

GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for Government and Politics

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The criteria

Introduction

AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

1. AS and A level specifications in government and politics should encourage learners to:
 - develop a critical awareness of the nature of politics and the relationship between political ideas, institutions and processes;
 - acquire knowledge and understanding of the structures of authority and power within the political system of the United Kingdom, and how these may differ from those of other political systems;
 - acquire knowledge and informed understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the individual;
 - develop an interest in, and engagement with, contemporary politics.

Specification content

Knowledge and understanding

2. AS level specifications should:
 - develop a broad knowledge and understanding of the political system of the UK, including the local and European Union (EU) dimensions;
 - encourage learners to develop their capacity for critical thinking, to see relationships between different aspects of government and politics and to perceive their field of study in a broader perspective, including some comparisons with other political systems;
 - develop knowledge and understanding of relevant political concepts and processes.

3. AS and/or A2 specifications should address the following:
 - the essential characteristics and interrelationships of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary;
 - the adequacy of existing political arrangements for ensuring representative democracy and participation;
 - the rights and responsibilities of the individual ;
 - ideologies, theories and traditions;
 - current political debates.
4. Although learners should cover all the above issues, it is not expected that they will cover each area of study in equal breadth or depth, or that specifications should adopt the structure implied above.
5. In addition, A2 specifications may require learners to extend their knowledge and understanding of the political system of the United Kingdom. However, they should require learners to go beyond the context of the United Kingdom in at least one of the following areas:
 - the politics and government of another state;
 - comparative politics;
 - international politics;
 - political ideologies or political thought;
 - politics of the European Union.

Skills

6. AS and A level specifications should require learners to:
 - comprehend, synthesise and interpret political information in a variety of forms;
 - analyse and evaluate:
 - political institutions, processes and behaviour;
 - political arguments and explanations;
 - the relationship between institutions, processes, ideologies, concepts, behaviour and values;

- identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the political systems studied;
- select and organise relevant material to construct arguments and explanations leading to reasoned conclusions;
- communicate arguments and explanations with relevance, clarity and coherence, using appropriate political vocabulary.

Assessment objectives

7. The assessment objectives for AS and A level are the same. All learners must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated.

| Assessment objectives | | Weighting |
|------------------------------|--|------------------|
| AO1 | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and debates | 40–50% |
| AO2 | Analyse and evaluate political information, arguments and explanations, and identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the political systems studied | 30–40% |
| AO3 | Construct and communicate coherent arguments making use of a range of appropriate political vocabulary | 10–20% |

8. Within a specification covering both AS and A2, assessment objective 2 should have a higher weighting at A2 than at AS.
9. The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification.

Scheme of assessment

Synoptic assessment

10. Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.
11. All A2 specifications should include synoptic assessment. Synoptic assessment in government and politics will draw on all three assessment objectives and be defined in the context of government and politics as follows:
 - the drawing together of knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in different parts of the A level course. It involves the explicit assessment of understanding of the connections between the relevant areas of study included in sections 2 – 6 above.

AS performance descriptions for government and politics

| | Assessment objective 1 | Assessment objective 2 | Assessment objective 3 |
|--|--|--|--|
| Assessment objectives | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and debates. | Analyse and evaluate political information, arguments and explanations, and identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the political systems studied. | Construct and communicate coherent arguments making use of a range of appropriate political vocabulary. |
| A/B boundary performance descriptions | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) demonstrate full and accurate knowledge of political institutions and processes and a sound understanding of political concepts, theories and debates;</p> <p>b) produce answers that deploy relevant knowledge to answer the question;</p> <p>c) demonstrate clear contextual awareness;</p> <p>d) use relevant evidence and, where appropriate, contemporary examples to illustrate points</p> | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) provide analyses that display a sound awareness of differing viewpoints and a clear recognition of issues;</p> <p>b) evaluate political institutions, process and behaviour, applying appropriate concepts and theories;</p> <p>c) make valid comparisons.</p> | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) construct and communicate clear, structured and sustained arguments and explanations;</p> <p>b) use accurate political vocabulary.</p> |

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| | made. | | |
| E/U boundary performance descriptions | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate a basic knowledge of political institutions and processes and begin to show some understanding of political concepts, theories and debates; b) make a limited attempt at answering the question; c) produce at least one piece of relevant evidence, which may be drawn from source material provided. | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) show some basic awareness of differing viewpoints; b) attempt simple evaluation of political institutions, processes and behaviour; c) make simple comparisons. | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) attempt to communicate and develop an argument or explanation; b) use basic political vocabulary. |

A2 performance descriptions for government and politics

| | Assessment objective 1 | Assessment objective 2 | Assessment objective 3 |
|--|---|---|--|
| Assessment objectives | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and debates. | Analyse and evaluate political information, arguments and explanations, and identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the political systems studied. | Construct and communicate coherent arguments making use of a range of appropriate political vocabulary |
| A/B boundary performance descriptions | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) demonstrate accurate, detailed and comprehensive knowledge of political institutions and processes, and a competent understanding of political concepts, theories and debates, incorporating the relevant specification content;</p> <p>b) produce answers which fully address the requirements of the question;</p> <p>c) demonstrate good contextual awareness;</p> | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) provide analysis that synthesises political concepts, theories or issues;</p> <p>b) evaluate political information clearly and fully, using appropriate supporting evidence that may be drawn from the whole specification;</p> <p>c) make effective comparisons, explaining parallels, connections, similarities or differences.</p> | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <p>a) construct and communicate cogent and coherent arguments and explanations;</p> <p>b) illustrate a clear sense of direction and, where appropriate, culminate in a coherent conclusion which flows from the discussion;</p> <p>c) use a range of relevant evidence and appropriate political vocabulary.</p> |

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| | d) provide accurate evidence and, where appropriate, contemporary examples deployed to illustrate points made. | | |
| E/U boundary performance descriptions | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate an outline knowledge and understanding of political institutions and processes, political concepts, theories and debates, with evidence of some relevant specification content; b) make a limited attempt at answering the question; c) demonstrate some basic contextual awareness; d) provide some relevant evidence or examples. | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) offer limited analysis that shows some awareness of differing ideas; b) attempt a simple evaluation of political institutions, processes, behaviour, arguments or explanations, and make some comparisons; c) outline basic concepts and theories; d) demonstrate some recognition of basic parallels and connections or similarities and differences | <p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) construct and communicate some arguments and explanations with a structure that is narrative or descriptive; b) illustrate a sense of direction and, where appropriate, offer a conclusion, though the relationship to the preceding discussion may be tenuous or implicit; c) use some relevant evidence and some appropriate political vocabulary. |

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