

GCE



Revised GCE

# Government and Politics

## Student Course Companion

A2 1: A Comparative Study of the  
Government and Politics of the  
Republic of Ireland and  
the United Kingdom

For first teaching from September 2016  
For first award of AS Level in Summer 2017  
For first award of A Level in Summer 2018





# A2 Government and Politics Course Companion Unit A2 1:

## Comparative Government

### Option B: The UK and the Republic of Ireland

*‘One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.’*

Plato

#### **What is this unit about?**

This unit provides an introduction to the government and politics of the Republic of Ireland with specific focus on its legislative and executive branches. It allows students to consider the function and powers of the Oireachtas, the role of the executive and the relationship between them. Students will understand how the function and powers of the legislative and executive branches are defined by the constitution and also how they have evolved.

Having considered how things are done in the Republic of Ireland, you will then be able to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of how this compares with the UK system. Drawing on the knowledge and understanding gained through the study of Unit AS2 – The British Political Process, you will be able to analyse the similarities and differences in the structures, power and operations of the Legislature and Executive of both countries and compare and evaluate the effectiveness of both in performing these functions.

Concepts such as democracy, representation, power, authority, scrutiny and judicial review which you encountered in the AS units are also key strands that run through this unit. In addition to this, you will also be introduced to the ideas of political continuity and change, accountability, limited government and individual rights.

## **What are the main areas I need to study?**

### **The Government and Politics of the Republic of Ireland – the legislative branch**

- What are the main principles and features of the Irish Constitution?
- What are the main roles and functions of the Oireachtas?
- How have the roles of the Dáil and Seanad evolved?
- How effectively do the Dáil and Seanad fulfil their main roles of representation, legislation and scrutiny?
- What has been the impact of the judiciary and judicial decisions on the legislative branch?
- What is the relationship between the Oireachtas and the Executive?

### **The Government and Politics of the Republic of Ireland – the executive branch.**

- How does the Constitution define the role and powers of the Executive?
- How have the powers of the Executive evolved?
- What limits are there to the powers of the Executive?
- What has been the impact of judicial decisions on the executive branch?
- What has been the impact of coalition government on the operation of the executive?
- What is the relationship between the Executive and the Oireachtas?

## **Comparative Government**

### **By this part of the unit you should be able to address key issues such as:**

- What are the similarities and differences in the structures, powers and operation of the UK and Irish legislatures?
- How do the UK and Irish legislatures compare as law-making, scrutiny and representative bodies?
- How do the powers of the Prime Minister and Taoiseach compare?
- How do the limits on the Taoiseach's powers and the Prime Minister's powers compare?
- Is the UK or the Irish executive the more effective government?

## **How will I be assessed?**

The exam lasts 2 hours 15 minutes. It is divided into **two sections**.

### **Section A focuses on the Republic of Ireland alone.**

It has 4 questions on the Irish system.

The four questions are worth 5, 10, 15 and 30 marks, making a total of 60 marks for this section.

Two of the questions require reference to a piece of source material.

### **Section B is the comparative section.**

It has two questions on how the UK and Irish systems compare.

The two questions are worth 10 and 30 marks and there is a choice of one from two options for the 30 mark question.

There is no Source to consider.

## **Pay attention to the following instructions when answering each question:**

### **Section A:**

#### **Q1: 5 marks**

- The command phrase is “what is meant by?”
- This is a definition question.
- You will be asked to define a term used in the study of Irish politics, for example, “brokerage.”
- A paragraph length answer is sufficient to achieve full marks.
- No assessment/evaluation is required.
- Reference should be made to one example. If no supporting example is given a maximum of 3 marks can be achieved.
- QWC is not being assessed; approximately 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

#### **Q2: 10 marks**

- The command phrase is “identify and explain”.
- Two things will have to be identified and explained.
- Reference has to be made to the Source for one of the ‘ways’ and the second will be drawn from your own knowledge.
- Relevant examples will contribute to an effective explanation.
- Answers may be presented as two bullet or numbered points.
- QWC is not being assessed; approximately 12 minutes should be spent on this answer.

#### **Q3: 15 marks**

- The command word is “explain”.
- Assessment/evaluation is not required.
- The question will focus only on an aspect of the US political system.
- A more extended explanation is required.
- QWC is being assessed; approximately 20 minutes should be spent on the answer.

**Q4: 30 marks**

- The command word is “assess”.
- Answers should be balanced in terms of presenting arguments and evidence for both sides. An answer that is very unbalanced cannot achieve more than Level 4.
- If an answer contains no relevant examples/evidence, a maximum of Level 3 can be achieved.
- Reference should be made to the Source which will have content that is relevant to an answer.
- QWC is being assessed and answers should be in essay format.
- Approximately 40 minutes should be spent answering this question.

**Section B: -**

**Q5: 10 marks**

- The command phrase is “identify and explain”.
- The question will require a comparison of some aspect of the operation, structure, effectiveness of the two political systems.
- Two things have to be identified and explained.
- Relevant evidence is required to support the response.
- Answers may be presented as two bullet or numbered points.
- QWC is not being assessed; approximately 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

**Q6: 30 marks**

- The command word is “assess”.
- Direct comparison of the two political systems is required throughout an answer.
- Answers should be balanced in terms of presenting different arguments and evidence, where these exist.
- QWC is being assessed and answers should be in essay format.
- You have a choice of two possible questions so take time to make the right choice.
- At least 40 minutes should be spent answering this question.

## How can I make the most of my ability?

Government and politics affect the lives of everybody. To develop real understanding you need to relate what you study in class to the national and international political events and issues that are reported in the media. Following the tips below will help to develop your interest and understanding of the content of this unit.

**Watch the news!** British politics appears every day on TV, radio and in the papers. If you can, watch or listen to the news on RTE as well and read an Irish paper such as the Irish Times. Paying attention to the news will not only increase your understanding but give you examples you can use in exams.

**Surf the net!** There's lots of valuable information about British and Irish politics on the net but you need to be selective in how you use websites. The BBC and Guardian politics sites are first class. Blogs are one of the most amusing and informative ways to follow political events. Wikipedia also contains a lot of relevant material and has excellent links.

**Read!** There are many excellent textbooks on British and Irish politics. However, be selective and don't think that you have to read every book from cover to cover. For example, the chapters on the executive and the legislature may be particularly relevant. There are also several good political magazines and journals which have relevant and up-to-date information and articles. Politics Review has consistently relevant material. Reading around what you discuss in class is an excellent way of broadening and deepening your understanding.

**But there's so much information!** True, but you should already be familiar with much of it from your study of Unit AS 2. To manage this information you should:

- Organise your notes. Use headings such as 'The Scrutiny role of the Dail,' 'The impact of the judiciary and judicial decisions' to structure your work.
- Be clear on the key issues. Keep them in your mind throughout your study of this unit.
- Understand fully what the examiners expect you to be able to do. Familiarise yourself with the specimen questions and mark schemes that CCEA has produced.
- Write practice answers to the different types of question and check them against your notes. Make sure you practice making comparisons between the UK and US political systems.

**Examination technique:** Exams can be stressful but by being well prepared and confident of how you are going to approach the paper, you can minimise the stress and make sure you give of your best on the day. Following the advice below will help.

- The time spent on the question should reflect the mark allocation. A 30 mark question should take about 40 minutes.
- Only do what the question asks you to do – there are no marks for including information that the question doesn't ask for.
- Make sure you use the Source in answering those questions in Part A that instruct you to do so.

- The two 30 mark questions must be answered with a balanced essay answer. Make sure you address both sides of the issue - this means evaluating and being critical.
- This is about real political systems so be sure to include examples and provide evidence to support your arguments.
- In questions 5 and 6, make sure that you directly compare the relevant aspects of the UK and the ROI's political systems. This involves identifying the parallels, connections, similarities and differences between them.

## Glossary

The following is a list of key terms that you should know and use correctly:

**Accountability:** The requirement for representatives to answer for the way that they perform their duties. Members of a legislature may be brought to account for their voting record by party officials such as whips, their local parties, or their constituents. Government ministers are accountable for decisions to the legislature and the voting public.

**Cabinet government:** The cabinet is a body of important members of the government, normally senior ministers. Cabinet government refers to a system such as that which operates in theory in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In this system, the cabinet is appointed from the legislature and collectively decides on government policy and tactics.

**Change:** The process of transformation or transition for a political system from one condition or phase to another. Change can refer to the ability of the constitution or institutions to adapt to changes in society or to the policy agenda of different political parties.

**Clientelism:** This describes a situation in which politicians assist voters in their constituencies who become their clients. In this situation, elections are occasions for voters to repay their debts to their politicians by re-electing them. Clientelism is often claimed to be a feature of the Irish political system.

**Coalition:** This describes a situation in which the government is made up of two or more political parties because no one party is strong enough to govern on its own. In the Republic of Ireland, most governments are coalitions whereas in the UK coalition government has been infrequent.

**Constitution:** The national constitution is a statement of the basic rules and principles of a political system. It specifies the structure of government and the powers, duties and procedures of different parts of the political system, principally the executive, legislature and judiciary. Most national constitutions also set out certain basic rights for those who are governed. Most countries, like the Republic of Ireland, have codified constitutions which are contained in a single document. Some countries, such as the UK, have uncodified constitutions which are contained in several different sources that may be either written or unwritten.

**Continuity:** This refers to features of a political system that represent an uninterrupted succession or flow over time. The term may be used in connection with the constitution and political institutions of a country or the nature of its government. At a general election, voters often have to weigh up the advantages of continuity represented by re-electing a government against that of voting for the change represented by the opposition.

**Executive dominance:** This describes a situation in which the executive dominates and controls the legislature. In the UK, it is sometimes argued that the legislative programme of Parliament is largely determined by the government whose bills are normally passed by the House of Commons due to the governing party's majority.

**Individual rights:** These are the rights of individuals rather than groups. They normally refer to civic and political rights rather than economic, social and cultural ones. In the Irish Constitution, individual rights are outlined within the Bill of Rights.

**Judicial review:** This refers to the power of the courts to set aside acts of the executive or legislature because they are in conflict with a higher authority such as the terms of a written constitution.

**Limited government:** This is the idea that government restrictions on personal liberties and government intervention in the economy should be kept to an absolute minimum and be specified by law, normally through a written constitution.

**Parliamentary system:** This is a political system in which there is a fusion of executive and legislative power. The executive sits in the parliament and may exert considerable control over it. Parliamentary systems usually make a clear distinction between the head of government and the Head of State. The head of government is usually the prime minister or premier. The Head of State is more of a figurehead, normally either an elected president or hereditary monarch.

**Party discipline:** This refers to the ability of a party to get its elected representatives to support the policies of the party leadership. Party discipline tends to be much stronger in parliamentary systems such as the UK and the Republic of Ireland than in congressional systems such as the US.

**Party loyalty:** This refers to the degree to which legislative members remain faithful to the party. Party loyalty may be viewed differently by members of different political parties and by party leaders and backbenchers. For example, in the UK Conservative MPs tend to view loyalty as allegiance to the party leadership whereas many Labour MPs would consider loyalty to the purpose and aims of their party as being more important.

**Presidential system:** This is a political system in which the executive branch is separate from the legislature. The executive is controlled by a president directly elected for a fixed term rather than by a cabinet of ministers. The president is not accountable to the legislature and, in normal circumstances, cannot be dismissed by it.

**Separation of powers:** This is the idea that there should be strict separation of political powers between the executive and the legislature. This enables each branch of government to act as a check on, and a balance to, the power of the other and helps to prevent the emergence of dictatorial government.

**Single party government:** A situation in which one party has a sufficiently large majority to ensure that it can get most of its legislation passed without requiring the support of another party or parties. This is normally the case in the UK but has not been the case since 2010.

## Revision checklist

As a final check before the exam, make sure you can do the following:

You should be able to:	✓	Notes
<b>Demonstrate</b> knowledge and understanding of key political terms and concepts (see the glossary).		
<b>Explain</b> the roles of the Dáil and Seanad in the Oireachtas.		
<b>Compare</b> the effectiveness of the Oireachtas and British Parliament as representative, law-making and scrutiny bodies.		
<b>Analyse</b> and <b>evaluate</b> different views of whether there is greater executive dominance over the legislature in the UK or Republic of Ireland.		
<b>Analyse</b> and <b>evaluate</b> different views of whether the UK Prime Minister or Irish Taoiseach is more powerful within their respective political systems.		

