

7.1

How does the UK Political System Work

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Introduction to: How does the UK Political System Work?

Welcome and Introduction

These materials accompany and outline the course, How does the UK Political System Work, and are primarily intended as a resource for adult education tutor/trainers working in a community context. This community context will be a varied one and tutor/trainers will be working with course participants from diverse backgrounds and with different experiences and expectations.

Course participants will range from existing tutor/trainers who wish to develop a broader awareness of active citizenship education, through to participants who are active in their community and want to explore active citizenship further. Other participants and groups might be thinking about some of these ideas for the very first time and others might be taking their first tentative steps in tutor/training and will be keen to develop skills through future modules such as Introduction to Train the Trainers, Introduction to Active Citizenship, and the City and Guilds, in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector. This course is an introduction to that (optional) teaching and learning journey.

Tutor/trainers delivering this course may themselves be extremely experienced in adult education but be relatively unfamiliar with some of the 'active citizenship' themes and approaches. Thus one of our aims in producing this course has also been to provide a best practice model which the experienced tutor/trainer can develop and build on.

For all of those working through this course, whether as tutor/trainers or course participants, we hope that it helps to stimulate active citizenship – in the widest sense of the term!

Using the Materials

These materials offer a structure and outline for a 10 hour non-accredited course: How Does the UK Political System Work? Included are ideas for activities, a tutor pamphlet, resources and session plans.

This course has been structured into 5 x 2 hour sessions. No breaks have been planned into the sessions - you might want to make refreshments available on a 'help yourself' basis.

However the course can be delivered in a number of different ways – in 2 five hour blocks as day schools, over a number of linked evenings or in any other way appropriate to a group of participants. Again flexibility is important. If taught over 2 sessions of 5 hours per session the time allocated for two 'Getting Started' and two 'Wrap Up and Evaluation' slots could be distributed amongst the other sessions or used for different purposes.

The scope of the content - the UK political system - is ambitious in the amount of time allowed. The tutor will need to make judgments on where to go into more detail and where to signpost for further information depending on the interests and issues raised by the group of learners.

The course handbook is intended to support the inputs and discussions that take place in the sessions. It provides an introduction to the political structures and institutions that govern the UK and sets out some of the key questions about how we do politics. Each section provides sources for further information.

Course Aims:

- To explore how politics affect our lives and where political decisions are made
- To explore who are the stakeholders in our political system and where the power and influence lies
- To undertake a democratic audit.
- To identify key elements that make up democratic politics and consider whether there is a democratic deficit in the UK
- To encourage participants review their own learning and take part in research

Course Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

- Identify the range of structures and institutions that govern the UK - local, national and international
- Define some key elements of democratic government and why this matters
- Demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements
- List the advantages and disadvantages of some alternative arrangements
- Make suggestions as to how the system could work better for citizens
- Identify sources of information/support and ways to get involved
- Identify skills and knowledge to 'take part' in research

Tutor/Trainer Notes and Ideas

Introduction: How does the UK political System Work?

This course has been structured into 5 x 2 hour sessions. No breaks have been planned into the sessions - you might want to make refreshments available on a 'help yourself' basis.

The scope of the content - the UK political system - is ambitious in the amount of time allowed. The tutor will need to make judgments on where to go into more detail and where to signpost for further information depending on the interests and issues raised by the group of learners.

The course handbook is intended to support the inputs and discussions that take place in the sessions. It provides an introduction to the political structures and institutions that govern the UK and sets out some of the key questions about how we do politics. Each section provides sources for further information.

Theme 1: What is politics?

Activity 1: Icebreaker

- Introduces the group to each other

Each learner is given a bingo sheet with a number of statements on it - **Resource Sheet 1**: The statements on the bingo sheet can be changed or added to suit the context. They have to move around the room, find people who meet the criteria for each statement and place their names next to it. Be aware of whether any of the group have mobility issues - in which case give the option of sitting down and people coming to them. Look out for literacy and language levels - the tutor can read out the statements. A small joke prize can be provided but isn't essential.

Activity 2: Word Wall

- Establishes shared understanding and differences around what we mean by politics
- Introduces learners' experience of/feelings about politics
- Establishes learners' expectations of the course
- Provides a means of evaluation

Stick up 3 sheets of flipchart paper around the room. Hand out post-its.

- 1 Get participants to write on a post-it the first word that comes into their heads when you say 'politics'. Get each person to say the word they wrote as you collect in the post-its and stick them on Flipchart sheet 1. Facilitate discussion and provide basic definition (see Handbook).
- 2 Ask participants to think about how they feel about politics and write a word on a post-it to describe this. Get each person to say the word they wrote as you collect in the post-its and stick them on Flipchart sheet 2. Facilitate discussion.

- 3 Ask participants to discuss in pairs what they want to learn about the UK political system in these sessions. Write one thing down on a post-it. Get each person to say what they wrote as you collect in the post-its and stick them on Flipchart sheet 3. Group the post-its. Compare expectations to the course outline and aims and objectives. Highlight areas where the course is intended to deliver on the expectations expressed; identify if there are any expectations that may not be met and make alternative suggestions.

Inform the group that the flipcharts will be kept and there will be an opportunity to re-visit the questions and responses at the end of the course.

Activity 3: How politics affect us

- Identifying how politics impacts on just about every aspect of life.

Start by re-visiting the definitions of politics. Ask the group to think of some examples of how politics affects their daily lives. The 'Do Politics' posters (www.dopolitics.org.uk) can be used as a prompt.

Divide participants into small groups and ask them to outline an average day in their life. Encourage them to do this by drawing pictures to illustrate. They then decide which parts of their day are affected by politics and how. Once everyone has finished get them to feed back to the wider group.

Activity 4: The Democracy Tree

- Identifies the range of political institutions that affect life in the UK
- Clarifies their functions and responsibilities and where they can overlap

Working in the smaller groups, ask participants to write on post-its the aspects of life and the issues they have identified that are affected by politics.

Introduce the Democracy Tree (**Resource Sheet 2**) drawn out on a large sheet of flipchart paper. Check whether there are any institutions that are unfamiliar. Refer to Handbook for more detailed explanations. Ask participants to identify which democratic institution(s) are responsible for the issues they have identified and to stick the post-its on the relevant part of the tree. They may find that they need to write several more post-its as there can be more than one institution that is responsible.

This activity may take some time and involve discussion about the different institutions and what they are responsible for. The tutor will need to ensure that the group is clear what form of local government is operating in their area.

Resources:

Democracy Cookbook:

Definitions:

www.dopolitics.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/70603/2-Whats-It-All-About.pdf

Descriptions of democratic institutions:

www.dopolitics.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/70612/4-Who-Decides.pdf

Further detail on the UK political system can be found at:

www.direct.gov.uk/

www.parliament.uk

www.number-10.gov.uk

Description of current situation:

POWER 2010 Deliberative Poll guide to reforms P 4 – 6

www.power2010.org.uk

How Your Council Works

www.urbanforum.org.uk

Further resources on economics:

www.economicsforeveryone.com

The UK economy:

Observer UK Fact File 25.04.10

www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog+business/economics

Activity 5: Democracy Learning Log

- Enables participants to create an ongoing record of the representatives and institutions that impact on their lives
- Encourages participants to undertake research
- Encourages participants to think about which democratic institutions are responsible for different issues affecting their lives and what they can do to influence change

Provide each learner with a copy of the Democracy Learning Log - **Resource Sheet**

3. Explain that it is a tool for them to use during the course to support their learning. Suggest that they complete the information on their representatives and bring it to session 2. At the end of each session, encourage the learners to spend 5 minutes reviewing their learning log and adding to it.

Theme 2: Who Decides?

Activity 6: Recap and Blankety Blank Quiz

Return to the Democracy Tree and check learners' understanding of the different institutions. Use the quickfire quiz - **Resource Sheet 4** - to check learners' understanding of the political institutions. Draw attention to the section in the Course Handbook and signpost to further sources of information. As part of the discussion, check that learners have the information they need to fill in the information section of the Democracy Learning Log.

When reviewing the Democracy Tree, explore whether there are institutions or bodies that impact on political decisions that have not been included on the tree. The main gaps are bodies such as the markets and the media and multi-lateral institutions such as the World Bank, IMF. Refer to the course handbook.

Activity 7: Power and Influence

Tutor input:

- Make the point that 'power' has a number of different meanings
- You can't talk about democracy and change without addressing the underlying power dynamics
- There are a number of frameworks that can help to examine the underlying power dynamics of a situation

Start from the learners' own understanding and experience of power.

Work in pairs and share experiences: When do they feel powerful? When do they feel powerless? What are the different types of power that are coming into play?

Facilitate feedback and discussion. Explore where power can be positive - 'power to' - as well as negative - 'power over'. Explore where power is visible and where it is hidden or invisible. Refer to Course handbook.

Use the stakeholder matrix – **Resource Sheet 5** – to explore where power and influence lie and how this might be changed.

Resources:

Power analysis for social change: www.powercube.net

Introduction to power analysis:

www.powercube.net/an-introduction-to-power-analysis/why-power-why-now/

Handout on Power and Empowerment: summary of some concepts and approaches: www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Handout-on-Power-and-Empowerment.pdf

Quick guide to power analysis: www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/quick_guide_to_power_analysis_external_final.pdf

Mapping personal power capabilities: www.demos.co.uk/projects/the-power-gap

Power analysis and power tools:

www.democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/democracy

Activity 8: Democratic Audit

- Prepare learners to take Democratic Audit tools away and explore the sections of interest to them prior to the next session.

Provide each learner with a copy of the DIY Guide to Democratic Auditing and the section by section guide to the Assessment Framework. Talk the group through the basic principles set out in the assessment framework. Explain how the DIY questionnaire works. There is a lot of information provided so check that everyone is following the introduction. Check out the levels of interest in the different sections - the group may want to concentrate on a few specific areas. Ask the learners to take the tools away and use the questionnaire to explore the issues of interest to them. Encourage them to read the section(s) in the guide and complete the part(s) of the DIY questionnaire. Offer learners the option of just focusing on one section of the framework that they are interested in eg Free and fair elections.

Resources:

Democratic audit assessment framework

www.democraticaudit.com/auditing_democracy/assessmentframework.php

DIY Guide to Democratic Auditing

www.democraticaudit.com/download/DIY-Auditing-v2.pdf

Theme 3: Are British Politics Broken?

Activity 9: Democratic Audit

- Identify the different dimensions involved in democracy
- Critically assess UK democracy

Take feedback from the group as to which sections of the Assessment Framework they have focused on/are interested in. Organise into small groups to discuss specific sections:

- 1 Citizenship, Law and Rights
- 2 Representative and accountable government
- 3 Civil society and popular participation
- 4 Democracy beyond the state

Draw out a 'Wheel of Democracy' on a large sheet of flip chart paper - **Resource Sheet 6**. Invite feedback on each of the sections and facilitate discussion of what works well, where there are problems and possible improvements.

Tutor input on the basic principles of democracy - popular control and political equality. Facilitate discussion on how we see good government in order to identify the bulls eye of good practice on the Democracy Wheel.

Ask learners to summarise their views by placing coloured dots on the Wheel of Democracy.

Resources:

We the People – Ch 7 Summary: A checklist for active democracy
www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/We_The_People.pdf

Democratic Findings No 7 Democratic audit of the United Kingdom - Failing Democracy
www.democraticaudit.com/download/Findings7.pdf

The Unspoken Constitution
www.democraticaudit.eu/download/Unspoken_constitution.pdf

Activity 10: Are British politics broken?

Following the general election in May 2010 there has been intense discussion on the state of British politics and the need for constitutional reform. The quiz - **Resource Sheet 7** - is a tool to stimulate discussion as to whether there is a need for reform.

If there is internet access, learners can search the voter power web site.

Activity 11: Agree/disagree

The discussion can be concluded by a physical voting exercise.

The activity uses statements to encourage the learners to think about where they stand on different issues.

Stick large 'Agree'/'Disagree' signs on opposite sides of the room and ask everyone to gather in the space between the two.

The tutor reads out a statement and asks participants to go to the end of the room that best reflects their opinion. The stronger they feel about the issue, the further they should go to the end of the room. Encourage discussion about why they have chosen their position. People may decide to move position as they listen to the points of view. Once discussion has drawn to a close, begin again with another statement. If there is time, ask the group if they have an issue they would like to put to the group.

Sample statements:

- The electoral system in Britain is unfair
- People should be fined if they don't vote
- Politicians are trustworthy
- Etc.....

Resources:

Spoiled ballot – why less than three per cent have a fair share of power in Britain
www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Spoiled_Ballot.pdf

Voter power index
<http://www.voterpower.org.uk/>

2008-2009 Citizenship survey
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/citizenshipsurveyaprmr08

Our Nations Civic Health report
www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1519912.pdf

The State of British Democracy
www.jrrt.org.uk/uploads/SoNSummary.pdf

Theme 4: What's the Big Idea?

Activity 12: Proposals for change

In the lead up to the General Election 2010, Power2010 conducted a deliberative poll to identify the changes that the public would like to see in the UK political system. They produced a ballot paper - **Resource Sheet 8** - to encourage people to vote for the changes that they think are most needed. Participants can vote for as many ideas as they like. The purpose is to identify the five ideas with the most votes to form the core of a campaign for change.

The ballot paper can be used or adapted or the group can be invited to draw up their own list of proposals for change. Visit the Power2010 web site to see which are the top 5 proposals that formed the basis of their election campaign.

Resources:

Power2010 Deliberative Poll – Guide to reforms
Explains proposals and sets out advantages and disadvantages
http://citing.3cdn.net/114ff346931f337110_kkm6i41qv.pdf

Unlock Democracy Election manifesto – proposals for change
www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/1003-extra-web.pdf

100 day action plan to save Britain's democracy
[www.takebackpower.org/100 Days to Save Democracy.pdf](http://www.takebackpower.org/100_Days_to_Save_Democracy.pdf)

Why reform?
www.electoral-reform.org.uk/article.php?id=3

Activity 13: The Queen's Speech

Introduce the proposals for constitutional reform that have been outlined in the Queen's speech. The group can compare the proposals from the Coalition government with the results of their own poll.

Resources:

Queen's Speech

www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/05/queens-speech-2010-2-50580

Urban Forum policy briefing

www.urbanforum.org.uk/briefings/the-queen-s-speech

Program for Government – Political Reform

programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/political-reform

Activity 14: Alternative Voting

- Participate in the AV system and understand how it works in practice
- Consider the advantages and disadvantages
- Have an awareness of the alternatives

Remind the group that a referendum will be held on changing to the Alternative Voting system. Introduce the voting exercise and distribute the ballot papers. **See Resource Sheet 9.**

When the group has completed the voting exercise, facilitate a discussion on their experience and the advantages and disadvantages of the system. Refer to other voting systems, including those already in use in the UK.

Resources:

Electoral Reform Society – explanation of other voting systems

www.electoral-reform.org.uk

Guide to Alternative Vote System

www.electoral-reform.org.uk/article.php?id=55

Theme 5: Beyond the Ballot

The previous 4 sessions have focused on proposals and possibilities for constitutional reform. The final session returns to the issues of power. It introduces the idea that stronger democracy is about more than the institutions of the state - it is about the relationship between the citizen and the state. Re-engaging people in politics will be about people having more real influence over the issues that affect their lives.

Activity 15: Different Ways of Doing Democracy

Tutor introduces some alternatives to representative democracy – see course pamphlet.

Resources:

Champions of participation

[www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/downloads/Champions Report.pdf](http://www2.ids.ac.uk/logolink/resources/downloads/Champions%20Report.pdf)

Beyond the ballot – Democratic innovations from around the world.

http://www.powerinquiry.org/publications/documents/BeyondtheBallot_000.pdf

Selecting innovations

Power Moves – exploring power and influence in the UK

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/Power%20Moves%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

A New Weave of Power, People & Politics The Action Guide for advocacy and citizen participation, ,

<http://www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm>

Making Good Society – Commission of Inquiry into the future of civil society

<http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/files/Makinggoodsociety.pdf>

Power tools

http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/democracy/power_tools/tools_for_understanding

Activity 16: Exploring alternatives

Working in small groups, participants explore a case study - **see Resource Sheets 10a,b,c,d** - that outlines an alternative approach to democratic decision making.

They consider:

- What were the key elements of this approach
- Who was involved – inclusivity
- How were they involved
- What was the impact on decision making

They discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the approach described and feedback their views to the whole group.

Activity 17: Completing Democracy Logs

Working in pairs, participants return to their Democracy Logs. They review the comments they have already made and focus on identifying their thoughts on how they can get involved in politics and what they can do to improve their local area. They review and add to the table on the back of the log and identify their priority for things they would like to see change/who can change them and how they can make a difference.

Participants share with the group one thing they would like to see change and one action they will undertake to try and bring this about.

Resources:

Campaigning is OK
<http://static.novas.org/files/campaigningisok-456.pdf>

Louder – e-campaigning web site
www.louder.org.uk/

Activity 18: Return to Evaluation Wall

The flipcharts generated in session one are put up on the wall. Use a different set of post-its to distinguish their comments now from those at the start of the course. Participants are asked to repeat the exercise by writing up:

- what they now feel about politics
- one thing they have learned about politics during the course
- the first word that enters their head now when they hear the word ‘politics’.

Invite the group to gather round the flipcharts to discuss and comment.

WEA SESSION PLAN 1

Course title: How the System Works – and making it work for us				
Session aim(s) WHAT IS POLITICS? Explore how politics affect our lives and where political decisions are made				
Learning Outcomes a) Identify the range of structures and institutions that govern the UK - local, national and international				
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource sheets 1,2,3 • Course Pamphlet • Session plan • Tutor briefing session 1 • Course outline 				
Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
0h00 15m	Introductions and icebreaker - Political Bingo Resource Sheet 1	Introduce and wrap up activity - see Tutor briefing	Engage with other learners	Observation Completed bingo sheets
0h15 5m	Introduce the course	Introduce course outline	Questions for clarification/ understanding	Questions
0h20 20m	Word wall - exploring definitions of politics, how we feel about politics and establish learners expectations of the course	Lead Word Wall activities and facilitate discussion	Brainstorm definitions; Reflect on how they feel about politics. Work in pairs re expectations of the course. Participate in feedback discussion and respond to contributions from other learners	Completed flipchart sheets Observe learner feedback and discussion

WEA SESSION PLAN 1

Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
0h40 30m	How politics affects us - identifying how politics impacts on everyday life	Lead activity and facilitate discussion - see Tutor briefing	Work in small groups to identify ways in which politics impacts on daily life Feedback to whole group and take part in discussion	Observe learner feedback and discussion
1h10 30m	Democracy Tree – resource sheet 2: What are the institutions that are responsible for making decisions that impact on our lives	Lead activity and facilitate discussion - see Tutor briefing	Identify the connection between the issues they have raised and the political institutions shown on the democracy tree	Democracy Tree flip chart. Observe learner feedback and discussion
1h40 15m	Democracy learning log – resource sheet 3. Encourage individual research and reflection	Introduce democracy learning log	Research and complete information section Ongoing reflection and notes	Learning logs
1h55 5m	Recap and look forward to next session			

WEA SESSION PLAN 2

Course title:	How the System Works – and making it work for us		
Session aim(s)	WHO DECIDES? Explore who are the stakeholders in our political system and where the power and influence lies.		
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Define some key elements of democratic government and why this matters b) Identify the range of structures and institutions that govern the UK – local, national and international c) Have an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements 		
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor briefing session 2 • Course Pamphlet • Session plan • Resource sheets 4 • Handout: Quick guide to power analysis • Handout on Power and Empowerment: summary of some concepts and approaches • Democratic Audit Assessment Framework and DIY Guide 		
Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity Methods for Checking Learning
0h00 20m	Recap- Blankety Blank Quiz - resource sheet 4. Check knowledge and understanding of democratic institutions. Identify how to find out more	Lead activity and facilitate discussion. See tutor briefing. Signpost to further sources of information.	Participate in activity; contribute knowledge and identify gaps and how to fill them
0h20 30m	Power - exploring what it is and who has it	Input re types and sources of power - see tutor briefing Provide handouts on power Facilitate feedback discussion	Work in pairs to identify experiences of power and powerlessness - see tutor briefing Observe discussion and feedback

WEA SESSION PLAN 2

Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
0h50 45m	Power and influence - resource sheet 5 Exploring where power and influence lies and how this might be changed	Lead activity and facilitate discussion	Participate in activity. Identify levels of power and influence and discuss how these might be changed	Observe activity and discussion.
1h35 15m	Introduce democratic audit	Provide copies of Democratic audit Assessment Framework and DIY Guide Introduce basic principles of framework and explain DIY Guide Explain preparation for session 3	Questions for clarification/ understanding. Identify theme(s) of interest	Questions
1h50 5m	What are we learning?		Democracy logs	
1h55 5m	Recap and look forward Close			

WEA SESSION PLAN 3

Course title: How the System Works – and making it work for us				
Session aim(s) ARE BRITISH POLITICS BROKEN? Undertake a democratic audit. Identify the key elements that make up democratic politics and consider whether there is a democratic deficit in the UK				
Learning Outcomes a) Define some key elements of democratic government and why this matters b) Identify the range of structures and institutions that govern the UK - local, national and international c) Have an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements				
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor briefing session 3 • Course Pamphlet • Session plan • Democratic Audit Assessment Framework and DIY Guide • Resource sheets 6,7 Course outline				
Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
0h00 60m	Democratic Audit - Identify the different dimensions involved in democracy Critically assess UK democracy using Democracy wheel - resource sheet 6	Introduce and lead activity – see tutor briefing	Undertake democratic audit assessment Express opinions using Democracy Wheel	Completed DIY democratic audit Observe activity and discussion

WEA SESSION PLAN 3

Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
1h00 30m	Are British politics broken Quiz - resource sheet 7 Exploring whether there is a democratic deficit in Britain	Introduce and lead activity Facilitate discussion	Complete quiz sheets Questions for clarification Discussion on democratic deficit based on the information provided in the quiz	Completed quiz sheets Observe activity and discussion
1h30 25m	Agree/disagree Sharing views on the strengths and weaknesses of the current democratic processes	Introduce and lead activity Facilitate discussion	Participate in activity Contribute to discussion on strengths and weaknesses Suggest statements to explore the views of the group	Observe activity and discussion
1h55 5m	Recap and look forward to next session			

WEA SESSION PLAN 4



Course title: How the System Works – and making it work for us				
Session aim(s) WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? Proposals for constitutional reform				
Learning Outcomes e) Have an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of some alternative arrangements f) Make suggestions as to how the system could work better for citizens				
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor briefing session 4 • Course Pamphlet • Session plan • Handout: How the Alternative Vote system works • Handout: Ballot paper • Resource sheets 8, 9 				
Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
0h00 50m	What needs to change? Deliberative poll on reforms - Resource sheet 8	Introduce and lead activity	Participate in activity. Consider and suggest proposals for change. Identify priorities for change	Deliberative poll sheets Observe discussion
0h50 20m	The Queen's speech - Coalition government proposals for change	Input on proposals for political reform Facilitate discussion	Questions for clarification. Discuss and compare to previous activity	Observe questions and discussion

WEA SESSION PLAN 4

Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
1h 10 45m	Experience how AV works - resource sheet 9 Alternative Voting Systems	Introduce and lead activity	Participate in activity. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of the AV system	Observe activity and discussion
1h55 5m	Recap and look forward			

WEA SESSION PLAN 5

Course title:	How the System Works – and making it work for us		
Session aim(s)	BEYOND THE BALLOT Alternative possibilities		
Learning Outcomes	e) Have an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of some alternative arrangements f) Make suggestions as to how the system could work better for citizens g) Be aware of more sources of information/support and ways to get involved		
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor briefing session 5 • Course Pamphlet • Session plan • Resource sheets 10a,b,c,d • Evaluation wall flipcharts from session 1 		
Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity
0h00 15m	Different ways of doing democracy	Tutor input on the alternatives to representative democracy	Question and discussion
0h15 40 m	Exploring alternatives – discussing case study examples of innovative approaches	Introduce activity. Facilitate feedback	Discuss case studies Explore advantages and disadvantages
0h55 20m	Complete democracy logs	Introduce activity	Reflect on the learning from the course. Identify priorities for change and how they can participate in influencing this.
			Completed democracy logs Observe learner feedback and discussion
			Observe questions and discussion
			Observe discussion and feedback

WEA SESSION PLAN 5

Time	Content/ Activity	Tutor activity (teaching methods)	Learner Activity	Methods for Checking Learning
1h15 20m	Share proposals for change	Facilitate feedback discussion. Record on flipchart	Feedback and discuss priorities for change and how they can participate in influencing this.	Observe learner feedback and discussion
1h35 20m	Return to Evaluation Wall	Introduce and lead activity	Participate in activity. Reflect on learning from the course. Share views and listen to other participants	Evaluation Wall Observe learner feedback and discussion
1h55 5m	Close			

Resource Sheet 1

How the System Works – and making it work for us

POLITICAL BINGO

Find someone who:

Has met a politician	Has signed a petition
Is interested in Environmental Issues	Has voted in an election
Has gone on a march or demonstration	Has been to the Houses of Parliament
Can name 4 political parties	Can name 3 countries in the European Union

Resource Sheet 2

How the System Works – and making it work for us



Democracy Tree

Resource Sheet 3

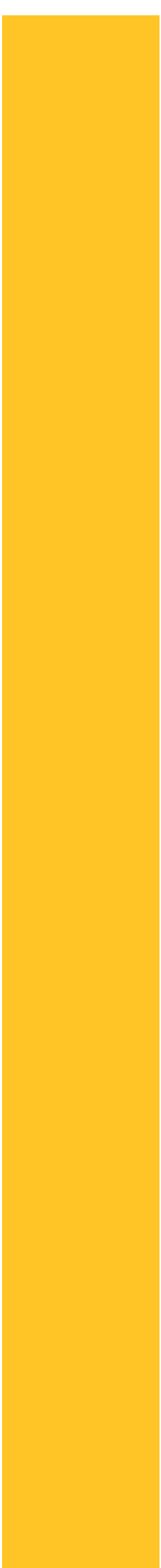
How the System Works – and making it work for us

Democracy Learning Log

My local council is*	
My ward is	
My councillors are	
My UK Parliamentary constituency is	
My Member of Parliament (MP) is	
Three ways I could get involved in politics	Three questions I have about politics
1	1
2	2
3	3
Three things that I can do to improve my local area	Three things that I would do if I was Prime Minister
1	1
2	2
3	3

* You may live in an area where you have two councils – a county council and a district council.
Some areas also have parish or town councils.

Things I would like to see changed	Who can change this?	How can I make a difference?



Resource Sheet 4

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Blankety blank quiz

Produce a jumbo size quiz sheet and answer cards on A3 paper which can be laid out on a table or on the floor. Ask the participants to work together and answer the questions by placing the correct answer card in the blank space. Stick to time to keep the pace going.

The following questions can be changed/adapted to suit the group and the context.

Sample guide to answers:

In a UK parliamentary election people vote to decide which politicians get elected to the House of Commons.

There are 646 parliamentary constituencies in the UK.

The House of Lords has some members that are elected but most are selected and appointed

Sheffield is a Metropolitan District Council

If you have a problem with a local service you should contact your local Councillor.

The National Assembly for Wales represents people in Wales.

The European Commission is responsible for the day to day running of the European Union.

Sample Quiz sheet:

In a UK parliamentary election people vote to decide which politicians get elected to

There are _____ parliamentary constituencies in the UK.

The _____ has some members that are elected but most are selected and appointed

Sheffield is a _____ Council

If you have a problem with a local service you should contact your local _____

The _____ for Wales represents people in Wales.

The _____ is responsible for the day to day running of the European Union.

Sample answer cards:

House of Commons

646

Councillor

Assembly

European Commission

Resource Sheet 5

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Power and Influence

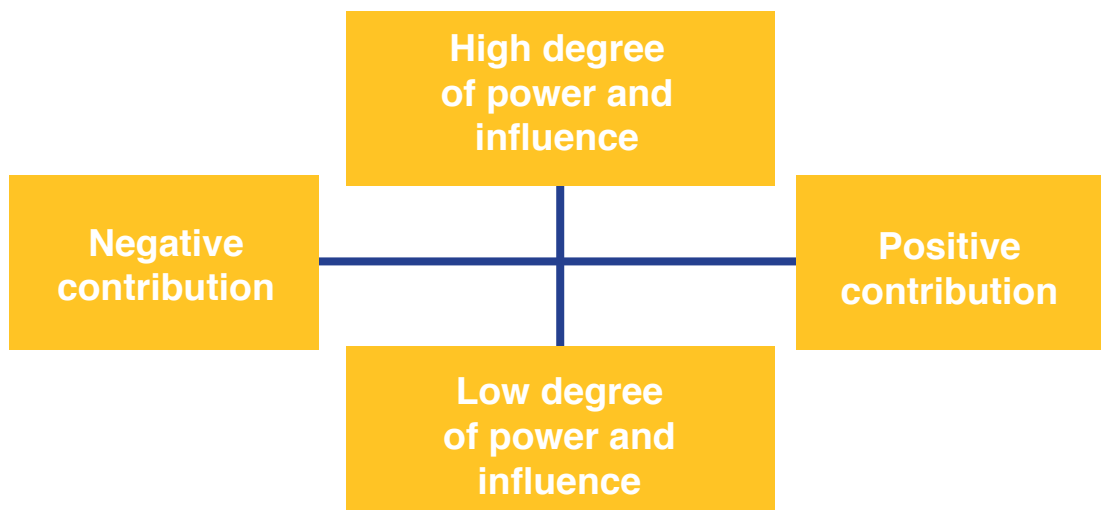
Prepared index cards

Blank index cards

Masking tape

A4 labels for matrix

- 1 Prepare pre-written index cards each labeled with one of the democratic institutions that have been identified in the 'Democracy Tree' exercise. Have blank cards available so that participants can add stakeholders.
- 2 Set out a grid on the floor (or large table) using masking tape that creates a matrix as illustrated below. Make sure each section of the matrix is clearly labelled.
- 3 Deal out the stakeholder cards to the group and ask them to place the cards at the point they feel is appropriate on the matrix without any discussion. Once the cards have been placed, the blank cards can be used to add stakeholders to the matrix.
- 4 Each participant can then question the placing of up to two cards. After about 20 minutes discussion, each participant is allowed to move one card if they wish and the discussion continues.
- 5 The role of the facilitator is to get the group to focus on how to reduce the level of power of some stakeholders and increase the power of others and to shift those perceived to be negative. Try to keep the discussion open and direct the group to think positively about how this picture can be changed for the better. This can involve some action planning.



Resource Sheet 6

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Wheel of Democracy



The outer wheel represents the elements of democratic government based on the democratic audit assessment framework. The group may want to add some additional criteria.

The centre represents how we identify good democratic government as discussed in the group following tutor input.

Based on the discussions around the DIY Democratic Audit, learners place coloured dots on the spokes of the wheel to indicate their assessment of how near the UK system is to their criteria for good government. For a worked example see Democratic Audit of the UK p.3 www.democraticaudit.com/download/Findings7.pdf

Resource Sheet 7

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Are British politics broken – quiz

Sample questions – with answers in brackets – are listed below. These can be adapted to reflect discussion that has taken place so far. It may be helpful to present the questions with multiple choice answers so that the group doesn't have to rely on total guesswork.

In 2007-08, (38 per cent) of people in England agreed that they could influence decisions in their local area. ¹

In 2007-08 (one-fifth (20%)) of people felt they could influence decisions affecting Great Britain. ²

In 2007-08, (10 per cent) of people had, in the last year, either participated in direct decision-making about local services or issues, or participated in the actual provision of these services by taking on a role such as a local councillor, school governor or magistrate. ³

(Thirty-nine per cent) of people engaged in some form of civic participation, such as contacting a local councillor, attending a public meeting or signing a petition at least once in the past year. ⁴

(31) safe seats haven't changed hands since Queen Victoria. ⁵

Turnout in UK general elections has fallen from (80%) in the early 1950s to around (60%) in 2007. ⁶

Membership of the three main UK parties is less than (25%) of its 1964 level. ⁷

The 2004 State of the Nation poll found that (63%) agree that the way that Britain is governed need 'quite a lot' or a 'great deal' of improvement. ⁸

In 2006, a UK electoral Commission poll found that (74%) said that ordinary voters have little or no power over government. ⁹

The average age of a Councillor in England is (58.3) years old. ¹⁰

At the current rate of growth it will take (135) years for the number of BME women councillors to reflect the number of BME women in the wider population. ¹¹

¹ Citizenship survey 2007-08

² Citizenship survey

³ Citizenship Survey

⁴ Citizenship survey

⁵ Take Back Parliament

⁶ Future for Civil Society

⁷ Future for Civil Society

⁸ The state of British Democracy Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust

⁹ Voice of the People. Democratic Audit

¹⁰ The Councillors Commission

¹¹ The Councillors Commission

Resource Sheet 8

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Ballot Paper

	Strengthen Parliamentary Select Committees	
	Offer 'None of the above' as an option on ballot papers	
	More free votes in the House of Commons	
	Consult the public on controversial matters through a deliberative process	
	Scrap ID cards and roll back the database state	
	Hold elections on the weekend	
	Draw up a strong Bill of Rights through meaningful public consultation	
	Reduce the government's use of statutory instruments	
	Give local people the right to recall their MP	
	Expand the scope of the Freedom of Information Act	
	Define MPs [pay, expenses and conditions through public consultation	
	Hold a referendum on replacing the pound with the euro	
	Give MPs control of the Parliamentary timetable	
	Require political parties to become more internally democratic	
	Introduce compulsory politics lessons in school	
	English votes on English laws	
	Ban members of the House of Lords from becoming government ministers	
	Give more decision making and taxation powers to local government	
	Fully disclose MPs and civil servants' communications with lobbyists	
	Cap donations to parties and candidates	
	Introduce fixed term parliaments	
	Directly elected mayors	
	Ban the appointment of former MPs to the House of Lords	
	Introduce a written constitution	
	Have a second chamber that represents different sectors	
	A fully elected House of Lords	
	Lower the voting age to 16	

Resource Sheet 9

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Alternative Voting System

Distribute ballot sheets to the participants and invite them to rank the candidates in order of preference – 1,2,3.

Sample ballot paper:

Plum	
Scarlett	
Mustard	
Green	
White	
Peacock	

Collect the ballot sheets and involve the group in the count.

Prepare a chart on which to mark the votes:

50%						
	Plum	Scarlett	Mustard	Green	White	Peacock

Record the result of the first preference count on the chart. If no candidate has achieved over 50% then the lowest placed candidate is eliminated and their 2nd choice votes are allocated to the remaining candidates.

This process is repeated until a candidate achieves over 50% of the vote.

Discussion:

- How do people feel about their candidate being eliminated?
- How do people feel about their second or third choice candidate becoming the winner?
- Is this a 'fair' system?

Resource Sheet 10a

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Case study: Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia

The Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform was established by the government of British Columbia (with full support from the legislature) to review the BC electoral system and, if necessary, to recommend an alternative system. The BC government committed itself to holding a referendum on the Assembly’s recommendations. The Assembly was made of 160 randomly-selected citizens – one man and one woman from each electoral district plus two Aboriginal members.

An independent Chair – Jack Blaney – oversaw and directed the Assembly’s work.

The Assembly began its work in January 2004. Its work can be divided into three aspects.

- Initially Assembly members spent a series of weekends learning about different electoral systems.
- The Assembly then took evidence during 50 public hearings attended by around 3,000 citizens and received 1,603 written submissions.
- Finally, the Assembly spent a period of time deliberating over the merits of different electoral systems before voting on different options.

In December 2004, it produced a report – Making Every Vote Count – that recommended the introduction of the single-transferable vote (STV) electoral system.

To ensure that citizens were able to attend, meetings were held at weekends, childcare and other support services were available to members with special needs and all expenses associated with serving on the Assembly were covered. Members also received an honorarium of \$150 per meeting day.

The Assembly differs in a number of important ways from innovations such as citizens’ juries and deliberative opinion polling:

- a relatively significant number of citizens were involved in an on-going process rather than a single one-off event;
- there was a guarantee that recommendations would be taken seriously and have an impact on the decision-making process (i.e. frame a referendum).

At the end of the process, Jack Blaney, the Chair of the Citizens’ Assembly, stated that:

Never before in modern history has a democratic government given to unelected, “ordinary” citizens the power to review an important public policy, then seek from all citizens approval of any proposed changes to that policy. The British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform has had this power and responsibility and, throughout its life, complete independence from government.

Resource Sheet 10b

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Case study: Youth Councils

The lack of engagement with the political process on the part of young people in the UK is often noted amongst policy makers. Thus any innovation that increases the involvement of young people is likely to be of interest. This case study focuses on two youth councils in Lambeth and in Espoo, Finland. The contrast between the two initiatives raises interesting issues for the design of youth councils.

Espoo Youth Council

- The Youth Council was established independently of the city administration in 1997.
- 30 representatives are elected (with an equal gender balance) – candidates must be between 13 and 19 years old and serve two-year terms.
- Proposals can be generated and discussed by young people in the city on the online 'Ideas Factory.' Feasible suggestions are presented to the three-weekly general assemblies of the youth council.
- The Youth Council has significant access to the decision-making process in the city – members sit on the various city committees responsible for running local services and are able to take their proposals to the City Board.
- Approximately 25% of the proposals generated by the Ideas Factory have been enacted by the city administration.

Lambeth Youth Council

- Lambeth Borough Council established the Youth Council in February 2002 in an attempt to make services and policy more responsive to young people and foster future community leaders.
- The Youth Council meets once a week in Brixton Town Hall and is open to anyone between the ages of 11 and 24. Around 100 young people have signed up and around 30 attend regularly. The majority are from BME groups.
- The Council is chaired by a youth development worker (from the Borough Council).
- The Council has worked on a number of issues such as stop and search, teenage pregnancy and HIV-aids. Members have gone into local schools and helped train new police recruits.

Resource Sheet 10c

How the System Works – and making it work for us

Case study Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) first emerged in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989. As it established itself as an effective mechanism for engaging citizens, it spread to about 180 other Brazilian municipalities, one Brazilian state and to a number of other cities across Latin America.

Taking the Porto Alegre model as our primary guide, there are three distinct levels of citizen engagement in the annual PB cycle: popular assemblies at regional and neighbourhood level; regional budget forums; and the municipal budget council.

Popular assemblies

- Regional and neighbourhood assemblies are the most participative element of PB in the sense of large-scale attendance by citizens – assemblies are open to all.
- The process begins in March with the first regional assemblies in each of the city's 16 regions reviewing the previous year's budget allocation.
- After the first regional assembly, neighbourhood assemblies draw up their lists of investment priorities (e.g. sanitation, paving, health care) which are formally presented at the second regional assembly.
- Also at the second regional assembly delegates are elected to the Regional Budget Forums (the number of delegates from each region is proportional to the number of citizens attending the first regional assemblies) and two councillors are voted onto the Municipal Budget Council from each region.
- A parallel process to the regional assemblies occurs for city-wide thematic issues that are not neighbourhood-specific, such as education, health and social services and transportation. Five thematic forums generate priorities and elect delegates and councillors.

Regional Budget Forums

- Each of the 16 regions has a Budget Forum where delegates work with the administration to coordinate the priority lists from the various neighbourhood assemblies into an overall list of investment priorities for the region as a whole.
- Decisions are usually based on needs-based criteria and direct negotiation between neighbourhood representatives.
- The Forums are also responsible for on-going negotiations and the monitoring of implementation by the various city agencies.

Municipal Budget Council

- The Municipal Budget Council is responsible for deciding the relative distribution of resources among the various regions of the city and the overall distribution of resources between the various city agencies.
- Decisions are guided by needs-based criteria and the priority lists generated by the regions.
- The MBC presents the budget to the Municipal Council assembly by the end of September.

PB has made the budgetary process much more transparent and led to a transfer of resources and investment to the poorest regions of the city.

Course Handbook

Introduction

This pamphlet has been written to sit alongside a programme of 5 x 2 hr sessions that explore the political institutions that govern England and examine how they ‘work’ for citizens. It provides an introduction to the political structures and institutions – European, national, devolved and local. It summarises the make-up of the institutions, their roles and responsibilities and how citizens can engage and hold them to account. This information is set in the context of some key questions about the way we do politics in Britain: Do our political institutions work for us? Do people feel that they have a say? Do we need to ‘fix’ our political system? Is constitutional reform enough to re-engage people with formal democracy? The pamphlet includes resource lists that point to further sources of information and debate.

1 What is politics?

Politics is about how the places we live are run.

“Politics is the science or art of government. Politics in its broadest sense is how people govern their society, institution or group. Specifically it means the ways in which people use power to make rules, take decisions, allocate resources and manage their own affairs.”

Learning Power, Titus Alexander. Scarman Trust

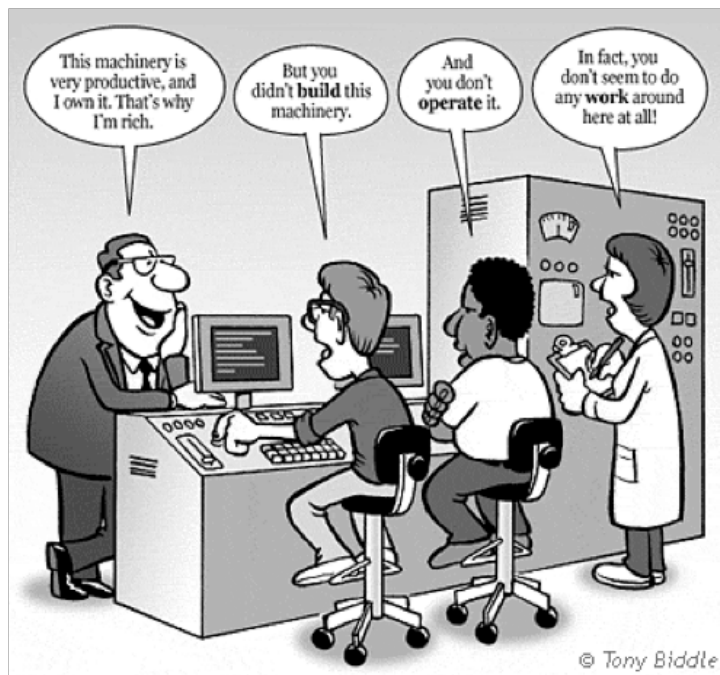
The **economy** is a central element of politics. It is not just a neutral, technical issue. It also encompasses social and political issues where different groups of people have different –and sometimes conflicting – interests.

“The economy is about work: organizing it, doing it, and dividing up its products. And at work, one way or another, we interact with other people.

The link between the economy and society goes two ways. The economy is a fundamentally social arena. But society as a whole depends strongly on the state of the economy. Politics, culture, religion, and international affairs are all deeply influenced by the progress of our economy. Governments are re-elected or turfed from office depending on the state of the economy. Family life is organized around the demands of work (both inside and outside the home). Being able to comfortably support oneself and one’s family is a central determinant of happiness.

So the economy is an important, perhaps even dominant, force.”

Economics for Everyone, Jim Stanford. Pluto Press



Democracy is the way we decide who will do the running. **Democratic institutions** are where your political representatives go to represent you. The UK parliament, your local council and the European Parliament are all democratic institutions.

Because we live in a democracy we have certain rights:

- Elections – where we can vote over who wins power and who loses it
- The right to have different political opinions from the government
- The right to join a political party
- The right to run a campaign on an issue
- The right to protest peacefully

There are still many places in the world where people do not have the right to decide who makes political decisions about their lives.

Why do you think it is important that the public decides who has political power?

What are other ways of governing or running a country – what are the advantages and disadvantages? Can you name any countries that are not democracies? ²

Democracy can be described as having two basic principles: ³

Popular control, meaning the right of people to have a controlling influence over public decisions and decision-makers; and Political equality, meaning

¹ Economics for Everyone, Jim Stanford. Pluto Press

² Democracy Cookbook: Doing politics with young people. The Electoral Commission.

³ Guide to Auditing Democracy Framework. Democratic Audit www.democraticaudit.com

that people should be treated with equal respect and as of equal worth in the context of such decisions.

These two principles are not fully realised anywhere. But to the extent that they are, we can call a system of public decision-making democratic. Democracy is not an all-or-nothing state of affairs, but a matter of the degree to which the two principles are realised in practice. A country's performance will vary over different areas of inquiry, and it may make progress or regress over a period of time.

In the context of the modern state, however, our two basic principles - popular control and political equality - require a distinctive set of institutional arrangements and conditions in wider society:

- 1 A guaranteed framework of equal citizen rights (including the rule of law, access to justice and economic and social rights as well as civil and political rights)
- 2 Institutions of representative and accountable government
- 3 A civil or democratic society (including free and pluralistic media and civic organisations, consultative processes and other forums to ensure popular participation in government and responsive government).

2 Who decides?

UK government

The system of government in the United Kingdom is known as a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch.

The United Kingdom is a **constitutional monarchy**. A monarch is a hereditary ruler; a constitutional monarchy is a state headed by a monarch who rules according to the constitution. There are two basic principles to the British Constitution: The Rule of Law and the Supremacy of Parliament

The British Constitution

A constitution is a set of laws on how a country is governed; it is a set of rules that regulate the powers of government and the rights and duties of citizens. In all but a handful of democracies in the world, the nation's constitution can be found in a single document. The exceptions are Israel, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. As a result, people sometimes say that we in Britain do not have a constitution. What we do have is a number of written documents or statutes such as Magna Carta (nearly 800 years old; served to limit the power of the King of England), the Bill of Rights, the Act of Settlement and the Parliament Acts where much of the constitution can be found.

Key concept: Britain is governed according to the constitution

Supporters of the constitution believe that the current way allows for flexibility and change to occur without too many problems. Those who want a written constitution believe that it should be codified so that the public as a whole has access to it – as opposed to just constitutional experts who know where to look and how to interpret it.

This contrasts with the notion of judicial review, where, if the legislature passes a law that infringes on any of the basic rights that people enjoy under a written constitution, it is possible for the courts to overturn it.

This also makes British citizenship a difficult concept to define as there is not a formal written constitution or Bill of Rights to which to refer.

Do we have a constitution in Britain? Is British government undemocratic and illegitimate because our constitution can't be found in a single document?

Further reading:

The Unspoken Constitution

www.democraticaudit.eu/download/Unspoken_constitution.pdf

Rights and freedoms

Rights and freedoms are the foundation of democracy. They are crucial for defining and limiting the role of the state. We cannot imagine a genuine democracy without the right to freedom of speech or freedom to protest; rights which allow the Government to be challenged and held to account.

Some people like to think of these freedoms as 'civil liberties'; some like to think of them as 'human rights' – either way they are fundamental to our dignity and to the health of democratic society.⁴

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – established a statutory right of access to official information (with 37 exemptions).

A Bill of Rights and the Human Rights Act: The Human Rights Act (HRA) was campaigned for long and hard and is seen as a vital step in protecting rights and freedoms in the UK. It incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into British law. The HRA offers a minimum standard of protection across the UK. Reformers⁵ argue that human rights are best defended by entrenching them in a Bill of Rights which strengthens individual freedom as part of a written constitution which serves to limit the power of the state. The Coalition government has agreed to set up a commission to review the HRA and investigate the possibility of creating a Bill of Rights.

⁴ Power 2010 deliberative poll document.

⁵ Unlock democracy (formerly Charter 88)

The Monarch

In theory, political authority rests with the Queen. However, almost all of the Queen's constitutional powers are exercised on the 'advice' of her government. The advice she receives cannot be ignored: in practice, it is the Queen's ministers who make almost all the decisions.

The Queen is Supreme Governor of the Church of England and Head of the Commonwealth. The Sovereign has important powers, and may still be called upon to exercise them. Under the British constitution, the monarch:

- decides when to dissolve parliament
- decides who should be appointed Prime Minister

The Government

The government is made up of Ministers of the Crown who are selected by the Prime Minister. They are responsible to parliament for actions carried out in the Crown's name.

The **UK government** is formed by the party with the most MPs in parliament. The government makes recommendations for new laws that should be introduced or issues that should be looked at, and carries out the decisions made by Parliament.

The government can't make laws – Parliament does this. The government can propose new laws in the form of bills that it presents to Parliament for consideration. In practice, because the Government is formed from the largest party, the laws that it suggests are usually agreed by Parliament. However, the government does make many decisions that affect us, through government policy. Policy isn't law. Policy sets out what government departments want to do about particular issues.

Who is in the government? Prime Minister, The Cabinet, Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Civil Service, The Opposition.

Parliament:

The UK Parliament is the supreme law-making or 'legislative' body of the United Kingdom. Parliament consists of an 'Upper House', the House of Lords, and a 'Lower House', the House of Commons.

In theory, the supreme power is said to lie with the Sovereign (or the 'Queen-in-Parliament'). In practice, real power is vested in the House of Commons, as the Sovereign generally acts on the advice of the Prime Minister, and the powers of the House of Lords have been limited.

The House of Commons

The House of Commons is a democratically elected chamber. Elections to the House are held at least every 5 years. There are 646 MPs in total in the Commons, which will increase to 650 at the next election. Each MP represents the residents of a constituency in the UK with an average population size of roughly 68,000. They are paid a basic salary of £64,766, with higher salaries for those who become ministers.

The majority of an MP's duties involve working on behalf of constituents, examining and debating legislation. Many MPs serve on select committees, where detailed scrutiny of Government policy is carried out. The House typically sits from Monday to Thursday in term time, with Fridays usually reserved for constituency business.

The role of the Commons is to debate policy, revising and scrutinising legislation introduced by the Government. The Prime Minister is drawn from the House of Commons and Government ministers are drawn from the Commons and occasionally the Lords. All bills must go through both Houses before they become 'acts' (laws).

The **Queen's Speech** is delivered at the State opening of parliament. It outlines the overall programme of government for the coming year.

To find out more about MPs:

www.theyworkforyou.com

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

You can watch debates in parliament by going to:
www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Home.aspx

The House of Lords

The House of Lords is primarily selected rather than elected. Of the 706 members in the House of Lords, 588 are life peers (nominated and appointed by the Crown under the advice of the Prime Minister), 92 are hereditary peers and 26 are bishops.

The House of Lords is subordinate to the House of Commons. Its role is to scrutinise, revise and, if necessary, delay laws proposed by MPs in the Commons. Under normal circumstances the agreement of the House of Lords is needed for all laws, but in exceptional circumstances the Commons can use the Parliament Acts to pass legislation without the Lords' agreement, subject to certain delays.

The Judiciary

There are three separate judicial systems in the UK – England and Wales, Scotland, and that of Northern Ireland. The final court of appeal in all cases, except in Scotland, is the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom which was established under the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005. For Scottish criminal cases, the final court of appeal is the High Court of Justiciary.

Government in the UK suffers from being unrepresentative, over-powerful, centralized and largely unchecked. It may be strong but it is not effective.

Agree?

Disagree?

Devolved Government – ‘the quiet revolution’

In a large modern state like the UK, political power is exercised at a number of different levels. The UK Parliament in Westminster is the supreme law-making power and the central institution of the state. One of the biggest changes in the past 13 years has been the advent of devolved government in the UK. Since 1998, power has been devolved from the UK Parliament to the Scottish Parliament and to the Northern Irish and Welsh Assemblies. These bodies have powers over education, health and other areas whilst all foreign policy matters and some domestic matters, including the economy and taxation, remain with the UK Parliament. England does not have its own national parliament and is governed from the UK Parliament. Local Government meanwhile is made up of a complex and uneven pattern of local authorities, unelected regional assemblies and Regional Development Agencies.

Devolved spending 2008: ⁷		
Population		
Scotland	£33 bn	5.2 m
Northern Ireland	£16.3.bn	1.8 m
Wales	£15 bn	2.9 m

Examples of different policy directions and entitlements emerging include:

- No university tuition fees in Scotland
- Free personal care for the elderly in Scotland
- Free prescriptions in Wales

Scotland

The Scottish Parliament has law-making powers over areas including education, health, agriculture and justice. All foreign policy matters and some domestic matters, including the economy and taxation, remain with the UK parliament in Westminster.

The referendum was held in September 1979. Turnout: 60.4%. 74.3% YES to Scottish Parliament. 63.5% YES to tax-varying powers.

129 members – 73 elected from single member constituencies based on the Westminster parliamentary map and 56 chosen from lists presented by registered political parties in 8 regions.

Wales

The Welsh Assembly does not have equivalent law-making powers but does have the right to law-making powers in some areas if it receives the permission of the Secretary of State for Wales and the UK Parliament. It also has the power to vary laws passed by Westminster using secondary legislation.

Referendum held in September 1998. Turnout: 50.1%. 50.3% YES to Assembly for Wales.

⁷ Guardian fact file: UK politics 30.04.10

40 members elected by majority voting in parliamentary constituencies. 20 chosen from party lists presented in 5 regions that correspond to European elections.

Northern Ireland

The situation in Northern Ireland is unique: devolved arrangements are based on an international treaty between Great Britain and Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement 1998, which helped bring an end to decades of troubles. The Northern Ireland Assembly has authority to legislate in areas known as ‘transferred matters’, such as education, health and agriculture. Powers retained by Westminster are divided into ‘excepted matters’ which it retains indefinitely (such as immigration and international relations), and ‘reserved matters’ (such as policing and criminal law), which may be transferred to the Northern Ireland Assembly at a future date.

Key issue: The West Lothian question

Is it right that MPs elected in Scotland, Wales and N Ireland should vote on all affairs affecting England when English MPs do not have a vote on matters decided in the devolved institutions? Do we need an English parliament to vote on English affairs?

Further detail on the UK political system can be found at:

www.direct.gov.uk/

Wikipedia: Politics and government of the United Kingdom

www.parliament.uk

www.number-10.gov.uk

Regional

The regional structures that have been in place are now under scrutiny by the Coalition government and have been targeted for radical reform. The first stage of this has been the abolition of the **Regional Development Agencies**.

Government Regional Offices: ‘Whitehall in the region’ staffed by civil servants acting as regional representatives of 10 government departments. These are also currently under review.

Local government

The structure and functions of Local Government in England, Scotland and Wales have developed over centuries and changes are still being implemented.

There are 2 distinct structures in England: unitary; county and district. Sometimes a third tier at Parish or Town Council level. Councils provide 3 types of services:

- Statutory
- Regulatory
- Discretionary

Councillors are bound by ministerial directives and regulations and many decisions they take require the approval of a government minister or civil servant. Many of the services are inspected by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates. Some of their decisions may be subject to appeal to a minister or government department. Local government power is embodied in statutes and regulations and so its decisions can be challenged in the courts.

Sustainable Communities Act gives local councils, working with the communities they serve, a right to demand greater powers from central government.

There has been a shift in the balance of power between central and local government over the last 5 years. The Coalition government are pursuing a policy of localism to reduce central, and increase local, powers.

“We want to make sure people can take control and take responsibility in their street, their estate, their town. Solving problems and taking action for themselves. With neighbourhoods, people working together, as the basis for the big society.....

.... Local government will no longer be the poodle of central government. And together, we are going to be part of the most radical shake up of power there has been for generations.”

Eric Pickles MP. Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
11.6.10

Further information on local government can be found at:
‘How Your Council Works’ www.urbanforum.org.uk
www.lga.gov.uk
www.idea.gov.uk

Europe

The European Union is an organisation of 27 member states committed to economic and political co-operation. It was established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 upon the foundations of the European Economic Community, which was itself set up by six European states following World War Two to help economic recovery and promote peace.

In the future the EU is likely to continue to expand, primarily on the fringes of Eastern and Central Europe, as a number of countries have expressed an interest in joining.

The EU has a single market enforced through a standard system of laws which apply in all member states, ensuring the free movement of goods, services, people and capital. It maintains common policies on trade, fisheries, and regional development and has a limited role in foreign policy and in

justice and home affairs. Sixteen member states have adopted a single currency, the Euro. This zone of 16 is known as the Eurozone.

In certain areas, decisions are made through negotiations between member states, while in others independent EU institutions have responsibility.

There are five principal institutions in the EU:

The European Commission is responsible for proposing legislation, enforcing law, implementing decisions, and the day to day running of the EU. It comprises 27 commissioners selected by member states. It is appointed once every five years and is politically answerable to the European Parliament.

The Council of the European Union is the principal decision-making body of the EU. It comprises two levels:

- The European Council, which is made up of the heads of state or Government of the member states, meets every six months to set out the policy direction of the EU.
- The Council of Ministers, which is composed of national ministers from member states with a rotating six month presidency - it may initiate new EU law in the specific policy areas member states have delegated to it.
- The European Parliament is directly elected by European citizens every five years. It has legislative and veto authority in some specific areas. Its powers have been gradually expanding since it was established in 1979.
- The European Court of Justice acts to ensure all EU law is applied consistently in each member state. It is composed of one judge from each member state.
- The European Central Bank has responsibility for the monetary policy of the Eurozone.

Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973. In 1975 a nationwide referendum was held in which a majority voted for the UK to remain a member. Since that time several EU treaties have expanded the power of EU institutions and brought closer integration between member states, most recently the Treaty of Lisbon which came into force December 2000.

Further information on Europe can be found at:
<http://europa.eu>
www.direct.gov.uk/
www.europarl.europa.eu/

Who rules?

When asked who should have a great deal/fair amount of influence over government policies, responses to a poll show the gap that people see between who should have influence and who actually does.⁸

	Should	Do
Ordinary voters	78%	17%
The media	28%	65%
Large companies	27%	67%
Parliament	80%	80%
Trade unions	41%	57%

The markets: Events in 2009 challenged the long standing assumption that ‘the markets know best’. However in the 5 days leading up to the creation of the Coalition government in May 2010, one of the main questions in every news bulletin was: ‘How are the markets responding to this uncertainty?’

Business interests work very closely with political decision makers. Public resources are increasingly being distributed through private companies and public services opened up to competition and private investment. This reduces the democratic opportunities to control and direct public resources. It interrupts the transparent flow of decision making from public need to public power.⁹

“In practice it is impossible for the modern state to maintain an independent control over the decision of big business. When the state extends its control over big business, big business moves in to control the state. The political decisions of the state become so important a part of the business transactions of the corporations that it is a law of their survival that most decisions should suit the needs of profit-making.”

Nye Bevan, Labour Party Conference, 1944

⁸ The State of British Democracy. Democratic Audit Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2006

⁹ Reclaim the State: Hilary Wainwright. Seagull 2010

The media: The power to shape meaning has diffused over centuries from the church and the state to the mass media. The most recent shift has occurred within electronic media wherein communication is slowly evolving from messages being sent vertically from the few to the many to people communicating horizontally with each other. The idea of many to many communication is what makes the internet an essentially power spreading rather than power hoarding mechanism. That said, nearly all media content is still produced by vertically integrated media conglomerates such as those owned by Rupert Murdoch. Moreover such conglomerates not only control content but have significant stakes in the internet service providers and social networking sites that act as gatekeepers in the new world of horizontal, many to many communications. Thus for all its democratising promise, the internet is itself enmeshed in hierarchies of ownership, control and exclusion.¹⁰

Multi-lateral bodies

There are a number of international bodies that exert power and influence over democratic institutions and take decisions at a global level that can over-ride national decision-making bodies and are far removed from the ability of individual citizens to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

Three key international institutions are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The World Bank's stated mission is to aid developing countries and their inhabitants to achieve development and the reduction of poverty, by helping countries develop an environment for investment, jobs and sustainable growth, thus promoting economic growth through investment and enabling the poor to share the fruits of economic growth. The World Bank is based in Washington DC, USA, and by custom headed by an American.

Critics of the World Bank argue that the so-called free market reform policies which the Bank advocates are often harmful to economic development if implemented badly, too quickly ("shock therapy"), in the wrong sequence or in weak, uncompetitive economies.¹¹

The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** is the intergovernmental organization that oversees the global financial system by following the macroeconomic policies of its member countries, in particular those with an impact on exchange rate and the balance of payments. It is an organization formed with a stated objective of stabilizing international exchange rates and facilitating development through the enforcement of liberalising economic policies on other countries as a condition for loans, restructuring or aid. It also offers highly leveraged loans, mainly to poorer countries. Its headquarters are in Washington, D.C., United States.¹²

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have introduced 'structural adjustment programmes'. These 'reforms' have included opening up markets and investment opportunities to US and European corporations, privatising state assets, lifting protective legislation etc as conditions for development loans. Recent policy documents talk of 'community participation' but have not yielded real power or authority to change economic decisions.¹³

¹⁰ Demos: Defining power and powerlessness

¹¹ wikipedia

¹² wikipedia

¹³ Reclaim the State: Hilary Wainwright

The **World Trade Organisation** was established in 1995. It includes 153 countries and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. The WTO has been used to push an expansive array of policies on trade, investment and deregulation that exacerbate the inequality between the North and the South, and among the rich and poor within countries. The WTO enforces some twenty different trade agreements, including the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Critics of the WTO argue that it is inherently undemocratic. Its trade tribunals, working behind closed doors, have ruled against national health and safety, labour, human rights and environmental laws, which have been directly challenged as trade barriers by governments acting on behalf of their corporate clients. National policies and laws found to violate WTO rules must be eliminated or changed or else the violating country faces perpetual trade sanctions that can be in the millions of dollars. Since the WTO's inception in 1995, the vast majority of rulings in trade disputes between member nations have favoured powerful industrialized countries.

Further information:

World Development Movement – anti-poverty campaigning organisation
www.wdm.org.uk/

Our world is not for sale – campaigning against corporate globalisation
www.ourworldisnotforsale

The Age of Consent: manifesto for a new world order. George Monbiot;
Flamingo 2003

Power

The term 'power' can have a number of different meanings. Analysing power can help to explore the underlying dynamics of a situation. A clearer understanding of power relations can strengthen our ability to influence and to bring about change.

Power is complex and operates across a number of dimensions and levels. A starting point for analysing power is to explore the different sources of power, both negative and positive, that you can access or of which you can be part:

Power over: has many negative connotations such as force, coercion and discrimination. Having power means taking it from someone else, and then using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it.

Power with: has to do with finding common ground among different interests and building collective strength. It is based on mutual support, collaboration and solidarity across individual talents and knowledge. It can help build bridges across different interests to promote more equal relations.

Power within: has to do with a person's sense of self-worth and self knowledge: It includes the ability to recognise individual differences while respecting others.

Into the Lion's Den: a practical guide to including women in regeneration.
Oxfam UK Poverty Programme

The Demos publication: 'The Power Gap' talks about democratising ideas of power by looking at the distribution of people's capacities to be the authors of their own lives. They argue that to reframe the debate about power - and what constitutes power failure - it is necessary to turn the telescope away from elites to map people's power in their everyday lives. They suggest that there are 3 key elements in human power:

- the power to shape one's own life
- the power to be resilient in the face of shocks and the arbitrary power of others
- the power to shape the social world

Using a set of indicators they have developed a Power Map. This depicts the differences in levels of personal power by parliamentary constituency in England, Wales and Scotland. The map provides an overview of the power held by individual citizens. This understanding of power takes in both the power that one has to decide how one's own life will go, as well as power to have a voice in shaping the wider social world. The key concern is people's power to be in control of their own lives.

Power and Empowerment. See page 6 'Resources'

Find the power rating for the constituency where you live:

www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/dec/17/demos-power-map-constituency

The handout: 'Power and Empowerment' provides a useful summary of a number of frameworks that can be used to analyse power.

3 Are British politics broken?

The public has been switching off from formal politics in this country for some time. Polls consistently show a majority dissatisfied with the way democracy works in the UK and in favour of change. The expenses scandal which engulfed Westminster in the spring of 2009 simply strengthened this

feeling. The public anger at MPs was always about more than simply duck houses, moats, dry rot, and bell towers: it is symptomatic of a much deeper disconnect between the public and politicians that has been building for years.

Voter turnout at the last two General Elections in 2001 and 2005 was at a historic low of around 60%. Turnout for non-Westminster elections is low and falling. Political party membership is also falling. These trends indicate that the public has lost confidence in representative processes.

When examining people's perceptions of local democracy a poll conducted for CLG (2008) showed that:

- 60% of people do not feel that they are given adequate say in how local council services are run
- More than 90% believe that councils could be more accountable
- Nearly 40% people do not feel that councillors are representative of their communities

- 60% of people do not believe that councillors adequately reflect their views
- Only 30% of people feel that they can influence decisions in their local area.¹⁴

General election turnout: early 1950's = 80%. 2001 = 59% ,2005 = 60%.
 Membership of the three main UK parties in 2001 was less than 25% of its 1964 level.¹⁵

There has been much public discussion and concern over the fall in turnout at the polls – both national and local – termed the democratic deficit. Many people see a link between this lack of engagement with the current system and major parties and the growth of support for the far right .

The Power Inquiry points out that there is a belief that Members of Parliament have little say with decisions being made by a handful of people at the centre and then driven through the system:

*Politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the hands of privileged elites as if democracy has run out of steam.*¹⁶

The Power Inquiry, which carried out the largest ever investigation into people's attitudes to British democracy several years ago, concluded that this disengagement doesn't arise from apathy or satisfaction with the status quo. Instead, disengagement arises from feelings of powerlessness and a sense that the political system is too remote and unresponsive to people's needs and interests. If this is to change then power needs to be taken from the few who wield it in the centre and put it in the hands of ordinary people. This means making Government more accountable to Parliament, and Parliament more accountable to the people. It means ensuring politics is open, transparent and free from sleaze or corruption.

There have been long running campaigns in the UK to secure Freedom of Information, a Bill of Rights, a written Constitution and to reform the parliamentary voting system to name just a few. In addition to reforms to the electoral system, there are also calls for reforms to the political institutions, party politics, and for increased opportunities for democratic conversation.

The electoral system

The recent General Election, held in May 2010, has delivered a hung parliament. Alongside the pressing economic issues facing the country, this has brought constitutional and electoral reform to the top of the political agenda. The 'election that nobody won' is being interpreted as a message from the voters that there is no one political party that commands majority support in the country; this requires an alternative to the two party 'adversarial' political system that has dominated British politics for so many years. It has also illustrated the 'unfair' nature of the current voting system:

¹⁴ Leading lights: research into the role of councillors and third sector representatives in community leadership Urban Forum 2009. www.urbanforum.org.uk

¹⁵ Making good society. Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society. www.futuresforcivilsociety.org

¹⁶ Power to the People: an independent inquiry into Britain's Democracy. The POWER Inquiry 2006 www.powerinquiry.org

Britain is now politically fragmented: Guardian Election Guide 8.5.10

It took 284,566 votes to elect one Green MP; 119,000 for each Lib Dem MP; 34,000 to elect each Labour MP and 33,000 to elect each Tory MP.

According to a report by the New Economics Foundation: Spoiled Ballot¹⁷ democratic power in Britain is more unevenly distributed than income: the most powerful electors in Britain have 50 times more power in an election than the least powerful. By contrast, the richest 20% of the UK population have 14 times more income than the poorest 20%. The value of the 'one person one vote' system depends on each vote having the same power to influence the result of an election. However the parliamentary electoral system doesn't deliver this – the more marginal the constituency and the smaller the size of the electorate in it, the greater the democratic power of each voter – essentially a postcode lottery of how much democratic power electors actually wield. There is a relationship between low turn out and low democratic power.

In many constituencies where there is a candidate with an inbuilt majority, the general election result is already determined:

- In the 2005 election, more than half of all voters **voted against their winning MP.**
- In the UK, the only voters with any real power to choose the government are those who live in **marginal constituencies.**
- **Less than 20%** of constituencies can be considered marginal.
- The rest of us have little or **no power to influence the outcome of the election.**

In fact, statistical analysis by the new economics foundation (nef) shows that one person in the UK does not have one vote...

- ...it's more like **0.25** votes.
- In some ultra safe constituencies the value of your vote falls to **practically zero.**¹⁸

If you want to check how much power you have in the electoral system go to:
<http://www.voterpower.org.uk/>

Some other concerns about our democratic system include:

- Emergence of far right – exploiting the vacuum and people's sense of disconnection
- Political parties and institutions are subservient to the power of the market and multi-national/global economy
- Having a say doesn't make any difference – outcomes are pre-ordained; can't get things on the political agenda
- Centralisation of power in political parties
- Centralisation of power in government

¹⁷ www.neweconomics.org/publications/spoiled-ballot

¹⁸ www.voterpower.org.uk

What has changed?

The world has changed and people have changed but the political system hasn't. The nation state is no longer the independent autonomous political unit it once was. It is embedded in an interdependent web of global governance structure. Power has shifted outwards to international markets and global institutions.¹⁹

According to Power, there are 2 major disjunctions between the system and citizens:

- the British parliamentary system of elected representation and considerable executive power was built in a time of limited education provision and in which deference and rigid hierarchy and static social relations were taken for granted.
- the British party system is based on the dominance of two parties construed around the pursuit of interest and ideological leaning of the two dominant classes that existed during the industrial era.

We have a political system that cannot respond to the diverse and complex values and interests of the individuals who make up our post-industrial society. Parties have adapted by changing policies in order to try and win elections; this bypasses debate and democratic channels of engagement in favour of driving a strategy through. People still volunteer and raise funds for charity. They undertake civic roles such as School Governors and take part in protests and campaigns. People still participate - what they don't do is join a political party or get involved in formal politics; they see less and less point in voting.

4 What's the big idea?

"We have a coherent programme to fix our broken politics and drag our democracy into the post-bureaucratic age. It involves a massive, sweeping, radical redistribution of power — from the political elite to the man and woman in the street."

Prime Minister David Cameron

The Queen's Speech May 2010 included a number of proposals for political and constitutional reform:

- Fixed term – 5 year parliaments
- The right of constituents to recall their MP
- A partly or wholly elected House of Lords
- A referendum on the Alternative Vote System for electing MPs
- 55% majority needed for dissolution of parliament between scheduled elections
- Re drawing constituency boundaries and reducing the number of MPs by about 50

¹⁹ Making good society

“So, the repeal of illiberal laws, the reform of politics, and the redistribution of power. Our very own Great Reform Act. Not everyone will like it. Not every MP, not the vested interests that want government to stay closed, opaque, easily captured. But this new government, this new kind of government, creates an enormous opportunity for those of us who have spent our lives fighting for political reform.

This is a moment to step back and look at every bit of damage that has been done to our democracy, before we launch into the most radical programme of reform, empowerment, enfranchisement in over a century.”

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg

The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg has announced that there will be referendum on changing the voting system from ‘first past the post’ to a system known as the Alternative Vote. There is a growing body of opinion that agrees that the current voting system is unfair and supports voting reform as the key to ‘fixing’ British politics. One of the leading campaigning organizations is the Electoral Reform Society. The ERS recommends a change to the Single Transferable Vote for public elections. There are a number of other voting systems – some of which are already used in elections for the devolved institutions and for the European Parliament.

For information on different voting systems:
 Electoral Reform Society
www.electoral-reform.org.uk

Referendum

A referendum is a vote on a question about a particular issue or policy. It means that the public can have a direct decision on a question rather than letting their elected representatives decide on their behalf. The way that the question is posed in a referendum can determine the answer you are likely to get. The Electoral Reform Society will publish a judgement on whether the question is clear, simple and neutral before parliament finalises it.

Think of a question you are asked in daily life. What are the different ways in which it could be asked? How does this affect the answer? ¹⁸

Alternative vote system

Under Alternative Vote (AV), voters would be asked to rank candidates by order of preference (1, 2, 3, etc) rather than placing a cross (X) next to a single candidate’s name. If no candidate secures a majority of first preference votes, then second, third and even fourth preferences are taken into account until such point as one candidate has secured support from at least 50 per cent of those casting ballots.

Currently parties tend to invest much more energy and resources in seats considered ‘marginal’, where a relatively small change in the numbers voting for each party would change who wins the seat – those seats that are very tightly poised between parties. Those supporting a party not deemed in the race would via AV still be able to impact upon the outcome.

Arguments in favour

- Everyone elected to Parliament would have some kind of support from at least half of those who voted in their constituency.
- Candidates would be encouraged to broaden their appeal in order to achieve higher preferences from those who might not rank them first.
- The system would be relatively easy to understand, particularly because existing constituency boundaries would be kept the same.

Issues / arguments against

- The system can be even more unequal in the relationship between votes cast in a General Election and seats gained by parties than under the existing First-Past-the-Post System.
- The ‘majority’ that many candidates won would be based partly on voters who did not want them as their first choice.
- Campaigning could become more complex and confusing to voters, since candidates would be aiming not only to win outright support, but to gain second preferences as well.

5 Beyond the ballot

“Democratising the state means people becoming the subjects of policy rather than the object of policy. It is not only a better way to make decisions about how to meet the needs of people, but it is about inclusion, respect and a new political culture – it is a project for the democratization of everyday life.”

Olivio Dutre, former mayor of Porto Alegre, Brazil where participatory budgeting was introduced.

Since these words were spoken in 1989, the concepts of participatory democracy and citizen empowerment have become widely promoted, from the World Bank to local government partnership working. But will this deliver real democratic control over the big decisions shaping people’s lives?

New institutional forms of democracy are promoted, but are absorbed and reshaped by the contexts of power in which they sit. ‘To talk about participation’, one participant said, ‘you have to talk about power. Participation isn’t powerful enough in itself’ to bring about desired change.²¹

²¹ www.powercube.net/an-introduction-to-power-analysis/why-power-why-now/

The need to modernise democracy is widely recognised. In Britain, this has taken three forms: structural changes like reform of the House of Lords or devolution in Wales and Scotland; renewed attention to citizenship, for example in the school curriculum; and ‘technical fixes’ to improve voting rates. These include e-voting and making postal votes available on demand. Much less attention has been paid to helping people become fuller

citizens through discussing and influencing issues that they care about. We need more than constitutional change to re-engage people in politics – it’s about giving people real influence over the bread and butter issues which affect their lives.²²

Innovations

Examples of innovations in the relationship between the citizen and the state include:

Electoral innovations – aim to increase electoral turnout. Examples include postal ballots, electronic voting, positive abstention, compulsory voting, reducing voting age, universal citizenship.

Consultative innovations – aim to inform decision-makers of citizens’ views. Examples include public meetings, focus groups, planning for real, community visioning, standing forums, standing citizens’ panels.

Deliberative innovations – aim to bring citizens together to deliberate on policy issues, the outcomes of which may influence decision-makers.

Examples include citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polling, America Speaks, national issues forums, study circles, deliberation days.

Co-governance innovations – aim to give citizens significant influence during the process of decision-making.

Examples include Chicago community policing, youth councils, participatory appraisal, participatory budgeting, Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia.

Direct democracy innovations – aim to give citizens final decision-making power on key issues.

Examples include New England town meetings, referendum, initiative, recall, citizens’ assemblies selected by sortition.²³

E-democracy innovations – aim to use ICT to engage citizens in the decision-making process.

Examples include e-voting, e-consultation, e-representatives, online deliberative polling, e-petitions, e-referendum, Minnesota E-Democracy, BBCiCan, HeadsUp.²⁴

Exploring the case studies provides an opportunity to assess the extent to which different innovations have widened and deepened participation.

²² Power to the People: The report of Power: An Independent Inquiry into Britain’s Democracy. www.powerinquiry.org

²³ random selection to choose a citizens’ assembly. Thus it is possible to create a face-to-face assembly with legislative power over a large geographical area.

²⁴ Beyond the Ballot. Research produced for the Power Enquiry by Graham Smith

Developing meaningful participation can present a number of challenges:

- Worthwhile participation delivers outcomes that can't be predetermined – democracy becomes a little more 'dangerous'
- People must learn to form judgements and to think of the interests of others by participating in making real decisions
- Participatory approaches require commitment over time
- Conflicting views and value systems encounter each other and there needs to be a way for people to change their opinions through such encounters.²⁵

Civil society

There are also numerous ways in which people come together and work for change outside the structures of the state. Civil Society is where people come together to pursue their shared interests and to campaign for change. Democracy in the UK was created in large part by pressure from civil society. Power was not willingly shared by those who held it, but prised from them by campaigners for reform, such as the chartists and the suffragettes and, more recently in the UK by institutions such as the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the All Wales Convention.²⁶

Community Organising – the citizen perspective²⁷

Growing participatory and deliberative democracy

London Citizens is a broad-based organization comprised of faith groups, trade unions, schools, universities and community groups. It seeks to organise communities that are diverse in terms of ethnicity, faith and class in order to effect social change. Recent initiatives have focused on a 'living wage' for London workers and on the idea of granting an amnesty for undocumented workers in the UK – the 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign.

Dialogue and deliberation are facilitated by full-time organisers, who continuously hold both one-to-one meetings with affiliates and/or potential affiliates, and local caucuses that feed into the larger assemblies of the whole organisation. This process is illustrated by the Lunar House

Inquiry, set up by South London Citizens in 2004. Lunar House is the Home Office building processing asylum and immigration applications. In one local meeting in Croydon, South London, a priest told a story concerning a parishioner's treatment at Lunar House. At the same meeting, there was a person who worked at Lunar House who tried to explain the difficulties the staff faced on a day-to-day level. The full-time organisers then took these testimonies from caucus to caucus and found that many affiliates had individuals who had experienced similar poor service provision. At the first South London Citizens' Assembly, the organisation agreed to set up an Inquiry into service provision at Lunar House. Crucially, the input of staff, users (migrants) and civil society associations working in the field meant that the Inquiry report findings were able to integrate the multiple perspectives and make recommendations for change.

In this case, what started as a local dialogue broadened into a deliberative process that engaged different groups on a common issue and was followed up by appropriate action.

www.londoncitizens.org.uk

²⁵ Participation and Democracy in the 21st Century City. Ed J. Pearce. Palgrave 2010

²⁶ Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society. www.futuresforcivilsociety.org

²⁷ Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society. www.futuresforcivilsociety.org

Civil society can encompass anything from community centres to collaboration through the web. It includes campaigning, trade unions, responses to natural disasters. In 2006 – 2007 the UK had 870,000 formal civil society associations with assets of £210 billion. This is as well as the thousands of informal community groups and initiatives generated through the internet. Civil society has grown as an expression of the values of co-operation, solidarity, mutual commitment and freedom. It has complemented and influenced the formal institutions of democracy.

A recent Commission of Inquiry into the future of civil society²⁸ argues that civil society has the potential to play a central role in responding to the triple crises of our time: those of political trust, economics and the environment. Civil society can ‘rescue’ the legitimacy of political parties and parliaments by engaging people in deliberation, argument and decision-making.

It has a key role to play in helping to develop public participation, deliberation and the spaces in which it can take place. It is independent from government and has the ability to reach diverse constituencies. It has been the source of a number of new models of participation. Civil society activity can provide people with opportunities to debate and to reconcile differences peacefully; it can support the development of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and norms necessary to make deliberation effective.

“It is in civil society that the great strength of democracy in Britain lies.”²⁹

Becoming involved in change:

Democratic reform:

www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk

www.takebackparliament.com

Campaigning is OK

<http://static.novas.org/files/campaigningisok-456.pdf>

Louder – e-campaigning web site

www.louder.org.uk/

²⁸ Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society. www.futuresforcivilsociety.org

²⁹ Democratic Audit: The State of British Democracy

Activity Sheet Sources:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 Political bingo | Democracy Cookbook: The Electoral Commission
www.dopolitics.org.uk |
| 2 Democracy Tree | Democracy Cookbook |
| 3 Democracy Learning Log | Adapted from Democracy Cookbook |
| 4 Blankety Blank Quiz | Adapted from Democracy Cookbook |
| 5 Power and Influence | Making Community Participation Meaningful:
Burns, Heywood, Taylor, Wilde and Wilson.
Joseph Rowntree Foundation |
| 6 Wheel of democracy | (Credited on resource sheet)
Adapted from Democratic Findings No 7
Democratic Audit
www.democraticaudit.com/download/Findings7.pdf |
| 8 Ballot paper | Power2010 |
| 9 Alternative Voting System | Adapted from Electoral Reform Society |
| 10 Case studies a,b,c | Beyond the Ballot: Power Inquiry |