

GCE



Revised GCE

# Government and Politics

## Student Course Companion

AS 1: The Government and  
Politics of Northern Ireland

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





# AS Government and Politics Course Companion

## Unit AS1: The Government and Politics of Northern 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?

The focus of this unit is on how Northern Ireland is governed today and how it was governed in the recent past. It therefore looks at the main institutions or bodies that make up the system of government that operates in Northern Ireland.

It looks at the policies and objectives of the main Northern Ireland political parties and the differences between them. This includes looking at how and why support for the parties has changed in recent years.

So, in short, this unit is about Northern Ireland's:

- Political Institutions
- Political Parties

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

### **Political Institutions**

#### **Essential knowledge and understanding:**

##### **The Northern Ireland Assembly**

- What were the ideas behind the creation of the Assembly?
- How is it elected?
- What are its representative, legislative and scrutiny functions?
- How successful is the Assembly in performing its functions?
- Is it controlled by the Executive?

##### **The Northern Ireland Executive**

- What were the ideas that influenced the creation of the Executive?
- How is it chosen?
- What are its functions?
- How successful is the Executive in performing its functions?
- Is it really a power-sharing government?

##### **The Northern Ireland Political Parties**

#### **Essential knowledge and understanding:**

You need to study the two main unionist parties (DUP and UUP), the two main nationalist parties (Sinn Fein and SDLP) and the Alliance Party. For each party, you need to know:

- What are the party's long term objectives and how have these changed?
- What are the party's current policies and how have these changed?
- How much support does the party have and how has this changed?
- What are the reasons for the change in the party's support?

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

The exam lasts 1 hour 15 minutes.

You have to answer four questions worth 4, 6, 15 and 25 marks.

You will have to read one source and use it in answers to questions 2 and 3.

Total marks for the paper is 50.

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

#### **Q1: 4 marks**

- The command word is “identify”.
- Two things must be identified, with two marks for each correct identification.
- QWC is **not** being assessed.
- Less than 5 minutes should be spent on this question.

#### **Q2: 6 marks**

- The command word is “explain”.
- Explanation of a term or phrase in the Source is required.
- Reference should be made to the Source.
- A relevant example will contribute to a full explanation.
- A paragraph length answer is enough to achieve full marks.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; approximately 6 minutes should be spent on this answer.

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

- The command word is “explain”.
- Three things have to be explained, with one of these things being identified in the Source.
- Reference should be made to the Source.
- Answers can be in the form of three numbered or bulleted points, but the explanations should be full with examples.
- QWC is being assessed; approximately 20 minutes should be spent on this question.

#### **Q4: 25 marks**

- The command word is “assess”.
- A balanced essay answer is required in which argument and evidence for both sides will be presented.
- You have a choice from two questions: take time to make the right choice.
- Examples should be included.
- About 35 minutes should be spent answering this question.
- QWC is being assessed.

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

Northern Ireland's government and politics affects the lives of everybody in the society in which you live. To develop real understanding you need to relate what you study in class to the political events and issues that are reported in the media. Following the tips below will help to develop your interest in, and understanding of, the content of this unit.

**Watch the news!** Northern Ireland politics appears every day on TV, radio and in the papers. Paying attention to the news will not only increase your understanding but give you examples you can use in your examination.

**Speak to your local MLAs.** Almost all MLAs and parties are keen to make visits to local schools and be questioned by students.

**Surf the net!** There is a lot of valuable information about Northern Ireland politics on the internet. The BBC and Guardian Politics sites are first class. Wikipedia is good too, with excellent links. Political blogs are not only informative but can also be critical of local politicians which should assist you in developing your own evaluation skills.

**Read a book!** There are not many textbooks on Northern Ireland politics but more are being produced all the time.

**Visit the Assembly:** Ask your teacher to organise a visit to the Assembly. Meet your MLAs and ask them questions. The Education Service at the Assembly has produced a wealth of up-to-date information that is available online.

**But there's so much information!** True, but to handle it you should:

- Organise your notes. Use the headings 'Northern Ireland Assembly', 'Executive Committee' and 'Political Parties' to help you structure your material.
- 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. Familiarize yourself with specimen questions and mark schemes that CCEA has produced.
- Write practice answers to the different types of question and check them against your notes.

**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 get the best out of yourself on the day. Following the advice below will help:

- The time spent on the question should reflect the mark allocation. A 25 mark question should take about 35 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 when the question tells you to but don't rely excessively on the Item for your answer.
- The 25 mark question must be answered with a balanced essay answer. Make sure you address both sides of the issue - this means evaluating and being critical.
- The exam is about a real political system so be sure to include examples and provide evidence to support your arguments.
- The exam is not just a test of your knowledge and understanding. It assesses how well you interpret questions and select relevant information. It examines how effectively you can analyse and evaluate and how clearly you can communicate your ideas.
- Remember! To score highly you must answer the questions directly. Read and re-read the questions and make sure you understand exactly what they are asking before you start writing. Think carefully about the command words and what they require you to do, for example, identify, explain and assess.

## Glossary

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

**Ad hoc Committees:** Temporary Assembly Committees that are established from time to time usually to deal with specific issues (mainly reserved matters).

**Alliance Party:** The Alliance Party is a liberal and non-sectarian party. It is Northern Ireland's fifth-largest party overall, with seven seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly and one MP in the House of Commons. Since the devolution of powers for policing and justice in 2010, its leader has held this ministerial responsibility in the Northern Ireland Executive.

**Assembly:** The name of the Northern Ireland legislature or parliament. It is made up of the 108 MLAs.

**Authority:** A form of power based on consensus about who has the right to make decisions.

**Consensus:** A generally accepted view or decision among a group of people.

**Constituency:** The geographical area that each MLA represents.

**Democracy:** A system of government in which the people elect representatives to govern on their behalf and in their interest.

**Democratic deficit:** When organisations or institutions, which are meant to be democratic, in practice fall short of fulfilling the principles of democracy.

**Democratic Unionist Party (DUP):** The larger of the two main Unionist parties, the largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the fourth-largest party in the United Kingdom's House of Commons.

**Devolution:** This is when a government hands over certain powers to a region within the country to make its own policies and laws. The powers that the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly have are devolved from the United Kingdom's Parliament.

**D'Hondt system:** The system used to decide the number of ministries to which each party is entitled to in the Northern Ireland Executive. Ministerial positions are allocated to all of those parties with significant representation in the Assembly. Larger parties are allocated more ministries.

**Direct rule:** This is the opposite of devolution. It is when the United Kingdom's Parliament and Government take direct control of the government of Northern Ireland. There is no devolved Assembly and Executive.

**Executive:** The name of the Northern Ireland government. It is made up of the First and Deputy First Ministers and the other Ministers who are in charge of the various government departments.

**Joint Committees:** Assembly committees that consider matters of concern to more than one committee.

**Legislative role:** One of the functions of MLAs who make up the Assembly. It involves the creation and passing of new laws. Proposed laws or bills are presented to the Assembly for scrutiny and discussion. Once a bill is passed by the Assembly and is given Royal Assent it becomes an Act.

**MLA:** A Member of the Legislative Assembly

**Nationalist:** The name given to parties and voters who wish Northern Ireland to break its link with the United Kingdom and become part of a new united Ireland. Such parties and voters tend to see themselves as “Irish”.

**Power:** The ability to get other people to do what you want them to do.

**Power sharing:** This is the term used to describe the system of government in Northern Ireland. Power is shared by parties representing different sides of the community rather than one party being in power by itself.

**Proportional representation:** A feature of some electoral systems which ensures that the share of seats which each party receives closely reflects its share of the total votes cast.

**Representative role:** Another of the functions of MLAs. It involves representing the constituency which elected them.

**Scrutiny function:** The MLA function that involves keeping a check on the Executive and holding it to account for its actions.

**Sinn Féin:** The larger of the two nationalist parties and the second-largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Sinn Féin operates on an all-Ireland basis and is the third largest party in the Dáil, the legislature of the Republic of Ireland following the General Election of 2016

**Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP):** The SDLP is the smaller of the two major nationalist parties in Northern Ireland. The SDLP is a social democratic party and has links with the Irish and British Labour Parties.

**Speaker:** The Speaker is the name given to the MLA who acts as the Chairperson of the Assembly. The Speaker calls Members to speak in debates, maintains order in the Chamber and responds to points of order raised by MLAs. The Speaker has to act impartially and does not directly participate in any debates in the Assembly.

**Standing Committees:** Permanent committees of the Assembly which undertake specific roles as set out in the Assembly Standing Orders.

**Standing Orders:** These are the rules which govern the way the Assembly carries out its work. There are currently 99 Standing Orders and they range from detailing the times the Assembly may sit to the rules concerning establishment of committees to assist the Assembly.

**Statutory Committees:** Committees of the Assembly which advise, assist and scrutinise Ministers and their Departments.

**Unionist:** The name given to parties and voters who wish Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom and who do not want to become part of a united Ireland. Such parties and voters tend to see themselves as “British.”

**Ulster Unionist Party (UUP):** The UUP is the more moderate and smaller of the two main unionist parties. In 2009, the party made an electoral alliance with the Conservative Party meaning that the two parties were represented by joint candidates in elections for the House of Commons and European Parliament.

## Revision checklist

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

You should be able to:	✓	Notes
<b>Explain</b> what the Northern Ireland Assembly is meant to do and <b>evaluate</b> how it has performed.		
<b>Explain</b> what the Northern Ireland Executive is meant to do and <b>evaluate</b> how it has performed.		
<b>Describe</b> the main goals and objectives of the main Northern Ireland political parties and <b>analyse</b> how and why these have changed.		
<b>Explain</b> how and why support for the main political parties has changed in recent years.		

