

GCSE Citizenship Studies - Key Term Vocabulary

The following subject specific vocabulary provides definitions of key terms students should be familiar with and gain understanding of these terms.

Active citizen

A person who actively takes responsibility, becomes involved in areas of public concern and tries to make a difference.

Active citizenship

Participating in society to bring about change.

Advocacy

Representing or supporting a person or an organisation by writing, speaking or taking action on behalf of that person or organisation.

British values

A set of standards which reflect the ideals of the British society.

By-election

An election to a public office that occurs when a post holder dies or resigns between elections.

Campaigning

Actions or events organised by an individual or a group of people to achieve an aim.

Censorship

The control of information or ideas within a society.

Charities

Local, national or international organisations which are set up to help those in need. The term also has a legal status as charities registered with the Government receive some tax benefits.

Citizenship

Being a citizen of a country and being vested with the rights and responsibilities of that state.

Civil law

Law that deals with disputes between individuals or groups. There are civil courts which award damages (a money payment).

Civil service

Individuals who are employed by the Government.

Coalition

An agreement between political parties to form a government.

Common law

Law made by the decisions of judges over the years.

Commonwealth

An international association between the UK and the countries which were previously part of the British Empire.

Council of Europe

An intergovernmental organisation founded in 1949, which encourages European countries to cooperate with each other. It is an independent body and should not be confused with the European Union, which is a completely separate organisation. The European Court of Human Rights is the best-known body in the Council of Europe.

Criminal law

Law which deals with individuals who break the law, and which punishes offenders because they have broken laws that Parliament has stated we must all obey.

Democracy

A system of government, where the citizens are able to vote in regular and fair elections for representatives, who will make laws and decisions on their behalf.

Demonstration

A public meeting or march protesting against a specific issue.

Devolution

The transfer of some powers from the Government to the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

Direct democracy

Where the people decide on the policy directly, for example through a vote or referendum on each issue.

Equal opportunities

Allowing all people access to the same opportunities, regardless of their disability, religion, age, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

Executive

The branch of the Government, which is responsible for putting laws or decisions into effect.

EU (The European Union)

An economic and political union between a number of European countries, who work closely together.

First past the post

The voting system used in the UK to elect members of some local councils and members of Parliament, whereby the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins.

General election

When the citizens of a country vote to elect a new government. A general election in the UK usually happens once every 5 years.

Government

The individuals who have been elected to run the state, led by the UK Prime Minister (PM).

House of Commons

An elected body currently consisting of 650 members of Parliament. It is the lower house of Parliament and meets in the Palace of Westminster.

House of Lords

The upper house of Parliament, meeting in the Palace of Westminster. It comprises of life peers and hereditary peers, who scrutinise the bills approved by the House of Commons.

Human rights

Basic rights and freedoms which all people are entitled to.

Immigration

The process of people moving from one country to another to live and work.

Interest group

An organisation who try to influence the government to adopt policies on a particular issue.

Judiciary

Branch of the state that is responsible for enforcing the law. It comprises Judges and other legal officials.

Juries

A group of local people who are chosen randomly to make a decision in a legal case.

Justice

The fairness as a result of the application of a Law, usually by a judge, in society.

Legislature

The law-making body of the state i.e. the Parliament.

Lobbying

A person or group of people meeting or taking action (e.g. writing letters, demonstrating, petitioning) to try to persuade a politician to take up their cause.

Local government

A system of government that operates at a local level providing services to its community.

Localism

When people in a particular local area are able to make decisions about policies which affect their local area.

The media

A means of communication.

- mass media – television, radio and printed media which can reach a large number of people.
- new media – the internet and social media.

Migration

The movement of people between different countries.

Monarchy

A form of government in which a king or queen reigns as the head of state. The UK is a constitutional monarchy.

Multiple identities

When an individual is able to assume a range of different identities, these may clash.

Multiculturalism

The co-existence of different ethnic races, cultures or religions.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation)

An international military defence organisation comprising of different countries who work together to try and settle disputes amongst nations.

NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation)

A non-profit, voluntary group of citizens who work on a local, national or international level to achieve an aim. They are not controlled by the government, but will often work closely with them. An example of an NGO is Save the Children.

Parliament

The institution of Government in the UK. It comprises of three parts: the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch.

Petition

A formal, written request, usually signed by many people, which appeals to the authorities to bring about change in regard to a particular issue.

Police

An official state organisation which is responsible for maintaining public order by preventing and detecting crime.

Pressure group

An organised group of people who take action together to try to bring about change regarding a specific issue.

Prime minister

The head of a government.

Public spending

The money spent by the state.

Referendum

A general vote by the electorate on a single issue which has been referred to them for a direct decision. It is a form of direct democracy.

Representative democracy

When the citizens of a country elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf.

Responsibilities

A duty that we are expected to do as a citizen of a country.

Rights

A right is something we are entitled to by law.

Sentencing

The process of giving a punishment to a person found guilty in a court case.

Society

The people living together in an ordered community.

Taxation

The way in which the government finances some of its spending by imposing charges on citizens and corporations.

Trade unions

A group of workers in the same trade or profession who have joined together to protect their rights.

UN (United Nations)

An international organisation comprising of most countries in the world which aims to promote peace, security and international cooperation. The UK is a permanent member of the Security Council with the ability to veto any decision.

Volunteering

When one person gives their own time to help others without being paid.

Voter apathy

When a lot of people decide not to vote in an election.

WTO (World Trade Organization)

An international organisation which deals with the global rules of trade between nations.