

Contents

Abbreviations	5
Introduction	7
Section A: The UK Parliament and Executive	
Chapter 1 Who is in Parliament?	11
Chapter 2 MPs and The House of Commons	20
Chapter 3 The Legislative Process	32
Chapter 4 Committees in Parliament	47
Chapter 5 The House of Lords	63
Chapter 6 The UK Executive: the PM and the Cabinet	76
Chapter 7 How Powerful is the Prime Minister?	92
Section B: The British Judiciary	
Chapter 8 The Judiciary, Independence and Neutrality	106
Chapter 9 The Powers of the Judiciary	115
Section C: Pressure Groups in the UK	
Chapter 10 Understanding Pressure Groups	129
Chapter 11 How do Pressure Groups Work?	141
Exam Technique	155
Copyright Information	167
Index	168

Introduction

Democracy is a system of government based on the principle of giving ‘power to the people’; in fact, the term ‘democracy’ derives from the Greek words *Demos* (people) and *Kratos* (power). In a democracy, laws, policies and leadership are directly or indirectly decided by the citizens. In ancient Athens, one of the world’s first known democracies, all male citizens could vote on the actions and policies of the city state. A direct democracy such as this, where every citizen has a vote on each issue, would be too time consuming and require too much research by each individual to be practical in a larger, modern state. As a result, most modern democracies are representative democracies, where voters elect professional politicians to make decisions on their behalf.

The British political system is, in many ways, one of the models for representative democracies around the world. The 1215 English charter, the Magna Carta, dictated that the power of the monarchy was not absolute. This allowed a ‘parliament’ of advisors – effectively politicians – to play an increasingly important role throughout the Middle Ages. A-Level politics students are not required to know the historical events that led to the modern British political system, but it is helpful to understand the principles that underpin how modern British democracy works.

In most modern democracies, including Britain, there are three ‘branches’ of government. Each have their own responsibilities, powers and checks upon one another.

1. **The Legislature** – The Houses of Parliament – is responsible for making laws, representing voters, and scrutinising the Government.
2. **The Executive** – His Majesty’s Government – is responsible for administering the state, setting policies and enforcing laws. It is led by the Prime Minister.
3. **The British Judiciary** – interprets and applies the law, is independent from the other branches, and is able to review government actions through judicial review.

In addition to the three branches of government, British politics also involves **pressure groups**. Pressure groups aim to influence political decisions, policies or actions to benefit their members, particular causes or broader sections of society. They do not seek to win elections, but instead work to ensure that specific issues or interests are represented in the political process.

How to use this book

CCEA AS 2: The British Political Process exam candidates are expected to have an in-depth understanding of how (and how effectively) the UK Legislature and the Executive fulfil their respective roles, hold one another to account, and have evolved (or failed to evolve) in recent decades. Section A, worth 40 marks (two thirds of the paper's marks), covers the Legislature and the Executive. To answer Section A confidently – especially the 26-mark essay question – candidates must have a thorough understanding of all Section A content.

The rest of the paper offers candidates a CHOICE between Section B (The British Judiciary) and Section C (UK pressure groups). Both sections are worth 20 marks (one third of the paper's marks). Candidates CANNOT mix and match questions from B and C: they must answer both questions on the Judiciary OR both questions on pressure groups. For this reason, teachers may choose to teach one of these options, rather than both.

This book explains the core concepts needed to answer all sections of CCEA AS Paper 2, along with examples of key events from Margaret Thatcher's ministry to the current Prime Minister, Andy Burnham. This content is supported by 'Consolidate your knowledge' and 'Go find out' questions to guide specification-focused note-taking and research beyond the course. 'Past paper questions' are also included to provide exam practice. A dedicated chapter on exam technique includes sample answers and guidance on constructing responses that meet CCEA's assessment objectives for each question type. However, it should be noted that this textbook alone will not be enough to maximise success in the exam, given the dynamic nature of politics as a subject. Students who wish to excel should take an interest in the news and current affairs. Engaging with news sources such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Week*, *New Statesman* and *The Economist* can help students increase their understanding of the principles covered in this book and apply them to current events. Similarly, podcasts such as *The Rest Is Politics*, *Pod Save the UK* and *Newscast* can add variety to the learning process.

NOTE

Given the fast-moving nature of UK politics, positions and individuals can change quickly. Details in this text reflect the situation at the time of writing – July 2026.

Due to the nature of Unit AS 2: The British Political Process, the content overlaps throughout this book.

CHAPTER 1

Who is in Parliament?

This chapter will examine:

- How is Parliament chosen?
- How are governments and the official opposition formed?
- The Speaker of the House
- Frontbenchers and backbenchers
- The job of whips

The Houses of Parliament, situated inside the Palace of Westminster, are widely regarded as one of the birthplaces of modern democracy. This chapter introduces the British democratic process: it briefly examines how Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected in the UK, how governments are formed as a result of these elections, and some of the specific roles that MPs might play in the House of Commons, including Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Speaker of the House and Party Whip.

How is Parliament chosen?

The UK Parliament is the legislative branch of the British Government, consisting of the two Houses of Parliament (the House of Commons and the House of Lords) and the Monarch. In modern practice, however, the Monarch's role is largely symbolic and ceremonial, so references to 'Parliament' usually mean the two legislative chambers.

Parliament is the UK's Legislature. In a parliamentary system (as opposed to a congressional system like that of the US), the Legislature and the Executive branches are linked or fused. Government is distinct from Parliament and may have separate aims and responsibilities, but government ministers (including the Prime Minister) are also members of one of the Houses of Parliament, with the same responsibilities and privileges given to them as a result of this combined role. Chapters 1–5 look predominantly at Parliament but is also important to understand the Executive and its relationship with

Parliament. Chapter 7 discusses the tension and competition between these two fused branches of government, which is one of the core issues in modern British politics.

The UK has a bicameral legislature, meaning that legislation must be passed through two chambers in order to become law. The members of the House of Commons are directly elected in a general election, which must happen at least every five years. House of Lords' members are appointed for life by the Monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Lords is therefore not democratically elected and has been formally recognised as the less powerful house since the Parliament Act of 1911. The Government can technically consist of members of either house, but the party who gets to govern depends on who has a democratically elected majority in the House of Commons. The majority of government ministers and every prime minister since 1903 have therefore held a seat in the Commons while serving as Prime Minister.¹

The UK is divided geographically into 650 roughly equally populated constituencies. Each of these local areas is represented in the House of Commons by one person – the local Member of Parliament (MP). The MP is chosen in an election via a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, when all eligible people living in the constituency are given one vote to choose who will represent them in Parliament. Usually this happens in a general election, when all 650 constituencies vote for a new MP at the same time. The Prime Minister can call a general election at any time, but legally they must do so at least once every five years. However, individual constituencies may also have by-elections if their local MP dies, resigns or is otherwise removed from their role as an MP in between elections.

2024 UK General Election results

Party	Seats	Change	Vote share
Labour	411 ²	+211	33.7%
Conservative	121	-251	23.7%
Liberal Democrats	72	+64	12.2%
Scottish National Party	9	-39	2.5%
Reform UK	5	+5	14.3%

In addition to parliamentary elections, the UK may also hold referendums. A referendum is a direct vote in which the electorate is asked to decide on a specific political question, usually with a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. Unlike

general elections, which are used to choose representatives, referendums allow citizens to make decisions on particular issues themselves, making them an example of direct democracy. In the UK, referendums are typically used for major constitutional or policy questions and can be either advisory, meaning the government is not legally required to follow the result, or binding, where the outcome must be implemented. Because they are used for specific issues rather than to select MPs, they are held infrequently and on no set timetable. A well-known example is the 2016 EU Referendum, where voters were asked whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union or leave. The result was 51.9% in favour of leaving, which led to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Referendums are significant because they give the public a direct say on important issues, rather than delegating this responsibility to MPs through a process of representative democracy.

The Conservative Party has been one of the two main parties in the UK since it was founded in the 1830s. Its history can be traced back to the Tory Party of the eighteenth century, and to this day, the Conservatives are often referred to as the Tories. Traditionally, Conservatives support lower taxes and a smaller, more limited role for government, alongside more traditional or conservative principles around social issues, such as crime or social justice. The Conservatives governed from 1979–1990 and from 2010–2024, including a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats (a centre-left party that have traditionally been the third largest in Parliament) from 2010–2015.

Recent Tory Prime Ministers include Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990), John Major (1990–1997), David Cameron (2010–2016), Theresa May (2016–2019), Boris Johnson (2019–2022), Liz Truss (September 2022–October 2022) and Rishi Sunak (2022–2024). The party has been led by Kemi Badenoch since November 2024.

The Labour Party, or simply Labour, is the other main party. It has been one of the main political parties in Britain since the 1920s. As a traditionally left-wing political party, it has historically been in favour of worker's rights, higher taxes and government spending, and more progressive or liberal policies than the Conservatives around social issues. Labour governed from 1997–2010, and are the current party of government since July 2024.

Recent Labour Prime Ministers include Tony Blair (1997–2007), Gordon Brown (2007–2010), Keir Starmer (2024–2026) and the current PM, Andy Burnham (2026–). Another notable figure is former Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn (2015–2020).

How are governments and the official opposition formed?

Most MPs belong to a political party. A political party is an organised group of people, with similar political views, who work together to gain political power. Candidates usually stand for election on behalf of a party, which selects them to campaign for a seat in a specific constituency. After an election, the leader of the party with the most elected MPs will be invited by the Monarch to attempt to form a government, as they can rely on the confidence of a majority of the MPs in the House of Commons to govern the country and pass laws. This party leader will become the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

If no one party can rely on an absolute majority of the available votes in the House of Commons, the largest party will be offered the chance to form a coalition government with another party or parties. Here the parties agree to form a government together. Between 2010 and 2015, this arrangement occurred in the UK, with the Conservatives forming a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, traditionally the UK's third-largest party. The Government may also seek to form a minority government, where they can rule without a majority by relying on agreed support from other parties not in government. Theresa May's Government did not have a majority after the 2017 General Election, but was able to carry on governing due to a 'confidence and supply' arrangement with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The DUP promised to support the Conservatives on confidence votes and other important bills in exchange for a number of constitutional guarantees and an extra £1 billion of funding for Northern Ireland.

In either a coalition government or a minority government, the Prime Minister will have to compromise with other parties (and with disagreeable members of their own party) in order to govern effectively. With a big majority, Prime Ministers can rely on the 'confidence of the house', knowing a majority of MPs will support them. With a small or no majority, the PM will have to compromise more to hold onto power, fighting to keep enough MPs on side to prevent them from losing a vote of no confidence. If Parliament pass a vote of no confidence, the Executive is forced to resign or seek a dissolution of Parliament and call a general election; the Executive is dependent on the confidence of the Legislature.

The Government will consist of members of either house of Parliament, who are selected by the Prime Minister to be a part of the Executive branch. At the heart of the Government is the Cabinet – a committee of ministers who are individually responsible for managing different departments. Each department is responsible for managing government actions and policy over

a different issue. For example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is responsible for economic policy, while the Health Secretary is responsible for managing the National Health Service (NHS). Each department will be led by a cabinet secretary, who sits in the Cabinet, and may also have several other MPs who serve as junior ministers. Ministers *must* be members of one of the houses of Parliament. Usually, they will be MPs in the Commons, but some ministers have been drawn from the Lords – such as Lord Cameron’s appointment in 2023 to the role of Foreign Secretary.

All non-governing parties in the House of Commons might be said to be in ‘opposition’. The leader of the second-largest party in the House of Commons (currently the Conservative Party) will become the Leader of the Opposition (presently Kemi Badenoch). This party will normally form the Official Opposition or Shadow Government, whose role is to question and scrutinise the work of the Government by forming a credible alternative government. Just as the Prime Minister is shadowed by the Leader of the Opposition, all other government ministers will also have a shadow minister from the Official Opposition. These shadow ministers question and scrutinise their work directly, with the aim of presenting an alternative that voters might choose at the next election. The Shadow Cabinet is therefore sometimes called a ‘government in waiting’.

The Speaker of the House

Other than the leaders of the two main parties, the most visible role in the House of Commons is the Speaker of the House (currently Sir Lindsay Hoyle). The Speaker presides over debates of the whole House and maintains order in the House of Commons. Although speakers are MPs, they are expected to act in an impartial manner upon being selected by other MPs. They do not partake in debates (other than to preside over them) and are traditionally not contested by the major parties in general elections to prevent them from having to campaign in a partisan manner (representing one political party and opposing others).

The Speaker serves a few specific roles in the House of Commons:

- Calling on MPs to speak in debates, such as Prime Minister’s Questions, and ensuring that the distribution of time given to MPs from each party is fair and proportionate.
- Correcting and disciplining MPs when they break the rules or procedures of the House.
- Overseeing votes in the House of Commons and announcing their results.

- Deciding when to allow emergency debates or urgent questions.
- Administrative responsibilities including overseeing the House of Commons Commission (the overall supervisory body of the Commons) and Hansard (the official record of parliamentary debates), and serving as a member of the Privy Council (a formal body of advisers to the Monarch).
- Making a casting vote in case of a tie in the House of Commons. This is expected to follow the 'Denison rule': the Speaker should always vote in favour of further debate when possible, and to maintain the status quo when no further debate is possible. This last happened in 2019, where Speaker John Bercow struck down a motion for more indicative votes on Brexit.

Frontbenchers and backbenchers

Members of the Government and the Shadow Government are said to be on the 'front benches', as this is generally where they sit during sessions of the House of Commons. Up to 95 MPs from the governing party can be appointed by the Prime Minister to become ministers and join the front benches; for the current Labour government³ this is around one quarter of its 403 MPs. These are the MPs that are most involved in either running the Government or scrutinising it as part of an effective opposition. By contrast, 'backbenchers' are MPs on either side of the House who do not hold government or shadow government positions. They are typically more junior members of the major parties or from smaller parties who are not in an official role. Backbench MPs do not have a role in the Executive branch, but they still have important legislative, scrutinising and representative roles, mirroring those of Parliament itself. Backbench MPs also sit in parliamentary committees, where they are able to play a significant role in crafting and scrutinising legislation. Many of the responsibilities of Parliament that will be discussed in the coming chapters correspond directly with these roles of backbench MPs.

The job of whips

Whips are a significant fixture of both houses of Parliament. A whip is an MP or Peer who acts as a party official, whose responsibility is to ensure that the work of the parliamentary party is carried out effectively. Whips act as a bridge between the Government/Shadow Government and the backbenches, making sure that there is feedback and communication going from each side to the other. In practice, this often involves trying to maintain party discipline by controlling how MPs vote and behave.

CHAPTER 8

The Judiciary, Independence and Neutrality

This chapter will examine:

- What are the Judiciary and the Supreme Court?
- What is judicial independence?
- What is judicial neutrality?

What are the Judiciary and the Supreme Court?

The British Judiciary is one of the three fundamental branches of government in the United Kingdom: the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. It is responsible for interpreting and applying the law through an independent system of courts and tribunals. Earlier chapters considered how the fused Legislature and Executive in the UK make laws and carry out the functions of government in accordance with them. The Judiciary's responsibility is to ensure that the law is followed and enacted fairly and correctly. In summary, the Judiciary *interprets* the law, rather than making or enacting it.

While the term Judiciary can refer to all of the UK's judges, this chapter focuses on Supreme Court judges, who have the most direct impact on the UK's Legislature and Executive. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the UK. It is the final court of appeal for criminal cases outside of Scotland and civil cases for the entire country. For a case to make it to the Supreme Court, it generally has to go through several other lower courts before being referred upwards through the appeals process, usually because of the case's complexity and wider importance to society.

As the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court makes many decisions with major constitutional significance. For example, in 2017, the Court famously ruled that the Government needed parliamentary authorisation before it could notify the EU of the UK's intention to withdraw. Judicial reviews and inquiries also provide opportunities for the courts to have an impact on all of society, by acting as a check on the powers of the Executive. The Court also has the authority to decide whether an issue should fall under the jurisdiction of Westminster or devolved bodies (such as Stormont).

Finally, it should be noted that decisions made by the Supreme Court set precedent, meaning that the rules and principles they establish must be followed by lower courts.

The modern UK Supreme Court was authorised by the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 and was formally established in October 2009 as the highest court of appeal in the United Kingdom. The Court replaced the prior system, in which specific members of the House of Lords, known as ‘Law Lords’, served as the UK’s most senior judicial authority from within Westminster itself.

The Court meets at Middlesex Guildhall, near Westminster, and is made up of 12 senior judges who no longer sit in the House of Lords. The separation of the Court from Westminster, in terms of both who is in it and where it sits, is important as a way of showing that the Judiciary is independent from the Executive and Legislature.



The Supreme Court usually sits in the Middlesex Guildhall in Westminster, opposite the Houses of Parliament. *Photo by Christine Smith.*

Many commentators note that since the separation from Westminster in 2009, the Supreme Court has shown greater willingness to engage in public law cases. Studies indicate that the Supreme Court has intervened in high-profile

political matters – such as the Brexit-related prorogation challenges – in ways that reflect an increasingly assertive approach to enforcing constitutional limits on executive power.

This increased independence has led to accusations of ‘judicial activism’, where the Supreme Court is seen as using its interpretative powers to influence policy or overturn government decisions – effectively *making*, rather than merely *interpreting* the law. The Human Rights Act 1998 has increased the Court’s ability to declare legislation incompatible with human rights. Critics argue this puts pressure on Parliament to change laws and blurs the line between judicial interpretation and law-making. This form of activism can be controversial because it challenges the traditional doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, under which Parliament is the supreme law-making body in the UK.

What is judicial independence?

An independent judiciary is widely regarded as one of the cornerstones of effective democratic governance, essential in maintaining equality of all before the law, and in checking the powers of both the Legislature and Executive to prevent them from acting beyond their reach. Judicial independence is the principle that judges must be able to make decisions free from external pressures, particularly from the Government or other powerful interests, ensuring that their rulings are based solely on the law and the facts of each case. This is an extremely important principle in maintaining fair, equitable and effective government in the United Kingdom. Judicial independence ensures that judges decide cases based purely on legal merits rather than political influences; serves as an important check on the power of the Executive and the Legislature; and maintains public confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the legal system and of Government more broadly. Independence prevents political interference and allows judges to protect individual rights, ensuring that their decisions are legally correct even if this is unpopular with the public or the Government.

Prior to the first sitting of the UK Supreme Court in 2009, Law Lords were the highest judicial authority in the UK. These full-time, professionally qualified judges were granted life peerages solely to fulfil their judicial roles. Unlike other peers, they received a state salary, rather than just a daily allowance for attending the House. However, Law Lords did not vote on politically contentious matters in the House. Instead, they sat as a committee within the Lords that was responsible for making the judicial decisions now delegated to the Supreme Court. Additionally, the Lord Chancellor

(a Cabinet minister) presided over the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords, of which the Law Lords were members, and played a central role in appointing them. This close connection meant that the Lord Chancellor exercised both judicial and executive influence, while also serving in the Legislature. This created concerns about the overlap between the three branches of government: one person holding positions in multiple branches would undermine the independence of the Judiciary and its ability to ‘check’ the other two branches effectively.

The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 established the Supreme Court as separate from Parliament, reinforcing the Judiciary’s autonomy and strengthening the separation of the Judiciary from the other two branches of government. It also reduced the significance of the role of the Lord Chancellor by making appointments more independent. The establishment of the Supreme Court removed judges from Parliament and provided them with a distinct institution and building – Middlesex Guildhall. This reform eliminated perceived conflicts of interest and reinforced the autonomy of the Judiciary from political influence both practically and symbolically.

How is judicial independence maintained?

1. Independent appointments

Appointments to the Supreme Court are made by an independent selection commission, rather than by politicians from the other two branches of government. The commission is made up of five members: the President of the UK Supreme Court; another senior justice appointed by the President; and representatives from the three independent judicial appointment commissions for the UK (England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland). The panel’s recommendation is passed to the Justice Secretary, who has a single opportunity to reject it, before being forwarded to the Prime Minister, who submits it to the Monarch for final approval.

The possibility of the Justice Secretary rejecting a judicial appointment could be perceived as undermining the independence of the Supreme Court. However, to be eligible to be a justice of the Supreme Court, a candidate must be a very high-ranking member of the British judicial system. In practice, this means that it is extremely unlikely that the Justice Secretary would ever reject a candidate (even if they technically could), as it would imply a lack of faith in a very senior member of the judicial system. To date, the power to reject an appointment has never been used.

CHAPTER 11

How do Pressure Groups Work?

This chapter will examine:

- Conventional methods and direct action
- Factors affecting the success of pressure groups
- Do pressure groups help or hinder democracy?

Conventional methods and direct action

The strategies used by pressure groups are often divided into two types: conventional methods and direct action. **Conventional methods** closely resemble traditional forms of political campaigning. These include lobbying, letter-writing campaigns, marches and demonstrations, and participation in consultations. Such approaches are generally seen as more legitimate and effective, as they work within the established political system. Most of the strategies discussed in the previous chapter fall into this category, since they are neither violent, illegal or disruptive.

By contrast, **direct action** is a form of political activism. It involves individuals or groups taking immediate steps to achieve their aims, often outside formal political channels. These strategies can be disruptive and, in some cases, illegal, and are used when conventional methods are seen as ineffective or too slow. They are designed to draw public attention to an issue and put immediate pressure on decision makers.

Examples of direct action include:

- **Strikes** – For example, the junior/resident doctors' strikes organised by the **British Medical Association** from 2022 to 2026.
- **Performances or public art** – For example, **Trans Kids Deserve Better**, a group of teenage trans activists, left a paper coffin outside the then Health Minister Wes Streeting's constituency office every day between August 2024 and March 2025. This was to protest his continuation of the previous government's ban on prescribing puberty blockers for under-18s experiencing gender dysphoria.

- **Civil disobedience** – such as sit-ins or refusing to obey laws deemed unjust. For example, pro-Palestinian student groups, such as **Oxford Against Genocide**, established encampments at a number of UK universities in 2025. They demanded that their institutions divest from companies linked to Israeli-occupied territories or companies.
- **Vandalism or destruction of property** – More extreme groups have used vandalism or destruction of property as a form of direct action. In 2025, members of **Palestine Action** broke into UK airbase RAF Brize Norton and vandalised two planes with red spray paint in protest of UK arms sales to Israel. The group was proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000, making support for the group illegal, although this was overturned in February 2026.

Why do pressure groups use direct action?

Direct action can be very effective for groups with few other options:

1. The best option

Direct action is often used by groups that feel excluded from traditional decision-making processes. These groups typically lack the access of insider groups, meaning they are less able to lobby or influence government directly. As a result, direct action becomes an effective way of gaining attention and applying pressure when conventional channels are ineffective, particularly when the Government is unresponsive to more moderate approaches. For example, **Extinction Rebellion (XR)**'s economic approach does not prioritise growth, placing it at odds with mainstream political parties. As a result, it is unlikely to be effective in lobbying Government to prioritise environmental concerns over economic ones. Direct action provides an alternative way to express their views in the absence of the ear of government.

2. Gains publicity for a cause

Direct action can be a very effective way to gain publicity for a cause. Well-attended public demonstrations show policymakers that a cause has wide, visible and committed support, while also attracting media attention. This allows groups to communicate their message through interviews, placards and images, helping to raise awareness and potentially expand support. By increasing the visibility of an issue, direct action can pressurise the Government to respond. For example, **Just Stop Oil** stated in 2024 that it would scale back public protests, claiming success after the Labour Party signalled opposition to new oil and gas exploration licences. Although

Just Stop Oil has relatively low public support (around 17%), its highly visible actions – such as throwing soup at paintings – have kept it in the public eye. This suggests that direct action can raise awareness and influence the public agenda even without widespread popularity.

3. Pressurises the Government

Direct action is effective in some circumstances because it can put immense pressure on the Government to find a solution, particularly if the disruption is highly visible or impactful. The most obvious example is strikes. Strikes by public service workers, such as doctors, nurses or teachers, can disrupt the public – they may need to wait longer for healthcare, arrange alternative childcare or miss work. Despite this, many still support public sector workers, seeing them as underpaid and ‘essential’. In these circumstances, direct action may pressure the Government to compromise on pay or working conditions. For example, strikes by doctors represented by the **BMA** from 2022–2026 contributed to an improved pay deal from the Starmer Government, after prolonged negotiations with both Conservative and Labour governments.

The limitations of direct action

1. Alienates the public

Direct action may alienate the public. When pressure groups engage in disruptive tactics – such as roadblocks, occupations or protests that cause inconvenience – they risk losing support from the very people they aim to persuade. Public opinion is crucial to the success of pressure groups, and actions that create widespread frustration or inconvenience can harm their credibility. For example, **XR** faced criticism in 2019 for blocking roads and halting transportation in London. While these actions drew attention to climate change, they also angered many members of the public who were affected by the disruptions, undermining XR’s broader support. This illustrates how direct action, rather than galvanising support, can drive people away from the cause.

2. Legal and political backlash

When pressure groups engage in unlawful activities or civil disobedience, they risk facing legal repercussions, such as arrests or fines, which can undermine their legitimacy and damage their long-term influence. They may also face political consequences, in the form of laws and measures designed to limit their ability to organise. For example, new legal restrictions on protests were introduced by the Johnson Government in 2022, partly in

response to direct actions by climate protesters who blocked motorways and other infrastructure. Five members of **Just Stop Oil** were each sentenced to four to five years in prison in July 2024 under this new legislation.

Direct action focuses on raising awareness and applying public pressure rather than directly securing policy change or achieving tangible results. While protests and disruptive tactics can highlight a cause, they do not necessarily lead to immediate legislative change or policy reform. For example, despite the significant attention generated by climate change protests and direct-action campaigns by groups like **Fridays for Future** and **XR**, the pace of global policy change on environmental issues has often been slow and incremental. Governments have frequently responded with limited measures and reforms rather than substantive policy changes. Without a clear strategy to follow up with lobbying, negotiation or policy formulation, direct action alone may fall short of delivering the desired political outcomes.

3. Exacerbates political polarisation

Direct action can exacerbate political polarisation and entrench opposing views, making it harder for pressure groups to build consensus or engage in constructive dialogue. In democratic societies, where political competition is often divided, direct action can polarise debates and force policymakers to take a harder stance against the groups involved. This is particularly true when direct action is perceived as radical or disruptive. For example, the early twentieth-century **Suffragettes**, who employed militant tactics such as hunger strikes and chaining themselves to railings, were initially viewed as extreme by large sections of society. While the suffragettes eventually succeeded in securing voting rights for women, their radical tactics risked alienating many who might have otherwise supported the cause, which may have slowed the progress of their movement. This example highlights how direct action can foster division, making it harder to achieve long-term political success.

Factors affecting the success of pressure groups

1. Achievability of aims

The achievability of a pressure group's goals is critical to success. Groups with realistic aims can align themselves more successfully with political parties and secure incremental or specific outcomes. Achievable aims are precise and considered politically realistic, increasing the likelihood that a group can gain 'insider' status, consult directly with government and influence policy more effectively. The 2011 **Occupy Movement** criticised the global economic system and corporate influence of politics, but lacked clear, unified

Exam Technique

How to answer CCEA AS paper 2: The British Political Process

The two most important things candidates need to succeed in AS paper 2 are an understanding of how to approach the exam questions and the knowledge to answer them accurately. Chapters 1–11 address the core knowledge for the exam. This technique section focuses on the questions themselves, breaking down the various styles of question that are typically seen on the paper. It explains what candidates are being asked to do, how they should structure their answers, and the common mistakes to avoid in the exam.

This section also includes a sample answer for each type of question on the paper, plus guidance on how the mark scheme works.

Candidates must answer all the questions in ‘Section A: The UK Parliament and the Executive’ but have a choice between answering questions in ‘Section B: The British Judiciary’ or ‘Section C: Pressure Groups in the UK’. The sample answers in this chapter for Section B/C address questions from Section C but the same principles apply to the equivalent questions in Section B.

Some exam questions have marks for Quality of Written Communication (QWC). In these cases, the examiner is not only concerned with how well candidates know the course, but also how well they communicate this knowledge. Clear communication is an important aspect of answers to all questions in the exam, as it helps signal knowledge to the examiner more directly and effectively. However, in questions 3, 5 and 7 of this paper, candidates are awarded marks specifically for good communication.

Assessment objectives

Assessment objectives are the goals of the course and what examiners expect to see in candidate answers. While it is not helpful to focus heavily on assessment objectives, it is useful to understand what CCEA examiners are trained to look for when marking. There are three assessment objectives for the CCEA Government and Politics specification. Candidates must:

- **demonstrate knowledge and understanding** of political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and debates (AO1);

- **analyse and evaluate** political information, arguments and theories, and identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between the political systems studied (AO2);
- **construct and communicate coherent arguments**, using a range of appropriate political vocabulary (AO3).

Section A

Section A is obligatory and worth two-thirds (40/60 marks) of the overall grade for this paper. These questions could be on any aspect of the Legislature (Parliament) and Executive components of the course. As such, candidates need a thorough knowledge of BOTH these areas of the specification in order to answer any question that appears in the exam. Questions 1 and 2 can cover any aspect of either the Legislature or the Executive, with no choice offered. Question 3 sometimes offers a choice between the two components but this is not always the case. The fused nature of the UK Legislature and Executive also means that most questions require candidates to have in-depth knowledge of both in order to convincingly answer either one.

Question 1

Question 1 is worth 4 marks and always asks candidates to ‘identify’ two things about the British Executive or Legislature. The command word ‘identify’ means to name or list, so no explanation is required. The assessment objective for this question is AO1 (demonstrate knowledge and understanding), so there is no need to evaluate content. Quality of Written Communication (QWC) is not assessed in this question, so a two-bullet answer is acceptable.

Question 1 is the least valuable question on the paper, but it also offers the easiest and quickest marks candidates can bank during the exam. CCEA advise that around 5 minutes should be spent on this question, but in practice many candidates can answer it more quickly and use the remaining time elsewhere.

Past paper question and sample answer

1. “Identify two functions of the speaker of the House of Commons.” [4]

- *To chair debates in the chamber.*
- *To read out the results of votes on Legislation.*

Question 2

Question 2 is worth 10 marks and always asks candidates to ‘explain’ two things. Although the question is worth 10 marks overall, it is marked as if it were two identical 5-mark answers.

To get the full 5 marks for each part, candidates must provide a full and clear explanation of a valid piece of information, with a relevant example. Candidates are awarded:

- 1 mark for identifying a valid point.
- 2–3 marks for identifying a valid point with a partial explanation and evidence.
- 4–5 marks for a full explanation of a valid point; an example is needed for the full 5 marks.

The assessment objective for this question is AO1 (demonstrate knowledge and understanding), so there is no need to evaluate content. QWC is not assessed in this question. CCEA recommend spending around 10 minutes on question 2.

One of the most effective ways to structure a response to this question is through two ‘PEEL’ paragraphs. This method helps organise points clearly and can be applied successfully to most questions in paper 2.

The PEEL method

P	Point	<i>State the main idea or argument clearly at the start of the paragraph. This is the topic sentence and tells the reader what the paragraph will be about.</i>
E	Explanation	<i>Explain how and why the evidence supports the point. This step shows the candidate’s understanding and analysis, making the connection clear for the reader.</i>
E	Evidence	<i>Provide evidence or examples to support the point.</i>
L	Link	<i>Link the argument back to the question or to the next point, ensuring the writing flows logically and remains focused on the overall topic.</i>

The sample answer that follows uses the textual highlighting in the table above to show the PEEL method in practice.