



UNIT GUIDE

BA Social and Policy Studies Scheme

Politics Decision Making and Democracy

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

Unit>Title:	Politics, Decision Making and Democracy
Level:	1
Unit Number:	PPO-1-107
Unit Value:	1
Student Study hours:	150 hours
Class contact hours	40 hours
Private Study Time:	110 hours
Co-requisites	None
Unit Co-ordinator:	Hugh Atkinson , BR 341a, ext 5730
Parent Faculty:	Arts and Human Sciences
Subject area:	Politics and Social Sciences

1.0 UNIT DESCRIPTION

This unit is concerned with the institutions and central processes of British politics. It looks at the framework and dynamics of the British system and aims to promote an understanding by students of contemporary politics in the United Kingdom.

2.0 AIMS

- 1) To introduce students to the basic concepts of politics and academic perspectives of the state.
- 2) To provide knowledge and critical awareness of the political institutions that make up the British state.
- 3) To examine the main aspects of British political life and culture, elections, parties, pressure groups and media.
- 4) To briefly examine mainstream political doctrines relevant to British political life.
- 5) To examine and analyse key issues and developments in British political affairs.

3.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the unit students will have:

- acquired an understanding of post-war political trends, and their relevance to contemporary political debates;
- gained a good understanding of the complexity of British politics;
- understand the role of power and ideology in political decision making;
- developed some critical awareness of political concepts;

- acquired an understanding of the difference between analysis and description;

4.0 TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

At the end of the unit students will have:

- developed good time management skills;
- acquired good communication skills both written and oral;
- developed presentation skills.

5.0 INDICATIVE CONTENT

British Politics and the Constitutional Framework; the principal political institutions of the British political system; the central executive – the cabinet and Prime Minister, the role of the Civil Service, the role of Parliament; voting behaviour and elections; sub national government in the United Kingdom; the political influence of pressure groups and the mass media; pressures for change and continuity in the British political system.

6.0 TEACHING AND LEARNING PROGRAMME

The aim is to develop a concern with both the processes of policy making and of specific issues in contemporary British politics.

Teaching and learning strategies are designed to encourage student involvement and to develop a conceptual appreciation of British politics. To this end various teaching methods will be employed – lectures to provide overall frameworks and concepts; seminars based on student group work and presentation. There will also be video presentations, directed reading and handouts.

Private study should be used for directed reading and question preparation as indicated in the unit guide. Also, to follow contemporary developments in newspapers, journals, television and radio, and internet resources.

Please note that the unit is supported by an active Blackboard site

7.0 LECTURE PROGRAMME

- (1) The changing role of the British State
- (2) Central Executive: The PM and the Cabinet
- (3) Central Executive: the Civil Service
- (4) Parliament
- (5) Local Government
- (6) Representation, Elections and Democracy
- (7) Political Parties
- (8) Pressure Groups and Power
- (9) The Politics of Northern Ireland
- (10) British Foreign Policy
- (11) The Politics of Sustainability
- (12) British Politics: A Review

8.1 CORE READING

- 1) R Leach et al, British Politics, Palgrave 2006
- 2) J Fisher et al, Central Debates in British Politics, Longman, 2003
- 3) P Dunleavy et al, Developments in British Politics 8, Palgrave 2006
- 4) I Budge et al, The New British Politics, Pearson Longman 2007

NB You should not confine yourself just to these texts. There are a number of other very good texts on British politics out there. Make sure you check the date of publication. Politics is a fast moving area!!

8.2 SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

- 1) Atkinson, H. and Wilks, S. Local Government in Britain from Thatcher to Blair, Polity Press, 2000
- 2) D Marsh et al, Post War British Politics in Perspective

The following politics journals are available in the library and should be consulted regularly:

Government and Opposition; West European Politics; Parliamentary Affairs; Political Quarterly; Politics. Also internet sites relevant to Politics.

9.0 ASSESSMENT

Assessment is based on a combination of coursework and examination. Coursework takes the form of a 1500 – 2000 word essay accounting for 50% of the total marks.

The essay question will be chosen from one of the seminar titles.

At the end of the semester, there will be a two-hour examination for 50% of the total marks. This will comprise two questions to be answered from 10 questions.

The pass mark for the unit is 40% of the total mark available, on condition that at least 30% is obtained in each element of assessment.

Assessment Objectives

All coursework essays and examination scripts are assessed in relation to the individual learning outcomes for each unit. Requirements in relation to the level of conceptual analysis and acquired skills will intensify with the student's progression through the course.

At Level One:

The overall learning outcome of level one units is that the student should be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of basic institutions, concepts and ideas, in the Politics area and should be attempting to provide some analysis of alternative views. In particular, at the end of level one, students should have acquired a number of key skills, which should be reflected in their written work:

- the ability to collect, sift and record information from a variety of sources (e.g. library, database, lectures);
- the ability to distinguish between description and analysis in information sources;
- the ability to isolate key arguments within source material.

At Level Two

The conceptual analysis and skills developed at level one will be deepened, and students will develop their interactive skills within a learning group. Additionally, students will be expected to demonstrate:

- ability to distinguish between differing viewpoints;
- ability to identify key elements of a problem and choose the theories/methods for its resolution;
- ability to analyse political systems using comparative methodology;
- ability to research a topic of their choice as part of a group, and to present this research in oral and written form (Group Project).

At Level Three:

Students will be expected to demonstrate:

- ability to identify and define problems in the area of inter-state relations;
- ability to apply appropriate knowledge and skills to the solution of problems;
- clear understanding of the relation between economic, social and political factors in international political processes;

- a clear understanding of the influence of global political forces on international relations;
- ability to present in written form a critical piece of academic analysis and research, demonstrating a firm grasp of methodological principles in the selection and use of themes for a more specialised piece of work (10,000 word Contemporary Issues Project).

At level three, the student should be able to critically review evidence-supporting conclusions and to assess its validity and significance.

Marking Criteria

At all levels, five areas of assessment objective can be recognised:

1. Knowledge of the topic - ideas, concepts and institutions
2. Analysis of issues and an awareness of different viewpoints
3. Evaluation of competing explanations or theories applied to a problem
4. Ability to identify relevant sources of evidence, both empirical and theoretical, and to use these to produce an informative referencing system
5. Skill in the presentation of an answer with accuracy, clarity and coherence.

With these objectives in mind, the following model marking scheme should apply:

Fail	0-30%	Badly misunderstands the question; contains factual errors; none of basic objectives are achieved
	30-35%	Some knowledge of topic and examples, but objectives 2-5 not met
	35-39%	Exhibits some knowledge of topic, but essentially descriptive; cannot identify alternative viewpoints; objective 1 is present but 2-5 poorly met
Third	40-49%	Demonstrates limited basic knowledge of the topic, but essentially descriptive; displays an attempt at evaluation of material, but low on clarity and coherence; limited achievement of objectives 1,2,3,4,; low on objective 5
2:ii	50-59%	Exhibits good knowledge of the topic; can distinguish different approaches or viewpoints, and some ability of evaluation is present, but may to some extent lack clarity and coherence; reasonable attempt at referencing; very good on objective 1, weaker on 2-5
2:I	60-69%	Very good knowledge of basic ideas, concepts and institutions with good analysis of issues and evaluation; good uses of sources and references; meets objectives 1,2,4,5, weaker on 3
First	70-79%	Excellent knowledge of the topic, with high level analysis of a balanced nature. Strong on critical evaluation, clarity, coherence. All assessment objectives covered

80% +	Same as the range 70-79% but adds a deeper understanding and evaluation of the issues and can “impose oneself on the subject”
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Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking the words or ideas of others and passing them off as your own. In many cases plagiarism takes the form of copying from books and articles without full and accurate acknowledgement of sources. This can happen unintentionally when you use notes taken from a book/journal article and put them directly into your essay without properly attributing the source. Whether intentional or not, plagiarism is not acceptable in any circumstances. It is regarded as a form of cheating and there are strict University regulations to deal with it if it is discovered. You will find a discussion of the University regulations & procedures governing plagiarism in your Course Guide. You must read these carefully.

It is vital when taking notes to:

- (1) Note the FULL reference of the book/article at the top of the first page of notes.
- (2) Keep a precise note of the page numbers of any quoted material (for example in the margins of your notes)
- (3) Use precise double quote marks at the beginning & end of any quotes in your notes and check that any quotes/material used in your essay is accurately and carefully attributed.

Referencing & Bibliography

All essays must be fully and accurately referenced and must include, at the end, a bibliography of material consulted in the preparation of the essay. There are two well known systems of referencing which can be used for academic work. They are the Harvard System and the Notes system.

THE HARVARD SYSTEM:

This takes the form of giving details of the author and date of publication in square brackets after the relevant place in the text, for example [Pugh:1994]. The full reference to this text is then given in the Bibliography. When citing specific arguments or using quotations the page number must also be given in the bracket: e.g. [Thompson: 1963, p.66]

NOTE: When using sources which themselves quote or paraphrase other pieces of work always cite the source that you have consulted, e.g. Bentham believed.... [Garland:1985, p.77] The source in the bracket should be listed in the Bibliography.

Perry Library has a very detailed Help Sheet on the operation of the Harvard system. You should obtain a copy from the Library and read it carefully.

When constructing the Bibliography works should be listed by authors' surnames in

alphabetical order. When you have used two more works by the same author these should be listed by chronological order of publication. Where there are two or more works by one author in the same year they should be distinguished in the text and the bibliography by a letter [a,b,c...] thus [Tilly: 1977a], [Tilly:1977b].

Titles of **books** and **journals** should always be underlined and the date of publication given. For your purposes it is not necessary to give place of publication OR publisher.

Books should be cited in the following manner:

K.LAYBOURN, Britain on the Breadline, (1990)

J.STEVENSON & C.COOK, The Slump, (1977)

Articles in readers [i.e. edited collections] are cited as follows:-

G.FENNELL, "The Second World War and the Welfare State in Britain: Sociological Interpretations of Historical Development," in L.JAMIESON & H.CORR, State, Private Life, and Political Change, (1990)

Articles in journals should be cited giving volume and issue number as well as date, for example:

J.TOMLINSON, "Planning: Debate and Policy in the 1940s," Twentieth Century British History, V.3(2), 1992

THE NOTES SYSTEM

With this system references are cited in the text by means of consecutive numerals and the sources given either at the bottom of the relevant page [**Footnotes**] OR gathered together in numerical order at the end of the text [**Endnotes**]. The footnote/end note usually gives full text citation the first time a particular source is used. Subsequent citations of the same source can be abbreviated. The text references are gathered together at the end of the essay for the Bibliography, set out in the manner described above. Many word processing programmes now have easily operated systems for creating and editing footnotes/endnotes.

You may use either of these referencing systems. BUT the important point is to be **consistent** and not to mix them.

WEEKLY TEACHING PROGRAMME

1) Lecture: The Changing Role of the British State

The Creation of the Welfare State
The Mixed Economy
Consensus
The End of Consensus
A New Consensus?

Seminar

How has the role of the state in Britain changed in the last twenty years?

2) Lecture: The Central Executive and the Role of Government

The Cabinet System
The Role of Prime Minister
Changes in the Central Executive

Seminar

How dominant is the Prime Minister within the British system of Government?

3) **Lecture: Central Government and the Policy Process**

Policy Making at the Centre
Role of the Civil Service
Management and Politics

Seminar

How politicised is the British Civil Service?

4) **Lecture: Parliament**

Parliamentary Procedure
The Select Committee System

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Seminar

What reforms might be usefully applied to Parliament?

5) Lecture: Local Government and Democracy

Local Government and Community
Provider or Enabler
Local Politics and National Government

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Seminar

How has local government in Britain changed since 1979?

6) Lecture: Representation, Elections and Democracy

Nature of Representation
Elections and Voting Behaviour
Electoral Systems and Proportional Representation

Seminar

Should proportional representation be introduced for British General Elections?

7) Lecture: Political Parties and the Party system

The Role of Parties
Party System and the Major Parties

Seminar

What are the key policy differences between the main parties in Britain?

8) Lecture: Political Influence on Policy

Pressure Groups
Power and Influence

Seminar

Do pressure groups play an important part in decision making?

9 Lecture: The Politics of Northern Ireland

Division and Conflict
The Good Friday Agreement

Seminar: Will politics in Northern Ireland ever be normal?

10 Lecture: British Foreign Policy

Retreat from Empire
The Special Relationship
Britain and Europe

Seminar: How has Britain foreign policy changed over the last ten years?

11 Lecture: the Politics of Sustainability

Post materialism
The rise of Green Politics
Sustainable Development

Seminar: How important is the environment as a policy issue in Britain?

12 Lecture: British Politics, A Review

Seminar: Where is Politics in Britain headed

ADDITIONAL USE OF RESOURCES

- 1) Handouts and references for further reading will be provided throughout the course.
- 2) In order to keep up with current affairs it is important for students to access the relevant media.

It is important that students use non contact time to develop the issues and arguments that arise in the lectures and seminars. In order to do this, it is expected that students will explore the relevant literature in the library, use the electronic resources in the Learning Resource Centre and keep up with the changes in current affairs through the use of the media.