

# **New AS and A Level Politics Specifications**

## **Overview and Comparison**

**Version 1.0 (non-accredited specifications)**

**September 2016**

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## **Background to specification changes**

### **Timings**

For a number of subjects, the new AS and A levels have been in full swing for over a year now with the first AS exams sat in May and June 2016. Other subjects have joined them for the 2016-17 academic year, with the new Politics specifications due to be taught from September 2017. The first AS exams will be sat in summer 2018 followed by the first full linear A level exams in summer 2019.

### **Linearity**

The most obvious change is the move back to “linearity”. This means that the new AS levels are “decoupled” from the A level. So, students may still be entered for the AS exam, but their marks will not count towards their full A level in that subject. Instead, the A level will be awarded based solely on the exams taken at the end of Year 13 after two years of study. This linearity is an enormous change, and in the experience of tutor2u with other subjects, the challenge is certainly not to be underestimated!

### **Co-teachability**

All new A level specifications are, according to Ofqual and the awarding bodies, meant to be “co-teachable”. This means that students wanting to sit the AS examination at the end of Year 12 should be able to be taught alongside those students progressing to the full A level. Our reaction, having seen the proposed new specifications, is that this is likely to prove challenging for teachers as it will result in large amounts of content to be covered in the second year of teaching (year 13).

### **Current state-of-play at the awarding bodies**

Government and Politics was previously offered by all three major awarding bodies in England – OCR, AQA and Pearson Edexcel. However, OCR has made the decision not to offer a new specification. Both AQA and Pearson Edexcel have published the final draft version of their specifications for both AS and A level, along with Specimen Assessment Material (SAMs). Please note that these are not yet accredited by Ofqual. We anticipate that there will be some changes, and will update this briefing when this occurs.

## Awarding body data – examinations 2016

AS POLITICS ENTRIES (Summer 2016)							
Exam Board	Share	Candidates	A	B	C	D	E
<b>AQA</b>	27.3%	6383	21.0	42.9	63.5	80.8	91.5
<b>Edexcel</b>	66.2%	15484	21.2	43.6	65.9	80.9	90.3
<b>OCR</b>	4.6%	1078	26.3	50.0	69.0	83.4	91.2
<b>Eduqas / WJEC</b>	2.0%	461	17.4	39.5	64.9	79.2	90.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>23406</b>					

A2 POLITICS ENTRIES (Summer 2016)								
Exam Board	Share	Candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E
<b>AQA</b>	25.6%	3743	5.9	25.4	53.7	77.4	91.9	97.8
<b>Edexcel</b>	68.0%	9941	6.6	27.4	56.7	80.7	93.4	98.3
<b>OCR</b>	4.6%	669	10.5	37.0	60.0	80.2	92.9	98.5
<b>Eduqas / WJEC</b>	1.8%	258	3.9	27.1	51.9	83.3	95.3	99.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>14611</b>						

## Mandated content

The new specifications are not entirely constructed individually by the two awarding bodies. Ofqual has stated a common 'core', which must form 60% of the qualification. Awarding bodies are then allowed to develop a further 40%. Ofqual has also determined the Assessment Objectives and their proportions. You can read the entire Ofqual statement on the common core in the following two documents:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/526474/gce-subject-level-guidance-for-politics.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526474/gce-subject-level-guidance-for-politics.pdf)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/526540/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-politics.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526540/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-politics.pdf)

In this section of the briefing, we've set out the clear differences and changes to the Assessment Objectives, as well as the new content.

**Updated assessment objectives:**

AO	OLD meaning	OLD AS weighting	OLD A level weighting	NEW meaning	NEW AS weighting	NEW A level weighting
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and debates	50	45 AQA 40 Edexcel	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and issues	40 - 50%	30 - 40%
AO2	Analyse and evaluate political information, arguments and explanations, and identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the political systems studied	30	35 AQA 40 Edexcel	Analyse aspects of politics and political information, including in relation to parallels, connections, similarities and differences	30 – 40%	35 – 45%
AO3	Construct and communicate coherent arguments making use of a range of appropriate political vocabulary	20	20 AQA and Edexcel	Evaluate aspects of politics and political information, including to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions	20 – 30%	25 – 35%

Clearly the biggest change in terms of Assessment Objectives is the separate of “analysis” and “evaluation” into AO2 and AO3, marking a clear change in the assessment of Politics. This is likely to be a significant improvement over the old specifications, since the old AO3 was often regarded as too subjective.

It is **important to note** that the Ofqual guidance on Assessment Objectives requires that no more than 10% of the total mark for the paper can be awarded for “knowledge in isolation”. In other words, if students simply provide definitions of key terms or recall other facts/pieces of knowledge, then they cannot access all AO1 marks. The remainder of the AO1 marks **must** come from selecting the right knowledge for evidencing an argument, or for applying knowledge in a particular context.

Ofqual has also given guidance on how teachers and students should interpret the word ‘analyse’ for AO2. **Analysis**, here, means deconstructing ideas and/or information and/or evidence to find connections and provide logical chains of reasoning. Similarly, for AO3, ‘**evaluate**’ means appraising and/or ascribing value to information and/or issues.

**Additions to the specifications**

There are some 'broad brush' themes in terms of the overall picture of changes to the Politics specifications. Firstly, there is greater emphasis on comparative analysis of historical and contemporary political events/situations – this has led the awarding bodies to be very specific about the dates, people and events that students must know. Secondly, there is a compulsory element of political ideologies – some are required, others are optional. The most significant changes are in relation to the second year content – these changes may be greater for some centres, depending on which options they have previously taught.

Body	Addition to AS Politics (UK Politics)
Ofqual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The debate over further reform to the UK's constitution</li> <li>• The power of the PM and Cabinet to dictate events and policy making with specific examples from 1945-1997 and post-1997</li> <li>• Theories of representation</li> <li>• The importance of <i>ultra vires</i> with respect to the Supreme Court</li> <li>• The impact of devolution in terms of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England</li> <li>• The historical development of suffrage from the Reform Act 1832 with respect particularly to gender and ethnicity</li> <li>• Knowledge, in detail, of two different pressure groups</li> <li>• Influences on government and parliament including pressure groups, corporations, media, lobbyists and think tanks</li> <li>• Conflict between individual and collective rights</li> <li>• In depth knowledge of three influential general elections (pre 1997, 1997 and post 1997)</li> <li>• Comparison of UK general elections with elections to at least one devolved body</li> <li>• The influence of the media on election outcomes</li> <li>• The impact of election results on the party and the country as a whole</li> <li>• Origins and historical development of the Conservatives, Labour and Lib Dems</li> <li>• The development of a multi-party system in the UK including minority parties</li> <li>• the aims of the EU and the extent to which they have been achieved; the role of the EU in policy making and the impact of it on UK political systems and policy making</li> </ul>
AQA specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific historical aspects to the UK constitution including Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, Act of Settlement, Parliament Acts, and European Communities Act</li> <li>• The delegate model and the trustee model</li> <li>• Parliamentary privilege</li> <li>• The concept of pluralism</li> <li>• The pressure groups studied must include one insider group and one outsider group</li> <li>• The different EU institutions</li> <li>• The democratic deficit, in relation to the EU</li> </ul>
Pearson Edexcel specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The health of democracy in the UK</li> <li>• The work of a current movement to extend the franchise</li> <li>• Study of pressure groups to include one sectional group and one causal group</li> <li>• The effectiveness of contributions from civil liberty pressure groups</li> <li>• Policies of Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem in relation to economy, law and order, welfare, foreign policy</li> <li>• Two and a half party systems</li> <li>• The issues of safe and marginal seats</li> <li>• Rational choice theory</li> <li>• The changing media platform, including the relevance and importance of opinion polls</li> <li>• Detailed knowledge of one pre-1997 and one post-1997 prime minister</li> <li>• The extent to which the balance of power between the executive and Parliament has changed in recent years</li> <li>• The location of sovereignty in the UK</li> </ul>

Body	Additions to second-year A level Politics
Ofqual	<p><b>Ideologies:</b> All students will be required to study some political ideologies – previously this was optional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compulsory ideology - Liberalism: core principles, tensions (classical liberalism vs modern liberalism), the work of thinkers John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls and Betty Friedan</li> <li>• Compulsory ideology – Conservatism: core principles, tensions (traditional conservatism vs New Right), the work of thinkers Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke, Ayn Rand, Michael Oakeshott and Robert Nozick</li> <li>• Compulsory ideology – Socialism: core principles, tensions (revolutionary socialism vs social democracy), the work of thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Beatrice Webb, Rosa Luxemburg, Anthony Crosland and Anthony Giddens</li> <li>• One of the following optional ideologies: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, Ecologism, Feminism, Anarchism</li> </ul> <p><b>USA option</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deeper comparative analysis with UK Politics – specifically structural, rational, and cultural theoretical approaches</li> <li>• The extent to which the legislatures of the UK and US are equal</li> <li>• Why the US has a two-party system and the UK a multi-party system</li> <li>• Similarities and differences in the protection of civil rights in the UK and US</li> </ul> <p><b>Global option</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More emphasis on the origins and development of international law for global politics</li> <li>• More specific on influence of global civil society and NGOs</li> <li>• Systems of government: autocratic through to democratic</li> <li>• Changing nature of the world since 2000, including superpowers and emerging powers (BRICs), the spread of liberal economies</li> <li>• The effectiveness of different types of power (military, diplomatic, and cultural)</li> <li>• More emphasis on regionalisation across the globe, not just Europe</li> </ul>
AQA	<p><b>Ideologies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compulsory ideology – Liberalism: ideas and values regarding the individual and welfare, neoliberalism and its relation to the New Right</li> <li>• Compulsory ideology – Conservatism: views on authority and private property, the significance of conservative attitudes towards the government, free market and the individual, strands of thinking from traditional conservatism to the New Right</li> <li>• Compulsory ideology – Socialism: class analysis (Marxism and Neo Marxism) debates relating to the fundamental goals of socialism, revolutionary socialism / democratic socialism / social democracy</li> </ul> <p>There is <b>no</b> Global Politics option – students must study the US. There is little change from the legacy US specification other than slightly more emphasis on knowledge of specific landmark Supreme Court cases,</p>
Pearson Edexcel	<p><b>Ideologies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All compulsory and optional ideologies include significant consideration of the “spectrum” and range of views/subcategories within that ideology, above and beyond that required by Ofqual</li> </ul> <p><b>US option</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No additional changes/additions – but centres will find that the specification presents the order and combination of topics rather differently than when US Politics and US Government were separate units, and this must be taken into consideration when planning.</li> </ul> <p><b>Global option</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant emphasis on sovereignty, and challenges to sovereignty e.g. humanitarian intervention</li> <li>• Globalisation and the impact on peace</li> <li>• In-depth analysis of the UN, including the Security Council</li> <li>• Attempts to resolve poverty through SAPs, economic development theories, aid, debt relief</li> <li>• Significant emphasis on climate change, including international treaties, developed vs non-developed countries, IPCC, and even more emphasis on detailed policies to mitigate climate change</li> <li>• Failed states and rogue states</li> </ul>

## Type of assessment

AQA	New proposed assessment	Our view on AQA assessment
AS	<p>One single paper of 3 hours that combines all elements from the AS specification, with a total of 98 marks.</p> <p>Section A focuses on the “government” element, and includes a short piece of stimulus material followed by 2 questions worth 6 marks each (testing knowledge) and 12 mark question requiring some analysis, and then a choice of 1 essay from 2, worth 25 marks.</p> <p>Section B tests the “politics” element, and follows an identical structure to Section A (although there is no stimulus material).</p>	<p>The move to a single 3 hour paper, away from two 1.5 hour papers as is currently the case with the legacy spec is likely to prove challenging, although may be an appropriate ‘stretch’ for more able candidates.</p> <p>For centres currently teaching the AQA legacy paper, there is now no choice for candidates in terms of which topics they tackle in the exam (other than the essay questions, which can be drawn from anywhere in the specification). This will necessarily increase teaching time for many centres, who previously have chosen not to teach the political parties topic of the legacy Unit 1 and the multi-level governance topic of the legacy Unit 2. The wording of questions looks very similar to the legacy specifications.</p>
A Level	<p>There are three compulsory papers; each paper is 2 hours in length and has a total of 77 marks.</p> <p><b>Paper 1</b> covers all of the AS material (UK politics). Section A comprises 3 compulsory short-answer 9 mark questions testing AO1 and AO2 on any of the UK politics content. Section B requires students to answer 1 compulsory 25 mark essay question based on a short piece of unseen stimulus material. Section C requires students to select 1 essay question worth 25 marks from a choice of 2.</p> <p><b>Paper 2</b> is “The government and politics of the USA and comparative politics”. The structure is exactly the same as that of Paper 1, with short answers, followed by an essay based on stimulus material, and then a Section C choice of 1 from 2 essays. In Section C, the essays require students to compare and contrast features of the US system with the UK system.</p> <p><b>Paper 3</b> is “Political Ideas”. Section A, as in the other 2 papers, comprises 3 short-answer 9 mark questions based on the compulsory ideologies of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism. Section B is a 25 mark essay question based on stimulus material. Section C offers students 5 essays, 1 from each optional ideology (feminism, multiculturalism, ecologism, nationalism, anarchism)</p>	<p>The similar structure of the 3 papers will be reassuring to students. The lack of choice, compared with the legacy specification, may be less reassuring. The biggest challenge, in our view, is that students will need to know around 3 times as much material for the new A level linear exams than is currently the case for A2 exams. This is an inevitable consequence of the Ofqual changes to Politics A-level.</p> <p>The Specimen Assessment Material looks far less pretentious than the exam papers based on the legacy specification, which should make the A level exams more accessible than is currently the case – this is certainly one reason why AQA entry numbers have been consistently lower in recent years than Pearson Edexcel. However, it is clear from reading the Specimen Assessment Paper Mark Schemes that the highest marks will still be awarded to students who go well above and beyond the specification, in terms of key terminology and concepts understood, and examples used.</p> <p>A clear one third of the total marks are available for the UK politics content (AS content) and one third for ideologies. The introduction of the UK/US comparative element in Paper 2 combines the marks available for US and UK knowledge.</p> <p>The papers themselves are nicely structured in terms of topics – students should have a clear understanding of what they specifically need to revise for each paper.</p>



Edexcel	New proposed assessment	Our view on Edexcel assessment
AS	<p>There are two papers, each 1.5 hours in length, and consisting of 60 marks.</p> <p><b>Paper 1</b> is “UK Politics”. Section A comprises a choice of 1 from 2 “describe” questions worth 10 marks each. Section B comprises two compulsory short 10 mark questions that require students to undertake some analysis / assessment of unseen data. Finally, Section C comprises a choice of 1 from 2 essay questions worth 20 marks each.</p> <p><b>Paper 2</b> is “UK Government”. The structure is identical to that of Paper 1.</p>	<p>The retention of two separate papers, one for each of UK Politics and UK Government, makes the Edexcel AS offering accessible and manageable for students, as does the identical structure of each paper.</p> <p>Edexcel has also noted that they will be consistent in their use of ‘directive’ or ‘command’ words, which will add further reassurance to students and centres about consistency between papers. This should help with teaching and revision.</p> <p>The choice of questions in 2 of the 3 sections provides some useful flexibility for students.</p>
A Level	<p>There are three papers, each 2 hours in length, and worth 84 marks.</p> <p><b>Paper 1</b> is “UK Politics and Core Political Ideas”. Section A tests the UK Politics element of the AS course, giving students some choice - 2 from 4 questions, each worth 30 marks, and requiring evaluation/AO3. Section B tests the compulsory ideologies, asking students to write one (difficult!) 24 mark essay from a choice of 2.</p> <p><b>Paper 2</b> is structured identically to Paper 1. Section A tests the UK Government element of the AS course, and Section B tests the optional ideologies. Students are given a choice of 1 from 2 essays here, for each of the optional ideologies.</p> <p><b>Paper 3</b> covers either US Politics or Global Politics, depending on the option selected by centres. <b>Paper 3a</b> is “Comparative Politics – USA” and Paper 3b is . In 3a, Section A gives students a choice of 1 from 2 12 mark questions asking them to examine differences between UK and US politics/government. Section B consists of 1 compulsory 12 mark question based on a very short source, again comparing the US and UK. Section C requires students to write 2 30 mark essays from a choice of 3, entirely grounded in the politics and government of the USA. <b>Paper 3b</b> is “Comparative Politics – Global Politics”. The structure is identical to that of Paper 3a, with elements drawn from across the Global Politics specification.</p>	<p>The combination of topics in Paper 1 and Paper 2 looks rather odd with a fairly unnatural fit. This structure / juxtaposition of topics may well affect how centres choose to teach UK politics and ideologies, and may well render the AS and A level to be not properly “co-teachable” as intended. It is likely, though, that many centres will choose not to allow candidates to enter AS exams anyway, so this issue will not matter as much.</p> <p>The UK politics element is worth just shy of 50% of the overall marks, with ideologies worth just under 20%, and US/Global worth a third – this seems right, given the likely focus on UK politics in the AS/first year of teaching. Most questions cover all Assessment Objectives.</p> <p>We think that the choice of questions available on each paper will help to bring out the best in students, and reduce risk.</p> <p>We like the choice available to centres in terms of the topics available for Paper 3 – Global Politics has been growing in popularity in recent years, and arguably provides students with a better grounding in politics and international relations if they want to continue the subject in Higher Education. Many centres, though, will be more than comfortable with continuing US politics.</p>

## Our Verdict

### AQA summary

The content of the proposed AS specification appears manageable, and doesn't add too much in addition to the required additions from Ofqual. However, some areas of the specification look rather vague, leaving teachers and students unsure about the required depth – this has been an issue with the legacy specification for AQA, and sadly hasn't been properly resolved. Having just one 3 hour exam for the AS seems overly challenging, especially given the lack of choice on the one compulsory paper.

That said, there is good scope for co-teachability between the AS and the A level, given that UK politics is tested in a standalone paper for the full linear A level. The questions on the 3 A level Specimen Assessment Materials are well written and more accessible (in terms of wording) than has been the case with the legacy specifications, although the 'indicated content' in the mark-schemes suggests strongly that teachers must go significantly beyond the specification for students to access the highest marks. The standardised structure of the A level papers, and the fact that the board appears to have added very little to the additional required US Politics and Ideologies content, means that the teaching load should be manageable.

### Pearson Edexcel summary

Similarly to the AQA proposed offering, the content of the AS specification looks manageable, and where there are any additions, they look topical and interesting. We particularly like the inclusion of a key terms glossary at the end of the AS specification (and A level specification) that will help teachers and students to define the boundaries of the set of knowledge required. The big winner here in terms of the AS qualification are the straightforward exams that closely mirror legacy papers and providing students with some choice in the exam.

The A level, though, may be slightly more problematic. For centres that will not be entering candidates for the AS qualification, it will likely make sense for students to be taught Component 1 (UK politics and compulsory ideologies) together, and Component 2 (UK government and optional ideologies) together – these don't fit 'naturally', though. The content for the US politics option looks straightforward with no surprises. It is nice to see Edexcel retain the Global Politics option, although this looks more demanding than their previous legacy specification, and indeed, includes quite a bit more than required by Ofqual. This is likely to be the more demanding option, although arguably much more interesting.

### Overall

We expect Edexcel to maintain, or increase, their market share despite the demise of the OCR specification. Centres will need to think very carefully about the order in which to teach topics, especially if teaching is shared between two teachers. Centres will also need to pay considerable thought to helping students retain AS/Year 1 knowledge through the Year 13 course.