often going back to 1945 or stopping in 1979 despite the present tense of the question.

25. *What did the constitutional design of the Federal Republic of Germany owe to understandings of why the Weimar Republic had collapsed?* (33 takers; popularity rank 10/28).

This question was generally well done, with a good mix in the best answers of historical analysis and the theory of constitutional design. Some candidates failed to distinguish adequately between the understandings of the constitution-makers, and present-day understandings.

26. *Why are political parties so privileged in the German political system?* (7 takers; popularity rank 26/28)

This was not a popular question, but was also well done, although one or two candidates offered overly descriptive accounts of the party system rather than engaging with the question of privilege. This was one example where comparative perspectives might have been especially useful.

27. *Does the US Supreme Court set agendas or ratify consensuses?* (95 takers; popularity rank 3/28).

A very popular question which was generally clearly and accurately answered. Most candidates engaged fully with the terms in the question, and were pleasingly well-informed about recent cases decided by the Court. Candidates reached a wide variety of conclusions, with many of the best answers disputing the proposed alternatives as a false choice.

28. *Are US political parties becoming more polarised? If so, why?* (20 takers; popularity rank 15/28).

This question was not as well done as the other US question. Most answers did not make it clear in what dimension they were judging polarization, and few offered deep or sophisticated explanations of why any polarization had occurred. Here again, a comparative perspective on party systems would have helped many candidates to improve their answers.

Politics Recommendations for 2013-2014

One year ago in the 2012 report, the Politics assessors recommended that an additional assessor be appointed for Section A (political theory questions) in 2012-2013. In June 2012, over 70% of the candidates had chosen two theory questions, but there had been only one assessor (L. McNay) marking Section A, while Section B had two markers (G. Peele and T. Power). For 2012-2013, a more balanced approach was

taken: the scripts were marked by four assessors, with two from theory (L. McNay and M. Philp) and two from comparative government (N. Owen and T. Power). This allowed for not only a more equitable distribution of the work, but also for far easier shifting of scripts within pairs of markers. We recommend that this arrangement be maintained in the future.

For 2013-2014, we would again recommend some reconsideration of the rubric for Section B. We are concerned that the rubric does not only allow single-country questions in Section B(ii) (which is fine) but also allows, or even encourages, candidates to use single-country examples to answer questions in Section B(i), where to do so may not always be sufficient for a good answer. We recommend that the Department consider this issue in its review of the course.

Overview of Politics Results

(Data for the 251 candidates who sat the exam on 19th June 2013;
does not include resits)

Mean Score: 60.8
Maximum: 71.8
Minimum: 20.3
Std Dev: 5.8

Breakdown of Results

Percentage of Total Candidates and (N)

70 and Above:	3.19	(8)
67-69:	9.16	(23)
63-66:	20.72	(52)
60-62:	33.07	(83)
57-59:	15.54	(39)
53-56:	9.96	(25)
50-52:	5.58	(14)
49 and Below:	2.79	(7)
Total:	100.0	

Lois McNay
Nick Owen
Tim Power

3. Report on INTRODUCTORY ECONOMICS (June 2013)

The *Introductory Economics* paper was taken by 376 candidates (252 PPE, 90 E&M, 13 H&E, 21 E(M)EM).

All of the economics examiners were concerned by the poor grasp of economic concepts and apparent lack of intuition shown in a large majority of scripts. As was also noted in last year's report, most candidates demonstrated competence in carrying out standard calculations, but those parts of questions that required explanation and exposition of economic ideas were poorly done. This criticism applies across the full range of scripts: even those who achieved first class marks relied more on technical competence than economic insight; candidates who were technically weaker could have compensated for this by intelligent exposition but did not do so.

As was emphasised both in last year's report, and in the document "Advice for Students Preparing for Examinations in Economics", answers to problem questions should include full explanations, and economic interpretation. Disappointingly, this advice was ignored by most candidates.

Part A (candidates must answer three out of six multipart questions).

1. Competitive Industry (47% of candidates)

This question was mainly bookwork, but the standard of answers was dismally low, revealing serious confusion about the behaviour of competitive firms. A significant minority of students confused microeconomic and macroeconomic concepts – asserting, for example, that supply is vertical in the long-run, or prices fixed in the short-run. Another common mistake was to claim that "in the long-run there are no fixed costs", leading to confusion in part (ii); this claim is true only in the sense that fixed costs may be avoided by exit from the industry. Few candidates were able to provide a complete analysis of the effects of fixed costs and taxation in part (ii), although some had intuitive insight. For part (iii) candidates generally noted that less efficient firms would leave the industry, but did not realise that this implied an upward-sloping industry supply function, affecting tax incidence in the long-run.

2. Consumer Demand (82% of candidates)

This was by far the most popular Part A question. It was relatively straightforward, and not very discriminating. Most students can solve a constrained optimisation problem competently, and achieved good marks on the mechanical parts of the question, but demonstrated little economic intuition. Most did not distinguish between the budget set and the budget constraint, or consider whether preferences were well-behaved to justify their solution to the optimisation problem. In part (vi), few mentioned equivalent variation, or income and substitution effects.

3. Monopoly (45% of candidates) There was considerable variation in the quality of answers, but most candidates were able to make progress with parts (iii) and (iv), covering standard material, even if they did not make accurate use of the data given in the question. In part (i), intuitive explanations were weak. In part (v) few candidates realised that if the elasticity had been different the marginal cost would also have been different. (Some may have interpreted a "higher" elasticity as a less negative one, without making this clear in the answer.)

4. AS-AD Model (47% of candidates)

This was a textbook question, and generated competent answers: candidates understood what was wanted. In part (i) the majority chose to describe the sticky price model, but demonstrated a rather shaky grasp of it; explanations of other models were better. For part (ii) many candidates who understood the basic effects of a demand shock lost marks for answers that were too brief and mechanical. Some assumed horizontal SRAS, instead of applying the model in part (i) to explain how prices adjust. In part (v) most candidates recognised that the Phillips Curve may have shifted, but failed to explain why in any detail – either in theoretical terms or by referring to recent events.

5. Classical Model (30% of candidates)

This was the least popular macro question in Part A and was poorly answered. Use of the classical model requires an understanding that output can change only as a result of changes in factor supply or technology. Even candidates who explained correctly how output is determined in part (ii) tended to forget this later. Only a minority were able to derive the result in part (i); others simply claimed that competitive firms make zero profits. Circular flow diagrams were inaccurate, and rarely tailored properly to the question – for example, by including the government. The role of the interest rate in bringing about equilibrium was often omitted. Some students provided a Keynesian rather than classical explanation in parts (iii) and/or (iv) (where a supply shock is required for consistency with the classical model). Answers to part (v), on money, were scrappy and incomplete.

6. Mundell-Fleming Model (47% of candidates)

A surprising number of students had difficulty with parts (i) and (ii) on the (Keynesian) multiplier: common mistakes were to assume it was $1/(1-\alpha)$, ignoring imports, and/or to answer (ii) with respect to a *different* multiplier incorporating interest rate effects. Answers to parts (iii) and (iv) demonstrated some understanding, albeit superficial and insecure, of the Mundell-Fleming model. The interpretation of the data in part (iv) was challenging; candidates obtained some marks by describing the changes in the data accurately (for example, recognising that the Zloty depreciated).

Part B (candidates must answer one out of four essay questions).

7. Perfect Competition and Intervention (39% of candidates)

This was the most popular essay, and reasonably well answered. Most candidates referred to the welfare theorems, but (as examiners have noted in previous years) failed to explain how competition results in an efficient allocation. The most coherent answers challenged the quotation by considering whether markets existed for all goods, and discussing the role of government with respect to externalities; others did so by simply challenging the premise of perfect competition.

8. Oligopoly (27% of candidates)

Most candidates could describe the main oligopoly models, but explanations were often thin and superficial, and/or failed to establish what is meant by “an efficient level of output” in the context of the model. Few answers went beyond the basic theory to discuss real-world markets.

9. Fiscal Austerity (22% of candidates)

This was quite a difficult question, which elicited some good and well-informed answers making a genuine attempt to apply macroeconomic theory, and many mediocre ones in journalistic style. Relatively few considered the question of

whether, after several years of poor growth, we should still think of the economy as being below potential output.

10. Natural Rate of Unemployment (11% of candidates)

This was the least popular essay, and attempts were almost uniformly poor. A common (and unfortunate) beginning was a tautological definition of the natural rate as the rate corresponding to the natural rate of output. This was typically followed by some confused discussion of frictional unemployment. Having failed to identify the determinants of unemployment, candidates were unable to answer the question.

Margaret Stevens

Brian A'Hearn