

# Living In A Democracy

## Content and concepts

In this part of the syllabus you should know -

- How candidates are chosen for election
- Ways in which people can take part in politics in the UK
- How elections work in Scotland and the UK
- How representatives work for their constituents at Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, and on Local Councils
- Trade Unions in the UK
- Pressure Groups in the UK

Knowledge and Understanding questions for this Syllabus Area will be based on three different **concepts** -

- Participation
- Representation
- Rights and Responsibilities

Remember - Questions about Politics in Scotland could be based on the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, the Westminster Parliament in London, or local councils in Scotland.

## **Politics in Scotland**

This page will help you revise how elections work in Scotland and the UK and how Members of the Scottish Parliament represent their constituents.

### **Voting system - Scottish parliament**

The voting system for the Scottish Parliament is the Additional Member System. This combines a form of Proportional Representation (PR) with First Past the Post (FPTP). The Additional Member System attempts to benefit from the advantages of the two systems while avoiding their problems. 56 MSPs are elected through PR by regional lists, while more, 73 MSPs, are elected by FPTP.

The First Past The Post system is the system used to elect MPs to the House of Commons in Westminster.

### **Advantages of the Additional Member System**

- Makes the Parliament more proportional – the MSPs accurately reflect the views of the Scottish people
- Maintains the link between constituent and constituency MSP
- Reduces confrontation in politics – consensus politics
- MSPs from smaller parties are more likely to be elected

### **Disadvantages of the Additional Member System**

- Creates two types of MSP – constituency and regional list
- Political parties dominate the lists
- May not produce a clear winner, leading to coalition or minority government.
- More complicated to understand, and may lead to more tactical voting.

### **Advantages of First Past the Post**

- Easy for voters to understand
- Result known quickly
- Voter votes directly for the party/candidate of his or her choice
- Clear link - elects constituency MPs who represent a certain area and all its people
- Usually produces a strong majority government
- Avoids coalitions which some people think are likely to be weak governments
- Tried and tested system which voters are used to

### **Disadvantages of First Past the Post**

- System favours the big parties like Labour and Conservative
- Many votes are wasted - a vote counts for nothing if a person does not vote for the "winner" in their constituency
- Number of seats in parliament do not accurately reflect the views of the voters
- Minority governments can be elected (eg. 1974)
- A party can come second in many constituencies and gather many votes but have no seats
- Can allow a government that received under half the votes in the General Election to force unpopular laws through parliament

### **Voting system - Local councils /**

## **Voting system - Local councils**

Since 3rd May 2007, the system for local council elections has used a form of Proportional Representation known as Single Transferable Vote (STV).

### **Advantages of Single Transferable Vote**

- More proportional than Additional Member System
- Better reflects public views than First Past the Post
- Reduces confrontation in politics – consensus politics
- Much harder for one party to dominate a council than under FPTP – very few Scottish councils now have one party rule
- Councillors from smaller parties are more likely to be elected
- Could make it easier for more female and minority candidates to get elected

### **Disadvantages of Single Transferable Vote**

- Complicated and unfamiliar to British voters
- Results in large multi member-constituencies
- No longer one local councillor for an area
- The resulting mixed-political powers can be unstable

## **The Scottish Parliament**

The first election to the Scottish Parliament took place in May 1999. Labour won a majority of seats but not enough to form the Scottish Government (*formerly called the Scottish Executive*) on their own. Labour and the Liberal Democrats therefore formed a coalition.

In 2007, the Scottish National Party won 47 seats and the Scottish Labour Party won 46 seats. The Scottish Conservatives won 17 seats, the Scottish Liberal Democrats 16 seats, the Scottish Green Party 2 seats and one Independent (Margo MacDonald) was also elected. The Scottish National Party formed a minority government with support from the

Greens on certain issues. The Scottish Socialist Party which won seats in the 2003 election, didn't win any seats in 2007.

## **Representation**

People in Scotland can seek help with issues that affect them from their political representatives.

### **Local councillors**

A local councillor can represent the residents of their council ward regarding local issues such as planning, schools, housing and transport. The councillor can do this by:

- Speaking at council meetings
- Contacting council officials to sort local problems
- Holding weekly surgery to listen to problems
- Passing on relevant problems to MPs or MSPs when appropriate

### **MSPs**

MSPs can represent their constituents over less local issues, such as health service, education or benefits. MSPs can represent their constituents in a number of ways, including:

- Writing to or meeting with a relevant Cabinet Secretary or Minister
- Speaking in the Parliament during debates
- Asking questions during Question Time
- Introducing Members Bills on topics of concern to their constituents
- Lobbying other organisations (such as local councils, health boards) and individuals on behalf of their constituents
- Raising the profile of an issue in the media

## **MPs /**

### **MPs**

MPs can represent their constituents in similar ways to an MSP. Matters that would be taken to an MP rather than an MSP would include UK wide and International issues, such as economic policy or defence. An MP may represent constituents by:

- Writing to or meeting with a relevant department, official or Minister
- Asking questions during Question Time
- Introducing a Private Member's Bill
- Lobbying organisations or individuals on behalf of their constituents
- Raising the profile of an issue in the media

### **Political Participation**

Voting in an election is not the only way in which someone can take part in political life. Other ways to raise an issue include -

- Standing as a political candidate
- Helping a party or candidate with their election campaign
- Lobbying elected representatives
- Taking part in demonstrations. A public demonstration may help raise public awareness of an issue, increasing political pressure to address it
- Submitting or signing a petition. A public petition can be submitted to the Scottish Parliament or the House of Commons, asking for a matter of national public interest to be looked into or for laws to be introduced or amended. Both parliaments have e-petitioning services allowing petitions to attract a wide audience and to be submitted online.
- Joining a pressure group. Pressure groups, such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International, can organise advertising and publicity campaigns, demonstrations and boycotts to raise awareness, exert influence and bring about change in relation to specific causes.

- Making use of the media. Making issues known through the media can bring them to wider public attention. This can put pressure on politicians to bring about change.

Trade Unions in the UK

### **Participation in a trade union**

Members of a trade union can participate in many ways. Firstly, workers need to join a union and pay their membership subscription. They can then attend union meetings in the workplace and discuss issues like health and safety in the workplace and pay and conditions.

Members can also take part in elections. Sometimes these ballots will be to decide whether or not the union should take industrial action, for example the nursery nurses and fire fighters voted before going on strike. At other times the ballot may be to elect a new representative within the union such as a shop steward.

Alternatively a trade union member may decide to stand as a candidate in an election for shop steward. The candidate will campaign to try to be elected and if they are successful they will have to represent the views of their members during negotiations and at district meetings. A shop steward may also attend the annual conference as a delegate.

Finally, a member may take part in a form of industrial action such as a work-to-rule or a strike.

### **The role of the shop steward**

The shop steward is one of the most important jobs in the trade union. They are responsible for trying to recruit new members into the union. A shop steward keeps members informed of any new initiatives such as changes to the pay scale. The shop steward is also the first person a member will go to in order to seek help or advice about a problem at work. Finally, the shop steward is the link between the ordinary trade union members and the union head-quarters. They are responsible for distributing newsletters and keep members informed of activities through the union notice-board.

### **Rights and responsibilities of trade unions /**

## **Rights and responsibilities of trade unions**

Trade unions have rights that they are entitled to but they also have responsibilities which they must adhere to.

| <b>Right</b>   | <b>Responsibility</b>   |
|--|---|
| To take industrial action in order to in order to protect the rights of the workers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To hold a secret ballot in order to see if the majority of members are in favour of taking the action. To ensure that all forms of industrial action are peaceful and within the law.</li></ul> |
| To try to attract new trade union members.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not to pressure anyone into joining a trade union.</li></ul>  |
| Trade unions can ask members about changes in the workplace.                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trade unions have a responsibility to make reasonable demands.</li></ul>  |

## **Pressure Groups /**

## Pressure Groups

### What are pressure groups?

- Organisations of people who believe in the same cause or share an interest.
- They have strongly held views and wish to influence some aspect of society. . Often this will require influencing the government, local council, etc.
- Groups of people working together usually have more effect than individuals

### Types of pressure groups?

- Some Pressure groups are **big** e.g. Confederation of Businesses (CBI) represents 100,000 businesses - but some are **small** e.g. a local group fighting closure of a children's play park.
- We can also divide pressure groups into 'Sectional' or 'Promotional':
  - Sectional PGs seek to protect the interests of a particular section of people with a common interest, and are sometimes called 'interest' groups. Therefore employers groups, trade unions and professional bodies are **sectional** groups. (e.g. The Law Society). Such groups are sometimes called interest groups.
  - Promotional PGs try to promote a particular cause rather than a special group of people and are therefore sometimes called 'cause' groups. They can be joined by individuals who have little else in common rather than their support of that cause. Therefore Greenpeace, which tries to protect the environment, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Children (RSPCC) are **promotional** groups.

### What rights do pressure groups have?

- They have the right to criticise the government
- They have the right to hold meetings
- They have the right to protest
- They have the right to make their views known by using the media

### **What responsibilities do pressure groups have?**

- They have the responsibility to base their criticism on fact
- Meetings should be peaceful and legal
- Should inform local authorities and the police when they are making a protest
- They have a responsibility not to intimidate

### **What methods do pressure groups use?**

- Internet - email and web sites
- Letters
- Lobbying
- Petitions
- Demonstrations
- Mass media campaigns (T.V., radio and newspapers)

### **Name some pressure groups?**

- Shelter - aim to help homeless people
- Amnesty international - defends human rights
- Greenpeace - campaigns on environmental issues
- CBI (Confederation of British Industry) - promotes business interests
- TUC (Trade Union Congress) - promotes workers interests
- ASH (Action on Smoking Health) - anti-smoking group
- FORREST - pro smoking group