

How to approach teaching Political ideas in the new 2017 specification

Background

Our specification uses Political ideas to provide linkages across the whole Pearson Edexcel A level Politics qualification. By placing the Political ideas content across two separate exam papers, Pearson wants to encourage students to develop a critical awareness of the changing nature of politics and the relationships between political ideas, institutions and processes.

The two options below are examples of how teachers may wish to structure their teaching. Other variants are possible and acceptable. **About 16% of guided learning hours should be devoted to the study of Political ideas.**

Teaching AS and A level together

Term	Content
Autumn Year 12	UK Politics
Spring Year 12	UK Government
Summer Year 12	AS exams and political ideas (two and a half weeks teaching for each core political idea, to total seven and a half weeks)
Autumn Year 13	Complete the political ideas (two and a half weeks for the non-core political idea), then Comparative Politics – USA or Global Politics
Spring Year 13	Comparative Politics – USA or Global Politics
Summer Year 13	Exams

Teaching the full A level only

Term	Content
Autumn Term Year 12	UK Politics & UK Government
Spring Term Year 12	UK Politics & UK Government
1 st half Summer Year 12	UK Politics & UK Government
2 nd half Summer Year 12	Core political ideas x2
1 st half Autumn Year 13	Core political idea x1 and non-core political idea x1
2 nd half Autumn Year 13	Comparative Politics – USA or Global Politics
Spring Year 13	Comparative Politics – USA or Global Politics
Summer Year 13	Exams

Paper 1

The core political ideas will enable students to widen and deepen their understanding of the origins and historical developments of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties and how this has shaped their ideas and current policies on the economy, law and order, welfare and foreign affairs. Of course, each of these political ideas is not exclusive to any one political party and various liberal, conservative and socialist ideas are at different times embraced by a range of political parties.

When teaching the core political ideas, teachers must make links to other elements of the specification, where they can do so in a relevant way.

Paper 2

By studying one non-core political idea, students will learn how political ideas, institutions and processes have been challenged by their chosen non-core political idea and how they have responded to that challenge. In addition, the non-core political ideas both challenge and complement the core political ideas.

Core and Non-core political ideas

How to approach teaching both the core and non-core political ideas

The specification sets out each of the ideas in three sections:

1. Core Ideas and Principles
2. Differing views and tensions within the idea
3. Key Thinkers and their ideas

As well as this, the specification asks you to relate these areas to how they relate to the four elements of:

1. human nature
2. the state
3. society
4. the economy

So how should you try to teach the content? Where should you start?

1. Begin by teaching your students the five or six core ideas and principles of the political idea. In many cases with the core ideas this will inevitably result in you discussing their view of human nature, the state and the economy, and their view of society.
2. Now look at the differences between the various strands within the political idea when looking at the core ideas and principles. In some areas they may agree, in others they may disagree slightly and in other areas they may disagree to a large extent. Again, in doing this, you will also inevitably be discussing their views of human nature, the state, the economy and society.

3. Now for the key thinkers. Like the four elements, it is very likely that in doing 1 and 2 above, you will naturally have discussed some of the key thinkers. Having done 1 and 2, look at the key thinkers you haven't discussed and find out about the ideas they are known for. You should be able to identify where they now fit in.
4. The final stage is to look at the four elements of:
 - a) their view of human nature
 - b) the state
 - c) the economy
 - d) their view of society.

And how they relate to everything you have been studying so far. Perhaps make a table with the core principles down one side and the four elements along the other side. Tick which core principles are associated with which elements. Now get your students to write a detailed paragraph showing how each core principle in the specification is exemplified in terms of state, society, human nature and economy.

Liberalism	State	Society	Human Nature	Economy
individualism		✓	✓	
freedom/liberty		✓	✓	
rationalism			✓	
state	✓		✓	✓
equality/social justice		✓	✓	
liberal democracy	✓	✓	✓	

5. Now do the same with the key thinkers and the four elements.

Liberalism	State	Society	Human Nature	Economy
John Locke	✓	✓		
Mary Wollstonecraft		✓	✓	
John Stuart Mill	✓	✓		✓
John Rawls	✓	✓		✓
Betty Friedan	✓	✓	✓	

The following is a worked example for Liberalism.

Stage One: Explaining the core principles

1. Explain the concept of **individualism** as being at the heart of liberal ideology. Show how it links to their view of **human nature** i.e. that only individuals should make decisions for themselves; choices shouldn't be made for them.

2. Explain the liberal concept of **freedom** as being directly linked to **individualism**, i.e. individuals must be free to make decisions for themselves. Show how this links to a liberal view of **society**.
3. Explain the concept of **rationalism**, that individuals are capable of making logical decisions in their own best interest. Explain how this links to the liberal view of **individualism** and **freedom**, and connects to their view of **state**.
4. Explain the liberal view of the **state** which is that it is a necessary evil, necessary to protect **freedom** and **individualism** but evil as it can limit **freedom** if not controlled. Show how this links to their view of **human nature**. Incorporated in their view of the **state** is their view of the **economy**.
5. Explain that liberals see **equality** in terms of foundational equality, formal equality and equality of opportunity. Show how these views are based on their view of **human nature** and their idea of a meritocratic **society**.
6. Explain the concept of a **liberal democracy** as a **society** which balances the will of the people against the rights of the **individual**. Show how these views are linked with their view of a tolerant **society**, the proper role of the **state** and their view of **human nature**.

As you can see, the teaching of the core principles in liberalism naturally lends itself to a discussion of the role of the four elements. This will usually be the case with the three core political ideas.

Stage Two: Looking at differences in the strands.

Liberalism only has two strands, classical liberalism and modern liberalism. The next stage of your teaching could be to revisit each core principle and investigate how the different strands agree and disagree.

For each core principle, go through the following stages:

1. What do the strands agree over the core principle?
2. How do they disagree?
3. How great is the disagreement?

For example, your students should learn how to develop these headline points more deeply:

1. All liberals believe the state is a necessary evil (see points made above)
2. Classical liberals believe the state is more evil than necessary; modern liberals believe it is more necessary than evil.
3. Consequently, classical liberals are only prepared to endorse a limited role for the state whereas modern liberals support a larger, enabling role for the state.
4. The difference between classical and modern liberals is large despite the fact that they agree that the state is necessary.

Stage Three: Applying the key thinkers

The final stage for the core ideas is to use the key thinkers to illustrate your points. As mentioned previously, you may naturally find that you have discussed some key thinkers already in your teaching. If not how do you use key thinkers effectively without frightening the students?

One way is to introduce short, easy-to-understand quotes. For example, John Locke said, "where there is no law there is no freedom". This quote can be used when explaining the liberal view of the state (and law)

John Stuart Mill's famous quote that, "*the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will, is to prevent harm to others*" is great to use when discussing the role of the state, freedom, individualism, society and many other terms.

If you want to discuss natural, inalienable rights or the right to property, you could quote John Locke who argued that human beings were obliged by "natural law" not to harm "*the life, the liberty, health, limb or goods of another*"

Examiners will see it as a strength if your students accurately compare and contrast the views of **at least two** of the specified writers **and preferably more**; they must not replace these thinkers in their answers, with others, such as Lord Acton or Voltaire.

Specified thinkers from other political ideas will gain little or no credit if introduced into your liberalism essay. Thomas Hobbes is a specified thinker for conservatism, so he cannot be treated as a specified thinker for liberalism. Similarly specified thinkers for liberalism such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Betty Friedan will count as specified thinkers for liberalism but not, for example, feminism.

Getting your students to research quotes by key thinkers on the Internet is a great way to bring their ideas to life as well as using them in their answers. (But just tell them to make sure they really did say them; the Internet is full of made up quotes wrongly attributed to famous thinkers)

Non-core political ideas

The specification structures requirements for the non-core political ideas exactly as described above for the core political ideas, though, the non-core political ideas do not necessarily divide as neatly into the four elements as the core political ideas. It might be that a non-core political idea may not have all four elements covered. Nonetheless, the process can be repeated as outlined above. For example, in feminism candidates will need to recognise that sex and gender issues very much involve the true human nature of women.

For your chosen non-core political idea, you will need to make a grid - as for the core political ideas - linking core principles to human nature, state, economy and society:

Feminism	State	Society	Human Nature	Economy
Sex and gender		✓	✓	
Patriarchy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Personal is political		✓	✓	
Difference and equality feminism		✓	✓	
Intersectionality		✓		

Then you need to do the same for the key thinkers and the four elements.

Feminism	State	Society	Human Nature	Economy
Charlotte Perkins-Gilman	✓	✓	✓	✓
Simone de Beauvoir		✓	✓	
Kate Millet	✓	✓	✓	
Sheila Rowbothom	✓	✓		✓
bell hooks		✓	✓	

Core and non-core political ideas

The following briefly describe how each of the non-core political ideas relates to the core political ideas, and how they reinforce the teaching and learning in understanding all four political ideas studied.

Please note that questions in the exams will be asked on each idea in isolation, and will not require students to have a synoptic understanding of all four ideas studied and compare between them.

Anarchism

The biggest crossover here is that by studying this idea, teachers will be able to revisit and revise many of the main points, such as human nature, within the core political ideas section, in particular within Socialism, Classical Liberalism and the New Right. Anarchism offers a challenge both to the nature of Government and participation in the US and the UK.

Ecologism

This will allow students to revisit their study of the core political ideas by challenging some of the core concepts and whether existing ideas, processes and institutions can deal with

environmental crises. In addition, this idea will deepen and broaden understanding of section 4.2 in Global Politics on environmental issues.

Feminism

This idea will allow students to revisit their study of the core political ideas, as some aspects of Feminism complement them, such as Liberalism and Socialism and some aspects challenge them – Radical feminism. Liberal Feminism can also be used to develop discussions around Rights in Context with UK Politics.

Multiculturalism

The study of this idea will play a key role in broadening and deepening the understanding of both Liberalism and Conservatism in the core political ideas section. This idea will also enhance the understanding of Rights in Context (section 1.4) in UK Politics.

Nationalism

This idea will allow students to revisit their study of the core political ideas as some aspects of Nationalism complement them, particularly Conservatism and Liberalism, and some aspects challenge them – expansionist nationalism. Links can also be made with the study of colonialism and the North-South Divide (section 3.2.3) within Global Politics.

Assessment

The assessment of the political ideas will follow familiar formats each year.

For the core political ideas questions (Paper 1), there will be two questions and students choose one to answer. In one exam series, one question may be on Socialism, and the other on Liberalism. In another exam series, both questions may be on Conservatism. The question setting is designed this way to ensure that all three core political ideas are taught.

For non-core political ideas questions (Paper 2), each idea will have two questions, and students choose one to answer.

All political ideas questions will follow a familiar format:

- be worth 24 marks, eight marks for each of AO1, AO2 and AO3.
- students will be expected to refer to at least two thinkers in their answer (these must be named thinkers from the specification for the relevant political idea).
- use the command “To what extent...” and either:
 - Ask students to examine the political idea’s view on the economy, society, state or human nature, “*To what extent do conservatives value society?*”

Or:

- Ask students to examine the divisions within the political idea from a particular perspective, e.g. *“To what extent do ecologists agree over environmental ethics?”*

Or:

- or a combination of these, e.g. *“To what extent do modern and classical liberals agree over the role of the state?”*

To achieve Level 5 in essay questions on Component 2, candidates must make synoptic references to Component 1; these may be (but do not have to be) references to core political ideas.

To achieve Level 4 in Questions 1 and 2 of Component 3 (USA), candidates must make synoptic references to Component 1 and/or Component 2; these may be (but do not have to be) references to core political ideas. To achieve Level 4 on Question 2 on Component 3 (Global), candidates must make synoptic references to core political ideas.