**Introduction to A Level Government and Politics –**

Why study Government and Politics at A Level? The current situation in the UK could be described as ‘precarious’ – having finally formally exited the European Union, theoretically if not practically, the UK could be described as being on a ‘war’ footing due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The government is under a significant level of scrutiny from parliament, the media, the opposition and the general public over its handling of the current crisis. Whilst some newspapers are running headlines criticising the government’s lack of preparedness, others are saying that the government’s approval level is at an all-time high. What is the truth? Studying A Level Government and Politics will give you the understanding to formulate your own opinions and scrutinise the government so you can make your own mind up. The knowledge you learn and the skills you build, such as formulating an argument and then debating your point of view with others of opposing views, will last that you a lifetime, whether you decide to enter the political world or not. The course will give you an understanding of how power and influence operate in the UK and the USA and how and why the exercise of power is different in each. It will also introduce you to political theory, previously the domain of undergraduate level study; from studying liberalism, socialism, conservatism and anarchism you will be able to analyse the extent of the influence of these theories on today’s politicians.

The course is divided into three topic areas. The first area of study is the UK government and politics; this is followed by a study of the US government and politics, comparatively with the UK; finally we study the political theory element, drawing synoptic links between the theories of liberalism, socialism, conservatism and anarchism and the systems of government in the UK and the US. The exam consists of three written papers of two hours each, one on each section of the course.

**Topic One - UK Government and Politics**

This topic generally takes us from September of Year 12 to Easter of Year 12. You will study the government element of the course concurrently with the politics element. Mr Murphy teaches the government side (the constitution, structure and role of parliament, the prime minister and cabinet, the judiciary, devolution and the EU) and Mrs Titcombe teaches the politics topics (democracy and participation, elections and referendums, political parties, pressure groups, influence of the media and why people choose to vote for a particular party). There is an end of topic exam at this point.

**Topic Two – US Government and Politics – Comparative Politics**

As with the UK topic this is taught in two separate parts concurrently. The government element consists of the constitutional framework, constitutional arrangements, Congress, the executive branch (the President), and the judicial branch of government. As you work your way through these topics the focus is not merely on learning the structure and function of the US government but you are consistently using your knowledge of UK governmental systems to compare and contrast them as this is a key element of the higher thinking skills required to achieve the highest grades at A Level. For the politics part of the US course you will study the electoral process in all its intricacies and the use of direct democracy (referendums etc.). You will also look at the political parties in the US, the pressure groups in the US and civil rights and its impact on society. There is an end of topic exam at this point.

**Topic Three – Political Ideas**

This is often the part of the course that students enjoy the most as it gives you an opportunity to hone your debating skills further and begin to experience something like undergraduate study. There are four strands of each of the theories of liberalism, socialism, conservatism and anarchism that you study along with five key thinkers for each theory. You will look at how each of the theories defines human nature and its relationship with government, how the state and society are modelled by this theory and how it impacts on government and how the economy is structured by this theory. These ideas are then compared and contrasted with each other and the UK and US systems are revisited and analysed for elements of these theories. There is a full mock exam at this point.

There is a huge variety of resources to help you begin your study of government and politics. I would begin with the UK course, reading through chapters one and two that have been scanned in for you as these are an effective summary of the first part of the course. Chapter one deals with the evolution of the UK governmental structures such as parliament; this will be fairly familiar to those of you who studied history at GCSE as there are significant elements of War and Society and Personal Rule in this development. Each of these chapters introduces you to various key terms (in the boxes on the sides of the pages) which it would be very helpful for you to be able to understand prior to the formal beginning of your studies at A Level. The US introductory chapter will also be scanned onto the system for you. The entirety of the Political Ideas book is already available to you in the Year 12 Government and Politics folder. Please feel free to read through the US and Political Ideas resources but I would not be too concerned with focusing on these at this point as it is important to have an effective grounding on the UK system initially.

In addition to the resources we provide you with in this folder I would highly recommend following political developments both in the UK and the US (particularly on the up-coming US election). Beyond the all-pervasive coverage of the Coronavirus I would look out for information on how parliament is operating, the role of MPs (both government – Conservative – and opposition), the role local government is playing, particularly the mayors of London, Manchester and the West Midlands, identify new legislation that has been passed, and the on-going negotiations with the EU over the withdrawal of the UK. The sources I would recommend for this are:

1. Broadsheet newspapers (online and actual papers!) – The Times/Sunday Times, Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph, Guardian and Observer. The Guardian has a free to read app that you can download onto your phone. It is always good to compare and contrast the treatment of a story between the right-wing press (Times and Telegraph) and left-wing press (Guardian/Observer). The political comment section of each of these papers is often the most insightful about the newspapers’ perspective on events. I will regularly update this folder with articles that I read that I think will help with your understanding.
2. Television news – Channel 4 at 7pm is particularly good for in-depth interviews, the BBC, particularly Newsnight and Outside Source on the BBC News Channel. BBC Parliament is also a helpful resource, although it is obviously not running at the moment.
3. Radio 4’s flagship programme ‘Today’ has interesting and insightful reporting on political issues and can be accessed on iPlayer. Please see the link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/category/news>
4. The Electoral Reform Society has many articles on the state of democracy in the UK and will be useful if you decide to research topic two below. Recent podcasts include ‘Time for a virtual parliament’? and ‘New pandemic, old politics’.
5. ‘The UK in a Changing Europe’ website is useful for a wide variety of webinars, the latest two being ‘Brexit Breakdown’ and ‘How does Labour oppose during a national crisis?’. You can subscribe to both the Electoral Reform Society and The UK in a Changing Europe to be alerted to new podcasts. Please see the link below for a Guardian article (be wary of bias) for the best political podcasts: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/jun/17/political-podcasts-10-of-the-best>
6. BBC Sounds has a selection – please follow the link here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/category/factual-politics>
7. ‘Talking Politics’ and ‘Remainiacs’ are examples of other popular podcasts. The list is endless really!
8. If you have access to political journals such as the Economist and Private Eye have a read of those.
9. The website of the Fabian Society is also useful for insightful (left wing) articles.
10. Politics Review magazine (see instructions in the folder to access) gives you access to a very wide range of political explanations and articles, although these are very focused on the course itself and are not always particularly topical. It will be more useful when you actually formally begin working.
11. Crash Course government and politics is very good for US politics.
12. If you have access to PBS on satellite TV there are many great documentaries on there.

If you would like to complete a more formal research task I would recommend looking at either of the following:

1. The UK constitution and how it has developed and the US constitution and how it has impacted the US government. The UCL (University College London) Constitution Unit has some very interesting research on the UK Constitutional situation: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/>

The government parliament uk website is also useful: <https://www.parliament.uk>

1. The electoral systems used in the UK and the US. For this I would research specific electoral systems (first past the post, supplementary vote etc.) used in each country – why the electoral system has been chosen and how ‘democratic’ the outcome is for each.

If you would like to submit your research for feedback to either myself or Mr Murphy please feel free (email: [ctitcombe@st-benedicts.suffolk.sch.uk](mailto:ctitcombe@st-benedicts.suffolk.sch.uk) or [KMurphy@st-benedicts.suffolk.sch.uk](mailto:KMurphy@st-benedicts.suffolk.sch.uk)). Equally if you have a specific area of personal interest that you would like to investigate please let us know and we will try to guide your study so that your research helps you when you begin the course.

Very best wishes

Mrs Titcombe