

GCSE Citizenship – Politics and Participation

Devolved governments and elections

Key terms

Accountability – being held responsible for something

Councillor - are elected to the local council to represent their local community

Devolution - The transfer of some powers from the Government to the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

Voter turnout – how many people vote in an election.

Voter apathy - When a lot of people decide not to vote in an election.

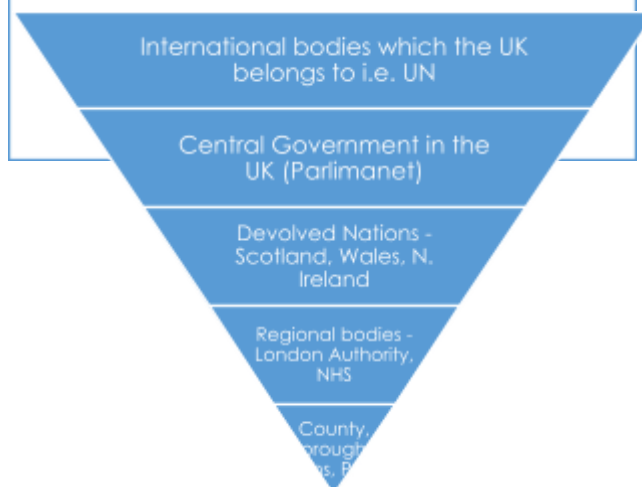
Elected mayor – normally a ceremonial role in most towns, however, in major cities such as London and Manchester the Mayor has decision making power.

Member of Parliament - elected by the public in general elections, MPs can assist their constituents in a variety of ways, from making private enquiries on your behalf, to raising matters publicly in the House of Commons. They are nearly all members of political parties.

General election - the election of representatives to a legislature (in the UK, to the House of Commons) from constituencies throughout the country. In the UK there are 650 constituencies.

What is a devolved government?

Devolution is the political idea where central government hands more power back to local authorities. At a national scale, this has meant that countries of the UK (i.e. Scotland) can manage certain things themselves such as education and healthcare. At a regional scale, this refers to counties such as West Berkshire being able to spend money where they see fit. At a very local scale, some decision making power is handed to town and parish councils.



What is a devolved government?

UK citizens are still mainly governed from Westminster (central government). For example, all tax is collected centrally, and then distributed to regions and counties. This is very different to the devolution in the USA, where the Federal government (Donald Trump etc) give nearly all decision making power and tax laws over to the individual states.

The arguments for and against devolution in the UK

Where are the devolved governments?

Scotland – the Scottish Parliament also goes by Holyrood which is the name of the building in Edinburgh where the parliament sits. It has 129 members (Members of Scottish Parliament). The First Minister is the leader of the Scottish Parliament, at the minute this is Nicola Sturgeon of the SNP.

Wales – the Welsh Assembly is based in Cardiff. There are 60 members of the Welsh Assembly. They are also lead by a First Minister who at the minute is Mark Drakeford.

Norther Ireland – The Northern Ireland Assembly consists of 108 members, and meet at a building called Stormont. The Assembly is proportional to represent the varying communities in Northern Ireland i.e. Republicans and Unionists. They are lead by a First and Deputy First Minister, currently filled by Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill respectively.

Who can stand in an election?

In a **local election**, you must be 18 years old, a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any of the member states of the EU (though this might change after Brexit).

There are four other criteria

- Be a registered elector for the local council
- Occupied as an owner or tenant any land or premises within the local council area for at least 12 months
- You work within the local council area for the last 12 months
- You have lived in the local council area for 12 months

You are disqualified if:

If you are employed by the local authority; if you are bankrupt; have had a prison or suspended sentence during the last five years; if you have been found guilty of corrupt or illegal electoral practices.

For those people wanting to become and **MP at Westminster**

- Be at least 18
- Be a British citizen, citizen of the Republic of Ireland or an eligible Commonwealth citizen
- You cannot stand in more than one constituency in the same General Election.
- The following people are also disqualified from standing as an MP:
 - Civil servants
 - Members of the police
 - Judges
 - Peers who sit in the House of Lords
 - Bishops of the Church of England.

It is worth noting that though people can stand as an independent candidate, nearly all MPs are currently attached to a political party (there are only 23 out of 650 seats), and it is the political parties who select who will stand as an MP in each constituency. For MPs who have been in their position for some time, this process is very straight forward, however, when the seat becomes vacant, a number of people from each party will go through a process of voting from local party members in order to

Who can vote in UK General elections?

First of all you must be registered to vote, after that, there are then criteria which will either allow you to, or disqualify you from voting:

Who can?

- Must be 18 and over
- Need to be a British citizen, a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of the Republic of Ireland

Who can't?

- Members of the House of Lords
- EU citizens' resident in the UK
- Any other nationality that isn't defined above
- Convicted persons in prison
- A person who has been found guilty of electoral fraud or illegal practices in the last five years
- If you have been detained under sections of the Mental Health Act.

Should the voting age be lowered?

In 2014 the voting age for the Scottish Independence vote was lowered to 16. There are a number of arguments that can be made for and against lowering the voting age.

Why do some people not vote?

Voter apathy is the term given to people who choose not to vote for a variety of reasons. This could be down to laziness i.e. not being bothered to go to the polling stations, but for many people they see their vote as a waste of time. A lot of people feel they are also not represented by the main political parties, so choose not to vote as they do not believe their opinions are represented in main stream politics.