

Teaching guide: Paper 1 Government and Politics of the UK

This guide provides advice for teaching the 'Government and politics of the UK' section of our AS and A-level Politics specifications.

Paper 1– Government and politics of the UK

The main purpose of this section of the course is to provide students with a sound knowledge and understanding of the government and politics of the UK, developing their ability to analyse and evaluate a range of aspects of the UK political system.

Students are expected to develop knowledge of the government of the UK, focusing on the British constitution, the UK Parliament, the prime minister and cabinet, the judiciary and devolution. This is approximately 50% of the Paper.

Students are also expected to develop knowledge of UK politics, covering democracy and participation, elections and referendums, political parties, pressure groups and the European Union. This comprises the remaining 50% of the Paper.

In each topic, there are a number of key concepts and terminology that students should understand and be able to communicate and a number of focus areas that provide a basis for analysis and evaluation. This teaching guide provides suggestions of the kind of debates students should be familiar with in the various 'focus' points.

Students should study all aspects of the specification. Although there is a degree of optionality in Section C of the exam, questions can be taken from any part of the specification. Also, the synoptic nature of the A-level means that the knowledge gained in the study of UK government and politics will also prove useful in Papers 2 and 3.

Paper 1 is worth one third of the A-level and has a two-hour exam, featuring three question types:

- Section A – short questions: students must answer three questions asking them to 'explain and analyse' an aspect of the specification. These questions are each worth nine marks.
- Section B – 'extract question': students must analyse, evaluate and compare arguments on an aspect of the specification using an unseen extract. This question is worth 25 marks.
- Section C – 'essay question': students must answer one essay question from a choice of two. The essay is worth 25 marks.

Before teaching this section of the course, it's worth noting three important differences from legacy specifications:

- there is no optionality and every topic must be covered (questions on Paper 1 can be taken from any section of the specification)
- this paper comprises a third of the A-level, rather than the half an A-level dedicated to UK government and politics for most exam boards in the legacy specifications; teachers should divide their time across the two years accordingly. In addition, UK government and politics is assessed in one paper rather than across two
- UK government and politics is assessed at A-level, rather than AS, with an appropriately higher demand. For example, it is expected that students develop a synoptic approach to the subject, seeing connections both within and across modules.

Teachers should split the teaching of UK government and politics, with one teacher delivering the material on UK government and the other UK politics. In this case, it makes sense to begin with the constitution and democracy and participation topics. Should teachers design a scheme of work with one teacher delivering the whole Paper, it would probably make sense to teach all the government topics followed by all the politics topics, or vice versa.

It is important that teachers when preparing their students take note of the changes relating to the Assessment

Objectives (AOs):

1. The criteria for each AO have been changed somewhat from the legacy syllabus.
2. Unlike the practice on the legacy syllabus all three AOs will not be tested in all questions.

For more information, visit [aqa.org.uk/7152 \(http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/government-and-politics/as-and-a-level/politics-7152\)](http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/government-and-politics/as-and-a-level/politics-7152) .

The nature and sources of the British Constitution

Students should be aware of the development of the Constitution and key historical documents such as Magna Carta (1215), the Bill of Rights (1689), the Act of Settlement (1701), the Parliament Acts (1911) and (1949) and the European Communities Act (1972). Students should also understand the key principles of the Constitution, such as Parliamentary sovereignty, the rule of law, the unitary state and Parliamentary government.

Beyond this, students should be able to analyse and evaluate the importance of the various sources of the Constitution, such as statute law, common law, conventions, royal prerogatives, works of constitutional authority and EU laws and treaties.

A key debate surrounds the question of which of these sources plays the most important role in the modern constitution:

1. contemporary legislation and current issues regarding rights
2. debates about the extent of rights in the UK
3. areas where individual and collective rights are in agreement and where they are in conflict: students should analyse and evaluate the extent to which rights have been protected or challenged, looking at the role of the various branches of government and external events in protecting or challenging rights.

Issues and debates around recent constitutional changes – students should develop an understanding of constitutional change since 1997 and analyse and evaluate the impact changes have had on elections, rights, Parliament, the judiciary and the unitary state. Students should consider the extent to which the Constitution has been transformed and whether a codified constitution is necessary.

The structure and role of parliament

1. Scrutiny of the executive and the effectiveness of scrutiny in practice: students should analyse and evaluate the tools available to both the House of Commons and House of Lords to scrutinise the executive. The extent to which Parliament can hold the government to account is a key debate and students should assess the various factors that determine how well Parliament can carry out this function.
2. Parliamentary debate and the legislative process: students should analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of the legislative process; and should understand the roles of government, parties, committees, whips, debates and the Speaker of the House of Commons.
3. Theories of representation: burkean, delegate, mandate theories.
4. The role and influence of MPs and peers: students should consider the roles of MPs and peers and the powers available to them to carry out their functions of representation, legislation, scrutiny and deliberation. The various models of representation should also be analysed, both from the perspective of how MPs carry out their roles in practice and the arguments for and against each theory.
5. The significance of the Commons and Lords:
 - i. work of committees
 - ii. role of the opposition
 - iii. the extent of parliament's influence on government decisions:
 - i. party discipline enables the government to routinely outvote opposition
 - ii. government control of civil servants' appearances before Select Committees
 - iii. membership of those committees is largely controlled by the Whip's offices
 - iv. interaction of Parliament and other branches of government.

The key debate here is around the extent to which parliament can fulfill its functions of representation, legislation, scrutiny and deliberation.

Students should have a grasp of the range of powers held by parliament and its ability to exercise them.

The Prime Minister and cabinet

1. How policy is made.
2. The relationship between Prime Minister and cabinet: students should analyse and evaluate where power lies in the development of government policy. A core debate is the extent to which Prime Ministers have become more powerful at the expense of cabinet, or whether 'cabinet government' still exists. In addition, students should analyse the factors that determine the power of the Prime Minister and cabinet, such as election results and size of majorities, popularity with both the electorate and the party, external events, the strength of opposition and the style of leadership of the Prime Minister. Students should ensure that they have knowledge of two key events; one before 1997 and one after 1997, which demonstrates the power of the Prime Minister and cabinet to determine policy making.
3. The difference between individual and collective responsibility.

The key debate here is the extent to which individual ministerial responsibility and collective responsibility are still key conventions of cabinet government in the UK.

The judiciary

1. The composition of the judiciary and the appointments process.
2. The role of the Supreme Court and its impact on government, legislature and policy process
3. Judicial influence on government.
4. Importance of *ultra vires*, judicial review and the Supreme Court's interactions with, and influence over, the legislative and policy making processes.

Students should analyse the composition of the Supreme Court and the appointment process, with an emphasis on the extent to which the judiciary can be considered independent and neutral. In addition, students should be aware of the powers of the Supreme Court since the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 and the increased separation of powers, as well as the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998. A key debate here is the extent to which these powers have enabled the judiciary to hold the government to account and students should be familiar with the role of judicial review and some Supreme Court cases that demonstrate its impact or otherwise.

Devolution

1. The roles, powers and responsibilities of the different devolved bodies in the UK.
2. Debate around devolution in England.
3. Existing devolution in England.
4. Impact of devolution on government of the UK.

Students should develop knowledge of the key constitutional changes since 1997, from devolved parliaments and assemblies in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to the London Assembly and various city mayors. In addition, the impact of these developments on the UK Constitution should be analysed and evaluated, including their impact on the principle of the unitary state and the questions facing the UK Parliament; such as the West Lothian question and so-called, 'English Votes for English Laws'.

Democracy and participation

1. The nature of democracy.
2. Different types of democracy – direct democracy, representative government.
3. Patterns of participation and different forms of participation.

Students should have an awareness of the development of democracy in the UK, from the Great Reform Act onwards; in order to understand how the right to vote has changed over time. They should be able to analyse and evaluate democracy in the UK, assessing the various methods available to citizens to participate in the democratic process. They should understand the differences between, and the debates surrounding, direct and representative democracy. Much of the content in this section of the course will be supported by the material studied in the next three topics.

Elections and referendums

1. Debates and issues around the performance of the electoral systems used in the UK.
2. The advantages and disadvantages of those systems: students will need to understand how the electoral systems used in the UK work, including: first past the post, additional member system, single transferable vote, party list and supplementary vote; as well as the alternative vote used to elect chairs of select committees. They should analyse and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the various systems and consider the criteria that should be applied to test the strengths of an electoral system. In addition, students should be aware of how these systems have performed in practice in the various UK elections.
3. Three key elections since 1945 should be selected for detailed study. These should include:
 - i. the 1997 general election
 - ii. one election from before 1997
 - iii. one election since 1997.
4. Patterns of voting behaviour/changes over time – as revealed by relevant national data sources and explanations of how and why they varied in different elections.
5. The influence of the media on outcomes.
6. The reasons for and the impact of party policies on the outcomes.
7. The reasons for and the influence of manifestos on the outcomes
8. The impact of campaigns and leadership on the outcomes.
9. The role of elections and their influence on policy and policy-making.
0. Likely effects of the electoral system on the party system.

In essence, this part of the specification requires students to be able to analyse and evaluate the outcome of three elections, assessing which factors played the biggest role in determining the result.

A key debate will be the extent to which long-term factors such as class, age or gender determine the outcome of elections, or whether more short-term factors such as the campaign, issues or leadership are the decisive factors.

When choosing which two elections to focus on, in addition to 1997, consider whether the issues above can be applied to that election successfully.

Students should also analyse and evaluate the use of referendums in the UK, developing knowledge of the range of referendums that have taken place, including the campaigns and results and analysing the outcomes and arguments for and against continued use of referendums to decide political issues.

Political parties

1. The origins, ideas and development of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties and how these have helped shape their current policies. Students should have an overview of the development of the parties and understand how their policies have changed over time. Students should analyse and evaluate the policies of the three parties, with particular attention on the extent to which they can be considered different from each other. For example, students may consider whether the period of so-called ideological convergence since 1997 has now come to an end.
2. Party structures and functions of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Students should have an understanding of how the parties make policy, choose their leaders and select candidates. The key debate here is the extent to which the parties can be considered as democratic organisations in which members determine the direction of the party, or are they less democratic organisations where the direction is determined by the excessive influence of the leadership. Students should also consider how far parties fulfill their functions, such as representation, recruitment, policy-making, participation and offering ideological choice.
3. Issues and debates around party funding. It's important that students have up-to-date knowledge of the rules around party funding, and the various recommendations for reform and of the sources of income for political parties. In addition, they should analyse and evaluate the current system, assessing whether there should be further reform of the system or a move to state funding of parties.
4. Policies of minor parties and their impact on political debates and the political agenda.
5. Development towards a multi-party system in the UK and its impact on government and policy. Knowledge of the policies of a range of minor parties is essential, such as the SNP, UKIP, Plaid Cymru, the Green Party, the DUP and Sinn Fein. The success of these parties should be assessed, including looking at the barriers to success for minor parties in the UK. In addition, students should analyse and evaluate the extent to which the UK is now moving

towards a multi-party system, or whether the two-party system remains strong. A key debate here is whether we now have a range of party systems, depending on which election or region is being assessed.

Pressure groups

1. Pressure groups and democracy – pluralism. Students should analyse and evaluate whether pressure groups are good for democracy in the UK, assessing arguments such as the role of money and other resources, scandals involving access to the government, the self-interest of groups, participation, the representation of minority interests, putting issues on the agenda and holding the government to account. The key debate is between pluralists, who can see a range of pressure groups competing for influence and representing a range of interests and elitists, who see influence being wielded by those with the most resources.
2. Methods used by pressure groups. Students should analyse and evaluate the various methods used by groups, such as lobbying at various levels of government, litigation, direct action, or using the media. Although a key debate is over which methods are the most successful, students should be aware that ‘success’ depends on the aims of the group and some thought should be given to what this means. Detailed knowledge of one ‘insider’ and one ‘outsider’ group is required, but students should be aware of a range of groups as well as the range of pressure groups typologies, such as sectional or cause.
3. Factors likely to affect the political influence of different groups, such as membership and resources. As in the pressure groups’ methods topic, attention should be paid to what counts as ‘success’ for groups as students analyse and evaluate which factors (such as wealth, leadership, membership, government support or public opinion) are most important. Though not considered to be pressure groups, per se, students should be aware of the role of think tanks, corporations, lobbyists and the media in influencing the government.

The European Union

1. Aims of the EU and the extent to which they have been achieved. Students should understand the different institutions of the EU and how they operate, and analyse and evaluate whether the EU is fulfilling its aims of promoting social and economic progress, speaking for the European Union internationally, introducing European citizenship, developing Europe as an area of freedom, security and justice, and maintaining and building on EU law.
2. The impact of the EU on UK politics and policy making. Students should analyse and evaluate the extent to which the EU has impacted on the UK from the perspective of all parts of the UK content, including the constitution, Parliament, the executive, the judiciary, elections, parties and pressure groups.

Specifications that use this resource:

- › [AS Politics 7151 \(https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/government-and-politics/as-and-a-level/politics-7151\)](https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/government-and-politics/as-and-a-level/politics-7151)
- › [A-level Politics 7152 \(https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/government-and-politics/as-and-a-level/politics-7152\)](https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/government-and-politics/as-and-a-level/politics-7152)

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