

A Level Politics
Transition Booklet
Edexcel
Unit 1- UK Politics
Unit 2 – UK Government



Unit 1 - UK Politics Key Terms

Legitimacy

The rightful use of power in accordance with pre-set criteria or widely-held agreements, such as a government's right to rule

	following an election or a monarch's succession based on the agreed rules.
Direct democracy	All individuals express their opinions themselves and not through representatives acting on their behalf. This type of democracy emerged in Athens in classical times and direct democracy can be seen today in referendums.
Representative democracy	A more modern form of democracy through which an individual selects a person (and/or political party) to act on their behalf to exercise political choice.
Pluralist democracy	A type of democracy in which a government makes decisions as a result of the interplay of various ideas and contrasting arguments from competing groups and organisations.
Democratic deficit	A flaw in the democratic process where decisions are taken by people who lack legitimacy, not having been appointed with sufficient democratic input or subject to accountability.
Participation crisis	A lack of engagement by a significant number of citizens to relate to the political process either by choosing not to vote or to join or become members of political parties or to offer themselves for public office.
Franchise/suffrage	Franchise and suffrage both refer to the ability/right to vote in public elections. Suffragettes were women campaigning for the right to vote on the same terms as men.
Think tanks	A body of experts brought together to collectively focus on a certain topic(s) – to investigate and offer solutions to often complicated and seemingly intractable economic, social or political issues.
Lobbyists	A lobbyist is paid by clients to try to influence the government and/or MPs and members of the House of Lords to act in their clients' interests, particularly when legislation is under consideration.

Recommended Reading for Unit 1 and Unit 2

Constitution	A set of rules determining where sovereignty lies in a political system, and establishing the relationship between the government and the governed.	
Unentrenched (entrenched)	A constitution with no special procedure for amendment.	
Uncodified (codified)	A constitution not contained in a single written document.	
Unitary (federal)	A political system where all legal sovereignty is contained in a single place.	
Parliamentary sovereignty	The principle that Parliament can make, amend or unmake any law, and cannot bind its successors or be bound by its predecessors.	
The rule of law	The principle that all people and bodies, including government, must follow the law and can be held to account if they do not.	
Statue law	Laws passed by Parliament.	
Common law	Laws made by judges where the law does not cover the issue or is unclear.	
Conventions	Traditions not contained in law but influential in the operation of a political system.	
Authoritative works	Works written by experts describing how a political system is run, they are not legally binding but are taken as significant guides.	
Treaties	Formal agreements with other countries, usually ratified by Parliament	
Devolution	The dispersal of power, but not sovereignty, within a political system.	
UK Parliament	www.parliament.uk	Covers all aspects of membership and activities of the UK parliament.
Politics home	www.politicshome.com	All to-day's politics in one place
BBC News	www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics	Breaking political news and analysis
Guardian politics	https://www.theguardian.com/politics	Current political news from a more liberal perspective
Telegraph politics	https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/	Current political news from a more conservative perspective

UK Politics	UK Government	
Direct and Representative Democracy	The UK Constitution	
UK Democracy	Devolution	
Participation Crisis	Reforming the UK Constitution	
The extension of the Franchise		
Pressure Groups		
Corporations, think tanks and lobbyists		
Rights Based Society		
Channel 4 News	https://www.channel4.com/news/	In depth video analysis of political stories. Especially useful is the nightly news programme
The Economist	https://www.economist.com/	Analysis and opinion of the latest political stories
The Spectator	https://www.spectator.co.uk/	Analysis and opinion of the latest political stories

Topics for the First Term

Unit 1 September Content: What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Direct and Representative democracy?

Watch the video link attached about Direct and Representative Democracy
<https://youtu.be/y5W45Va0cPE>

Task a)

Read the cards:

1. Decide if they are an advantage or a disadvantage.
2. Does direct democracy benefit some people more than others?

Further questions:

Which reason makes you think that direct democracy is the best form of democracy and the worst?

Task b) <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-representative-democracy-definition-examples-pros-cons.html>

1. Use this video and the advantages and disadvantages to complete a table of the pros and cons of this system.
2. Do you think a representative democracy is a true democracy?
- 3.

They are expensive. People must be educated about the decisions which costs a lot. There are also costs involved in voting. Voting on every issue increases this cost.	It creates a society that is generally happy because the government is there to please the people. There isn't a need to rely on constant communication with a representative in the hopes that the official will vote in a way that benefits the people	People don't always participate in a direct democracy, meaning a minority can dictate what happens for a majority.	In a direct democracy, a vote actually counts. Although decisions are based on the majority, everyone gets to have their say and be included on the decision. This increase the number of people who are politically active and knowledgeable.	It cannot work in a large country because there are too many votes to access and count.
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<p>There is more cooperation within societal demographics in a direct democracy. It encourages discussion and cooperation. This means there are fewer protests and unrest.</p>	<p>It can be difficult to make decisions quickly because voting must take place on any issue.</p>	<p>Government accountability is promoted within a direct democracy. People can voice their concerns without fear and must be allowed to vote on circumstances.</p>	<p>People may not understand the issue they are voting on.</p>	<p>There must be total transparency within a direct democracy. A government must provide accurate and complete data to its people to ensure they can vote effectively. It means there is an open level of communication between the people and the government.</p>
<p>Most votes are based on self interest rather than the good of the whole population.</p>	<p>It can encourage more segregation because people will congregate amongst like minded people when discussing politics. This creates fragments in society</p>	<p>There are more instances when people can influence and manipulate others because there are a greater number of votes. This means there could be a lot of corruption taking place.</p>	<p>Government officials can be immediately recalled in a direct democracy. People can quickly initiate a recall rather than wait for the end of the term. This keeps politicians honest because the power is with the people.</p>	

Unit 2 September Content: The Constitution

1. Watch the video below link attached
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwLgjUPQCMY>
2. Complete the Key word task below:

Below is a list of key-terms that are going to come up when studying the UK constitution.

You must then match the key-term to the definition and then link to the extra information.

(Hint: the key-term will be included somewhere in the definition and/or extra information.)

Key-term	Definition	Extra information
Codified Constitution	Members of the aristocracy who owe their title to their birth, i.e. they inherit their titles from their fathers.	The most recent national UK referendum saw the British people vote to leave the EU.
Constitutional Convention	Devolution refers to the division of powers among regions of the country.	Although theoretically devolved power could be taken from Scotland, NI and Wales, it is so unlikely to happen that the UK is often referred to as a quasi-federal state
Entrenchment	A constitution that is contained in a single document that was created at a specific time.	The 1999 House of Lords act limited the number of hereditary peers to 92.
Parliamentary Sovereignty	The principle established after 1689, which means that the UK parliament in Westminster is supreme within the political system.	In the UK, there was devolution of powers from Westminster to parliaments and assemblies in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.
Referendum	The constitutional arrangement whereby the three branches of government – legislature, executive and judiciary – have separate powers and can control each other's power.	The US have a codified constitution, written in a single, 10,000-word document that outlines the dispersion of power and rights of individuals.
Federalism	An unwritten rule that is considered binding, even though it is not part of the law.	Parliamentary sovereignty means that any new government can amend the constitution just by passing a new parliamentary statute.
Hereditary Peers	A constitutional principle that divides sovereignty, or ultimate power, between central government and regional governments.	The establishment of the Supreme Court in 2005/9 removed the highest appellate court from the House of Lords, increasing the separation of powers in the UK.
Electoral System	The constitutional principle that the judges should be independent from pressure by politicians.	In the UK, the Salisbury Convention prevents the House of Lords from opposing the second or third reading of any government legislation

		promised in its election manifesto.
Devolution	A constitutional principle whereby constitutional rules are safeguarded against change by a future government.	Entrenchment is the device that protects a constitution from short-term gain. Ireland and France require referendums.
The Independence of the Judiciary	The mechanism by which votes at elections are converted into seats awarded to candidates and parties.	The electoral system used in UK general elections is First Past the Post. More proportional systems are used in devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.
Separation of Powers	A system of devolution where it is so difficult for power to be returned to central government that it is effectively a federal system.	The independence of the judiciary was assured with the introduction of a Supreme Court following the Constitutional Reform Act, 2005.
	A vote held among the electorate at national, regional or local level to resolve an important issue.	The USA is a good example of federalism, with the states retaining certain powers that can only be removed through a change in the constitution.

Task 3: Understanding the UK Constitution

The UK Constitution is a central topic in British politics and government. Unlike many other countries, the United Kingdom does not have a single written constitutional document. Instead, it has an uncodified constitution—meaning its rules and principles are drawn from a variety of sources, both written and unwritten.

Key Features of the UK Constitution

1. Uncodified

The UK Constitution is not set out in one single document. Instead, it comes from several sources including statutes (Acts of Parliament), common law (court decisions), conventions (customs and traditions), and authoritative works.

2. Parliamentary Sovereignty

One of the most important principles is that Parliament is sovereign. This means Parliament can make or unmake any law, and no Parliament can bind

its successors. This concept was famously laid out by the constitutional theorist A.V. Dicey.

3. Rule of Law

Everyone, including the government, is subject to the law. The rule of law ensures accountability, fairness, and the protection of individual rights.

4. Unitary State

The UK is a unitary state, meaning power is concentrated in the central government. However, in recent years, devolution has granted some powers to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, allowing them to make certain laws independently.

5. Constitutional Monarchy

The UK is a constitutional monarchy, which means that the monarch (currently King Charles III) is the head of state but must act according to laws and customs. Real political power is held by Parliament and the Prime Minister.

Sources of the UK Constitution

- Statute Law: Laws passed by Parliament (e.g. Human Rights Act 1998).
- Common Law: Legal principles developed by judges through court decisions.
- Conventions: Established practices not legally enforceable but followed by government (e.g. the Prime Minister must be an MP from the majority party).
- EU Law and Treaties: Although the UK left the EU in 2020, past EU laws still influence UK law in some areas.
- Works of Authority: Writings by constitutional experts (e.g. Erskine May, A.V. Dicey).

Is the UK Constitution Fit for Purpose?

There is ongoing debate about whether the UK should adopt a codified (written) constitution, like the United States. Supporters argue that it would make the constitution clearer and more accessible. Critics claim that the current flexible system allows for practical and rapid change without the need for major amendments.

Comprehension Questions

1. What does it mean that the UK has an “uncodified” constitution?
2. Identify and briefly explain two key principles of the UK Constitution.

3. What are constitutional conventions? Provide an example.
4. Explain the concept of parliamentary sovereignty.
5. What are the pros and cons of having a codified constitution?

Essay Question:

“The UK should adopt a codified constitution.” Discuss the arguments for and against this statement.