British Values – Democracy in the UK

1 of 16 – Welcome

Welcome to this session on democracy in the UK.

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

* Explain different systems of governance
* Know what democracy is
* Understand how democracy works in the UK
* Know why democracy matters to you

2 of 16 – What is democracy?

The word democracy comes from two Greek words; demos, meaning common people, and kratos, meaning power.

The definition of democracy is: "A system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state." That means in a democracy, you have a right and responsibility to decide how your country is run, and what decisions are made.

In small groups this can mean that every person has a direct part to play in all decision making. In a larger group, such as a country, it often means that the people elect representatives to speak and make decisions on their behalf.

3 of 16 – Types of governance

There are many ways of ruling or governing a group of people. In general, they can all be defined as one of five types. Sometimes a system of governance will take elements from more than one of these groups to create hybrid models, such as a democratic republic.

* Dictatorship – A single person has absolute power over the state and rules according to their wishes. They gain power through means such as military coup or unfair elections. No-one holds them accountable for their actions.
* Communism – A government based on the ideology of Karl Marx, which suggests a society where all property is publicly owned, with each individual working according to their skills and needs. In a communist society everyone contributes and there is no class system and wealth is divided equally.
* Monarchy – The society is ruled by a family that inherits their power from the previous generation. Usually the head of the family is a King, Queen, Prince or Princess who holds the position until they die. Most monarchies in modern societies are purely ceremonial and do not have power to make decisions, but there are still some traditional monarchies left.
* Republic – A leader or group of leaders is elected or chosen by the people. A constitution protects the rights of everyone from being affected by the current leader, even if they have a majority of support from the society.
* Democracy – Everyone within the society has an equal say in how the society is run. In a representative democracy, the people elect a leader or group of representatives to make these decisions for them. These leaders are able to make any changes to existing law if they have majority support.

4 of 16 – Representative democracy

In the UK, we have a representative democracy. This means that through elections we choose other people to represent our views about how the country should be run.

In a representative democracy you pick a person or a political party that represents your views. They then vote on all matters on your behalf, instead of you personally voting on every issue.

This means that you have a **vote** on who gets to make decisions in the UK, through a ‘winner takes all’ system called **first past the post**. A vote is the tool you use to express your choice, which can be verbal, a show of hands or written on a ballot paper. First past the post is the system used to count votes in the UK.

5 of 16 – Levels of democracy

In the UK, democracy happens on a variety of different levels, from local to national.

Local democracy takes the form of town, county and city councils all around the UK. They make decisions about things that are happening in your area. To find out more about how a local council works, visit the gov.uk website.

<https://www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works/types-of-council>

National democracy is concerned with issues that affect the whole country. Decisions made here affect everyone, wherever you live. Part of national democracy includes working with the governments of other countries around the world.

6 of 16 – What is a parliament?

A parliament is a level of government that brings together elected officials to make laws that affect one or more countries, nations or states. The UK Parliament is the central body in the UK that proposes, scrutinises and passes laws.

Devolved nations within the UK also have their own parliaments, which make decisions relating to the running of their nations specifically. These are the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies. The European Union have a European Parliament which represent the nations of the European Union in collective decision-making.

To find out more about the UK Parliament, watch the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/RAMbIz3Y2JA?autoplay=1&rel=0&start=0&modestbranding=1&showinfo=0&theme=light&fs=0&probably_logged_in=0>

7 of 16 – Who can vote in the UK?

To vote in the UK, you must be a British, qualifying Commonwealth or Republic of Ireland citizen, 18 years old, and not be legally restricted from voting.

You can be prevented from voting if you're a convicted prisoner serving time in a non-civil prison, or if you commit electoral fraud or a similar offence.

If you're an EU citizen residing in the UK, you cannot vote in general elections, but may be allowed to vote in local council elections. Since the UK’s exit from the European Union an EU citizen’s right to vote or stand in a local election depends on whether the country from which they have come has signed a voting agreement with the UK. You can read more about this on the government’s website. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-voting-rights-for-eu-citizens-living-in-the-uk/local-voting-rights-for-eu-citizens-living-in-the-uk>

Finally, you must be registered to vote, which you can do at 14 in Scotland and 16 in the rest of the UK. If you are not already registered to vote and are eligible, you can click on the icon to visit the gov.uk website and register. <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

8 of 16 – Voting rights and responsibilities

As a UK citizen, you have a right to vote in all elections you qualify for, as well as stand for election yourself if you are 18 years old or over. This hasn’t always been the case, though, and who was eligible to have a say in the running of the country has grown and changed over time.

Here is a short history of voting rights in the UK.

* 1432 – Only owners of property who paid at least 40 shillings per year in tax could vote
* 1832 – Men aged 21 who owned property could vote
* 1918 – The women’s Suffrage movement’s extensive pressure and protest led to a change in the law meaning that all men aged 21 and over and women aged 21 and over who owned property could vote
* 1928 – All men and women aged 21 or above could vote
* 1969 – Everyone aged 18 or above can vote

You have a social responsibility to yourself and those around you that you exercise your right to vote with respect and proper thought. You should gain as much information as possible on the candidates, parties and values that your vote will represent before casting it.

9 of 16 – The polling station

A polling station is the place where people go to cast their votes in person, for a local or general election, or for other major elections such as the appointment of a Police and Crime Commissioner.

In the month or so before the election takes place, you will receive your polling card in the post telling you when the vote is and where the polling station is that you will need to go to. You can only vote at the polling station on the card, not another one. The polling card will also explain how to apply for a postal vote if you prefer to vote in that way.

On the day of the election, go to the polling station listed on your card. You do not need to take your polling card with you to be able to vote, however it can help the people working at the polling station to find you on their lists. The staff will give you the voting slip or slips known as ballot papers for the elections taking place and you will be directed to a private area where you can cast your vote by drawing an X in the appropriate box. Different elections will have different requirements for how you do this, so it is important that you read the form carefully to make sure you do it right. Ballot papers that are not filled out correctly are known as ‘spoiled papers’ and mean your vote is not counted.

Tellers, who are people wearing rosettes, may ask for your polling number so their party doesn't contact you after you vote. They shouldn’t ask you for anything else.

10 of 16 – Your MP

MP stands for Member of Parliament. Your MP is your elected voice in Parliament. There are 650 MPs in Parliament, each occupying a seat that represents a part of the UK. They are meant to represent your views and concerns on a national level, as well as locally. MPs are chosen at a General Election, which takes place usually every 5 years although they can be called more often than that.

They act on your behalf even if you didn't vote for them. They should represent the views of all their voters as much as possible.

You have the right to ask your MP for advice and help, to express your views in Parliament, and to champion causes you care about.

Visit the following website and look up where you live. Who is your MP in Parliament?

<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>

Look through their voting record; do you feel this person represents your views? What would you like to ask them?

11 of 16 – Why democracy matters

But what does all this mean for you? A lot of services you use every day are affected by who represents you.

By voting in any election, you can dramatically affect the funding, tax and regulation of every business and organisation in the UK.

Here are some examples to see just a small sample of those groups your vote can affect, and the consequences this has.

* Healthcare – Depending on who you vote for, the National Health Service may get an increase or decrease in funding, outsourcing and regulation. Make sure to research where your candidates stand.
* Business – Depending on who you vote for, businesses may see an increase or decrease in tax they pay, regulation and wages paid to workers. Who you vote for may affect your future job prospects.
* Emergency services – Depending on who you vote for, the emergency services may be made more or less directly accountable, see funding go up or down or see reform. A single election can see a lot of change here.
* Education – Depending on who you vote for, education services may be given more or less funding, see outsourcing or development, or major reform. Who you vote for could shape how the next generation grows up.

12 of 16 – Question 1

Which of these groups cannot vote in UK General Elections?

1. Citizens of the ROI
2. Citizens of the Commonwealth
3. Citizens of the EU

The correct answer is C, citizens of the EU. Citizens of the EU residing in the UK can't vote in General Elections.

13 of 16 – Question 2

When are you allowed to first register to vote in England?

1. Age 21
2. Age 16
3. Age 18
4. Age 17

The correct answer is age 16. Though you can only vote once you reach 18 years old, you can register from the age of 16.

14 of 16 – Question 3

Which of these are you allowed to ask of your MP?

Choose all that apply.

1. Speak up for you in Parliament
2. Help and assistance with central government matters
3. Lobby for your community

The correct answer is, all of the above. They have a responsibility to assist you with government matters, and guide you to where to get help otherwise. They're there to stand for you.

15 of 16 – Question 4

Which of the following will your polling card tell you? Choose all that apply.

1. When the vote is
2. Where your polling station is
3. How to apply for a postal vote
4. Who all the candidates are who are standing

The answer is:

Your polling card will tell you when the vote is, where your polling station is and how to apply for a postal vote if you prefer.

16 of 16 - End

Well done. You have completed this session on democracy in the UK.

You should now be able to:

* Explain different systems of governance
* Know what democracy is
* Understand how democracy works in the UK
* Know why democracy matters to you

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, speak to your tutor for more help.