

UZVYBX-15-M

Public Health Policy, Politics and Economics

Assignment

Write a political, policy, and economic assessment of a public health intervention

3000 words excluding references and appendices.

Submission deadline: 18th April 2024, 14.00 hours.

Resit submission deadline: 4th July 2024, 14.00 hours.

Contents

General guidance	2
Consulting with your tutor.....	3
Your initial plan	3
Draft outlines and sections	3
Guidance on writing your assignment.....	3
Overview	3
Provide a title for your assignment	3
Your introduction: developing your aim statement	4
Your introduction (and afterwards): developing an argument	4
Your introduction: outline statement.....	5
Overview of the intervention and its background	5
Main body: general comments.....	6
Main body: politics, policy and economics.....	6
Your conclusion.....	7
References	7
Appendices	7
General points: using headings, sub-headings and bullet points.....	7
General points: diagrams and charts.....	7
General points: using signposts	7
General points: use of the first person	7
Assessment Criteria	8

General guidance

These points cover a range of considerations. If some of them sound vague, it is because there are a variety of routes to produce a good assignment. Where you are not sure you understand, please ask for clarification.

1. This assignment involves demonstrating an ability to apply key concepts, theories, frameworks, or models from the fields of political science, policy studies, and economic science. Therefore, you need to reflect on how you will apply the political, policy and economics content of this module.
2. Choose a public health intervention as the focus for your assignment. In this module, we use the term 'public health intervention' to refer to any organised effort to promote public health. They arise from - or are part of- policies, legislation, government reforms, programmes, and packages of work usually (but not exclusively) informed by public bodies (governments, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, lobby organisations operating at local, national, or international levels).
3. You can select any intervention as long as you demonstrate its relevance to public health. Think carefully about your choice. While it may be tempting to choose an intervention that you are already familiar with, this may not be the best choice to illustrate key political, policy and economic issues. Over the course of the module, we will provide you with examples and case studies of the sorts of issues you should be looking out for when selecting your intervention.
4. You can choose an intervention that appears to have a positive, negative or highly contested impact on public health.
5. You can choose a group of interventions. This makes sense when a piece of policy making has led to a cluster of interventions, possibly intended to work together. Sometimes, it makes sense to consider a series of interventions that arise from a set of linked policies. Another scenario is where you explore a type of intervention that is deployed in more than one situation.
6. You can select a recent or an older intervention, the choice is yours. Consider that older interventions may have more literature about them and over time there may be more evidence of the effects of the intervention. A recent intervention will clearly have topical relevance. Even if there is little evidence of the effects of a recent intervention, you can draw upon extensive research from the past to discuss its potential effects.
7. Consider the scale and complexity of your focus. There is often a sweet spot between selecting an issue that is very narrow, specific, and technical (where there is not much for you to comment on) and an issue that is broad, complex and hard to define (where you may feel overwhelmed and struggle to manage the volume of the information).
8. 'Safe topics' and 'adventurous topics'. Some topics are more straightforward than others. Some are a topical public health priority, have lots of literature, and are probably covered elsewhere on the UWE MScPH. As long as you are not copying work from other assignments it is fine to select one of these topics as a basis for your essay. But remember

that this assignment is an opportunity to find out about something new and go outside your comfort zone. Previously students have examined HIV programmes in Thailand, care home policies in Japan, alcohol regulation in Russia, building controls in Germany, abortion policy in Ireland, food aid in Sudan. We know that it is challenging to research these adventurous topics and we make allowances where we can see that evidence is hard to work with. Putting this another way, we have somewhat higher expectations where students write about 'safe topics' because we know the literature is easier to find.

9. Keep concepts, frameworks, and theory at the front of your planning. Putting this another way, think of your selected initiative as an example that illustrates key ideas and debates in politics, policy and economics. If you do not use these key ideas and debates, you are likely to produce a descriptive piece of work that does not show your ability to apply learning outcomes from the module.
10. We do not have a strict weighting of marks against politics, policy and economics elements. You need to cover all three areas, even if you focus more on one area than the others.

Consulting with your tutor

Your initial plan

Once you have spent some time thinking through options, is a good idea to check your idea with your tutor. To help us advise you, it is best to:

1. write out a title, question and/or aim
2. note the intervention and its link to policy making
3. have examples of academic papers you think will be useful

Later in the module, you should also be able to tell us what key concepts, frameworks, theory you will be drawing upon.

Draft outlines and sections

You can ask for feedback on an outline and/or section of your essay. You can do this as part of seminars or by email/Teams. Please do not ask for feedback too close to the assignment submission date.

Guidance on writing your assignment

Overview

There is no fixed template for the assignment. The following guidance is intended to give you pointers about how to structure your assignment and respond to typical questions that arise in political, policy and economic analysis.

Provide a title for your assignment

Your title should be based on the assignment brief. The following are all good option. You can use a simple formula along the lines of:

“A political, policy, and economic assessment of [your selected intervention] in [country/political entity]”

For example:

“A political, policy, and economic assessment of in Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcoholic Drinks in Scotland”

You can adapt this format to create a question. A question can be a good idea to sharpen your attention towards what you want to focus on. It also helps the reader understand your focus. For example:

“How successful has Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcoholic Drinks been in Scotland? A political, policy and economic assessment”

You can allude to a main framework or line of argument you are using in your essay. For example:

“To what extent does Kingdon’s multiple streams framework help explain political, policy and economic aspects of Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcoholic Drinks in Scotland?”

You can use a provocative title, as long as you demonstrate that you meet the guidelines overall – and address the politics, policy and economics aspects. For example:

“Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcoholic Drinks in Scotland: a political disaster?”

Your introduction: developing your aim statement

We suggest you put an aim statement in the introductory paragraph.

If you have expressed your title in the form of a question, your aim statement should be straightforward to write.

An aim statement captures the overarching goal of your assignment. It should be succinct. It can usually be expressed in the form of one sentence. However sometimes it is easier to split it into two sentences. The following sentences can expand upon the aim statement to help your reader understand the different elements and give the rationale of the aim more fully. Keep it brief; there is no need to break the aim down into detailed objectives.

Your introduction (and afterwards): developing an argument

We recommend that you indicate your line of argument in the introduction. This means that even at this stage you should be indicating what you believe to be the most important learning that arises from your investigation.

Arguments revolve around sources of debate. The following statements are all examples of arguments that relate to this module.

“In this essay I argue how that while [the intervention] was grounded in a strong public health evidence base, political events disrupted its implementation and compromised its effectiveness”

“This assignment illustrates how, despite a high level of public and political support, it is often challenging to demonstrate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of public health interventions”

“I argue that the judging the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of this initiative depends upon the standpoint and criteria used to make judgements. This highlights the controversial nature of this issue and why policies in this area are often resisted.”

“I include a focus on the role of X as a ‘policy entrepreneur’ and question whether she was as important to the delivery of [the intervention] as the popular press claimed.”

“[The intervention] was limited in its impact because it was founded on private sector solutions and failed to engage with the structural determinants of public health.”

Your line of argument should shape the direction of your essay and be justified in the conclusion. A well-reasoned argument is logical and supported through the use of evidence. At all costs try to avoid a ‘polemical argument’. This is sometimes also called a soap box argument: with closed mind you already know what you think and set out to show that you are right!

Your argument is likely to be strengthened by drawing upon well recognised concepts, frameworks and theories. For example:

“In particular, this assignment makes use of Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework to examine why [the intervention] came to the top of the policy agenda as a solution to [an issue].”

When you are drafting your assignment, it is useful to make notes on your line of argument. However, it is only in the later stages of drafting that you will finalise your argument. This is because it is something that takes time to come together.

Your introduction: outline statement

It is useful to briefly summarise the outline of your assignment. This can be very brief. The intention is to help the reader get a feel for what is to come. If you do not feel confident about summarising your line of argument (above), that is okay, but make sure you give an outline of your assignment and the areas you plan to cover.

Usually this is the final part of the introduction.

Overview of the intervention and its background

After the introduction it is a good idea to succinctly set out an overview of the intervention. Hold back on the detail, remember this part is to help the reader orientate themselves to questions like:

- What issue does the intervention address?
- What are some features of the intervention: where and when does it happen, what organisation delivers it, what is the scale and main components of the intervention?

- Is the intervention the consequence of a piece of policy making?
- Plus, any other questions you think are relevant to answer

Main body: general comments

As the phrase implies the main body of the essay is where the main allocation of words should lie. Basically, this is where you make your assessment from political, policy and economics perspectives. The ordering of the material is up to you and will depend upon the key concepts, frameworks, and arguments you use.

It is often easiest to start at the beginning and work forward. For example, start with the political origins and issue agendas, then the policy formulation and intervention implementation and finally examine effects from an economic perspective.

Main body: politics, policy and economics

In this section you need to respond to several typical questions that concern politics and public policy researchers. Here are some questions you should consider. You are not expected to answer all of them, select those that appear to be most relevant and meaningful.

Mainly politics and policy

- What were the main political (and other) factors that shaped the policy/intervention?
- Who were the main policy actors and what did they seek to achieve?
- How, if all, was the policy shaped by ideology?
- How was the problem represented?
- What kinds of solutions to the problem were put forward?
- Were there any key events that triggered action?
- How was evidence used to inform the design of the intervention?
- How were decisions made? How were disputes negotiated? To what extent were decision-making processes visible?
- What kind of policy instrument does this intervention represent?
- How was the intervention put into practice?
- What role did different stakeholders have in the delivery of the intervention? How was power exercised?
- What circumstances helped or impeded the intervention?
- Was the intervention equitable?
- Was the intervention effective, efficient, and cost-effective?
- Was any wider social value produced? Were there side effects or unanticipated consequences?
- What were the challenges involved in evaluating the success of the intervention?
- Was the intervention a success or failure – according to who?
- What are the implications of your learning for public health practice?

An overarching theme might concern how well the concepts from politics, policy analysis and economics helped you assess the intervention and its context. Remember that no concepts are perfect. There are many debates among experts about the utility of theories and methods. For example, in the module we consider whether policies and interventions are linear processes; the claims behind evidence-based policy; and the appropriateness of cost-benefit assessments.

Your conclusion

This is a vital part of your work because it is the place where you show how you have addressed your aim or question. Often this is a much under-used part of the assignment: people don't address their aim, simply repeat points already made, introduce entirely new material or simply write very little. The signal goes to the marker 'I'm tired of writing this essay and just want it finished.'

We recommend that you do not send this signal to the marker. Instead save up your good points – and turns of phrase - for this stage of the assignment. Make sure that you allocate a generous number of words for this section. Draft and re-draft it carefully. Imagine there is a person reading your assignment who asks the simple question 'so what?'

References

Please use the UWE Harvard referencing system. The UWE Library website has a clear explanation of the format required.

Appendices

You can attach appendices. These are not considered within the formal word count. Appendices are not formally assessed, except they represent a sort of 'reference' for evidence that you want the reader to be aware of. In extreme cases appendices can count against you if they seem totally unnecessary and indicate lack of understanding of the assignment instructions.

General points: using headings, sub-headings and bullet points

These are all devices to help you and the reader navigate through the piece of work. You can choose to use headings, sub-headings, but remember that they can break up the flow of an argument especially if you use a lot of them. Sometimes this is an indication that the writer is struggling to order and link their ideas. A good example of this would be a long list of bullet point phrases that, in themselves, do not seem to tell us very much. Overall then, make sure you order and sequence your essay that gives a clear flow of argument.

General points: diagrams and charts

You can use diagram and charts. These can be useful for communicating information. But they can break up the flow of your writing. So, think carefully about whether diagrams and charts actually add to your work.

General points: using signposts

Signposting is hugely important in the assignment. It simply means helping your reader understand the flow and linkages between sections. An example of a signpost sentence is "Having considered the implementation of the intervention, I shall now explore the challenges involved in determining its cost-effectiveness." So a signpost is particularly important if you are moving from one issue to the next.

General points: use of the first person

It is fine to use "I" in your writing. Often it is a clearer, more transparent and effective way to communicate, although you should not need to use "I" very often. On the other hand, the third person can lend an air of objectivity and authority to your essay, but also create distance and awkward phrasing. Overall, either way is fine, but bear in mind that switching between the two options can be confusing.

Assessment Criteria

The criteria used to grade your assessment are:

		Indicative Qualities
100 - 90%	Outstanding/ Exceptional	<i>An exceptional and outstanding piece of academic work; showing advanced and critical awareness at the forefront of the discipline or professional practice. Exceptional use of appropriate texts, research and other learning materials, well beyond the taught content, displaying new insights and advanced scholarship; mastery of clarity in argument and communication. Exemplary</i>
89 - 80%	Excellent	<i>An excellent piece of academic work clearly demonstrating critical awareness of the discipline, current research or professional practice. Evidence of originality and advanced scholarship. Excellent analysis in most areas; use of new sources and approaches evident; balanced in analysis and argument. Clarity of argument and comprehensive knowledge.</i>
79 - 70%	Very Good	<i>A very good and competent piece of work, demonstrating good critical awareness and analysis of the subject. Comprehensive understanding of knowledge, with the ability to develop critiques at an advanced level. Evidence of originality; negligible errors or omissions. Notably good presentation/communication of ideas and comprehension.</i>
69 - 60%	Good	<i>A good piece of academic work demonstrating a moderate degree of critical awareness in the discipline or professional practice. Some ability to develop critiques at an advanced level and some evidence of originality. Good understanding of main concepts, although containing some minor errors. Reasonable presentation /communication.</i>
59 - 50%	Pass	<i>Meets the relevant learning outcomes An adequate piece of work, demonstrating an acceptable level of critical awareness in the discipline or professional practice. Generally sound, but lacking in originality or scope. Some evidence of reading and critical thought beyond the taught material but lacking in extensive evaluation and critique. Some errors and omissions; lacking in overall presentation.</i>
49 - 40%	Marginal Fail	<i>A piece of work not meeting the minimum requirements/standards expected for the assessment; some positive elements but limited critique and evaluation and containing an unacceptable level of error and/or omission; or lacking in overall presentation</i>
39 - 30%	Poor	<i>Less than complete; some positive elements but weak all round, with serious deficiencies; insufficient in quality and/or quantity for consideration as a marginal fail. Weak understanding of issues; unfocused/illogical argument; many errors or omissions; poor presentation</i>
29 - 20%	Weak	<i>Incomplete, very few positive elements and very weak all round, with serious deficiencies; little evidence of reading; lack of analysis; absence of developed ideas; mostly irrelevant or incorrect.</i>
19 - 10%	Very Weak	<i>A few positive elements but very weak all round, with very serious deficiencies; irrelevant or incorrect; no analysis; little ability shown; token attempt.</i>
9 - 0%	Exceptionally Weak	<i>No positive elements and exceptionally weak all round, with very serious deficiencies; no evidence of any preparation. Little or nothing worthwhile presented. Zero is reserved for failure to attempt an answer</i>