

Unit 6 Government, elections and voting

About the unit

This unit focuses on the role of government, the electoral system and the importance of voting in a democratic society. It explores key characteristics of parliamentary government and introduces pupils to other forms of government in the UK. Pupils investigate how government is organised, how it spends its budget and the subsequent impact on society. They also learn about different electoral systems, the principles of the democratic process and about the role of those involved in the process (political parties, MPs, government departments, local government, the electorate). Through this unit pupils learn that the power of government depends on support in parliament, which in turn depends on the support (votes) of the electorate.

The unit includes opportunities for class discussion and debate. There are also opportunities for pupils to work as individuals or in small groups to undertake research and enquiry. It is important to ensure findings are shared with the whole class so that all pupils learn about each aspect of the work.

Where the unit fits in

This unit addresses the following aspects of the key stage 3 citizenship programme of study:

Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens

Pupils should be taught about:

- 1c central and local government, the public services they offer and how they are financed and the opportunities they contribute
- 1d the key characteristics of parliamentary and other forms of government
- 1e the electoral system and the importance of voting

Developing skills of enquiry and communication

Pupils should be taught to:

- 2a think about topical political, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, problems and events by analysing information and its sources, including ICT-based sources
- 2b justify orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events
- 2c contribute to group and exploratory class discussion and take part in debates

Developing skills of participation and responsible action

Pupils should be taught to:

- 3a use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express and explain views other than their own
- 3b negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community-based activities
- 3c reflect on the process of participation

This unit links with work in introductory unit 1 'Citizenship – what's it all about?', unit 14 'Developing skills of democratic participation', unit 12 'Why did women and some men have to struggle for the vote in Britain? What

is the point of voting today?', unit 7 'Local democracy' and unit 8 'Leisure and sport in the local community'.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most pupils: know about the key functions of Parliament and other forms of government, the democratic process and MPs. They recognise the ways in which government spends its budget and how this can affect society. They understand the importance of voting within a democracy and appreciate the nature of political elections and how parties campaign. They know about different ways to run an election and are able to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of alternative systems. They think about their own participation in elections and explore some of the reasons why some do not participate.

some pupils have not made so much progress and: understand the basic principles of Parliament and the electoral system.

They recognise that voting occurs in a variety of settings. They understand that during an election political parties campaign to win votes. They recognise some of the tasks of an MP and know how to participate in elections.

some pupils have progressed further and: know and understand the role and functions of Parliament and other forms of government, and the nature of the democratic process. They evaluate how government spends its budget and how this impacts on society. They describe and appraise alternative voting and electoral systems, and support their personal judgements and opinions with evidence and argument. They assess how media coverage can influence election outcomes and link this with other factors to explain voter turnout. They have clear views on their own rights and responsibilities in elections.

Resources

Many groups and organisations produce online resources that are relevant to citizenship. QCA has not printed these website addresses as it recognises that they can and do change, often at short notice. So that we can monitor and maintain a reliable and useful resource, the website addresses of the following organisations can be accessed through the key stage 3 citizenship scheme of work site at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes

- UK Parliament
- 10 Downing Street
- Yvote (*includes mock elections and online debates*)
- House of Commons – Constituency Locata (*to find out the name of your MP*)
- Scottish Parliament
- National Assembly for Wales
- European Parliament
- HM Government Online (*website for all UK government bodies*)
- Hansard Society (*information on developing mock elections*)
- Charter 88 (*information on democracy and elections*)
- Institute for Citizenship
- Inland Revenue (*news and information on tax and national insurance matters in the UK*)
- BBC (*includes information on election results*)
- Governments on the WWW
- IEA Civics Project

NB: care should be taken when encouraging pupils to access websites

Literacy and language

References to the Key Stage 3 National Strategy *Framework for teaching English, Years 7, 8 and 9* (NSE) are given in brackets and are indicated in appropriate sections of this unit.

Through the activities in this unit pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- government, elections and voting, *eg parliament, democracy, MP, electorate, campaign, political party*

Speaking and listening – through the activities pupils learn to:

- explore issues in role-play (year 7 S&L15, year 8 S&L14, year 9 S&L12)

Reading – through the activities pupils learn to:

- undertake independent research using appropriate strategies (year 7 R2, year 8 R2, year 9 R2)

Writing – through the activities pupils learn to:

- organise and present information in appropriate ways (year 7 Wr10, year 8 Wr10, year 9 Wr12)

Links with other subjects

PSHE: 3k in the non-statutory guidelines

History: 13 in the programme of study; unit 16 ‘The franchise: why did it take so much longer for British women to get the vote?’ in the scheme of work

Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

When and how do we vote?

- about different situations where voting is appropriate
- about different ways to vote
- about the advantages and disadvantages of different voting systems
- Ask pupils if they have voted for something (this could include voting in a debate or school elections). Discuss other occasions when people vote, *eg survivor TV programmes, to accept members of a club, political office, shareholder meetings, talent competitions, TV debates, online opinion polls*. Why do we vote? Ask pupils to consider why we vote. Are there alternatives for making decisions in the examples discussed? Consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different ways of making decisions. These could include direct democracy, representative democracy, dictatorship or oligarchy. Use school-based examples, *eg uniform, homework timetables*, to illustrate the various ways to reach decisions.
- Ask pupils to list the different ways in which people vote. This could include: telephone voting for radio, TV or newspaper polls, postal votes, polling stations and a secret ballot, a show of hands at a meeting and internet polls. What makes some methods more suitable for certain purposes? For example, would you use an expensive secret ballot with polling stations and an electoral roll to vote for a talent show winner? Or a telephone poll to elect an MP? Consider numbers involved, cost, speed, importance, accuracy, access, security, double counting and confidentiality.
- know that voting is one of several ways in which decisions can be made
- understand that votes can be cast in different ways and that the chosen method can have an impact on the outcome
- appreciate the importance of fairness and accuracy
- This unit builds on work in introductory unit 1 'Citizenship – what's it all about?' and has strong links with unit 14 'Developing skills of democratic participation' and unit 12 'Why did women and some men have to struggle for the vote in Britain?' Schools will need to decide where and how to cover this work most effectively to ensure progression and avoid repetition.
- Familiar examples are invaluable. School-based examples could be drawn from other lessons, *eg history to reflect on decision-making in past societies*.
- During this unit pupils should develop an understanding of how polling stations work. This may be a suitable point as it would contrast with the less formal methods being discussed.

What is an election?

- about different elections in the UK
- about different electoral systems
- about the fairness of different electoral systems
- Explain to the pupils that voting on specific government decisions, known as a referendum, is rare in the UK. Citizens usually vote for a representative who takes decisions on their behalf. Ask pupils to list the various levels of government that citizens can vote for, *eg that elected representatives form government at local, national (including devolved government) and European level*.
- Pupils investigate different electoral systems and ways to organise the voting, *eg first past the post, and the national list – these may be easiest to contrast*. Explain the systems and ask pupils to think about the advantages and disadvantages of each. Is one fairer than the other or are there positive and negative points in any system? What makes an election 'fair'?
- know that there are elections at different times for various levels (local, national, global) of government
- know that there are several ways of casting and counting votes and allocating representation
- express an opinion about the fairness of different systems
- A European referendum will provide an important opportunity for citizens to have their say.
- Real examples of alternative voting systems in the UK will be useful, *eg Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the EU elections, London Assembly and Mayoral elections*. Refer to the websites of Charter 88 and the Institute for Citizenship (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).
- Parliamentary Education Unit provides an education sheet 'Parliamentary elections'.
- The BBC website provides statistics about election results (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).

Learning objectives

Pupils should learn:

Possible teaching activities**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

Points to note**How are election campaigns organised?**

- about the nature of election campaigns
- about how politicians try to win votes
- to explore issues in role-play (NSE)
- Encourage pupils to analyse political publicity campaigns to build on their media skills. Focus on how political parties try to influence the public, *eg through campaigning (highlighting their own strengths and their opponents' weaknesses)*. Draw comparisons between local and national media approaches. Look at the publicity material and the party political broadcasts. Are they effective? Are any particular examples likely to be more successful than others? Why do main political parties spend so much on advertising? How do smaller political parties compete?
- Alternatively, pupils could stage mock elections, as political candidates masterminding their own campaigns. Give pupils information about the ingredients of a modern campaign to get them started, *eg nomination, policies (manifesto), speeches (hustings), press releases, rebuttal of opponents' messages*. This activity also develops teamwork skills as it requires careful planning and coordination between team members.
- understand how politicians try to appeal to voters through different ways of campaigning
- This section is most relevant around the time of real elections. It can be linked to school elections. It also links with unit 14 'Developing skills of democratic participation'.
 - Link with NSE: year 7 S&L15, year 8 S&L14, year 9 S&L12.
 - The Yvote website provides information about mock elections (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).
 - BBC *Parliament and government* CD-ROM includes election campaigns and videos.

Participating in elections

- about the importance of voting and the implications of low turnout
- to question the reasons for low voter turnout and ways to increase turnout
- Ask pupils why they participated in certain elections. Why do they think it is important to vote? Consider the importance of having a say, being counted and participating in a decision. If less than half the class bothers to vote, how representative is the winning candidate? How might it affect the way the representative is seen or their ability to do the job?
- What if people do not vote? Compare figures for voter turnout over time for local, national and European elections. Pupils could also analyse figures for referenda. Why do they think that people are less likely to vote in local and EU elections than general elections? What might this suggest about people's feelings towards local and EU government? Ask pupils to prepare a survey to collect information from adults about their participation in different types of election. What reasons do people give for whether or not they participate in elections?
- If the voting age was lowered tomorrow, for example to 16 or 14, would pupils vote in an election? Ask them to list reasons for and against voting at local, national and EU level.
- know that turnout varies for different types of election in the UK and give some of the possible explanations for low turnout in elections
- understand the individual's motives for voting
- appreciate some of the possible consequences of low turnout, especially in terms of legitimacy and representation
- form a valid opinion on responses regarding turnout
- The survey could be carried out using members of the school community (including staff, parents, governors and any pupils eligible to vote).
- Link with thinking skills: reasoning, evaluation.
- The IEA Civics Project website may be useful here (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).
- This section links with unit 12 'Why did women and some men have to struggle for the vote in Britain? What is the point of voting today?'
- The Yvote website has online debates about reducing the voting age (see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes).

Learning objectives

Pupils should learn:

Possible teaching activities**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

Points to note**How does Parliament work? What other forms of parliament are there?**

- how democracy provides for a parliamentary system
 - how Parliament operates and the role of MPs
 - the main aspects of parliamentary government
 - about different forms of government at different levels
 - to undertake an investigation using a range of sources of information, including ICT
 - to undertake independent research using appropriate reading strategies (NSE)
- Pupils brainstorm key ideas and words about Parliament. They draw a flow diagram to link them together and investigate further using a range of sources of information including ICT. They create posters/documents to show findings, eg *MPs, ministries, Houses of Parliament*.
 - Pupils investigate the work of MPs or ministers, eg by following media coverage, using *Hansard*, and produce a record or case study of their findings. They find out how MPs divide their time between Parliament and constituency work. They could contact their local MP to talk about their varied responsibilities, eg *tasks, pay, hours, skills, knowledge*.
 - Groups of pupils could investigate how Parliament works and what happens during a parliamentary session by researching aspects of the parliamentary process, eg *Monarchy, House of Commons, House of Lords, MPs, the main political parties, Prime Minister, official opposition, the Cabinet, ministers*. A similar research activity could be carried out to compare the parliamentary systems of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.
 - Pupils could investigate how these relate to local government. What powers do they have, eg *can they raise taxes?* Pupils share their findings.
 - Pupils could produce a brochure, photomontage, poster of 'The young person's guide to Parliament' or prepare a guide to parliamentary government in the UK. They could visit the House of Commons, watch an online TV debate or run a mock parliamentary session on a real issue that affects them. They could also write a Hansard-style report on proceedings.
- identify the key characteristics of parliamentary government, know how Parliament works and understand the role of MPs
 - know that Parliament is responsible for making government account for its actions
 - know about the roles of the Prime Minister, Cabinet and ministers
 - identify other forms of parliament and recognise the complex nature of government in the UK
 - recognise the relationship between different levels of government
 - know how to devise an enquiry, posing appropriate questions and using a range of sources of information including ICT
 - analyse their findings and draw conclusions
- The Parliamentary Education Unit provides an education sheet 'Parliament and government'.
 - 'MPs and schools' pack is available from the Hansard Society.
 - Other useful resources include:
 - the HM Government Online website – comprehensive information on all aspects of government
 - the UK Parliament website – detailed information about Parliament, its members and workings
 - the 10 Downing Street website – up to the minute information from Downing Street, press releases and speeches
 - the Hansard Society website – full record of parliamentary proceedings
 - the House of Commons – Constituency Locata website – to find out the name of your constituency and MP.
- The addresses of these websites can be found at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes
- This section introduces pupils to other forms of parliament, and how different levels of government relate to each other. This important aspect of citizenship will be explored in more depth at key stage 4.
 - The *Teacher's guide* includes information on controversial and sensitive issues.
 - Link with NSE: year 7 R2, year 8 R2, year 9 R2.

Learning objectives

Pupils should learn:

Possible teaching activities**Learning outcomes**

Pupils:

Points to note**How does government spend its money?**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how governments spend money and the impact on society • about how government organises its work through departments • to use the internet to undertake research and to communicate findings • to organise and present information in appropriate ways (NSE) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils use the internet to find answers to the following types of question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>What does central government do?</i> – <i>How does central government work?</i> – <i>Who works for central government?</i> – <i>What do government departments do?</i> – <i>Where does central government get its money, who decides, how are taxes raised, and how much does it get?</i> – <i>How is the money spent?, eg by government departments. Who decides this, and how?</i> – <i>What is the relationship between government at a local and national level?</i> • Using ICT wherever possible, pupils could present their findings in a leaflet targeting younger pupils or parents and share these with the class. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the key functions of government and the role of government departments • realise that government departments spend money raised through taxes and other sources of revenue • recognise the effects that spending decisions can have on society • communicate research findings appropriately to the audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues relating to spending, taxation and finance are developed further in key stage 4. • Other useful resources include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the HM Government Online website – links to all government sites – the 10 Downing Street website – information, activities and links suitable for pupil use – the Explore Parliament website – interactive site allowing pupils to explore different aspects of Parliament and parliamentary activity – the National Assembly for Wales website – the Scottish Parliament website – the Inland Revenue website – financial information on government spending. <p>The addresses of these websites can be found at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link with NSE: year 7 Wr10, year 8 Wr10, year 9 Wr12. • This section could be used in conjunction with unit 5 'How the law protects animals – a local-to-global study'. This uses an issue to explore how government and parliament work, how issues are debated and how a bill is passed. Other issues could be used. |
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