The UK Government’s Response to Coronavirus

Read the key developments reading first (Pages 1-2), copy and paste the blue website links into your web browser to gather information and then answer the questions below. If you are still struggling, move onto the next question and then come back to any you have not completed at the end, using the internet to look up information beyond the links listed in the reading. If you are still stuck, message Mr Scott in Class Charts.

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| **Key Developments Reading:** |
| The last year has seen a monumental shift in UK politics. While we defend our NHS and protect the lives of our fellow citizens, it is worth reflecting on what recent events tell us about our political system, in particular the power of the executive and the protection of  our civil liberties.  **Section 1: The Coronavirus Act 2020**  On 25 March 2020, the Coronavirus Act 2020 received Royal Assent, giving the government emergency powers it felt necessary to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.  This included postponing elections and the closure of schools.   * The Coronavirus Act: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/7/contents/enacted/data.htm](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/7/contents/enacted/data.htm) * Government description of the act: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-bill-what-it-will-do/what-the-coronavirus-bill-will-do](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-bill-what-it-will-do/what-the-coronavirus-bill-will-do) * Government summary of the impacts of the act: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-bill-summary-of-impacts/coronavirus-bill-summary-of-impacts](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-bill-summary-of-impacts/coronavirus-bill-summary-of-impacts)   Two pressure groups (groups that seek to influence government), Liberty and Amnesty, published their response to the Coronavirus Act, drawing our attention to the potential misuse of the new legislation (laws) and its ability to threaten our fundamental freedoms and human rights.   * Liberty’s response: [www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/new-law-is-biggest-restriction-on-our-freedom-in-a-generation/](http://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/new-law-is-biggest-restriction-on-our-freedom-in-a-generation/) * Amnesty’s response: [www.amnesty.org.uk/coronavirus/uk-coronavirus-bill-explained](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/coronavirus/uk-coronavirus-bill-explained)   **Section 2: Scrutiny of government**  MPs expressed concern that the closure of parliament at a critical time would prevent adequate scrutiny (checking up on) of government action.   * The *Independent* outlines these concerns and the context for the closure: [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-parliament-closed-shut-down-house-commons-easter-recess-a9423401.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-parliament-closed-shut-down-house-commons-easter-recess-a9423401.html) * An ITV news report highlights the work of the Health Select Committee in scrutinising government policy and investigating topical issues such as the current pandemic. The Chair of the Health Select Committee, Conservative Jeremy Hunt MP, has been extremely critical of government in recent weeks. This is a good example of the role of parliament and backbench MPs in scrutinising the executive:  [www.itv.com/news/2020-03-17/health-select-committee-jeremy-hunt-patrick-vallance-government-chief-scientist-over-coronavirus/](http://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-17/health-select-committee-jeremy-hunt-patrick-vallance-government-chief-scientist-over-coronavirus/) * Before parliament closed, Jeremy Corbyn ended his final PMQs (Prime Minister’s Question Time) as Labour Leader, pushing the government to answer questions on their official response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK. Again, this is a useful example of government scrutiny:  [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-52032086](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-52032086) * David Runciman, Professor of Politics at Cambridge University, gives an interesting reflection in the *Guardian* about the nature of power at this time: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/27/coronavirus-politics-lockdown-hobbes](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/27/coronavirus-politics-lockdown-hobbes)   **Section 3: Impact of recent events on the Conservative Party**  It is important not to overlook the impact recent events have had on the Conservative Party and conservatism (a political idea we will study at the end of Y12) in the UK (as well as the US).  New Right conservatism under former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ushered in a neo-liberal approach to the economy and the role of the state: this meant cutting government spending and reducing the role of the government in the economy.  However, we have recently witnessed announcements of vast government spending and a greatly enhanced role for the state. This has not gone unnoticed in the media and it is clear that we cannot go back to the sort of Conservative Party policies we saw previously.   * The *Guardian* looks at the impact of the current crisis on the Conservative Party: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/22/coronavirus-crisis-ignites-bonfire-of-conservative-orthodoxies](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/22/coronavirus-crisis-ignites-bonfire-of-conservative-orthodoxies) * In an LSE blog post, Thomas Prosser explains why the Conservatives are placing greater emphasis on wealth redistribution (note this was written before the current lockdown and further spending announcements): <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/budget-2020-redistribution/> * An similar article can be found in the equally left-wing *Spectator:* [www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/03/budget-showed-how-conservatives-have-learnt-love-deficits](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/03/budget-showed-how-conservatives-have-learnt-love-deficits) |

1. Use this link <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/relations-with-other-institutions/parliament-government/> and the links in Section 1 to help

What is the prime minister or the executive (the government) able to do without consulting parliament? When do they have to consult parliament?

1. With the help of the article below, write a definition of what ‘Cobra’ is and what it does.

[www.itv.com/news/2020-03-09/what-is-a-cobra-meeting/](http://www.itv.com/news/2020-03-09/what-is-a-cobra-meeting/)

1. Why has Cobra been so important during the Pandemic?

1. Watch the address to the nation by Boris Johnson on 23 March in the article below. What does this address tell us about the role and power of Boris Johnson at this time?

[www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/23/boris-johnson-orders-uk-lockdown-to-be-enforced-by-police](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/23/boris-johnson-orders-uk-lockdown-to-be-enforced-by-police)

1. Use Section 2 of the Key Developments Reading: Explain the role of the Health Select Committee in the scrutiny process using the example provided

1. Explain the value of PMQs (Prime Minister’s Question Time) at a time of national crisis using the example provided

1. Use Section 1 of the Key development sheet to help & this link <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/civil-rights/human-rights/the-human-rights-act-1998/>

What are human rights?

1. What is the Human Rights Act? How does it protect our human rights?

1. How else are human rights protected in the UK?

1. How has the government sort to limit the rights of people living in the UK? For example, has it put in force any measures which might be deemed to conflict with our rights as outlined in the Human Rights Act 1998?

1. What are the concerns held by the pressure groups Liberty and Amnesty with regard to the Coronavirus Act?

1. What is the role of pressure groups like Amnesty and Liberty? How influential are they?

1. Use Section 3 of the Key Developments reading.

How do the spending announcements made by the new Chancellor Rishi Sunak suggest the Conservative party has had a dramatic change of economic policy? You may wish to look at the chancellor’s recent budget and his subsequent announcements of support for those affected by Covid-19 and the public services trying to control the pandemic.