

GCE Government and Politics: A2 Route A Additional Guidance

By Amanda Sexton

Content explanation and advice

The material below expands on the content of A2 Route A as outlined in the specification and in the Getting Started booklet. It is set out in the form of an outline scheme of work, in which knowledge and understanding is built up within each theme. However, this does not provide an exhaustive account of the knowledge and understanding relevant to Topic A, nor is it prescriptive in that other approaches to delivering the material may be equally effective.

UNIT 3A - UK Political Issues

Economic Policy

Key themes:

- Monetary and Fiscal policy, and how they impact on economic policy-making.
- How and why governments use micro and macro-economic policy.
- The factors that determine government's economic policies, including party ideology, globalisation, political & economic climate etc and their relative importance.
- Governments and economic policy in practice: although the Thatcher and Major eras are useful to demonstrate the ways in which economic policy has been formed by comparatively recent governments, no specific questions will be asked on these historical eras. The Labour era is a good starting point for how economic policy is formed and how it can be determined by party ideology, particularly with the 'Third Way' approach to the economy.
- The economic recession: its causes, consequences and the political and economic divisions it has caused both within and between parties. This should include the debate over the extent to which the recession was caused/could have been prevented by the Labour government, and the extent to which the major parties disagree on how to tackle the subsequent economic problems facing the UK.
- Political party stances on the economy: changing ideologies and policies and the factors that have caused changes - this includes knowing specific and, where possible, recent party or government proposals and policies.
- The impact of such party policies in key areas of the economy such as economic growth, inflation, taxation, employment, distribution of income, the free market, the financial sector (including the banking system) etc.
- Theories of economic policy and how these impact on party/government economic policy-making, including: the 'Third Way', monetarism, Keynesianism, supply-side economics, neo-liberalism and globalisation.

Key Debates:

- **Who controls economic policy-making in the UK?**
- **How far are the main UK political parties divided over economic policy?**
- **Have governments' economic policies been successful?**

Social Welfare, Education & Health

Key themes:

- The founding principles of the Welfare State, and to what extent reforms or proposed reforms of the component arms of the Welfare State have eroded these principles.
- Traditional political party perspectives on the component arms of the Welfare State, and how and to what extent these perspectives have changed.
- The scale of conflict and consensus amongst the main political parties on the issue of the Welfare State - this includes a working knowledge of specific policies and proposals.
- The reasons why reform is sought in all areas, and the extent to which it is considered necessary by both political parties, pressure groups and other organisations/groups involved in the Welfare State.
- The issue of spending versus quality: is the Welfare State offering value for money?
- The extent to which privatisation of the Welfare State is a controversial political issue.
- The Labour era is a good starting point - while the Thatcher and Major eras are useful for comparison in terms of how party ideology has changed, the main focus on a Key Issues paper should be on comparatively recent issues.

Education

- What governments have done to reform education at all levels: the motivation behind such reforms, the reforms themselves and the comparative success of such reforms. This should include opposition party attitudes towards the reforms, and any alternative proposals that have been made. This should include the tuition fees debate, the reform of the EMA system, the academies system and the recent 'free schools' initiative.

Health

- What governments have done to reform the health system: the motivation behind such reforms, the reforms themselves and the comparative success of such reforms. This should include opposition party attitudes towards the reforms, and any alternative proposals that have been made. This should include an examination of the coalition's proposed reforms, the reaction to these proposals and the subsequent proposed amendments.

Social Security

- What governments have done to reform social security: the motivation behind such reforms, the reforms themselves and the comparative success

of such reforms. This should include opposition party attitudes towards the reforms, and any alternative proposals that have been made.

- Social security includes pensions, the benefit system and housing (although no specific question will be set on housing). Studies should include the coalition's proposals for reforming retirement pensions, the proposed Universal Credit system, and suggested reforms to housing benefit.

Key Debates:

- **How far are the main UK political parties divided over welfare policy/the Welfare State?**
- **Has the Welfare State been privatised?**
- **Does the Welfare State offer 'value for money', or is it a case of spending versus quality?**
- **How far have the original principles of the Welfare State been eroded?**

Law, Order & Criminal Justice

Key themes:

- The main areas in this topic include: punishment/deterrence versus rehabilitation, the prison and probation system, criminal law and sentencing, policing, youth crime, public order, anti-terrorism, public security versus civil liberties, the causes of crime and the use of crime statistics.
- Unlike previous topics, an overview of the Thatcher and Major eras are essential here for understanding the change in party ideologies and stances on certain issues. The main bulk of study, however, should still focus on post-1997 governments and party policies.
- The change in the Labour and Conservative Party traditional approaches to law and order under Blair and Cameron respectively; specific policies, their aims, consequences and the extent of their perceived success/failure. This should include opposition party attitudes towards policies, and any alternative proposals that have been made.
- The Liberal Democrat Party approach to law and order, and specific policies proposed.
- The coalition government's approach to law and order; specific proposals/policies such as the DNA database, ID cards, prison sentencing and directly elected police commissioners; the aims and criticisms of the proposals/reforms. This should include the pre-coalition and current divisions both within and between the governing and opposition parties in terms of their attitudes towards policies made/proposed, and any alternative proposals that have been made.

Key Debates:

- **How far are the main UK political parties divided over law and order policy?**
- **How successful have governments been at tackling law and order issues?**
- **Are law and order policies increasingly encroaching on civil liberties?**

Environmental Policy

Key themes:

- As a comparatively new political issue, an historical background on why the environment has become a political issue is necessary for this topic - there will not, however, be a specific question on this area.
- The main areas on this topic include: climate change, pollution, renewable energy (including solar, wind and tidal power), resource depletion and sustainability, transport, food planning, rural affairs, global agreements, the issue of 'green' taxes. Recent issues that have arisen include the nuclear energy debate, the proposed Green Investment Bank and the high-speed rail network.
- Unlike previous topics, an overview of the Thatcher and Major eras are essential here for understanding the change in party ideologies and stances on certain issues. The main bulk of study, however, should still focus on post-1997 governments and party policies.
- The Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Party traditional and current approaches to environmental issues, including why and how attitudes may have changed over time (particularly the Conservative Party); specific policies, their aims, consequences and the extent of their perceived success/failure. This should include opposition party attitudes towards government policies, and any alternative proposals that have been made.
- The coalition government's approach to the environment; specific proposals/policies, their aims and criticisms of the proposals/reforms. This should include the parties pre-coalition stances, and current divisions both within and between the governing and opposition parties in terms of their attitudes towards the environment, and any policies that have been made/proposed.
- Divisions within and between the major political parties and also the green movement (including light/dark Greens and pressure groups) on environmental issues.
- The impact of globalisation on environmental policy-making in the UK, with specific reference to the impact of international agreements and treaties. The impact of EU membership is of particular significance to this topic. Some centres in the past have included references to the impact of devolution and/or local government on environmental issues- this is rewardable and not to be discouraged, but there will not be specific questions set on devolution and/or local government.

Key Debates:

- How far are the main UK political parties divided over environmental policy?
- Do UK political parties treat the issue of the environment as seriously as more 'traditional' political issues such as the economy?
- What factors impact on environmental policy-making?
- How successful have government policies been in tackling environmental issues?

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Politics UK (7th edition) by Bill Jones and Philip Norton (2010)
- British Politics (2nd edition) by Robert Leach, Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins (August 2011)
- British and European Political Issues (2nd edition) by Neil McNaughton (2010)
- The Verdict: Did Labour Change Britain? by Polly Toynbee and David Walker (2010)
- Developments in British Politics 9 by Dr Richard Heffernan et al (July 2011)
- The New British Politics by Professor Ian Budge et al (2007)
- British Politics (5th edition) by Dennis Kavanagh et al (2006)
- www.tutor2u.net First Past the Post Digital Magazine (1 year subscription and Network Licence £60)
- www.tutor2u.net Environmental Politics eBook by Andrew Ellams (Network Licence £50)
- www.tutor2u.net UK Political Issues under Labour eBook by Mike McCartney and Julie Smith (2008) (Network Licence £50)
- www.tutor2u.net Politics Revision Presentations Volume 1- covers AS, and both Route A units (Network Licence £40)
- <http://www.mcnaughtonspolitics.blogspot.com/> Neil McNaughton's blog
- <http://blogs.channel4.com/factcheck/> Channel 4's Fact Check blog
- www.bbc.co.uk/news
- <http://www.cps.org.uk> The Centre for Policy Studies: a collection of blogs, articles and links covering the economy, public services (education & health) amongst other, more diverse topics
- <http://www.endsreport.com/> The ENDS (Environmental Data Services) Report
- *Total Politics* magazine
- *Red Pepper* magazine
- *The Week* magazine
- *The Economist* magazine

UNIT 4A - EU Political Issues

Impact of the EU on the UK

Key themes:

- Although this is a Key Issues paper, an overview of how and why the UK joined the EU is necessary to understand the idea that the UK has also been a less enthusiastic member of the EU. In terms of studying political party perspectives, the Thatcher and Major eras are also essential here for understanding the change in party ideologies and stances on EU issues. The main bulk of study, however, should still focus on post-1997 governments and party policies.
- The Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Party approaches to the EU, particularly under Blair, Brown and Cameron; specific policies, their aims, consequences and the extent of their perceived success/failure. This should include opposition party attitudes towards policies made/proposed, and any alternative proposals that have been made.
- Other minor political parties who have a vested interest in EU affairs e.g. nationalist parties who are impacted by the policy of subsidiarity, anti-EU parties such as UKIP (although no specific questions will be set on UKIP).
- Studies of political party attitudes and policies should include changes in stances on the EU and divisions within and between parties, as well as the reasons for and consequences of such changes in attitudes and/or divisions.
- How and why UK public opinion has developed towards EU membership, including public opinion towards the EU overall, its institutions, and also public attitudes towards the EU stance taken by UK political parties and institutions. This should include a study of the idea that the UK is the EU's 'awkward partner'.
- How and why membership of the EU has affected the UK constitution, and the consequences of this on both how it operates in practice and political party and public attitudes towards the EU.
- How and why membership of the EU has affected UK institutions, and the consequences of this on both their day-to-day operation, relationships between the institutions and political party and public attitudes towards the EU. This should include the UK legislative, executive and judicial bodies- please note, however, that while such studies will be creditable in the examinations, there will not be any specific questions set on how EU membership has affected the devolved bodies.
- How and why membership of the EU has affected the operation of UK pressure groups, and the consequences of this on both their day-to-day operation, and their relationships with UK political parties and institutions and. This can include both the UK and devolved legislative, executive and judicial bodies - please note, however, that while devolution studies will be creditable in the examinations, there will not be any specific questions set on how UK pressure groups and the devolved bodies.

- The aspects of learning featured above will, of course, necessitate the study of the key concepts of national sovereignty, qualified majority voting, national veto and subsidiarity, as detailed in the specification.

Key Debates:

- **How far are the main UK political parties divided over the EU and policies towards Europe?**
- **Are UK political parties and the public fully committed to EU membership?**
- **Has EU membership undermined the UK constitution and/or institutions?**
- **Does UK membership affect UK policy to a great extent?**

European Integration

Key themes:

- Students will need to understand how and why the EU has developed since its inception - but this should be noted as historical background. Questions on integration will focus on comparatively recent developments - no specific questions will be set on the history of the development of the EU.
- The steps taken towards further integration, including: the Single European Act, treaties such as Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, Lisbon, QMV, subsidiarity, monetary union and the failed Constitution Treaty. This should include the study of specific policy areas into which the EU has expanded its influence, and the perceived benefits and criticisms of this.
- The perceived successes and failures of the moves towards further integration. This should include a study of the debate surrounding the extent to which member states have lost or gained sovereignty.
- Various theories of integration and the associated benefits and drawbacks of such theories on their own and in comparison to other theories. These include neo-functionalism, intergovernmentalism, supranationalism, 'pooled' sovereignty, federalism, multi-level governance, subsidiarity, and enlargement and the 'widening versus deepening' debate.
- How and why the EU has enlarged: the perceived benefits and criticisms of past enlargement, and the extent to which the new member states have remained transitional states or been fully integrated. This should include a study of the future of EU enlargement and its associated controversies.

Key Debates:

- **Should the EU pursue further 'widening' or 'deepening'? Are the two mutually exclusive?**
- **Has the EU become a federal organisation?**
- **Have EU member states gained or lost sovereignty?**
- **Is further integration necessary or desirable?**

EU Institutions & their Relationships

Key themes:

- The structure of the main EU institutions, including: the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, the European Council, the European Central Bank and COREPER.
- The role, powers and accountability of each institution; the ways in which the roles, powers and accountability of each institution may have been reformed. This should include a study of the extent to which such reforms have been perceived as successful.
- The distribution of power and the influence and interrelationship between the institutions; the strengths and limitations of each institution, including the comparative significance of each institution.
- How the decision-making process operates within the EU, and the factors that determine policy and decisions.
- The intergovernmental or supranational nature of each institution, and the impact that this has on the member states and the EU overall.
- The voting processes used within the EU, including Qualified Majority Voting, unanimity and co-decision, and how the use and significance of such process may have changed over time.
- The budgetary process of the EU, and the extent to which each institution has influence over the budget.
- The extent to which a democratic deficit exists within the EU overall and within the individual institutions; steps which have been taken to resolve the democratic deficit and how far this has been successful.
- The significance and influence of key posts and post-holders within the EU, including: the President of the Commission, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy, the President of the European Council, the President of the Council of Ministers and the President of the European Parliament.
- There should also be a clear distinction made between the posts and institutions of the European Union, and also between EU and other European institutions. Common errors include confusing the European Council and the Council of Ministers; a belief that the Presidents of the European Council, Commission and the Council of Ministers are one and the same post; an assumption that the European Court of Human Rights is an EU institution.
- An understanding of the role and influence of other institutions is also relevant- such institutions include the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, the European Ombudsman and the European Court of Auditors. Please note, however, that no specific questions will be set on these institutions.

Key Debates:

- **Does the EU still have a 'democratic deficit'?**
- **How far can any one EU institution dominate decision-making?**

- **Has the balance of power amongst the EU institutions changed over time?**

Domestic Policy Issues

Key themes:

- This area may overlap with the other topic areas, as inevitably many of these issues are ones which are hotly debated within the UK, and/or are ones which are intrinsically linked to integration, and/or are affected by the workings of the various EU institutions.
- **The Social Chapter:** how and why the issue of social rights became an issue for the EU; the main provisions of the Social Chapter; how and why the Social Chapter has caused controversy- with the associated benefits and drawbacks of its provisions; the impact it has had on labour markets- including flexibility, mobility and competitiveness; the extent to which the Social Chapter has been perceived as successful.
- **The Single Market:** the extent to which this concept has been embraced by member states; the steps taken towards achieving a Single Market; the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the Single Market; the impact it has had on labour markets - including flexibility, mobility and competitiveness the extent to which the Single Market is perceived as a success. This should include concepts such as free trade areas, opt-outs, tariffs, harmonisation, social dumping, judicial activism, impact of globalisation
- **Monetary Union:** why monetary union has become an aim of the EU, and the extent to which this has been embraced by member states; the steps taken towards achieving monetary union; the perceived benefits and drawbacks of monetary union; the extent to which monetary union is perceived as a success - including the impact of the current (July 2011) global recession and how the Eurozone has dealt with this, the impact of measures take to deal with it and the impact this has had on the workings and future of the Eurozone.
- **Common Agricultural Policy:** the aims of the CAP; the measures taken to try to achieve these aims; the problems that the CAP has caused/faced; reforms undertaken to improve the CAP/resolve such problems; the extent to which such reforms are perceived as being successful; the future of CAP reform, in particular the forthcoming 2013 review of the CAP and attempts by individual countries to influence the review.
- **Social models:** the different types of social models within the EU, and the extent to which a single European social model is either desirable or achievable; the need to compromise on social justice that has been caused by the varying social models in existence within the EU, and the extent to which this has become more difficult as the EU enlarges and integrates further. Such social models include Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Continental and Mediterranean.
- **Common Fisheries Policy:** how and why the issue of fisheries became an issue for the EU; the main provisions of the CFP; how and why CFP has caused controversy- with the associated benefits and drawbacks of its provisions; the extent to which the CFP has been perceived as successful.
- **Social justice:** why social justice has become an aim of the EU; the steps have been taken towards achieving this; the extent to which such steps are perceived as being successful; the issues that have arisen in this area since the Treaty of Lisbon in particular. This should

include the impact of the common adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Maastricht Treaty, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Treaty of Lisbon.

- Common Foreign and Security Policy: why this has become desirable within the EU; the steps have been taken towards achieving this; the extent to which such steps are perceived as being successful; the issues that have arisen in this area since the Treaty of Lisbon in particular.
- Justice and Home Affairs: how and why the influence of the EU has been extended into the area of Justice and Home Affairs; the controversy that this has caused within the EU and for member states; the extent to which this pillar is likely to be extended further. Issues include the Schengen Agreement, the impact of the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Lisbon Treaties, Europol, the changing role of the institutions, opt-outs, immigration & asylum and terrorism.

Key Debates:

- **How have EU member states been affected by domestic policy issues, and how much impact have they had on the formation of such policies?**
- **How and why has the scope of domestic policy been extended?**
- **How successful have domestic policies been?**

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Politics UK (7th edition) **Chapter 27** by Bill Jones and Philip Norton (2010)
- British Politics (2nd edition) **Chapter 15** by Robert Leach, Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins (August 2011)
- British and European Political Issues (2nd edition) by Neil McNaughton (2010)
- European Union Politics (3rd edition) by Michelle Cini and Nieves Perez-Solorzano Borragan (2010)
- The Government & Politics of the European Union by Neill Nugent (2010)
- Policy-Making in the European Union (6th edition) by Helen Wallace et al (2010)
- The Political System of the European Union (3rd edition) by Simon Hix & Dr Bjorn Hoyland (2011)
- Politics in the European Union (3rd edition) by Ian Bache et al (2011)
- Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration (4th edition) by Desmond Dinan (2010)
- Debates on European Integration: A Reader by Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2006)
- The Economist Guide to the European Union (2010)
- The Lisbon Treaty: A Legal and Political Analysis by Angela Merkel (Foreword) and Jean-Claude Piris (2010)
- The Institutions of the Enlarged European Union: Continuity and Change by Edward Best et al (2010)
- <http://www.civitas.org.uk/schools/euSchools.php> Civitas (Institute for Civil Society): Education Resources on the EU for teachers and sixth formers
- <http://www.cer.org.uk/> The Centre for European Union
- <http://www.democracy-movement.org.uk/> The Democracy Movement: an anti-EU organisation
- <http://www.euromove.org.uk/> The European Movement: a British pro-European organisation
- <http://www.federalunion.org.uk/> The Federal Union: a pro-federalism organisation

- <http://www.globalbritain.org/> Global Britain: a geo-political think tank that campaigns to improve understanding and relationships between the UK and EU
- <http://www.openeurope.org.uk/> Open Europe: an independent think tank
- <http://www.euoparltv.europa.eu/en/home.aspx> The European Parliament's own television broadcasts
- <http://euobserver.com/> The EU Observer: online newspaper
- <http://www.euractiv.com/en> EU news and policy debates
- <http://www.eurofora.net/> News site specialising in EU, Council of Europe and other European affairs
- http://europa.eu/press_room/index_en.htm The EU's press room
- <http://europeandaily.com/> The European Daily, an online newspaper
- <http://www.europeanvoice.com/> The European Voice, an online weekly newspaper dedicated to EU affairs
- <http://www.neurope.eu/> New Europe, a weekly online newspaper which emphasises EU affairs
- E!Sharp magazine <http://www.esharp.eu/>
- <http://www.endseurope.com/> The ENDS (Environmental Data Services) Europe Report
- www.tutor2u.net Politics Revision Presentations Volume 1- covers AS, and both Route A units (Network Licence £40)
- www.bbc.co.uk/news
- *Total Politics* magazine
- *Red Pepper* magazine
- *The Week* magazine
- *The Economist* magazine
- *The Parliament Magazine*