



HUMAN, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL SCIENCES  
ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT

CONTENT SPECIFICATION

2017

## Overview

The purpose of the Human, Social, and Political Sciences Admissions Assessment is to determine a candidate's potential to achieve in an academically demanding undergraduate degree course. The assessment is designed to be challenging, in order to differentiate effectively between able applicants, including those who may have achieved the highest possible grades in school examinations.

The assessment will take two hours and consists of two sections:

### Section 1

Section 1 is an assessment of candidates' reading skills, including their ability to read critically, understand main ideas in texts, analyse detail and grasp implicit meaning.

Section 1 is in multiple-choice format. 1 hour is allowed for this section of the assessment.

### Section 2

Section 2 requires candidates to write an essay on a topic of general interest, broadly related to the social sciences. This section is designed to assess candidates' ability to present a logical and persuasive argument, supported by relevant evidence.

1 hour is allowed for this section of the assessment.

Dictionaries may **not** be used in any part of this assessment.

## Section 1

Section 1 of the Human, Social, and Political Sciences Admissions Assessment assesses the ability to understand and draw meaning from texts in a multiple-choice format. This section of the assessment is not subject-specific, and texts included will be on a variety of topics and may be drawn from a range of sources.

All academic subjects require the ability to read a variety of sometimes challenging texts for meaning. Specifically, the tasks in Section 1 focus on identifying the way in which the texts are structured, the main ideas being presented, and the way in which these are supported and developed.

Section 1 consists of four tasks, based around text excerpts. Each task will have a set of multiple-choice questions with four options. Questions will not require specialist knowledge or any information beyond what is contained within the texts.

### Content

Each task will use recently written texts, from authentic sources, in English. Sources may include works of non-fiction (at a relatively high level conceptually and linguistically but which do not assume specialist subject knowledge), newspapers, general interest magazines, book reviews, abstracts written for research papers or journal articles, and professional websites. Texts will not depend on the understanding of specific aspects of British culture.

Questions will require candidates to:

- look at the main ideas and focus of a text;
- analyse the detail and distinguish opinions and attitudes presented in the text;
- determine the writer's purpose in writing the text, including consideration of intended audience;
- extract implications and implicitly stated elements of the text;
- draw comparisons and contrasts within a text or between different texts.

For all tasks, the emphasis is on identification of opinion, attitude, purpose and inferred meaning rather than the retrieval of directly stated factual details. Questions may also focus on elements of text organisation which support meaning, such as the use of exemplification and comparison.

## Format

Section 1 consists of four tasks. **Candidates will be required to answer all questions in all of the tasks.** Each task will consist of one or more text excerpts and a set of four-option multiple-choice questions. There will be no overlap between tasks. Answers to questions will not depend on other questions.

### Task 1: Understanding Short Texts

Questions in this task are on two short abstracts or reviews on a common topic. Texts will be no more than 200 words each. The task assesses a candidate's ability to identify, compare and contrast features of two different texts. The candidate's understanding of the two texts is tested through discrete questions aiming to cover a wide range of focuses with the emphasis on identification of opinion, attitude, purpose and inferred meaning rather than the retrieval of directly-stated factual details. Questions may also focus on elements of text organisation which support meaning, such as the use of exemplification, comparison and reference.

### Task 2: Multiple-Matching

Questions in this task are on four short extracts, either from four different writers on the same theme or four extracts from the same source. Extracts will be no more than 200 words each. This task requires candidates to locate a text where a particular idea is expressed, discounting ideas in other texts which may appear similar but do not reflect the whole of the question accurately. Each question requires the candidate to scan the four texts to locate the area of text which appears to contain the answer, and then to read this carefully to check that it is the correct answer.

### Task 3: Understanding Extended Text

Questions in this task are on one extended text (of no more than 1000 words). The task assesses the understanding of a longer stretch of academic text which may include argument, supported claims, and reference to previous work and ideas in a particular field.

### Task 4: Understanding Extended Text

Like Task 3, Task 4 tests the understanding of a longer stretch of academic text (in this case, of up to 1200 words) which may include argument, supported claims, and reference to previous work and ideas in a particular field.

## Scoring

All questions are worth 1 mark. Marks are not deducted for incorrect answers, so candidates are advised to answer all questions.

## Section 2

Section 2 of the Human, Social and Political Sciences Admissions Assessment requires candidates to write an essay. Candidates will answer **one** question from a choice of eight, and all the questions will fall broadly within the concerns of the social sciences subjects that make up the HSPS tripos, namely:

- Social Anthropology
- Sociology
- Politics and International Relations.

There is no expectation that candidates will have studied any of these subjects before, nor will the questions necessarily pertain obviously to one or another discipline, so questions may be approached from a number of angles, depending on an applicant's background and interests. Sample questions are included in the Appendix of this document.

Essays will be assessed with the following criteria in mind:

- relevance to the question;
- coherence of overall argument;
- ability to argue in a logical and persuasive fashion;
- ability to use evidence to support an argument;
- accuracy and relevance of evidence used;
- clarity and quality of expression;
- correct use of English.

## APPENDIX: SPECIMEN QUESTIONS

### Section 1

#### Task 1

Read the two abstracts below, which give summaries of two academic articles relating to cities and urban development. For questions 1 – 6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the texts.

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#### ABSTRACT ONE

##### **Retrofitting cities: Local governance in Sydney, Australia**

*Robyn Dowling, Pauline McGuirk, Harriet Bulkeley*

Transforming cities to a lower carbon future is a key challenge of contemporary urban governance. Retrofitting the city – or modifying existing urban infrastructures, buildings and daily life to suit different energy sources and expectations of energy consumption – is essential to this transformation. In urban studies, little focus has been applied to the shape and character of urban governance frameworks and mechanisms required to successfully retrofit cities. In this paper we address this lacuna by exploring the logics, practices and dynamics of retrofitting governance in the Australian city. Using a governmentality perspective, the paper identifies the involvements of different scales of government in retrofitting policies and mechanisms and connections between them. Based on our survey of carbon reduction initiatives involving government, business and community actors across Australia's cities, we outline the types of retrofitting solutions being proposed and enacted. Focussing on initiatives from Sydney, Australia's largest city, the paper documents four key techniques through which retrofitting is being governed – self-governing, holistic, facilitative and educative. The findings indicate that governance gaps remain in attending to the daily life of technologies and the materiality of daily life.

#### ABSTRACT TWO

##### **Critical research on eco-cities? A walk through the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City, China**

*Federico Caprotti*

This article uses the narrative tool of a walk through Tianjin Eco-City, China, as an entry point in raising and discussing key questions in contemporary eco-city research. Eco-city projects are becoming increasingly prevalent in policy and political-economic discourses in a variety of locations as new urban spaces where blueprints for low carbon economies can be trialled. In light of this, the article highlights the necessity of, firstly, considering scale when analyzing eco-city 'futures'. Secondly, the article argues for the need to interrogate eco-cities' definitions, as well as their evaluation, performance and monitoring frameworks, as this will aid in critical analyses of the marketing and presentation of actually built eco-city projects. Thirdly, the question of internal social resilience needs to be assessed: this is of crucial importance in light of the exclusive, gated nature of several flagship eco-city projects under construction at present. Lastly, the article argues that research on eco-city projects needs to consider not only high-tech, new urban environments, but also the low-paid workers who form what the article calls the 'new urban poor', forming large, often transient populations on the edges of flagship 'sustainable' urban projects worldwide.

- 1 According to Abstract One, what is the main aim of the article on retrofitting cities?
- A to defend the idea of retrofitting
  - B to point out weaknesses in retrofitting technology
  - C to describe the technology required for retrofitting
  - D to look at methods of achieving retrofitting
- 2 Which word from Abstract One describes the theoretical framework used by the writers in their analysis of retrofitting in Sydney?
- A 'lacuna'
  - B 'governmentality'
  - C 'holistic'
  - D 'materiality'
- 3 In Abstract One, the writers claim that one feature of their research is that
- A they have engaged with an area representing a weakness in the field.
  - B they have proposed a way of integrating key techniques.
  - C they have identified potentially divisive underlying attitudes.
  - D they have employed a controversial methodology.
- 4 In Abstract Two, the writer says that eco-city projects are important because
- A they show that low carbon economies are sustainable.
  - B they provide an opportunity for testing economic models.
  - C they offer new opportunities for disadvantaged groups.
  - D they encourage political involvement in environmental issues.

- 5 In Abstract Two, 'exclusive, gated nature' contrasts with
- A 'internal social resilience'.
  - B 'new urban environments'.
  - C 'new urban poor'.
  - D 'projects under construction'.
- 6 Which abstract refers to the physical experience of a particular city being used as a stylistic device?
- A neither abstract
  - B both abstracts
  - C Abstract One only
  - D Abstract Two only

**Key**

1 D 2 B 3 A 4 B 5 C 6 D

**Section 2**

Write your answer to **one** of the following questions on the separate answer sheet provided.

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Should the law ever treat people differently on account of their religious beliefs?

Is the policy of 'open borders' in the European Union a luxury that we can no longer afford?

Which technological change has had the biggest effect on society in the last fifty years?

