

Get off to a 'Flying Start' in

Politics - A Level

Welcome to Flying Start with North Devon College.

We hope that you are excited to join us at North Devon College. We want to help you to focus on your skills for your course with us and so below you will find questions to consider, tasks to complete and some background research to undertake before enrolment.

Please read the instructions and have a go at the activities.

If you get stuck, please see the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section at the end of this document for help.

A quick hello and introduction to the course

Politics at North Devon College is a broad A-Level that covers a wide range of topics following the Pearson Edexcel specification. The first year focuses on the UK political system and in the second year you will study global politics and political ideas. The entire course is graded through exams – there is no coursework.

The Flying Start will introduce you to the concept of democracy and ask you to examine its characteristics in the UK. This will form the basis of the first lessons at the start of the academic year where we will apply your findings to a broad range of concepts.

If you have any questions about the course or the work contained in this Flying Start, please contact Jon Price. jon.price@petroc.ac.uk

To get you started...

At the beginning of this course, we consider the term 'democracy', what it means, and how we can apply this to the UK. We also consider different methods of voting and what impact this has on politics in the UK.

You may think the UK is a democracy (we have elections, people vote for politicians, right?). However, it may surprise you to learn that the UK is ranked 18th in the world for democracy according to the Economist democracy index! Why is the UK not in the top 10? What are some of the problems with democracy in the UK?

Task – Watch the following video and answer the question below (Short answers are fine!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARnQmrLxjBk&t=4s>

1. Why might the House of Lords be considered undemocratic?
2. The main electoral system in the UK is called First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) - how does it work?
3. What are wasted votes? What percentage of votes were 'wasted' at the last election?
4. Why might voting for the Liberal Democrat party be considered a 'wasted vote'?
5. Why is FPTP considered an advantage for parties such as the Scottish National Party (SNP)?
6. What electoral system is used in the Scottish Parliament?
7. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of what is called 'proportional representation'?
8. What are 'safe seats'? Where generally are Labour safe seats and Conservative safe seats?
9. Is turnout at elections in decline? What is one way we could increase it?
10. What is a coalition and why is it considered a negative to have one?
11. Power used to belong to the monarchy, where does it belong now?
12. Judges in the UK are not elected, why would it be a problem if they were?
13. Through 'devolution' what areas do Parliaments like in Scotland have control over?
14. The video suggests that the answer to the question 'is the UK really democratic'? is no, due to FPTP. How far do you agree with this answer?
15. If you could suggest one thing to the government to increase democracy in the UK, what would it be and why?

For those who want a bit more...

Democracy is not all about voting for political parties, for example, the UK is also considered a 'pluralist democracy'. This means that political influence is spread amongst several groups and activities, not just politicians! One activity which is considered important in a democracy is the right to protest, which became a heavily debated issue this year due to significant protests about climate change and during the coronation of King Charles III.

Task 1 – Debate:

'The right to protest should be regulated to ensure that it does not cause disruption to the general public'

1. Read the following BBC News article, reporting on the protests during the 2023 coronation:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65507435>
2. Prepare for a debate on the statement above by researching both sides of the argument – We will then debate this in the first lesson of the year! Use the table layout below to help you.

'We should regulate protests like under the Public Order Act (2023)'	'Giving the police extensive powers to arrest protesters in an infringement of democracy'

Task 2 - Current Affairs Diary

1. Politics is a contemporary subject which requires good knowledge of how what we study relates to current events. Therefore, it is good to keep a diary of when events in the news relate to politics!
2. Get a news app (BBC for example) on your phone and make a note of any significant events happen over the summer.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Do I need to have studied Politics before or have detailed knowledge of it?

A: There is no expectation that you have any knowledge of what politics is, as it is not a subject you can take at school! It is good however to understand current affairs, even if this is just looking at the news headlines every day.

Q: Will this work be marked and when is it due?

A: This work may not be formally marked but will be discussed during your first classes with us in September. Just bring along what you have completed to your first timetabled sessions.

Q: I am not sure if I have the answers right, what should I do?

A: Don't worry, just have a go at getting something down and bring it along to the lesson where we can talk it through. There is no need to get anxious about the tasks, we are not expecting you to know everything before you arrive but are interested in your ideas and what you have found easy or difficult as it helps us support you right from the beginning.