



# Moving from GCSE to AS/A level Politics

13.03.2017

Version 0.1

## Introduction

There is no GCSE Politics qualification. However, the GCSE Citizenship Studies qualification covers much of the foundation knowledge and understanding necessary to begin a course in AS/A level Politics.

For those students who have not taken a GCSE Citizenship Studies qualification, the following content may be useful for students to research before they begin Year 12.

This can be classroom-led or given as a homework task to students over the summer holiday.

## Taken from Pearson Edexcel GCSE in Citizenship Studies, Paper 1, Theme B.

Students explore the idea of representative, parliamentary democracy in the UK including the voting and electoral system, the roles and responsibilities of MPs and how government is organised and kept in check. They will also consider the role of parliament in making and shaping law; the government's role in managing public money; and how power is organised across the constituent parts of the UK.

Opportunities for developing citizenship skills and taking action include: participation in decision-making forums and 'mock' or real school elections, researching and debating the effectiveness of democracy in the UK, the extension of voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds or further devolution of power versus independence for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Key questions explored:

- who runs the country?
- how does Parliament work?
- how is power shared between Westminster and the devolved administrations?
- how does government manage public money?

<b>Who runs the country?</b>	
<b>1. Parties and candidates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key philosophical differences between the major political parties standing in UK general elections.</li> <li>• How candidates are selected to stand for a constituency.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Elections and voting systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept of democracy; representative democracy (democracy via elections) and direct democracy (democracy via referendums) and the strengths and weaknesses of each.</li> <li>• How the Westminster-first-past-the-post system operates; who can and cannot vote in general elections and why; debates about extending the franchise; the frequency of general elections.</li> <li>• How the regional list system for European Parliament elections operates; the impact of this on which parties are represented compared with UK general elections.</li> <li>• The strengths and weaknesses of the first-past-the-post voting system compared with proportional representation.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Forming and organising the work of government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process of forming a government, including the role of the monarch in appointing a government. What happens when no single party can form a government and a coalition government is formed.</li> <li>• The organisation of government administration into departments, ministries and agencies staffed by civil servants.</li> </ul>
<b>How does Parliament work?</b>	
<b>4. The Westminster Parliament</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The distinction between executive, legislature, judiciary and monarchy.</li> <li>• The roles of the Houses of Commons and Lords and the relationship between them; the process of parliamentary debate and deliberation of public issues as part of the process of making and shaping policy and legislation.</li> <li>• The roles of prime minister, cabinet and ministers, the opposition, speaker, whips,</li> </ul>

	front bench and backbench MPs and the ceremonial role of Black Rod; the role of an MP in representing constituents' interests.
<b>5. Making and shaping law</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How a bill becomes law: debate in the House of Commons and the House of Lords; scrutiny by committees; royal assent.</li> </ul>
<b>6. The Constitution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The institutions of the British constitution: the power of government, the prime minister and cabinet; the roles of the legislature, the Opposition, political parties, the monarch, citizens, the judiciary, the police and the civil service.</li> <li>• That the UK has an uncodified constitution and examples of how this is changing, including as a result of devolution and membership of the EU.</li> <li>• The concept of parliamentary sovereignty; checks and balances, including the role of judicial review; how Parliament holds government to account through oversight and scrutiny.</li> </ul>
<b>How is power shared between Westminster and the devolved administrations?</b>	
<b>7. Government in constituent parts of the UK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The powers of devolved bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.</li> <li>• How relations are changing between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including views on devolution and independence.</li> </ul>
<b>How does government manage public money?</b>	
<b>8. Taxation and government spending</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How direct and indirect taxes are raised by central government.</li> <li>• The role of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in budgeting for income, expenditure and debts, managing risks and making decisions about the allocation of public funding.</li> <li>• Different views and debates about how governments and other service providers make provision for welfare, health, the care of the elderly and education.</li> </ul>

## For further information...

Please see <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/citizenship-studies-2016.html> where further information and specimen papers are to be found; other relevant parts of the GCSE specification in Theme D can also be identified. Alternatively, please contact [emgeography@pearson.com](mailto:emgeography@pearson.com).

## Support materials

Helpful support materials for students new to politics can be accessed here <https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/resource/citizenship-essentials-help-you-plan-or-update-your-citizenship-curriculum-provision-2016>

## Specimen questions

Here are a selection of questions from the specimen papers for GCSE Citizenship:

**4 (a)** Identify why the first-past-the-post system has been criticised for being unfair. (1)

- A** A party with a large share of votes may gain few seats.
- B** A party with a small share of votes may gain few seats.
- C** It is too difficult to predict the final result in advance.
- D** The system is too difficult to understand.

**(b)** Which statement about UK general elections is correct? (1)

- A** They are held once every 4 years.
- B** They are held once every 5 years.
- C** The prime minister can normally choose which year to hold a general election.
- D** The prime minister can normally choose which month to hold a general election.

**(c)** Which of the following groups of adults can vote in UK general elections? (1)

- A** All EU citizens
- B** Scottish people
- C** Prisoners serving sentences of less than 10 years
- D** Anyone who has been living in the UK for at least five years

Study Source B below and then answer the question.

Source B describes a mock election at a Midlands school.

**(d)** Explain how mock elections like this can help to strengthen democracy in the UK. (9)

**Source B: The right to vote – or not**

Russell Brand is a comedian and actor. He believes that democracy in the UK is not working. In 2014 he told his 7 million Twitter followers, many of whom are young, not to bother voting in elections. He says the 'first-past-the-post' system of electing a government does not give a result that reflects the choices of voters. Another comedian, Robert Webb, has argued that Brand is wrong. In a magazine article, Webb talked about the importance of not forgetting our 'hard won liberties', including the right to vote.

In schools and colleges, some students have shown they believe that voting matters. This is done by holding 'mock elections'. Students take the role of candidates and give serious or funny speeches.

At a Midlands school, one girl's speech compared politics in the UK with life in nondemocratic countries like China and North Korea. She argued that over-18s are lucky to have a say in how the country is run. She also said that her political party would reduce taxes.

**8** 'Central government is wrong to cut funding to local councils as it forces them to make cuts to necessary and popular services.'

How far do you agree with this view? (15)

Give reasons for your opinion, showing you have considered other points of view.

In your answer, you could consider:

- central government and the funding of local councils
- the services that local councils provide.