



Department
for Education

Politics

Draft AS and A level subject content

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The content for AS and A level politics

Introduction

1. AS and A level subject content set out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.
2. They provide the framework within which the awarding organisations create the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

3. AS and A level specifications in politics must encourage students to:
 - develop knowledge and an informed understanding of contemporary political structures and issues in their historical context, both within the United Kingdom (UK) and globally
 - develop a critical awareness of the changing nature of politics and the relationships between political ideas, institutions and processes
 - develop knowledge and an informed understanding of the influences and interests which have an impact on decisions in government and politics
 - develop knowledge and an informed understanding of the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups
 - develop the ability to critically analyse, interpret and evaluate political information to form arguments and make judgments
 - develop an interest in, and engagement with, contemporary politics

Subject content

Knowledge and understanding

4. AS and A level specifications in politics must be of sufficient depth and breadth to allow students to develop the knowledge, informed understanding and skills specified below.
5. AS and A level politics specifications build on the knowledge, skills and understanding established at key stage 4 and a range of GCSE qualifications.
6. Students will be expected to understand the interrelationships between the different areas of study and develop an awareness of their significance.
7. Students will be expected to know and understand aspects of the politics of the UK through study of the identified historical events, movements and processes, and their impact on contemporary politics.

8. A level specifications must require students to study one of the following areas in depth as specified in paragraphs 13 to 16, drawing on the knowledge gained in paragraphs nine to eleven:

- the government and politics of the United States of America (USA), or
- global politics

Government in the UK

9. AS and A level specifications must develop knowledge and understanding of government in the UK, its historical development, its institutions, their roles, powers and interrelationships including:

- the nature and sources of the British constitution, including: Magna Carta (1215), the Bill of Rights (1689), the Act of Settlement (1700), the Acts of Union (1707 and 1800), the Parliaments Acts (1911 and 1949), and the European Communities Act (1972); how it has changed since 1997 and debates concerning further reform
- the structure, role and powers of Parliament; the legislative process in detail; the work of committees; the roles and influence of backbench MPs and peers; the role of the Opposition; the sovereignty of Parliament and how it interacts with other branches of government; and parliamentary privilege
- the accountability of the government to Parliament, including the effectiveness of parliamentary scrutiny of the executive and the extent to which Parliament is able to influence the decisions of the government
- how effectively the Prime Minister and Cabinet are able to dictate events and determine policy making, including the concepts of collective and individual ministerial responsibility, using an example from 1945 to 1997 and an example from 1997 to the present day
- the Supreme Court and its establishment, interactions with and influence over the legislative and policy making processes, including the importance of ultra vires and judicial review, and its impact on the work of government and Parliament
- devolution and its historical causes, its impact on the UK, including the different roles, powers and achievements of the Scottish Parliament and Government, the Welsh Assembly and Government, and the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, as well as devolution in England

Political participation in the UK

10. AS and A level specifications must develop knowledge and understanding of levels and types of political participation in the UK including:

- democracy and participation
 - the nature of democracy, its origins and representative democracy
 - levels of participation and non-participation, and their impact on democracy

- debates over entitlement to vote in elections and referendums, and how suffrage has changed over time from the Great Reform Act (1832)
 - levels of activism, participation and support for democracy, and how these have changed over time
 - the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups, including: the development of rights from Magna Carta (1215), through the Bill of Rights (1689) and the Human Rights Act 1998 to the present day; debates about their application; and consideration of how rights may conflict
- elections and referendums
 - general elections since 1997, including key issues and the different outcomes and the reasons for them
 - the impact of elections on political parties and policies
 - the current electoral systems used for general, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly and UK European Parliament elections, including debates about why different electoral systems are used and whether the same electoral system should be employed for all such elections
 - key historical elections including the general elections of 1945 and 1979, the different outcomes and the reasons for them
 - voting behaviour patterns since 1997 as revealed by relevant national data sources, and debates about explanations of how and why they have changed, including assessments of the influence of media
 - how referendums have been used since 1997 and their impact
 - the role of the Electoral Commission
- political parties
 - the origins, ideologies, historical development, and policies of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties
 - how political parties are funded, the levels of funding achieved and debates relating to party funding
 - levels of success for the political parties and explanations of the fluctuations including the impact of mass media
 - the development of a multi-party system in the UK and its implications for government including the policies of emerging and minority parties
 - the different party systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- pressure groups
 - classifications of pressure groups and the relative success in achieving their aims by each type of group

- methods used by pressure groups and how they exert influence, including participation in consultation exercises, giving evidence to parliamentary committees, lobbying key decision makers, petitions and marches
- how far pressure group methods and influence have changed over time, including the suffragists and suffragettes
- whether pressure groups help or hinder democracy
- why the influence and levels of success achieved by different groups changes over time
- other influences on government and Parliament including think tanks and lobbyists

The European Union (EU)

11. AS and A level specifications must develop knowledge and understanding of the EU, including:

- the origins and development of the EU including the Treaty of Rome (1957), the Single European Act (1986), the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Lisbon Treaty (2009)
- the aims of the EU and the extent to which they have been achieved
- the institutions of the EU – the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the Court of Justice of the EU – and the EU’s main areas of policy activity
- debates over the EU and the ‘democratic deficit’
- the advantages and disadvantages of the EU membership for the UK
- EU responses to key European and global issues

Political ideas

12. A level specifications must require students to know and understand:

- liberalism
 - the core ideas, doctrines and theories of liberalism, particularly as they affect liberal views on human nature, the state, society and the economy
 - differing views and tensions within liberalism, notably between classical liberalism and modern liberalism
 - the ideas of key thinkers including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill and John Rawls
- conservatism
 - the core ideas, doctrines and theories of conservatism, particularly as they affect conservative views on human nature, the state, society and the economy

- differing views and tensions within conservatism, particularly related to divisions between traditional conservatism and the New Right
- the ideas of key thinkers including Edmund Burke, Michael Oakeshott, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman
- socialism
 - the core ideas, doctrines and theories of socialism, particularly as they affect socialist views on human nature, the state, society and the economy
 - differing views and tensions within socialism, in particular differences between revolutionary socialism, democratic socialism and social democracy
 - the ideas of key thinkers including Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Anthony Giddens

The government and politics of the USA

13. A level specifications offering this option must require students to study the government and politics of the USA in order to respond to in-depth questions about the USA. Students will also be required to make comparisons with the UK, based on knowledge from paragraphs nine and ten above. Details of the specific comparisons to be made are given in each section below.

14. A level specifications offering this option must require students to know and understand:

- the Constitution
 - the nature and principles of the US Constitution
 - the constitutional framework within which US institutions operate and the relationship between the Constitution and practical politics
 - constitutional rights and evaluation of their effectiveness in historical and modern contexts
 - the federal system of government and its implications
 - the relationship between the federal government and the states
 - how the US and UK constitutions differ both in terms of their nature and their impact on politics including: codified/uncodified, their sources and provisions, separation of powers and checks and balances in both systems; and how far the UK model of devolution parallels the US federal system
- Congress
 - the structure and workings of Congress, the distribution of power within Congress and debates about the adequacy of its representative role
 - the factors influencing the relationship between Congress and the presidency, and the policy significance and institutional effectiveness of Congress

- the extent and significance of party allegiance and incumbency
- the relative strengths and weaknesses of the US House of Representatives and Senate, and the UK House of Commons and House of Lords including their membership, the extent to which their powers are equal, and the comparative relationships between upper and lower chambers
- President
 - the formal and informal sources of presidential power, and the relationships between the presidency and other institutions
 - the factors that affect the role of the presidency
 - Presidents since 1992, including key successes and challenges
 - the role of the US President compared to that of the UK Prime Minister, the roles of the two cabinets and governments, extent of accountability to legislatures, and comparison of extent of restraints on the President and Prime Minister
- Supreme Court
 - the role of the US Supreme Court
 - the composition of the Supreme Court and the process for appointing Supreme Court judges
 - debates about the political significance of the Supreme Court and its impact on public policy in the USA
 - the basis for and relative extent of the powers of the US Supreme Court and the UK Supreme Court, and a comparison of the extent to which the independence of the judiciary is maintained in the USA and UK
- elections and voting
 - the electoral systems used in the USA including: presidential, congressional, primaries, caucuses and national party conventions; and their significance
 - the factors that explain the outcomes of recent presidential and congressional elections since 1992, including voting behaviour in recent elections and campaign finance
 - the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the electoral systems in the USA and UK, including a comparison of voting behaviour in US presidential elections and UK general elections, and why these have been different; and comparative debates around the issues of campaign finance in the USA and party funding in the UK
- political parties

- the ideologies, theories and traditions of the Democratic and Republican parties, conflicts and tendencies within each party, and their coalitions of supporters
 - the US party system, the distribution of power within parties, and the changing significance of parties as a means of organising the electorate and as channels of political access
 - minor parties, their impact and obstacles to participation
 - why the USA has a two party system but the UK has a multi-party system, degrees of internal unity within parties in the USA and UK, and different policy profiles of the parties in the USA and the UK
- pressure groups
 - the different categories of groups within the US system and how they operate
 - the policy significance of organised groups and interests, their resources and tactics, and debates about their impact upon democracy
 - how pressure groups operate to influence specified branches of federal government as well as exploiting the electoral process to enhance their influence
 - relative size, power, methods and influence of pressure groups in the USA and UK, and different access points in the USA and the UK
- civil rights
 - the protection of civil liberties and rights in the USA under the Constitution, Bill of Rights, subsequent amendments and rulings of the Supreme Court
 - the impact of racial divisions and immigration on US politics
 - the debates for and against affirmative action, and an evaluation of its success; and current key issues in minority politics
 - how the protections offered in the USA, under the Constitution, Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments, and human rights in the UK - based on the Human Rights Act 1998 - compare

Global politics

15. A level specifications offering this option must require students to know, understand and evaluate the key concepts, structures of and influences on global politics including:

- approaches to global politics
 - the divisions between realism and liberalism, and of the ideas of an anarchic international system and a society of states, and an evaluation of the extent to which they explain global politics
 - the processes of globalisation and its impact on the states system

- the factors driving globalisation (economic, cultural, political) and debates about the impact of globalisation, its advantages and disadvantages, and particularly its implications for the nation state
- developments in global politics
 - the changing nature of world order in the 20th and 21st centuries, the effects of events including the collapse of communism on the nature of global order; and the implications of conditions including bipolarity, unipolarity and multipolarity
 - the differing significance of states in global affairs, and why some states are classified as great powers or superpowers (USA) and emerging powers including BRICs (Brazil, India, Russia and China)
 - the use of power and different types of power (hard versus soft); instruments of power including military action, diplomacy and cultural activity; and their advantages and disadvantages
 - different systems of government – including democratic, semi-democratic, non-democratic and autocratic states
 - the development and spread of liberal economies, the rule of law, and democracy (for example South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore)
- global governance
 - the origins and development of international law
 - the origins, development and role of major global institutions from 1945, including the United Nations (UN) Charter (1945), in relation to the key problems of global politics
 - global political governance and the role, effectiveness, structure and significance of the UN and other key bodies such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
 - global economic governance and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Group of Eight (G7/G8/G20), and their effectiveness
 - global environmental governance including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its effectiveness
 - global civil society and the significance of the role played by non-state actors including non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- regionalism
 - the factors that have fostered European integration, the major developments through which this has occurred - particularly economic and monetary union - the process of enlargement, and significance of the EU as an international body

- the nature of Euro-federalism - national sovereignty, functionalism and neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and supranationalism
- the operation and effectiveness of the EU and its institutions – the European Commission, the Council of EU, the European Parliament, and the Court of Justice of the EU
- the development of regional organisations including: the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA), the African Union (AU), the Arab League and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); and debates about the reasons for, and significance of, regionalisation

16. A level specifications offering this option must also require students to know and understand the interaction between international organisations and NGOs, and two of the following issues:

- conflict
 - the causes and impact of key conflicts in the modern world including developments since 9/11, the 'war on terror', and nuclear proliferation and other weapons of mass destruction
 - changing nature of conflict and violence including civil wars, failed states, trans-border conflicts and zones of peace
 - the political responses by international organisations to the challenge of conflict and an evaluation of their effectiveness
- poverty
 - the nature, extent and causes of global poverty including the theories of absolute and relative poverty, and the North-South divide
 - changing attitudes to global poverty, and the work of charities and pressure groups, including political campaigns
 - the political responses by states and international organisations to the challenge of poverty, and an evaluation of their effectiveness
- environment
 - the nature and development of environmental politics, climate change including threats to global commons, and resource security and the 'free rider' problem
 - the development of environmental politics, including the politics of resource scarcity, and the growth of global environmental action
 - the political responses by international organisations to environmental challenges, their attempts to mitigate climate change and the evaluation of their effectiveness including UN Earth Summits and Conferences
- human rights

- the development of human rights including the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- the extent to which human rights are protected by international law and international courts, including International Courts and Tribunals including International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court (ICC), and Special Tribunals
- the political responses by international organisations to the challenge of human rights and an evaluation of their effectiveness including their responsibility to protect and humanitarian intervention

Skills

17. AS and A level specifications must require students to comprehend and interpret political information.

18. AS and A level specifications must require students to critically analyse and evaluate the areas of politics studied in order to construct arguments and explanations leading to reasoned conclusions.

19. AS and A level specifications must require students to identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the areas of politics studied.

20. AS and A level specifications must require students to construct and communicate arguments and explanations with relevance, clarity and coherence, using appropriate political vocabulary.

21. A level specifications must require students to make necessary connections between the areas of politics studied.



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