

Revision Summary Sheet – Citizen participation in the UK and taking citizenship action

Public Institution	A school, college, library, hospital or other place that is run for public benefit.	Public service	Using knowledge, understanding, skills and experience for community and/or national benefit.
Pressure group	A group of people with similar views on a single issue who lobby elected representatives	Advocate	Make a case for a particular viewpoint, cause or policy. Also used to describe someone whose job it is to speak on behalf of a viewpoint or person.
Lobbying	The process of trying to influence the opinions of decision-makers. Methods include sending messages, making presentations and organising rallies.	Direct action	To seek an immediate result by doing things to disrupt the work or life of the Government or the people thought to be responsible for a problem. E.g. strikes.
Charity	An organisation set up to provide help and raise money for those in need.	Volunteer	To work without pay to support a good cause.

Getting involved and having a voice

Active citizenship is about taking an active role in community life and making a positive contribution to society. This can be achieved by taking part in voluntary work, involvement in community organisations and participation in local and national politics. People can dedicate their time to their wider community and country by working for a public institution or in the public services.

Opportunities for young people – Government policy aims to achieve five overarching aims for young people – one of which is ‘making a positive contribution’.

The National Citizen Service (NCS)	<p>Open to all 16 and 17 year olds in England. Brings together young people from different backgrounds to develop skills for work and life through team-based challenges to sharpen leadership, teamwork and communication. The 3 NCS phases take place outside school term time in Spring, Summer and Autumn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 – Adventure – A week is spent away from home at an outdoor activity centre learning new skills such as canoeing, archery and rock climbing • Phase 2 – Future – Students learn to live independently, cook for themselves, budget and think about a career • Phase 3 – Making a difference – All participants work in teams on a social action project to bring a change or benefit to their community.
The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP)	<p>UKYP aims to give a voice to young people aged 11 – 18. It gives young people a chance to influence local, regional and national government, providers of young people’s services and other agencies with an interest in the views and needs of young people. UKYP is independent of government and has a programme of activities including a debate in the House of Commons, regional meetings, dialogue with government ministers and inputs to policy development. There are 369 UKYP representatives elected each year from special constituencies across the UK. In 2016, members of the UKYP voted for the top 5 issues that they wanted to campaign on:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combat racism and discrimination to give particular support to people of Jewish or Muslim faith. • Improve public transport by making it less expensive and more accessible. • Improve mental health services and help young people understand more about mental health. • Develop the curriculum in schools and colleges so that all young people can learn more about politics, finance and relationships. • Modify the living wage to make it applicable at a full hourly rate of £7.85 to everyone aged 16 and over (£9.15 in London).

Interest groups and pressure groups

In a pressure group, people have similar views on a single issue. They work together to promote those views and advocate change. They are different from a political party because it does not aim to form a government. Instead, it seeks to influence decision-making by persuading politicians and civil servants to take action on a particular issue. Pressure groups use the following to influence decision-makers:-

- Give evidence to Parliamentary committees
- Lobby decision-makers
- Present a petition or e-petition
- Persuade people to contact decision-makers individually
- Run media campaigns, organise protests and direct action.

Examples

- Amnesty International
- Migration Watch
- Animal Aid

The importance of community participation for democracy

Citizen participation is vital for a healthy democracy. People develop greater feelings of well-being and self-worth by engaging with others, sharing their skills and ideas, and making their voices heard. Decisions are likely to be better if everyone is involved, and, if people have had their say, they are more likely to support those decisions. Community participation also brings people together: breaking down barriers to encourage mutual respect and tolerance – important values that underpin UK democracy..

Revision Summary Sheet – Citizen participation in the UK and taking citizenship action

Charities and voluntary groups

Many people make a contribution to their community by supporting the work of a charity. 42% of adults volunteer at least once a year and 27% do so at least once a month. Organisations such as Oxfam, the Samaritans and Citizens Advice rely on people giving up their time to raise money or to work free of charge. Some of the benefits of this are:-

- Making a difference to people's lives
- Changing the way things work for the better
- Gaining valuable work experience
- Putting existing skills to good use
- Developing new skills
- Getting involved with the community
- Making new friends

Overcoming barriers to community participation

Sometimes people feel unable to participate actively in their community. Reasons for this might include:	Such barriers can be overcome by:
Not having enough time	Successful citizenship action in school
Not knowing where to begin	Experience of the Duke of Edinburgh Award or National Citizen Service
Being generally de-motivated	Confidence-building
Feeling they have nothing to offer	Working with activist mentors
Thinking that their contribution will not make any difference	

Increasing participation in politics

There has been a worrying decline in the number of UK electors turning out to vote. However, since 2001, numbers have started to rise. Electors are far more likely to vote when they feel something important is at stake, understand the issues and feel their votes matters. Governments have used a variety of approaches to make parliamentary politics more interesting and relevant, e.g. Making Citizenship part of the National Curriculum in 2002. Since 2010, there has been a surge of support for 'new' political parties such as the Green Party and UKIP.

Changing the way we vote

The way people vote in the UK has changed very little since Victorian times. Everyone votes on the same day (usually a Thursday) and those who turn up must go to a designated polling station between 7am and 10pm. People must register individually and, although they can do this electronically, the number registering to vote has fallen.

Using digital media

Worldwide use of the internet and social media has made it much easier to become directly involved in campaigning and decision-making. **Change.org, Avaaz and Digital Democracy** are examples of petitioning websites where people can sign existing petitions or start their own. The UK Government has an on-line petitioning system that enables people to raise issues and enlist support. Petitions remain live for 6 months. Any petition with at least 100,000 signatures will be considered for a debate in parliament. If a petition gets at least 10,000 signatures, the Government will make a public response. Unfortunately e-petitions have their disadvantages. As it is so easy to set up a campaign electronically, sometimes petitions are frivolous or of little value. Others contain misinformation or remain in circulation long after they become outdated. Fraud is also a problem as e-signatures are difficult to verify.

Eight stages for successful action

Stage 1 – Choose an issue that you and your team care about and that will bring a change or benefit to your school, community or wider society.

Stage 2 – Seek help and information, especially from decision-makers who can advise you.

Stage 3 – Seek support from those who might benefit from or care about your project

Stage 4 - Find out about your issue and people's opinions

Stage 5 – Decide exactly what you hope to achieve from your project with the resources and time available.

Stage 6 – Decide the form your action will take. Think about:-

- Targeting a decision-maker
- Keeping all team member and supporters safe
- Staying within the law
- Using democratic processes to contact, inform and lobby decision-makers
- Communicating with the project team, supporters, decision-makers and the general public.

Stage 7 – Agree an action plan

- Break your project down into tasks, sequence the tasks, allocate responsibility and deadlines for each task, build in regular team meetings to review progress and adjust your plans.

Stage 8 – Evaluate your action in relation to the objective you agreed at Stage 5. Consider how you or others could extend or enlarge your project.