# GCSE (9-1) Citizenship Studies (J270)

# Guide to specification changes for assessment from June 2025

Our GCSE Citizenship Studies specification has changed to bring it in line with the Department for Education’s new content requirements, which reflected the UK’s departure from the European Union.

We have also updated some of the examples elsewhere in the specification to ensure that the specification means relevant and engaging for students.

The changes will be first assessed in June 2025.

This document contains further guidance for teachers and students to help achieve a better understanding of these changes.

# What specification changes have we made?

## Changes relating to the UK’s departure from the European Union

The UK left the European Union on 31 January 2020. We have made the following changes to our GCSE Citizenship Studies specification following the UK’s departure from the European Union.

### Section 2: Democracy and Government

#### 2.1 Democracy, elections and voting in the UK

We’ve removed the closed party list system used in European Union elections from the list of electoral systems used within the UK.

Learners will no longer be required to:

* know the electoral systems and processes for the formation of the European Union
* understand the impact of the electoral system used in European Parliamentary elections on election outcomes for political parties and composition of governments.

We have also removed ‘the electoral systems and processes used in elections for the European Parliament’ from our list of examples.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** | |
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| **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** | **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** |
| Know the key features of electoral systems used within the UK including: first-past-the-post; types of proportional representation and referendum.  Election systems should include:  • First-Past-the-Post (General Elections)  • Additional Member System (Welsh Assembly)  • Single Transferable Vote (Northern Ireland)  • The Closed Party List System (European Parliament).  Know, as part of the above, the electoral systems and processes for the formation of the European Parliament.  Understand the impact electoral systems used in the UK, including those to the European Parliament, have on election outcomes for political parties and composition of governments.  Understand the possible advantages and  disadvantages of these systems. | By applying knowledge gained from a range of evidence and viewpoints, evaluate how far the different election systems used in the UK and the electoral systems and processes used in elections for the European Parliament can be described as ‘fair and effective’. | Know the key features of electoral systems used within the UK including: first-past-the-post; types of proportional representation and referendum.  Election systems should include:  • First-Past-the-Post (General Elections)  • Additional Member System (Welsh Assembly)  • Single Transferable Vote (Northern Ireland)  • The Closed Party List System (European Parliament)  Know, as part of the above, the electoral systems and processes for the formation of the European Parliament.  Understand the impact electoral systems used in the UK, including those to the European Parliament, have on election outcomes for political parties and composition of governments.  Understand the possible advantages and disadvantages of these systems. | By applying knowledge gained from a range of evidence and viewpoints, **evaluate how far the different election systems used in the UK can be described as ‘fair and effective’.** |

## Section 3: The UK and the wider world

### 3.2 The UK and its relations with the wider world

The European Union has been removed from the list of international organisations of which the UK is a member. We have amended the specification and provided an extra example that highlights the differences between the Commonwealth and the UN and NATO

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** | |
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| **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** | **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** |
| *Know* that the UK is a member of international organisations including: the United Nations and its agencies; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); **the European Union;** the Council of Europe; the Commonwealth and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). | By applying knowledge of the United Nations to evaluate how far its work reflects its aims. | *Know* that the UK is a member of international organisations including: the United Nations and its agencies; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); the Council of Europe; the Commonwealth and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). | By applying knowledge of the United Nations to evaluate how far its work reflects its aims.  **By applying knowledge of the Commonwealth to show an understanding of how this differs from organisations such as the UN and NATO.** |

Following the UK’s departure from the European Union learners are no longer required to:

* analyse the benefits and costs of the UK’s membership of the European Union
* analyse the impact on the UK (as a member of the European Union) of one decision made by the European Union
* evaluate different viewpoints on the UK’s continuing membership of the European Union.

Instead, learners will now need to:

* learn about the principles underpinning the formation of the European Union
* analyse the benefits and the costs of the UK leaving the European Union
* analyse the impact on the UK (in relation to current treaties and obligations) of one decision made by the European Union
* evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the current relationship between the UK and the European Union.

We have also provided new examples to help guide teaching and learning.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** | |
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| **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** | **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** |
| *Analyse* the benefits and costs of the UK’s membership of the European Union.  *Analyse* the impact on the UK of one decision made by the European Union.  *Evaluate* different viewpoints on the UK’s continuing membership of the European Union. | By researching information on EU membership costs and benefits from more than one independent secondary source. (These might include the BBC and research institutes with contrasting political perspectives such as *Civitas* and the *Institute for Public Policy Research*.)  Through an evaluation of statements made by political parties that adopt contrasting positions on EU membership.  By countering viewpoints they do not support. | ***Know* the principles underpinning the formation and development of the European Union.**  ***Analyse* the benefits and costs of the UK leaving the European Union.**  ***Analyse* the impact on the UK of one decision made by the European Union.**  ***Evaluate* the quality and effectiveness of the current relationship between the UK and the European Union.** | **By researching information from the European Union on its formation, its aims and its objectives.**  **Through an evaluation of statements made by economists, business leaders, trade unionists, politicians, pressure groups, political parties and research institutes.**  **By examining how migration, fishing, travel and trade have changed in the UK following the UK’s departure from the European Union.**  **Through an analysis of examples of cooperation and tension between the UK and European Union.** |

## Additional changes to the specification

We have also made the following changes to our GCSE Citizenship Studies specification:

## Section 1: Rights, the law and the legal system in England and Wales

### Rights and responsibilities

We have changed the example given for how candidates can understand the importance of documents such as the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights in protecting rights, equalities and freedoms. It now reads:

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** |
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| By assessing the legitimacy of holding people in detention without trial with reference to the Declaration and Convention, and to other appropriate contextual information | By assessing the legitimacy of holding people in  **detention for up to 14 days under the Terrorism Act.** |

We have added an example to illustrate evaluating outcomes in cases where rights and responsibilities need to be balanced using local, national, and global contexts.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** |
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| By analysing and discussing the balance of rights and responsibilities at school or college.  Through an evaluation of the effectiveness of the UK Human Rights Act.  Through an evaluation of different viewpoints on rights and responsibilities in one international example of conflict such as Israel/Gaza.  By countering viewpoints they do not support. | By analysing and discussing the balance of rights and responsibilities at school or college.  Through an evaluation of the effectiveness of the UK Human Rights Act.  **By evaluating the rights and responsibilities of two groups with opposing aims such as environmental protesters and motorist groups.**  Through an evaluation of different viewpoints on rights and responsibilities in one international example of conflict such as Israel/Gaza.  By countering viewpoints they do not support. |

### 1.2 The law

We have changed the context that candidates might use to evaluate the effectiveness of at least one piece of legislation.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** |
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| Through an evaluation of the effectiveness of the legislation (contexts could include media freedom; anti-terror legislation; the control of dangerous dogs). | Through an evaluation of the **purpose, legitimacy and** effectiveness of the legislation (contexts could include media regulation; anti-terror legislation; **restrictions on fox hunting and controls on public protest including strike action).** |

## Section 2: Democracy and Government

### 2.1 Democracy, elections and voting in the UK

We’ve amended the specification to remove reference to fixed-term parliaments.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** |
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| Know that the UK is a representative democracy with fixed-term sovereign parliaments, and that MPs represent constituencies. | *Know* that the UK is a representative democracy with **a sovereign parliament**, and that MPs represent constituencies. |

### 2.3 British Constitution

The UK Covid19 judge-led inquiry has been added as an example illustrate the separate but complementary roles of the executive, legislature and judiciary.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** |
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| By researching an example of a judge-led inquiry into actions carried out on behalf of the executive such as the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war. | By researching an example of a judge-led inquiry into actions carried out on behalf of the executive such as the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war **or the UK Covid-19 inquiry**. |

The following example has been included to illustrate why tensions between institutions might arise within the uncodified British constitution.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment in June 2025** |
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| Through an evaluation of the purpose and effectiveness of elected police commissioners in determining local police priorities. | Through an evaluation of the purpose and effectiveness of elected police commissioners in determining local police priorities. **Consider some possible examples of tension: greater central government control as opposed to further devolution of power; elected police commissioners as opposed to police commissioners appointed by local authorities or central government.** |

### 2.4 The economy, finance and money

We have added *government debt* to the following point under *Learners should be able to* and have added two further examples to illustrate this point.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** | |
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| **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** | **Learners should be able to:** | **Examples:** |
| *Understand* the relationship between taxation, administrative efficiency, economic growth and public spending. | By analysing official government and local authority information on the main types of public taxation, the revenue raised and the main areas of public expenditure. | *Understand* the relationship between taxation, administrative efficiency, economic growth, **government debt** and public spending. | By analysing official government and local authority information on the main types of public taxation, the revenue raised and the main areas of public expenditure.  **By analysing the government’s annual budget or autumn statement and considering the reactions of businesses, trade unions and consumer groups.**  **Through a case study of a large government project such as HS2, analysing how decisions about expenditure, risk and value for money are made and the different benefits and costs of the project.** |

### 2.5 The role of the media and free press

The following example has been added to enhance learners' understanding of the media's role and to assist their evaluation of its effectiveness.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| By analysing the ways in which information is presented by media with particular political affiliations. | By analysing the ways in which information is presented by media with particular political affiliations.  **Through an evaluation of the possible effects of print, broadcast and social media’s impact on human rights and democracy.** |

We have added the following example to assist learners in their evaluation of media regulation.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| By analysing the conclusions of the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, ethics and practice of the press, and applying this knowledge to evaluate the government response. | By analysing the conclusions of the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, ethics and practice of the press, and applying this knowledge to evaluate the government response.  **By analysing different examples of news and editorial content from print, broadcast and social media to assess how far such content is 'trustworthy'.**  **By evaluating the effectiveness of media oversight and regulation.** |

We have changed the examples of media used by influencers and decision makers as follows:

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| By researching digital campaigning and comparing its effectiveness with campaigns using more traditional media.  By evaluating the success of attempts by government, political parties or pressure groups to manage media coverage of their ideas and actions. | By researching **social media** campaigning and comparing its effectiveness with campaigns using **print and broadcast media.**  By evaluating the success of attempts by government, political parties or pressure groups **such as environmental groups or active-travel campaigns,** to manage media coverage of their ideas and actions. |

### 2.6 Citizenship participation in the UK

We have included a further example to help extend learners' knowledge and understanding of potential barriers to citizens' participation in democracy.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| By researching opportunities for active membership of political parties, interest groups, cultural and religious organisations, pressure groups, youth organisations and the National Citizen Service.  Through an evaluation of a range of methods to increase participation rates in UK democracy including: citizenship education in schools; changes in elections and voting; and Government e-petitions. | By researching opportunities for active membership of political parties, interest groups, cultural and religious organisations, pressure groups, youth organisations and the National Citizen Service.  **Explore ways to overcome barriers to citizens' participation in democracy through the use of case studies.**  Through an evaluation of a range of methods to increase participation rates in UK democracy including: citizenship education in schools; changes in elections and voting; and Government e-petitions. |

We have amended and added the following examples to suggest possible contexts for learners' research.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| Through case studies of how individuals and groups seek to influence decision makers through e-petitions, lobbying and direct action such as environmental groups and organisations combatting homelessness.  By researching the aims, methods and influence of different organisations that seek to represent citizens’ interests.  Through case studies of citizen action to evaluate aims, methods and effectiveness.  By planning, organising, executing and evaluating informed action to address a citizenship issue or question of concern in order to bring about change or improvement for a particular community or wider society. | Through case studies of how individuals and groups seek to influence decision makers through e-petitions, lobbying and direct action **such as campaigns to reduce the voting age to sixteen and organisations combatting homelessness.**  By researching the aims, methods and influence of different organisations that seek to represent citizens’ interests **such as trade unions, political parties and pressure groups.**  Through case studies of citizen action to evaluate aims, methods and effectiveness.  By planning, organising, executing and evaluating informed action to address a citizenship issue or question of concern in order to bring about change or improvement for a particular community or wider society.  **By investigating how individual or groups of citizens have sought to improve or change their communities. Examples might include communal garden projects or road-safety campaigns.** |

## Section 3: The UK and the wider world

### 3.1 Identities and diversity in UK society

*The Sikh community* has been added as an example of a cultural, ethnic or religious group in the UK.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| Through case studies of different cultural, ethnic or religious groups in the UK, understand that identities are often complex. | Through case studies of different cultural, ethnic or religious groups in the UK, **such as the Sikh community in the UK,** understand that identities are often complex. |

We've added a reference to one of the first large arrivals of Caribbean immigrants to the UK on HMT *Empire Windrush* as an example of a family and community experience of migration for learners to share and we have included the examples of immigration from Uganda in the 1970s or from the EU in the 2000s and 2010s as research themes learners might use to explore the political and economic reasons for migrations to the UK.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
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| By sharing family and community experiences of migration and the reasons for it.  By researching the political and economic reasons for the major patterns of migration affecting the UK including factors that have caused people to leave their country of origin and factors that have caused them to select the UK particularly as a place they wish to work, live or settle. | By sharing family and community experiences of migration and the reasons for it**, such as West Indian immigration to the UK on HMT Empire Windrush.**  By researching the political and economic reasons for the major patterns of migration affecting the UK including factors that have caused people to leave their country of origin and factors that have caused them to select the UK particularly as a place they wish to work, live or settle**, such as immigration from Uganda in the 1970s or the EU in the 2000s and 2010s.** |

We have added *Ukraine* as an example to be studied when evaluating the motivations, methods and outcomes of UK government intervention in one or more international disagreement, conflict or crisis.

| **J270 specification content for assessment until June 2024** | **J270 specification content for assessment from June 2025** |
| --- | --- |
| Through an evaluation of the motivations, methods and outcomes of UK government intervention, in one or more international disagreement, conflict or crisis. (Examples include but are not limited to: Kosovo from 1999; Afghanistan from 2001; Iraq from 2003; Sierra Leone civil war of 2002 and Ebola emergency of 2014.) | Through an evaluation of the motivations, methods and outcomes of UK government intervention, in one or more international disagreement, conflict or crisis. (Examples include but are not limited to: Kosovo from 1999; Afghanistan from 2001; Iraq from 2003; Sierra Leone civil war of 2002; **Ebola emergency of 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.)** |

# What you need to know to support your teaching

## The Fixed-term Parliaments Act

The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 meant that, unless decided by the House of Commons, elections would be held every five years. Previously, an election could be called by the King or Queen dissolving the house of commons. Convention meant that the monarch would act at the request of the Government.

In 2022 the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act repealed the Fixed-term Parliament Act, setting five years as the maximum length for a parliament and reinstating the monarch’s role in calling an election.

There is an explainer from the Institute for Government about how an election is called. (<https://tinyurl.com/2p8h58kz>)

## The principles underpinning the formation of the European Union

Originally formed in 1957 by the 6 signatories of the Treaty of Rome (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany), the European Union was initially an economic community. It has developed since then as a more political, economic and social union that today comprises 27 European States.

The purpose of the European Union is to encourage and safeguard:

* cross-border trade and cooperation
* economic development
* political cooperation between member states
* security
* cultural links and exchanges.

The European Union comprises a number of different institutions such as the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Commission and the Court of Justice of the European Union. These institutions create policy, oversee trade and create and uphold laws that affect all 27 of the EU member states.

The European Union operates a single market. This seeks to guarantee the free movement of goods, money, services and people. The free movement of people gives citizens of European Union member states the freedom to travel, live and work anywhere in the European Union.

The European Union makes policies that apply to all member states. This can affect things such as migration, travel, fishing, agriculture and trade. The EU also negotiates agreements on these issues with countries outside of the EU.

More information about the history of the European Union and the principles underpinning its formation can be found on the European Union’s website. <https://tinyurl.com/swapjp3e>

## The benefits and the costs of the UK leaving the European Union

The UK left the European Union on 31 January 2020. As a result:

* the UK is no longer represented in the institutions of the European Union
* the UK no longer has to abide by EU laws and policies on issues like migration, fishing, agriculture and trade
* the UK can now negotiate trade agreements with non-EU states
* EU citizens in the UK no longer have the automatic right to live and work in the UK without a visa (unless resident in the UK prior to December 2020 and have settled status)
* UK citizens in the EU no longer have the automatic right to live and work in any of the EU member states
* the UK is no longer a member of the European Union’s single market or customs union.

This explainer from This Week provides an overview of the pros and cons of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. <https://tinyurl.com/yck2dnac>

## The current relationship between the UK and the European Union

The UK government and the European Union put in place a number of new agreements. These included:

* The Withdrawal Agreement (2020) which set out:
  + how the UK would leave the European Union
  + the rights of EU citizens who were living in the UK at the time of Brexit to continue living in the UK
  + the rights of UK citizens who were living in an EU member state at the time of the UK leaving the European Union (Brexit) to continue living in that country.
* The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (2021) which
  + ensured continued free trade in goods between the UK and EU member states
  + set out continued cooperation on areas such as fishing, aviation and law enforcement.
* The Northern Ireland protocol (2021) and the Windsor Agreement (2023) which
  + set out how goods and people would move between Northern Ireland (which is part of the United Kingdom), the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (which is a European Union member state)
  + ensured that no hard border would exist on the island of Ireland.

While the UK is a sovereign nation, agreements between the European Union and the United Kingdom mean that the UK is still bound by EU legislation on a number of matters such as state support, fishing quotas and aviation.

The Council of Europe provides details of the current relationship between the UK and the EU. <https://tinyurl.com/547mpusa>

A BBC explainer of the key parts of the UK-EU trade agreement. <https://tinyurl.com/yc8anh48>

A BBC explainer of the Northern Ireland protocol and the Windsor Agreement. <https://tinyurl.com/4ah26f9m>

The gov.uk website has lots of information explaining how regulations have changed between the UK and the EU. These often focus on practical topics such as travel (<https://tinyurl.com/ca5tmwab>), trade (<https://tinyurl.com/yn7wf4fs>) fishing (<https://tinyurl.com/3prr5svs>) and working abroad (<https://tinyurl.com/2hjawxr6>).

# What other changes have we made?

We have updated our sample assessment material for GCSE Citizenship Studies and have issued a revised chapter of the Citizenship Studies textbook published by Hodder Education. These are available via *Teach Cambridge*.

# When will these changes take effect?

The specification content changes will be first assessed in the June 2025 series.

For students being assessed in June 2024, the mark scheme will allow responses in relation to the UK’s new and/or previous relationship with the European Union where applicable.

# What to do if you have any further queries?

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