



A Level Politics Bridging Activities



An introduction to UK politics

Name:

A Welcome to A Level Politics!

Welcome to A Level Politics!

We start the course by looking at how people participate in democracy in the UK and the numerous ways that people can get involved in the political process. First year is mainly spent studying politics in the UK. We look at the political parties and our rights as well as the roles of the Prime Minister and Parliament.

Over the course of the two years we will go on to study politics in the USA and political ideas. Viewed as a whole, the course offers you a comprehensive package of political knowledge.

The tasks in this bridging activities pack will give you the opportunity to take your first step into politics in the UK. You can identify some of the movers and shakers of the last few decades, keep up to date with politics on social media and look back at how the political system has developed in the UK.

Overall, studying politics at A Level is a deeply rewarding, challenging and immersive experience. You will have your chance to shape your views on the world around you on a whole host of topics and learn how you are part of the political process and not just a casual observer!

If you have any questions about the course, do not hesitate to ask me at:

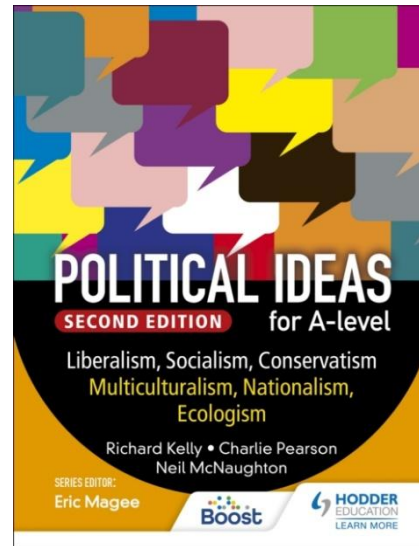
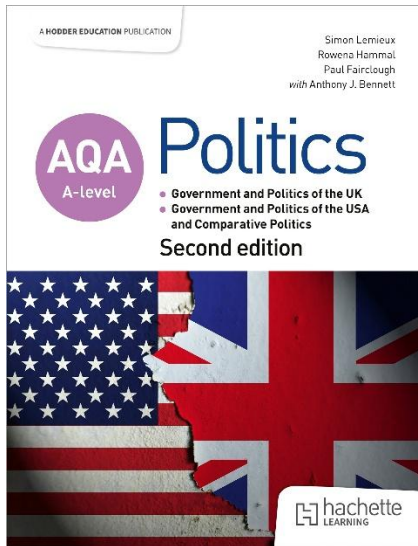
ben.connor@ccsw.ac.uk

What will you study?

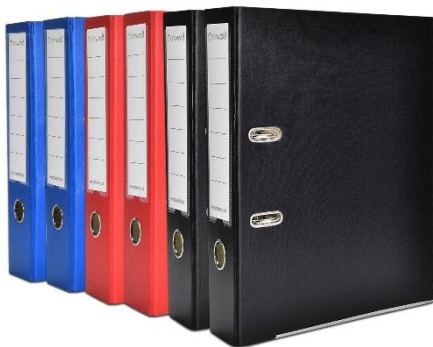
Year	Module	Topics
Year One	UK Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Democracy and participation ➤ Electoral and referendums ➤ Political parties ➤ Voting behaviour and the media ➤ Pressure groups ➤ Civil Rights ➤ The UK Constitution ➤ Parliament ➤ Prime Minister and Cabinet ➤ Supreme Court ➤ Devolution ➤ European Union
	US and Comparative Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ US Constitution ➤ Congress ➤ Presidency ➤ Supreme Court ➤ Elections and voting ➤ Political parties ➤ Pressure groups ➤ Civil rights ➤ Comparative Politics
Year Two	Political Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Liberalism ➤ Conservatism ➤ Socialism ➤ Nationalism

What do you need to do to prepare?

- 1) Get copies of the course textbooks



- 2) Get yourself some ring binder folders, topic dividers and plastic wallets – These will be essential to organise your work



- 3) Complete all of the tasks in this document – They are aimed to give you introduce you to the concepts and ideas of UK Politics
- 4) Follow / subscribe to related pages, social media and newsletters – See the last few pages of this document for suggestions!

Studying Politics - A Beginner's Guide

A* exam success

Studying politics A beginner's guide

This is probably one of the most exciting, important and significant times to be studying politics in the last 50 years. From the snap 2017 election, Brexit and the Scottish independence movement to Donald Trump and the rise of nationalism, you will have a much better understanding of the origins, meaning and impact of all of these and more after studying politics. Whatever you go on to do after your A-levels, the analytical and evaluative skills and knowledge you will develop through this course will be useful.

What prior knowledge is required?

It may be that you have very little knowledge of British, US and global politics or of political ideas. If this is the case it is sensible to focus on improving your basic knowledge of politics. You need to do this in your own time. Do not expect your teacher to do this for you — it is not in either your own or your classmates' interest to do this.

Begin by making yourself a set of introductory notes on the following areas:

- the difference between right-wing, left-wing and centrist political ideas
- how the British political system works — the executive, legislative and judicial branches and the relationship between these branches and the devolved assemblies

Box 1 Key terms to learn

Write an explanation and give a relevant political example of each of the following terms.

- parliament
- government
- executive
- legislature
- judiciary
- constitution
- separation of powers
- power
- authority
- election
- political party
- pressure group
- political ideology
- politics
- prime minister
- president

- how the different forms of election in the UK work and what purpose they serve
 - the names of all the major figures in UK politics, e.g. shadow chancellor
- Learn some key terms (Box 1).

What will I be studying?

If you are studying the 2-year A-level course, for most of the first year you will study British politics. You will cover UK politics and UK government:

- Democracy and participation
- Political parties
- Electoral systems
- Voting behaviour and the media
- The constitution
- Parliament
- PM and executive
- The relationship between the different branches of the government, including the EU

Towards the end of the first year (unless your teacher decides to do this differently) you will also start to study the core political ideas: conservatism, socialism and liberalism. As part of this you will also cover another political idea. Your teacher will pick one from: anarchism, feminism, nationalism, ecology and multiculturalism. However, you will probably not cover this until the second year of your course.

If you are just taking the AS course you will only study UK politics and UK government, and will not cover the political ideas sections. You will sit two examinations at the end of the year.

In the second year of your course, if you are doing the Edexcel specification, you will study either the USA or global politics. Your teacher will decide which option to choose. However, if you and your classmates have any strong feelings about this, it may be worth discussing it with your teacher, as they may be open to persuasion. It is definitely worth finding out if your teacher has made a decision yet, as this should guide your wider reading and current affairs study across your first year.



A beginner's guide to following current affairs

In order to make the course a living subject, rather than just something in a textbook, you need to follow current affairs on a daily basis. This will not only make the course much more interesting for you, but will also gain you marks as you need to give up-to-date examples in your exam answers. *Pocket* is a useful app that allows you to download and collect useful resources that you can then read, even when you are out of a Wi-Fi area.

How will you do this?

- Broadsheet newspapers/newspaper websites — the *Guardian* and *Independent* are still free online, others now have a paywall. They are all available as apps. Remember that all newspapers have a political stance — they are not neutral.
- Political magazines such as the *Spectator*, *The Week* and the *New Statesman* — sign up for weekly podcasts.
- Respected politics news websites — the BBC is most useful and, by law, must be neutral. Get the BBC news app on your phone and read the politics section daily. It also includes useful explanations of the news such as 'Brexit — all you need to know'. Sign up for the 'Week in Westminster' podcast: www.tinyurl.com/36qsnjh
- Vice and BuzzFeed can also be really useful as long as you ignore the celebrity news.
- On television, watch *BBC News at Ten*, *Channel 4 News*, *Newsnight* and *Question Time*. You could also try listening to Radio 4 and your local radio station.
- Use Twitter to follow your local MP and political commentators such as Nick Robinson.

Be aware that not all of the news you will see on the internet is true — fake news is everywhere. Stick to respected websites and avoid the tabloids. Wikipedia rejects the use of *Daily Mail* articles as a source, for example.

For your first year of study you should focus on reading about the activities of the British government, Parliament and judiciary, all elections (including by-elections, council elections, devolved assembly elections), pressure groups and the Brexit process.

If your teacher does not provide you with one, get a copy of your specification and download the sample papers. Familiarise yourself with the content and then look out for useful newspaper articles, television programmes and so on that you can collect, including for the second year content. The specification includes a detailed and useful glossary, which you can use to supplement your own glossary (using the correct political terminology is essential).

Create and regularly update a table of recent political events such as those in Table 1. The first entry is completed for you.

Starter skills

Do not worry about exam and timing skills yet. The most important skill you need to start the course is the ability to take detailed and useful notes. You must learn how to pick out the most helpful points, to summarise and add examples. Obviously this is quite a personal thing — many students like spider diagrams and colour, others use revision cards.

If you are not sure, try the Cornell note-taking system. This involves creating a wide margin in which you write the key headings, with more detail on the left and a summary

Table 1 Some recent political events

Recent political events	Significance and links to specification
2017 general election UK	Shows the workings and possible failings of the 2011 Fixed-Term Parliaments Act — it aimed to reduce the prime minister's power by fixing the dates of elections, but Theresa May got the two-thirds majority in Parliament necessary to overrule the Act.
Brexit referendum 2016	
US presidential election 2016	
2015 general election UK	
Scottish independence referendum 2014	
2010 general election and formation of coalition government	

Table 2 Example of note-taking system

Title: The origins and development of the Conservative Party	
Key points and terms	Explanation
Traditional conservatism and one-nation conservatism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A pessimistic view of human nature The significance of tradition and institutions Organic society — interdependence and the role of each individual in the wider community
New Right conservatism, neoliberal and New Right views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pragmatism — rejection of radical change and fixed ideas
Conclusions	
Conservatism is a pragmatic ideology that focuses on 'what works' rather than being connected to a fixed set of ideas. It rejects change, unless it is 'in order to preserve'. However, the Conservative Party is linked to a set of ideas, including neoliberal economics, strict law and order policy and limited welfare spending.	

box at the bottom of every page. Google it for more details. Table 2 is an example of an incomplete set of notes made using the Cornell system.

Troubleshooting

Do you fit into either of the following categories? If so, help is at hand.

(1) 'I am already finding this course really hard — help!'

Have you followed the advice above — are you building up a basic knowledge of the UK political system outside of lessons? You should also develop a political glossary, making a note of every new word you come across. Keeping up to date with current affairs — reading the BBC Politics webpage daily for example, will also help your course to start making sense.

(2) 'It seems pretty straightforward so far, I'd like to develop a wider understanding...'

Have you developed your own political viewpoint? Read ahead and find out about socialism, conservatism and liberalism. Which appeals to you? Is there a pressure

group or a party that you would like to join? Can you get work experience with your local MP or councillor? What about reading some classic politics-related books — *1984* or *Animal Farm* by George Orwell for example, or a political biography?

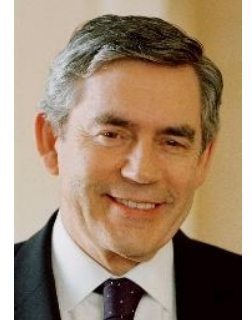
It is also really important to develop your knowledge of political history — the key turning points in the development of British democracy. Make a timeline of events. Does your school offer the Extended Project Qualification? Maybe that would give you the opportunity to develop your knowledge of politics further. Finally, find out who your MP is and attend an event that they are speaking at (www.theyworkforyou.com).

This is part one of a two-part article. Coming up in the next issue: how to answer exam questions, the significance of historical examples and using textbooks.

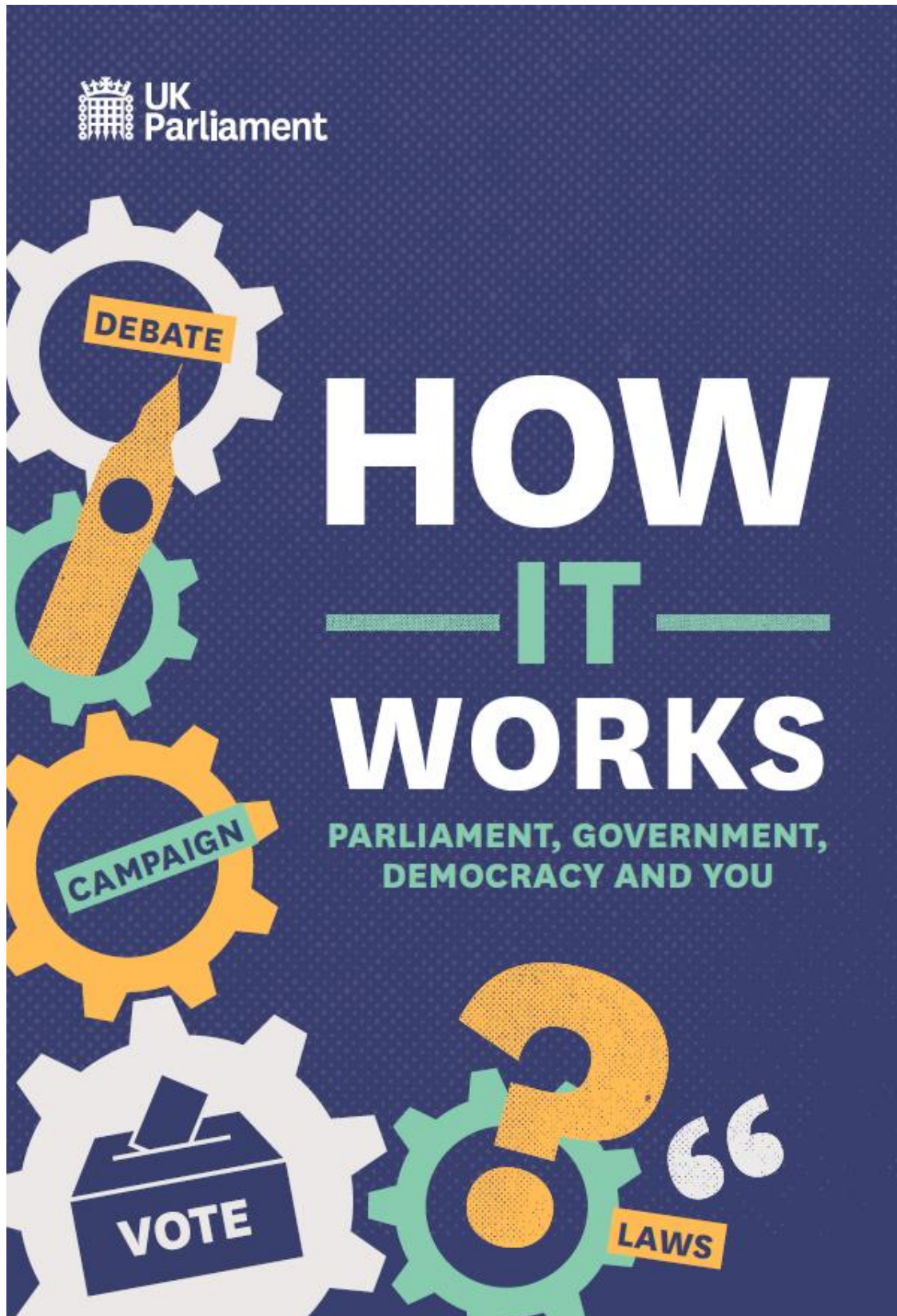
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Task One – Who’s Who in UK Politics?

Look at the below photos of UK politicians. Can you identify them? Which party do/did they represent? Which offices have they held (Prime Minister? Leader of the Opposition? Home Secretary?). Get your family involved and see if you can name them.



For the next tasks you will need the 'How It Works – Parliament, Government, Democracy and You' booklet – It has been uploaded with this document but can also be found here - [How it works. Parliament, government and you](#)



Task Two – The Road to Democracy

Read the timeline on pages 4 – 5 and complete the table below:

Event	Year	Impact on UK democracy
Magna Carta		
	1265	
The Bill of Rights		
	1832	
The People's Charter		
	1918	
The Equal Franchise Act		
	1969	
Devolution Referendums in Scotland / Wales / Northern Ireland		

Task Three – Democracy, Elections and Referendums

Read pages 6 – 11 and answer the following questions in your own notes:

- 1) Where does the term 'democracy' originate?
- 2) What are the key features of a liberal democracy?
- 3) Explain the difference between direct democracy and representative democracy
- 4) What are the different types of elections held in the UK?
- 5) What is a manifesto?
- 6) How does First Past the Post (FPTP) work? - [First Past the Post voting system in the UK - BBC Bitesize](#)
- 7) What is the difference between an election and a referendum?
- 8) What are the main strengths and weaknesses of referendums?
- 9) Do you think that referendums are a good way of making big decisions?
Justify your answer

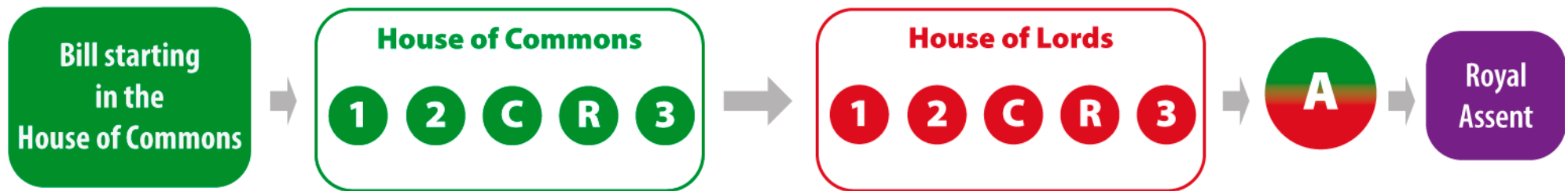
Task Four – The Constitution of the UK and Parliament

Read pages 12 - 21 and answer the following questions in your own notes:

- 1) Explain the term 'codified constitution'
- 2) Explain the terms legislature, executive and judiciary
- 3) Explain the term 'parliamentary sovereignty'
- 4) What are three main functions of parliament
- 5) Explain the term devolution. Where in the UK has devolution taken place?
- 6) What are the main differences between the House of Commons and the House of Lords?
- 7) Explain the term 'minister'
- 8) Explain the term 'backbencher'
- 9) Explain the term 'opposition'
- 10) Who are the members of the House of Lords
- 11) How has the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill 2026 changed the membership of the House of Lords? - [Hereditary peers to be removed from Lords as bill passes - BBC News](#)
- 12) What is a parliamentary committee?
- 13) What is the main difference in the roles of select committees and legislative committees?
- 14) What is the difference between a Government bill and a Private Members' bill?
- 15) Explain the terms free vote, green paper, white paper, amendment and motion

Task Five – The Legislative Process (How laws are made)

Read page 21 and use the link ([How does a bill become a law? - UK Parliament](#)) to label the process below:

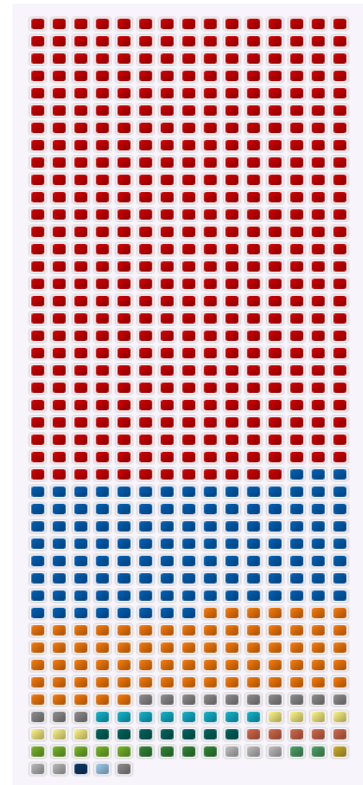


Task Six – Political Parties and Pressure Groups

Read pages 22 - 25 and answer the following questions in your own notes:

- 1) What are the main functions of political parties?
- 2) How many seats (Number of MPs) does each party currently have in the House of Commons? - [State of the parties - MPs and Lords - UK Parliament](#)

Party	Seats
Labour	
Conservative	
Liberal Democrat	
Independents	
Reform UK	
Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP)	
Sinn Féin	
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	
Green Party	
Plaid Cymru	



- 3) What is a 'coalition government'?
- 4) What is the difference between a political party and a pressure group?
- 5) What types of groups pressure the government? E.g. trade unions
- 6) Explain the different methods of campaigning and give an example of each on the issue of Climate Change

Task Eight – Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

Using the links and your wider research, create a table for and against the voting age being lowered to 16 in UK general elections – **This will form the basis of your first assessment.**

- [The Politics Shed - Should the voting age be reduced to 16?](#)
- [Votes at 16 - GOV.UK](#)
- [Voting Age Debate | UK Youth Parliament Sitting](#)

The voting age should be lowered to 16	The voting age should not be lowered to 16

The voting age should be lowered to 16	The voting age should not be lowered to 16

Wider Engagement

<p>To Read</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ BBC Politics - Politics Latest News & Updates BBC News➤ Newspapers – But remember that each paper has a particular viewpoint!➤ UK Parliament website - UK Parliament➤ Politics Online Newsletter – Sign up here -> Politics Newsletter Stay Informed with Politics Online➤ Politics Shed - The Politics Shed - Contents➤ Tutor2u (Politics) - Studying AQA A-Level Politics tutor2u
<p>To Watch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Question Time (BBC) - BBC One - Question Time➤ Newsnight - Newsnight - A London political earthquake? - BBC iPlayer➤ Politics Live (BBC) - BBC Two - Politics Live➤ Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) - PMQs (Prime Minister's Questions) - YouTube➤ Parliament Live (BBC) - BBC Parliament - BBC iPlayer➤ Laura Kuenssberg: State of Chaos Episode 1 - BBC Two - Laura Kuenssberg: State of Chaos, Series 1, May/Johnson Episode 2 – BBC Two - Laura Kuenssberg: State of Chaos, Series 1, Johnson Episode 3 - BBC Two - Laura Kuenssberg: State of Chaos, Series 1, Johnson/Truss

<p style="text-align: center;">To Listen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Rest is Politics podcast - The Rest Is Politics - YouTube ➤ Politics Thinking with Nick Robinson - BBC Radio 4 - Political Thinking with Nick Robinson ➤ The Week in Westminster - BBC Radio 4 - The Week in Westminster ➤ Politics Weekly (The Guardian) - Politics Weekly UK The Guardian ➤ Simple Politics podcast - THE PODCAST Simple Politics
<p style="text-align: center;">OpenLearn</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What is Politics? - What is politics? OpenLearn - Open University ➤ What kind of Democracy are you? - What kind of Democrat are you? OpenLearn - Open University

