

politics

A Level

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Exam board: Pearson Edexcel



What is this subject about?

Politics influences everything we do in life. It can affect where and how we work, whether we can afford to buy a home, our quality of life, our health, where to go on holiday – everything! Understanding how the government makes decisions, and the various domestic and global influences on those decisions, could help us to make better choices ourselves. Politics is a dynamic subject in that we learn about topics as they happen and continue to change. The topics we cover in the course are always 'in the news'. It may also mean that you finally understand the issues being raised on programmes such as Newsnight and Dispatches! William Sheward, a Professor at the University of Winchester has said "[Studying politics] encourages [people] to think critically and knowledgeably about contemporary issues and their historical contexts, which in turn allows them to be able to think for themselves as informed citizens". We would like to believe that understanding politics also encourages students to become more active citizens. In summary, this subject will provide you with the political knowledge and skills to enable you to make more sense of the political processes and decisions, both in the UK and internationally, that have so much impact on your everyday life. It will enable you to develop the political awareness that provides a foundation for effective participation as a citizen of the United Kingdom, and the world.

What will I study in the course?

This A Level course offers both breadth and depth of study of current political issues and institutions. The course is taught over two years and the specification contains three distinct parts:

- 1) UK Government & Politics (47% of the qualification)
- 2) Political ideas/ideologies (20% of the qualification)
- 3) Global Politics (33% of the qualification)

UK Politics: This part of the course is taught in the first year; you will be introduced to the political system in the UK. This includes a study of the strengths and limitations of British democracy and the examination of different proposals to increase

participation, and the policies and beliefs of political parties and how elections are contested, including voting systems, voting behaviour and the media. It also covers the evaluation of the roles and effectiveness of institutions such as the cabinet and Parliament, the judiciary and the constitution.

Political ideologies: four key political ideologies will be introduced and evaluated in the course: conservatism, liberalism, and socialism, in addition to one (the fourth) from the following choice: anarchism, ecology, feminism, multiculturalism or nationalism.

Global Politics: this part of the course is covered in the second year and it will give you an opportunity to

develop an understanding of international relations and the global dimensions of political activity. You will explore some of the topical global issues that affect all of us such as globalisation, climate change, global terrorism, human rights, wars and nuclear proliferation. The course will also critically examine the main theories of international relations as well as the roles and significance of institutions of global governance or regional such as the European Union, the UN, G-8/20, NATO, the IMF, World Bank and the WTO.

How is the course assessed?

Assessment is by three written exam papers, each 2 hours long. The exam papers include a range of different questions such as source-based questions, extended essay, and some shorter questions. The skills that are assessed in the papers are analysis, evaluation and written communication (essay writing). Note that the three papers do not necessarily overlap with the three themes above.

What skills will I need and develop in this course?

Reading and digesting large amounts of written material from one lesson to another is essential for success in the course, as well as the ability to produce clear, coherent and analytical essays. During the course, you will develop the ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political institutions, concepts and theories and be able to assess and evaluate political arguments and views. You will be able to construct and communicate clear arguments, using relevant examples and evidence and appropriate political vocabulary.

What can the course lead to in terms of higher education and future careers?

Many of our students go on to study Politics or related degrees, such as International Relations, at university. Some may eventually work in an area of political life but for the majority a qualification in Politics provides a range of intellectual skills that are transferable to a variety of employment and higher education opportunities. For example, the skills and knowledge developed in the Politics A Level provide a good basis for studying law, and a number of our students go on to a Law degree and a legal career.

What are the formal entry requirements for this course?

Aside from the general entry criteria that the College requires, you will also need to achieve a minimum of:

- Grade 4 in GCSE English Language

Do I need to have any previous knowledge of Politics in order to take it at A Level?

The course assumes no previous knowledge of the subject. However, during the course you will be expected to read extensively on the topics, take an interest in politics, and access resources, extending beyond the classroom and the textbooks. For example, using the media to follow the latest developments and the internet to undertake political research.

What extra support/enrichment activities are on offer?

In previous years we have offered students day-trips to Parliament, Europe House, the Supreme Court and other institutions. We also arrange regular residential visits to Berlin, looking at the issue of the Cold War and transition from authoritarian to a democratic regime. We also visit Brussels to discover more about the politics of the European Union, and The Hague to witness the work of international courts and tribunals. In addition, we have an extensive programme of visiting speakers from political parties, pressure groups and other organisations, including the media, who present and discuss a range of political topics. We also arrange cultural activities, such as theatre visits, where there is an obvious political dimension.

Subject combination advice:

This subject combines well with others, such as English and History, where there is an emphasis on clear written communication, evaluation and analysis. In addition, there are some subjects, such as Economics, Film Studies, Philosophy and Sociology that include an element of political knowledge or where an awareness of political analysis and concepts is useful.