



Department  
for Education

# Citizenship studies

**GCSE subject content**

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# The content for citizenship studies GCSE

## Introduction

1. This document sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in citizenship studies.

## Aims and learning outcomes

2. Specifications in GCSE citizenship studies should enable students to deepen their knowledge of democracy and government, the law, rights and responsibilities and how we live together in society. Specifications should enable students to think critically, evaluate evidence, debate ideas, make persuasive arguments and justify their conclusions. Specifications should enable students to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills to take responsible citizenship actions, play a positive role in public and democratic life as informed and active citizens, and provide them with the basis for further learning and study.

3. GCSE specifications should enable students to:

- know and understand what democracy is, how parliamentary democracy operates within the constituent parts of the UK, how government works and how democratic and non-democratic systems of government are different beyond the UK
- know and understand the relationship between the state and citizens, the rights, responsibilities and duties of citizens living and working in the UK and how people participate in democracy
- know and understand the role of the law in society, how laws are shaped and enforced and how the justice system works in England and Wales
- know and understand how taxes are raised and spent by governments, and how national economic and financial policies and decisions relate to individuals
- use and apply knowledge and understanding of key citizenship ideas and concepts, including democracy, government, justice, equality, rights, responsibilities, participation, community, identity and diversity, to think deeply and critically about a wide range of political, social, economic and ethical issues and questions facing society in local to global contexts
- use and apply knowledge and understanding as they formulate citizenship enquiries, explore and research citizenship issues and actions, analyse and evaluate information and interpret sources of evidence

- use and apply citizenship knowledge and understanding to contribute to debates, show understanding of different viewpoints, make persuasive and reasoned arguments, and justify and substantiate their conclusions
- use and apply citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills in order to participate in responsible actions to address citizenship issues aimed at improving society and positively contributing to democracy and public life, as individuals and in collaboration with others

## Subject content

4. The specifications must build on the knowledge, skills and understanding set out in the content, ensuring progression from national curriculum key stage 3 requirements and the possibilities for progression to a range of A levels and further study.

5. Short course GCSE citizenship studies specifications must address half the content specified in the scope of study. The elements from each section of the scope of study that should be addressed in short course specifications are asterisked.

## Knowledge and understanding

### Democracy and government

#### Democracy, elections and voting in the UK

- the concept of democracy and different forms of democracy, including representative democracy\*
- the values underpinning democracy: rights, responsibilities, freedoms, equality, rule of law
- the difference between the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the Monarchy; the nature of the bicameral Westminster Parliament, the respective roles of and relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and the role of The Monarch\*
- the roles of MPs and other key parliamentary roles including speaker, whips, front bench and back bench MPs and ceremonial roles including Black Rod\*
- how Parliament holds government to account through oversight and scrutiny\*
- the process of parliamentary debate and deliberation of public issues as part of the process of making and shaping policy and legislation
- how citizens can contribute to parliamentary democracy and hold those in power to account

- the major political parties operating in UK general elections and some of their key philosophical differences\*
- the electoral system based on parliamentary constituencies and the first past the post voting system: how candidates are selected, the frequency of general elections and who can and cannot vote and why\*
- other types of voting systems used to make decisions in first-past-the-post and proportional systems and the advantages and disadvantages of each

### **National, local, regional and devolved government**

- how national governments are formed by the leader of the political party in power or a coalition of political parties who agree to share power\*
- the role of the Prime Minister, Cabinet and ministers\*
- the organisation of government administration into departments, ministries and agencies supported by the Civil Service
- the nature and organisation of regional and devolved government in the constituent parts of the UK\*
- how powers are organised between the Westminster Parliament and the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and how relations are changing between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- the role and structure of local government in the UK\*

### **British Constitution**

- the institutions of the British constitution: the power of government, the Prime Minister and Cabinet; the sovereignty of Parliament; the roles of the legislature, the Opposition, political parties, The Monarch, citizens, the judiciary, the police and the Civil Service\*
- how the relationships between the institutions form an uncodified British constitution and examples of how this is changing

### **The role of the media and free press**

- the rights, responsibilities and role of the media and a free press in informing and influencing public opinion, providing a forum for the communication and exchange of ideas and opinions, and in holding those in power to account\*
- the right of the media to investigate and report on issues of public interest subject to the need for accuracy and respect for people's privacy and dignity\*
- the operation of press regulation and examples of where censorship is used

- the use of the media by groups wishing to influence public opinion and those in power

### **Politics beyond the UK**

- key differences in how citizens can or cannot participate in politics in one democratic and one non-democratic political system that is outside of the UK

### **Citizen participation in democracy and society**

- opportunities and barriers to citizen participation in democracy\*
- how digital democracy, social media and other measures are being developed as a means to improve voter engagement and the political participation of citizens\*
- the different forms of democratic and citizenship actions people can take to hold those in positions of power to account and how citizens contribute to wider public life: joining an interest group or political party; standing for election; campaigning; advocacy; lobbying; petitions; joining a demonstration; volunteering\*
- the roles played by public institutions, public services, interest and pressure groups, trade unions, charities and voluntary groups in providing a voice and support for different groups in society\*
- two different examples of how citizens working together or through groups attempt to change or improve their communities through actions to either address public policy, challenge injustice or resolve a local community issue\*

### **Rights, the law and the legal system in England and Wales**

#### **Rights and responsibilities**

- human, moral, legal and political rights and the duties, equalities and freedoms of citizens\*
- the responsibilities and roles of citizens in the legal system as a juror, magistrate, special constable, member of a tribunal hearing
- the right to representation, including the role and history of trade unions and employee associations in supporting and representing workers
- rights in local to global situations where there is conflict and rights and responsibilities need to be balanced
- the role of Magna Carta in the development of rights

- the role of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1998 Human Rights Act\*

### **The law**

- the nature of rules and laws in helping society deal with complex problems of fairness, justice and discrimination\*
- the fundamental principles of law to ensure rights and freedoms, the presumption of innocence and equality before the law\*
- different legal jurisdictions of the UK: England and Wales; Northern Ireland, Scotland
- the main sources of law: common law and legislation
- the key differences between criminal and civil law\*

### **The legal system (England and Wales)**

- the operation of the justice system: the role and powers of the police; the role and powers of the judiciary; the roles of legal representatives; the different types of criminal and civil courts and how they work; tribunals and other means of civil dispute resolution\*
- the age of criminal responsibility and other legal ages when young people become legally responsible for their actions (drive, marry, vote, join the forces)
- the operation of the youth justice system\*
- nature, purpose and effect of sentences and punishments for different criminal offences
- factors affecting crime rates in society and strategies to reduce crime

### **The UK and its relations with the wider world**

- the United Kingdom's role and relations with the rest of Europe and the wider world, including the United Nations and its agencies, NATO, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and the World Trade Organisation\*
- the ongoing implications of the UK's former membership of the European Union and examples of decisions that may continue to impact on the UK
- the role and contribution of the UK in an international disagreement or conflict and methods used: mediation, sanctions or force
- the role of international law in conflict situations to protect victims of conflict and how international humanitarian law establishes the rules of war

- the role of non-governmental organisations\*

### **Identities and diversity in UK society**

- the complex and diverse nature of identities of people living and working together in UK society, and the factors that affect individual, group, national and global identities, and the concept of multiple identities\*
- that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is comprised of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the impact of this on identity debates
- the changing composition of different communities, the recent impact, challenges and benefits of migration, and the movement of people over time to and from the UK\*
- the need for mutual respect and understanding in a diverse society and the values that underpin democratic society\*

### **The economy, finance and money**

- how public taxes are raised and spent by government locally and nationally\*
- the practice of budgeting and managing risk and how it is used by government to manage complex decisions about the allocation of public funding
- different viewpoints and debates about how governments and other service providers make provision for welfare, health, the elderly and education

### **Citizenship skills, processes and methods**

6. GCSE citizenship studies specifications must require students to demonstrate the ability to:

- form their own hypotheses, create sustained and reasoned arguments and reach substantiated conclusions when appropriate\*
- understand the range of methods and approaches that can be used by governments, organisations, groups and individuals to address citizenship issues in society, including practical citizenship actions\*
- formulate citizenship enquiries, identifying and sequencing research questions to analyse citizenship ideas, issues and debates
- select and organise their knowledge and understanding in responses and analysis, when creating and communicating their own arguments, explaining hypotheses, ideas and different viewpoints and perspectives, countering viewpoints they do not support, giving reasons and justifying conclusions drawn\*



- present their own and other viewpoints and represent the views of others, in relation to citizenship issues, causes, situations and concepts
- plan practical citizenship actions aimed at delivering a benefit or change for others in society
- critically evaluate the effectiveness of citizenship actions to assess progress towards the intended aims and impact for the individuals, groups and communities affected
- show knowledge and understanding of the relationships between the different citizenship aspects studied, using the concepts to make connections, identify and compare similarities and differences in a range of situations from local to global\*

## Taking citizenship action

7. This section applies only to the full course GCSE.

8. Citizenship action may be defined as a planned course of informed action to address a citizenship issue or question of concern and aimed at delivering a benefit or change for a particular community or wider society. Taking citizenship action in a real out-of-classroom context allows students to apply citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills, and to gain different citizenship insights and appreciate different perspectives on how we live together and make decisions in society. It requires them to practise a range of citizenship skills including: research and enquiry, interpretation of evidence, including primary<sup>1</sup> and secondary<sup>2</sup> sources, planning, collaboration, problem solving, advocacy, campaigning and evaluation.

9. Specifications must require that each student conducts an in-depth, critical investigation leading to citizenship action as defined above. Awarding organisations must require confirmation of this in the form of a written statement from centres.

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<sup>1</sup> Primary sources are the data and findings generated by the student when undertaking research and enquiries into citizenship issues and as part of the process of taking citizenship action. This can include data and findings from student observations, discussions with members of the community, qualitative and quantitative interview data, recordings, results of polls, votes and surveys relevant to their study.

<sup>2</sup> Secondary sources are the data and findings, generated in the past or by another party, that are used by the student when undertaking research and enquiries into citizenship issues and as part of the process of taking citizenship action. These can include published sources of data, findings and official reports from public bodies and institutions such as Parliament, government departments, local councils and authorities, reports in the news and the media, NGOS, groups, research and other organisations, opinion polls, statistics, videos and other sources, relevant to their study.

10. Examination papers must include questions that draw on the knowledge and understanding students have gained from taking citizenship action. These questions will have to account for 15 per cent of the marks for the full course GCSE and should focus on the following knowledge, understanding and skills:

- understanding the range of methods and approaches that can be used by governments, organisations, groups and individuals to address citizenship issues in society, including practical citizenship actions
- formulating citizenship enquiries, identifying and sequencing research questions to analyse citizenship ideas, issues and debates
- presenting their own and other viewpoints and representing the views of others, in relation to citizenship issues, causes, situations and concepts
- planning practical citizenship actions aimed at delivering a benefit or change for a particular community or wider society
- critically evaluating the effectiveness of citizenship actions to assess progress towards the intended aims and impact for the individuals, groups and communities affected



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