

Getting ready for A Level Politics

'Man is a political animal' **(Aristotle)**

Politics will suit students who:

- have an interest in the world around them: who want to know more about the society they live in, how it works and how it could work,
- enjoy debate, discussion and argument: who are comfortable with the fact that in politics there are no simple 'rights' or 'wrongs',
- like to think for themselves: who wants to develop their own views, rather than accept the views of others.
- Politics will be a new subject for you and therefore you may see it as an opportunity to do something fresh and new, an enriching experience in itself.
- It is particularly important that you have an **enquiring mind**, a desire to learn about how the political system works and its impact on you, the citizen.



"Just because you do not take an interest in politics, doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you." – *attributed to Pericles, 5th century BC*

The skills you will develop studying politics:

- **Knowledge and understanding** of basic political ideas , concepts, structures and processes, the relationship between them and how they work at different levels.
- An ability to interpret and **analyse** political information in various forms and from various sources, and to apply a range of political ideas concepts and theories.
- An ability to **evaluate** arguments, theories, values and ideologies to explain political behaviour and suggest solutions to controversial issues.
- The skills to **organise and present an argument with relevance, clarity and coherence using good English.**

Course Outline:

Year 12	Year 13
<p><u>UK Politics:</u> Democracy & participation, political parties, electoral systems, voting behaviour, the media.</p> <p><u>UK Government:</u> The Constitution, Prime Minister & the Executive, relationships between the branches of government.</p>	<p><u>Core and Non-core Political Ideas</u> Liberalism, Socialism, Conservatism, Anarchism</p> <p><u>Government and Politics of the USA:</u> The US constitution, federalism, US congress, US presidency, US Supreme Court, civil rights, US democracy & participation, comparative theories.</p>
<p><u>Exam:</u> Paper 1: UK Politics & Core Political Ideas Paper 2: UK Government & Non-Core Political Ideas Paper 3: Comparative Politics (USA)</p>	

How will you be successful on this course?

You will need to take an interest in current affairs and political issues.



This will involve:

- Reading a QUALITY newspaper (such as The Times, Guardian, Telegraph or their Sunday equivalent; magazines and specific politics journals such as **Politics Review** as well as the set textbooks.
- Watching current affairs programmes such as Panorama, Despatches etc. and specific politics programmes such as 'A Week in Politics'.
- Watching the news or listening to 'Today' on Radio 4.
- Discussing and debating political issues with both fellow politics students and others
- Keeping a scrapbook of press cuttings on politics and issues

Summer Activities in Preparation for A level Politics:

Task 1: Investigate the role of an MP.

a.) research your local MP, who is he/she; which party do they represent; which constituency do they represent; what have they recently shown an interest in; research their voting history to see where they stand on key issues.

<https://members.parliament.uk/>

b.) investigate the role of an MP by playing the game in the link below.

<https://learning.parliament.uk/resources/mp-for-a-week/#cta-target>

Findings:

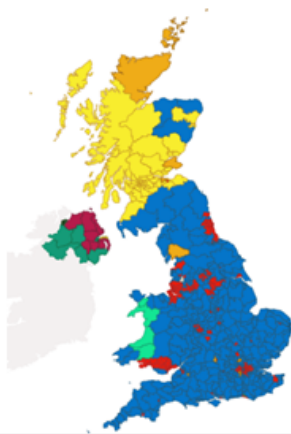
a.) My local MP









b.) The role of an MP

Task 2: General Election 2019

Find out about the results of the last General Election, held in December 2019. The BBC website is a good place to start: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2019/results>

Find out the percentage of the vote these parties received.



 Labour = %	 SNP = %
 Conservatives = %	 Plaid Cymru= %
 Lib Dems = %	 Green = %
 Brexit party = %	 DUP = %

Current number of seats in the House of Commons

How are the 650 seats in the House of Commons are divided up amongst the parties?



Party	No. Seats	% Seats

Something to think about.....

- Are you surprised that the % of the vote received at the General Election is not in proportion to the number of seats they have in Parliament?
- The third largest party is the Scottish National Party who only campaign in Scotland. Do you think this might create issues in parliament, which makes decisions that impact everyone in the UK?

This is something we will think about when we study election systems..

Task 3: Who is who in Boris Johnson's cabinet?

The cabinet are the senior politicians who collectively make decisions with the Prime Minister. Find out who currently fills these key positions?



Defence Secretary:

Justice Secretary:

Home Secretary:

Foreign Secretary:

Health Secretary:

Education Secretary:

Chancellor of the Exchequer:

International Trade:

Business Secretary:

- Which four of these positions are considered the top posts?
- Can you find out who was in charge of the government when Boris Johnson was ill in hospital suffering from Covid-19 in March?
- In the UK, we do not have an official 'Deputy Prime Minister', unlike in the USA who have a Vice President. Do you think we should? If so, why?

Task 4: Have I got news for you?!

Watch the news over the summer holidays. Create an 8 question quiz to test the rest of the class when you come back:

Questions:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

Task 5: Extension task- source analysis.

This is a trickier task but have a go...

Read the source below and answer the questions:

In the UK, the minimum voting age is 18, except in Scotland, where 16- and 17-year-olds have been given the right to vote in local and Scottish parliamentary elections. By and large, 16-year-olds haven't yet entered the world of home ownership, employment, tax or pensions but these economic issues are often at the forefront of election campaigns. The main argument against lowering the voting age is that a lack of experience in these matters prevents young people from making a considered judgement at the ballot box.

Opponents also point to the fact that 18- to 24-year-olds have the lowest turnout of any age group in elections, reflecting an apparent lack of interest in politics. These critics question whether an even younger generation would be any different. And there are concerns that teenagers who do want to cast their votes would be impressionable and easily influenced by radical politics, or would not fully think things through and would blindly vote for the same party as their parents.

But calls to lower the voting age come from a range of sources – adults as well as teenagers themselves, backed up by youth organisations, pressure groups and politicians. 16 and 17 year olds in the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Brazil and Austria already have the vote. They can also vote in some elections in Germany, Malta and Norway. Evidence from the Scottish independence referendum, substantiated by research from Austria and Norway, shows – aided by the encouragement of families and schools – 16 and 17 year-olds have higher rates of turnout than 18 to 24 year-olds.

For supporters, it's about giving young people a say in matters that directly affect them, such as tuition fees. It's also thought that lowering the limit will encourage civic-mindedness at an earlier age and establish an interest in the political system, which will be continued throughout a person's life. Scotland's positive experience of including 16- and 17-year-olds in the 2014 independence referendum led to the lowering of the voting age for local and Holyrood elections.

A study by the University of Edinburgh during the referendum found that some teenagers were initially doubtful of their own abilities to make the right decision, but that this led them to actively seek out information to help inform their judgement. In some cases, teenagers even influenced their parents' voting intentions with their new-found knowledge.

But as there are no immediate plans for the UK government to debate lowering the voting age for general elections, it is unlikely that all 16-year-olds will get the chance to put that to the test any time soon.

Sources: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zsbtbk7> and <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/campaigns/votes-at-16/>

1. Define the following political and non-political words from the source.

Parliamentary elections	
Forefront	
Ballot box	
Turnout	
Impressionable	
Radical politics	
Blindly	
Pressure groups	
Substantiated	
Tuition fees	
Civic-mindedness	
Referendum	
Holyrood	
Voting intentions	

2. Using two differently coloured highlighters, indicate:

- a.) The arguments in the source that support the view that 16 to 18 year olds should be given the vote
- b.) The arguments in the source that support the view that the voting age should remain at 18

3. Match up 3 arguments that support the view that 16 to 18 year olds should be given the vote with 3 counter-arguments that support the view that they should not.

Arguments that support the view that 16 to 18 year olds should get the vote.	Counter-arguments that support the view that the voting age should remain at 18

4. You are now going to practice **analysing** one of these arguments. You are going to use **evidence** to back-up your analysis. You may need to do some additional research to answer these questions.

The source states that the 18-24 age group has the lowest turnout in UK elections so therefore even younger voters are likely to have an even lower turnout.	
What is turnout?	
For example, what was the turnout for 18-24 year olds in the recent 2019 general election?	
How does this compare with turnout for this age group in the 2017 and 2015 general elections?	
Why therefore is it perhaps not a good idea to extend the vote to 16 and 17 year olds?	
In the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum (the first UK election to give 16 year olds the vote) what was the turnout for 16-18 years old? Which age group had the lowest turnout in this referendum?	
Therefore, how does this argument prove that the voting age should not be reduced to 16 years old?	

The work you have just done is how you would start to answer the A Level exam question - **'Using the source, evaluate the view that the voting age should be lowered to 16 for UK general elections.'**