

Exam Question Overview

Paper 1, Section B:
Democracy at work in the UK

Pearson Edexcel GCSE Citizenship Studies

SAMS	Specimen	2018	2019
3a) Name one tax that UK citizens pay on their wages. [1] 3b) Since 1980 there has been a large increase in UK central government spending on pensions. Explain two reasons for this. [4] 3c) Suggest three possible reasons why a government might decide to increase spending on schools. [3] 4a) Identify why the first-past-the-post system has been criticised for being unfair. [1] ☐ A A party with a large share of votes may gain few seats. ☐ B A party with a small share of votes may gain few seats. ☐ C It is too difficult to predict the final result in advance. ☐ D The system is too difficult to understand. 4b) Which statement about UK general elections is correct? [1] ☐ A They are held once every 4 years. ☐ B They are held once every 5 years. ☐ C The prime minister can normally choose which year to hold a general election. ☐ D The prime minister can normally choose which month to hold a general election. 4c) Which of the following groups of adults can vote in UK general elections? [1] ☐ A All EU citizens ☐ B Scottish people ☐ C Prisoners serving sentences of less than 10 years ☐ D Anyone who has been living in the UK for at least five years 4d) Source B describes a mock election at a Midlands school. Explain how mock elections like this can help to strengthen democracy in the UK.[6]	3a) Name one role carried out by MPs as part of their work. [1] 3b) Explain two roles carried out by the House of Lords. [4] 3c) Suggest three reasons why it is important for democracy in the UK that there is an Official Opposition to the Government. [3] 4a) Identify two political actions that the Monarch performs in the UK political system: [2] ☐ A votes in General Elections ☐ B opens each session of Parliament ☐ C stands as a candidate to represent a community ☐ D appoints and directs the Cabinet ☐ E forms a political party to compete in General Elections ☐ F appoints and advises the Prime Minister 4b) Which statement concerning civil servants is correct? [1] ☐ A They advise ministers when considering what decisions to make. ☐ B They are biased in favour of one political party. ☐ C They have no specialist experience. ☐ D Their jobs are lost as a result of a General Election. 4c) Source B describes the nature of the US Constitution. Compare the constitutions in the US and the UK.[6]	3a) Identify one reason why it is important for citizens to vote in elections. [1] 3b) Explain two features of how MPs are elected to the House of Commons [4] 3c) Identify one distinctive policy from each of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. [3] 4a) Which two of the following are generally agreed to be features of the UK's constitution? [2] ☐ A It automatically changes each time a new government is elected ☐ B It is rigid and difficult to amend ☐ C It is derived from several sources ☐ D It defines the role of the prime minister ☐ E It gives power to the judiciary to amend legislation ☐ F Its design means that all laws can be changed 4b) Which statement concerning parliamentary sovereignty in the UK is correct? [1] ☐ A Parliament was responsible in past times for issuing sovereign coins ☐ B Parliament has to obey petitions signed by more than 100 000 citizens ☐ C Parliament must give two years' notice to citizens for changes in the law ☐ D Parliament is supreme and its actions cannot be overruled 4c) Source B shows how Scotland's attitude to the UK has altered. Use Source B and your own knowledge to explain how the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK has changed since devolution was introduced.[6]	3a) State one example of direct democracy. [1] 3b) Explain one strength and one weakness of the first-past-the-post voting system.[4] 3c) Suggest three ways by which Parliament holds the government to account. [3] 4a) Which one of these explains what may happen when no single party can form a government after a general election? [1] ☐ A A coalition government or a minority government may be formed. ☐ B The Monarch will appoint the Lord Chancellor to become Prime Minister. ☐ C Another general election must be held after six months. ☐ D The Leader of the Opposition becomes the Prime Minister. 4b) Which one of these best explains the Royal Assent? [1] ☐ A It is when the Monarch signs a bill which becomes an Act of Parliament. ☐ B It is a symbol which shows that royalty is above ordinary citizens. ☐ C It is the principle that the monarch agrees not to enter the House of Commons. ☐ D It promotes the principle that only a male child can inherit the throne. 4c) Which one of these explains the role of a whip in Parliament? [1] ☐ A To punish anyone who breaks parliamentary rules ☐ B To act as a sponsor when a new MP swears the Oath of Allegiance ☐ C To ensure that members of the same political party vote together ☐ D To advise the government on legal issues 4d) Source B describes how New Zealand took the decision to abolish one of the two chambers in its parliament. Compare how the parliaments work in the UK and New Zealand.[6]

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2020	2021	2022	2023
3a) Name one role of the Prime Minister. [1] 3b) Explain one strength and one weakness of using referendums.[4] 3c) The uncoded constitution of the UK changes gradually, often after a general election or a major change of government. Suggest three ways in which the UK constitution has changed since 1997. [3] 4a) Backbench MPs in the House of Commons are those who: [1] ☐ A have fewer constituents than the average MP ☐ B are from an opposition party ☐ C are not part of the Government ☐ D have not sworn allegiance to the Crown 4b) Which one of these best describes the UK cabinet? [1] ☐ A It is the collected members of the Privy Council who advise the Monarch. ☐ B It is the senior figures in the main political parties. ☐ C It is the senior figures from Parliament including Black Rod and the Speaker. ☐ D It is a group of senior ministers chosen by the Prime Minister. 4c) The process of judicial review is: [1] ☐ A to check and fully investigate that no judge has ever broken the law ☐ B to check that all new laws have been scrutinised by the government and the opposition ☐ C to check that government and public bodies have not exceeded their authority ☐ D to check the prosecution's evidence against a defendant 4d) Source B describes the role of the monarch in the UK. Explain the advantages of the UK having a monarchy.[6]	3a) Name one role undertaken by a civil servant. [1] 3b) Explain two differences between the first-past-the-post system used for General Elections and proportional representation, as used in the UK.[4] 3c) Suggest three reasons why new laws are created in the UK. [3] 4a) Which one of these is an example of an indirect tax?[1] ☐ A tax placed on purchases of goods and services such as VAT ☐ B tax based on income from being employed by a business ☐ C tax levied on earnings from those who are self-employed ☐ D tax on the profits made by companies 4b) Which one of these is allowed to vote in general elections? [1] ☐ A the Monarch ☐ B members of the House of Lords ☐ C the Speaker of the House of Commons ☐ D people aged 16 or 17 4c) The UK's uncoded constitution has features where: [1] ☐ A all constitutional rules and laws that have been passed over time are written in one document. ☐ B the Monarch has the supreme constitutional law-making power ☐ C constitutional rules are partly written and derived from different sources ☐ D all constitutional changes must be approved in a referendum 4d) Source B describes the choices a government makes in setting its budget. Explain the factors that influence a government's decisions about future public spending.[6]	3a) Name one of the principal roles carried out by the Speaker of the House of Commons. [1] 3b) Explain two key stages of the process which a bill in Parliament goes through in order to become a law.[4] 3c) Suggest three ways by which Parliament holds the UK Government to account. [3] 4a) Which one of the following accurately describes the role of the House of Lords?[1] ☐ A Representing the Royal Family in Parliament ☐ B Acting to control what the government spends ☐ C Revising and checking legislation from the Commons ☐ D Ensures that no members belong to a political party 4b) Which one of the following is true concerning General Elections in the UK? [1] ☐ A To stand in an election you must be a member of a political party ☐ B Over half the seats in the UK are never contested ☐ C Each voter has to declare who they voted for ☐ D Elections must be held at least once every five years 4c) Which one of the following roles is fulfilled by judges in the UK? [1] ☐ A If required judges can consider whether a government has exceeded its authority ☐ B Judges ensure that all MPs swear an oath of allegiance to their local constituents ☐ C Judges annually produce new constitutional rules which governments have to abide by ☐ D Judges have the power to decide who gets allocated a position in the Cabinet 4d) Compare how the French select their Head of State and Prime Minister with the process in the UK.[6]	3a) Identify one of the roles carried out by a government minister. [1] 3b) Explain two of the main differences between the House of Commons and the House of Lords.[4] 3c) Identify three distinct features of the Westminster first-past-the-post voting system. [3] 4a) Which one of these accurately describes the power of the Scottish Parliament?[1] ☐ A It can only pass laws approved by the Westminster Parliament in London. ☐ B It has fewer legal powers over the Highlands and Islands of Northern Scotland. ☐ C It can decline to have the Monarch as Head of State. ☐ D It has power and control over fishing and agriculture but not defence. 4b) Which one of these is an example of Parliamentary oversight and scrutiny? [1] ☐ A The weekly session of Prime Minister's Question Time. ☐ B A new member of Parliament swearing an oath of allegiance. ☐ C The official opening of a session of Parliament by the Monarch. ☐ D Allowing members of the public to view proceedings in Parliament. 4c) Which one of these accurately describes the difference between a direct and an indirect tax? [1] ☐ A A direct tax is imposed on the wealthy, but an indirect tax is imposed on everyone. ☐ B A direct tax is taken from income, but an indirect tax is taken from spending. ☐ C A direct tax is levied by central government, but an indirect tax is levied by local government. ☐ D A direct tax must be paid, but it is optional to pay an indirect tax. 4d) Compare how referendums are used in the UK and Switzerland.[6]

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2024	2025	2026
3a) Name one of the principal roles of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [1] 3b) Explain two of the main features of the UK's constitution. [4] 3c) Identify three issues on which the UK's major political parties often disagree. [3] 4a) Which one of these accurately describes a referendum in the UK? [1] ☐ A They are held annually after the monarch has opened Parliament. ☐ B They occur after a closely contested vote in the House of Commons. ☐ C They are an example of direct democracy granted by Parliament ☐ D They must take place when no single party wins a general election. 4b) Which one of these is correct about the Prime Minister (PM)? [1] ☐ A The PM's party must have a majority in both houses of parliament. ☐ B The PM can only be replaced at a general election. ☐ C The PM has to approve all new bills introduced in Parliament. ☐ D The PM is appointed by the Monarch alongside other Ministers. 4c) Which one of these is accurate about the House of Lords: [1] ☐ A Only the House of Lords can appoint judges to the higher courts. ☐ B The House of Lords includes hereditary, life and spiritual peers. ☐ C The House of Lords makes the final decision concerning taxation issues. ☐ D Members of the House of Lords have more constituents than MPs. 4d) Compare how the UK and North Korea differ in forming and selecting governments.[6]	3a) Name one of the roles carried out by whips in Parliament. [1] 3b) Explain two differences between an election and a referendum. [4] 3c) Suggest three taxes central government might use to raise income. [3] 4a) Which one of these accurately describes proportional representation? [1] ☐ A It provides representation for heavily populated industrial areas of the UK. ☐ B It ensures the share of seats closely matches the share of votes won by a party. ☐ C It is used for postal votes sent in before the day of the election ☐ D It only operates if voting takes place on-line with secure internet access. 4b) Which one of the following describes a coalition government? [1] ☐ A It is when a government is divided and must resign. ☐ B It is when the Monarch refuses to accept a prime minister. ☐ C It is where a single party holds a majority of seats and forms a government. ☐ D It is when two or more parties combine to form a government. 4c) Which one of the following describes the ceremonial role of Black Rod: [1] ☐ A Summoning MPs from the Commons to the Lords for the Monarch's speech. ☐ B Ensuring that MPs do not claim excessive expenses. ☐ C Checking the qualifications of all new members of the House of Lords. ☐ D Restricting legislation if it is not in a political party's manifesto. 4d) Explain how citizens in a constituency benefit by having an MP. [6]	3a) Name one direct tax raised by central government in the UK. [1] 3b) Explain two strengths of representative democracy in the UK. [4] 3c) Name three current policies of the Labour Party.. [3] 4a) Which one of these accurately describes proportional representation? [1] ☐ A Judges investigating the work of the jury in a criminal case and how it reached its decision. ☐ B Judges considering whether the actions of the government or a public body are lawful. ☐ C Judges finding new evidence which the defence did not use, and the prosecution was unaware of. ☐ D Judges discovering that a key witness had committed perjury and lied under oath. 4b) Which one of the following tasks must be carried out by the UK Parliament in order to pass new laws [1] ☐ A It must gain the support of the EU to introduce the new laws to Parliament. ☐ B It must permit Black Rod to read the new laws to MPs. ☐ C It must allow both Houses of Parliament to debate the new laws. ☐ D It must gain public approval for the new laws in a referendum 4c) Which one of the following is an example of 'extending the franchise'? [1] ☐ A Creating more constituencies to allow more MPs to enter Parliament. ☐ B Increasing the age at which people can vote from 18 to 21. ☐ C Decreasing the age at which people can vote from 18 to 16. ☐ D Creating fewer constituencies to allow fewer MPs to enter Parliament. 4d) Explain some of the disadvantages of general elections in the UK. [6]

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Sources relating to Paper 1, Section B: Democracy at work in the UK

SAMS – Source B

Source B: The right to vote – or not

Some people believe that democracy in the UK is not working and so it's not worth voting in elections. This is because the 'first-past-the-post' system of electing a government does not give a result that reflects the choices of voters. However, the comedian, Robert Webb, has argued that this is wrong. In a magazine article, Webb talked about the importance of not forgetting our 'hard won liberties', including the right to vote.

In schools and colleges, some students have shown they believe that voting matters. This is done by holding 'mock elections'. Students take the role of candidates and give serious or funny speeches. At a Midlands school, one girl's speech compared politics in the UK with life in non-democratic countries like China and North Korea. She argued that over-18s are lucky to have a say in how the country is run. She also said that her political party would reduce taxes.

2018 – Source B

Source B: Changing relations between Scotland and the UK

In the 2014 Scottish referendum, independence was rejected by 55.3% while 44.7% voted in favour of becoming an independent state. The referendum came after Scotland was granted devolution in 1998 and established the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood.

In the main, devolution was seen as a means of promoting Scottish culture and identity and at the same time binding the common UK bonds that have been established since the 18th century. It was hoped that the union of the UK would become stronger. A promise made by the major political parties in Westminster was that Scotland would be granted further devolved powers if it voted to stay in the UK; this has now been carried out.

In the 2015 general election the SNP won 56 out of the 59 seats in Scotland and are the third largest party in Westminster. However, the UK-wide referendum on EU membership in 2016, which approved the UK leaving the EU, has caused upset in Scotland as the majority there voted to remain in the EU. This seems to have fuelled the demand in the SNP for a second referendum on obtaining Scottish independence and perhaps leaving the UK. However, in the 2017 general election the SNP lost over a third of its seats at the Westminster Parliament.

Specimen Paper – Source B

Source B: The Constitution of the United States

The US Constitution was the world's first written or codified constitution. Its aim was to define a system of government for the newly independent country.

It sets out how the US operates, what powers the President, Congress and the Supreme Court have and also the limits of those powers. It defines the US as a federal state, not a unitary state like the UK. Soon after passing the Constitution the first 10 amendments were added – these defined the rights of the individual: they are often referred to as the US Bill of Rights.

The US Constitution is a well-known document to its citizens and it is given respect by many and taught in every school in the US as part of their civic education.

To date there have only been 27 amendments to the Constitution. Some feel that the US Constitution is rigid and difficult to change and cite the Second Amendment, which enshrines the right to carry weapons and the associated problem of countless gun-related deaths in the US.

2019 – Source B

Source B: UK and New Zealand Parliaments

The UK has two chambers in its parliament, the elected House of Commons and the House of Lords (the second chamber) which is partly hereditary but largely appointed. In 1951, New Zealand decided to abolish its second chamber (called the Legislative Council) and has run effectively with one chamber ever since. The New Zealand government had been criticised for filling its second chamber with members from the governing party, giving little opportunity for second thoughts or taking other views into account, unlike our House of Lords where the government lacks a majority.

Having one legislative chamber avoids conflict between two chambers and makes passing laws more straightforward. There had been no consensus in New Zealand on how to reform its second chamber – nor any agreement on a suitable replacement. Worldwide, more countries have just one legislative chamber rather than two, thus avoiding the problems which two chambers can bring. But would the UK be less democratic if we abolished our second chamber?



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Sources relating to Paper 1, Section B: Democracy at work in the UK

2020 – Source B

Source B: The role of the monarch



(Source: © Handout/Getty Images)

Monarchy is the oldest form of government in the United Kingdom. In a monarchy, a king or queen is Head of State. The UK monarchy is known as a constitutional monarchy. This means that, while the monarch is the Head of State, the ability to make and pass legislation resides with an elected Parliament. The monarch is not allowed to vote or have any say in party politics.

Although the monarch no longer has a political or governing role, he or she has the right to be consulted or offer advice to the Prime Minister on major issues. As Head of State, the monarch undertakes constitutional duties and represents the UK at home and abroad. The monarch also has a less formal role as 'Head of the Nation'. The monarch acts as a focus for national identity, unity and pride. The monarch provides a sense of stability and continuity by officially recognising success and excellence. The monarchy also supports the ideal of voluntary service.

2021 – Source B

Source B: The government's annual spending programme

Each year the government decides what it will spend in the year ahead with the tax year starting in April. It will examine what it expects to raise in taxes and what it will spend. It will decide if it has to borrow money in the forthcoming year. In essence, it is making choices, deciding preferences and setting its wider agenda and allocating public spending.

Should more money be spent on education or defence or the environment? It has to set levels of taxation and decide what we spend on our elderly and our sick. Importantly it has to decide on the welfare benefits and payments to be paid to those who cannot work or are unable to secure a job.

It must respond to any emerging crisis – such as health, the economy or overseas problems. It also has to deal with any new genuine needs which arise. It has to satisfy its own political party and consider public opinion. It has to cope with short-term needs and cater for long-term plans.

2022 – Source B

Source B: The Government of France

France elects its Head of State, the President, for a fixed term of five years; a sitting President can then, if re-elected, only serve an additional five years. The President chooses who will become Prime Minister from the French Parliament. This person – who may never previously have been even a minister – forms a government. The President as Head of State, the Prime Minister and the government work closely together – though a French President can, and does often, replace their Prime Minister mid-term. In France the President is elected using a second ballot system. This involves two possible rounds of voting on Sundays two weeks apart. The candidates are voted for by the public. If any candidate gets over 50% of the vote they are declared the winner. If that level is not achieved, a second round of voting takes place two weeks later with only the top two candidates from the preceding contest. This ensures a majority for one candidate of over 50%.

2023 – Source B

Source B: The use of referendums in Switzerland and the UK

Switzerland is perhaps the best example in Europe to show how important referendums are. They are held regularly during the year with the whole population choosing how the country is run, repealing laws, and introducing new ones. They always attract over 65% of voters, thus making decisions legitimate.

The Swiss have held referendums over a vast range of topics including banning animal testing, improving the conditions and pay of nurses, allowing same sex marriages and amending the law dealing with terrorism. Referendums were available to the Swiss for difficult moral topics such as abortion and euthanasia.

Referendums are an example of direct democracy rarely used in the UK. They connect people to political life. This means that all major decisions are not taken by just a few politicians who can be seen to be out of touch with ordinary life and the challenges faced in society. Referendums work with the people setting the agenda and making important decisions over a range of issues. Holding more referendums would make a change to how the UK works politically and would improve democracy.



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Sources relating to Paper 1, Section B: Democracy at work in the UK

2024 – Source B

Source B: Selecting a government and officials in North Korea

Forming a government and selecting people for political office in North Korea is unique. Rather than the executive, legislature and judiciary being separate, they overlap. However, all three remain under the control of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). The party has been in power since 1948 and there is no opposition. The party has been run by one family with power passing down the male line. Power is concentrated in the leader Kim Jong-un. Purges or removals of office-holders are common and frequent. Executions occur of political office-holders and Kim Jong-un has executed his uncle and also his brother. The leader instils those in office around him with fear. All policy and new legislation originate with Kim Jong-un. The country is poor but has a small selection of elites who are wealthy and loyal to Kim Jong-un. The Army also has considerable political power.

(Source from: <https://www.cfr.org/background/north-koreas-power-structure>)

2025 – Source B

Source B: The source examines the advantages to citizens of having a constituency Member of Parliament (MP)

MPs represent the area where they are elected: many MPs produce newsletters and websites to explain what they have done recently in Parliament. Each MP must be the voice for their constituents in the House of Commons. The constituency role covers a range of functions. They must be a champion and spokesperson for their constituency. This means dealing with problems which arise and at the same time looking for opportunities for the constituency to prosper. An MP will most likely attend local meetings where major decisions are taken. The MP is seen as a leader for the area – and there is a need to be involved and be seen by the local media. Importantly MPs also act as a kind of social worker for all their constituents - not just those who voted for them, but those who voted against them and those who did not vote. There may be problems with benefits or access to public services. There may be problems with schooling and health and other aspects of an individual's welfare. A constituency MP holds regular surgeries to hear about and deal with these issues.

2026 – Source B

Source B: The source examines some of the disadvantages of general elections in the UK.

By law general elections must take place within five years of the last general election. They are a vital part of our democracy but some claim that they have the following disadvantages:

- Many citizens do not vote in general elections.
- The winning party often gets a minority of the votes.
- Many political parties do not gain seats in Parliament.
- Our first-past-the-post voting system produces unfair outcomes.
- Many seats or constituencies are 'safe' and do not change.
- The Prime Minister can be removed by their party between elections.