

# Pearson Edexcel GCE Politics

## Guidance on the scope of the EU and its application in the GCE Politics specifications (December 2022 update)

### Pre-amble

This document is not to be regarded in any sense a forecast of how the EU will be examined. It serves to delineate the continuing applicability, relevance and connection of the EU to the AS and A level Politics specifications.

We have received quite a few queries from teachers about this over the last few years, and this guidance is intended simply to clarify the requirements. The amendments to the specifications mean that the EU now plays a reduced role in GCE Politics, and this guidance does not recommend that teachers spend more time on it; the EU continues to feature in the specifications, but there is no new content on it.

### Why is the EU in the specifications given that the UK left in January 2020 and a trade deal was agreed and ratified by the EU Parliament in spring 2021?

In March 2016, the DfE included the EU as part of the defined subject content for new GCE AS and A level Politics specifications. At this initial stage, the June 2016 referendum, in which the UK voted to leave the EU, had not yet taken place. The DfE confirmed post-referendum that it would retain the EU in the defined subject content; hence its appearance in the first issues of the Pearson Edexcel AS and A level Politics specifications, for first teaching September 2017.

In May 2022, the DfE released an updated version of the [Politics GCE AS and A level subject content](#); the only change made was the removal of the reference to the European Communities Act (1972) from the footnote to section 9. In light of this, we reviewed and amended our specification content (details below). These amendments have been released as part of the A level specification Issue 3 and AS level specification Issue 2, both for first teaching from September 2022 and first assessment Summer 2023. Information on the changes, along with links to the documents and supporting guidance, can be found in Mark Battye's subject advisor update [here](#).

### Where is the EU explicitly mentioned in the GCE Politics specifications?

The EU appears in the [A level specification](#) and [AS specification](#) in Component 2 UK Government (9PL0/02 and 8PL0/02) section 4.3:

4.3 The aims, role and impact of the European Union (EU) on the UK government.

- The aims of the EU, including the 'four freedoms' of the single market, political and economic union, and the extent to which these have been achieved.
- The impact of leaving the EU on UK Parliamentary sovereignty in relation to policy making.

It also features in the [A level specification](#) in Component 3 Global Politics (9PL0/3B) section 5, Regionalism and the EU, in particular sections 5.3 on European integration and 5.4 on the significance of the EU as an international body/global actor.

Previous issues of the specifications referred to the following, which have now been **removed** from Component 2:

- UK Government section 1: The European Communities Act (1972) and European Union law.
- UK Government section 4.3: social policy, the role of the EU in policy making, and the effects of at least two EU policies and their impact on the UK political system.

### **What students need to know**

Students need to know what withdrawal from the EU means for the fundamental principles of the UK constitution and Parliamentary sovereignty. This includes the impact on the relationship between Westminster and the devolved administrations over EU matters. Awareness is also required for the tensions and issues concerning the EU with both the legislative and executive branches.

### **Where can we see implicit application of the EU in Component 2?**

The impact and scope of the EU reverberates throughout much of this component, and it will evolve according to circumstances and political events. The list below is illustrative – it is not exhaustive in any way, and time will change the relevance of certain topics:

- How has former membership of the EU affected the UK constitution?
- How have Scotland and Northern Ireland responded to Brexit?
- How is Parliament influenced by the EU?
- How are Ministers and, in particular, Prime Ministers affected by the EU?
- How has withdrawal from the EU affected the location of sovereignty in the UK?

### **Are there implicit connections elsewhere in the specifications?**

As above, this is not an exhaustive, prescribed list, and events will alter the dynamics of the connection, but we can see connections in Component 1 UK Politics (9PL0/01 and 8PL0/01):

#### *Section 2 Political parties*

- Established parties' policies on the economy and foreign policy (section 2.2)
- Emerging and minor parties, such as UKIP and the Brexit Party (section 2.3)
- Factors affecting party success (section 2.4)

#### *Section 3 Electoral systems*

- Referendums and their impact on political life since 1997 (section 3.2)
- Minority government – the role of the DUP in the May administration

#### *Section 4 Voting behaviour and the media*

- The impact of party policies and manifestos, techniques used in their election campaigns, and the wider political context of the election (section 4.1)
- The influence of the media (section 4.2)

## **UK and EU relations going forward**

The relationship between the EU and the UK will continue to change and evolve. Like all political events, this relationship is a dynamic topic.

Here are some examples of the current influence of the EU on UK politics:

- The issue of Northern Ireland (NI) and the NI Protocol in the Brexit agreement
- Debates and discussions concerning trade agreements with the EU
- Fishing rights in and around UK waters
- The positions of all political parties towards the EU and their reactions to events
- The rights of EU nationals who live in the UK
- The outcome of the December 2019 general election – the slogan ‘Get Brexit Done’
- The common position of the UK and the EU with regards to Russia and Ukraine

## **How relevant is Brexit?**

In a subject such as Politics, candidates are expected to be aware of new developments, such as the results of general elections; the appointment of new Prime Ministers; the impact of minority, coalition and majority governments; and the election of new US Presidents. Brexit falls into the same category. The term Brexit is an unavoidable feature of current UK political discourse – but whilst it has no formal mention in the specifications, it cannot be disregarded. In many senses Brexit has been the biggest political event in recent UK history, and we should be mindful of its ongoing reverberations.

## **Re-cap on the remit of the specifications**

Component 2 section 4.3 has a clear focus. It is **not** on the operative institutions of the EU but rather how leaving the EU has had an impact on political life in the UK. It is a fact that the UK has left the EU, and the focus on Brexit as a popular political topic may decline in importance – but there is a need to be aware of the impact that leaving the EU has had on contemporary political issues in the UK.

The focus is on the current position, now that the UK is a former member of the EU.

## **Summary**

- The EU remains on the specifications and thus is relevant.
- Britain’s membership of the EU changed as the specifications were developed, subsequently with profound impact on UK political life.
- Questions can only be based on what is on the specifications – there must be a clear link to the specifications.
- This guidance is intended to encourage teachers to think of the implicit and important links which the EU has with the UK political environment – from elections, to party positions, the PM etc. It is important to connect the EU to aspects of the current specifications wherever it is relevant.