The general election

The UK general election is just like a horse race: whoever is first past the post on 7 May has won and gets the keys to 10 Downing Street.

That's right: the leader of the party that has won the most seats in the House of Commons in the election is the one who will be appointed by the Queen to become Prime Minister. And usually that means winning an overall majority. But the current Prime Minister, David Cameron, leader of the Conservatives (similar to CDU/CSU in Germany) won the most seats in the 2010 election, but he did not win an overall majority and this resulted in a hung parliament. He chose to form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats (similar to the FDP in Germany, but more centrist). Coalitions are uncommon in modern British politics (the previous one was over 70 years ago during the second World War).

In this year's general election there are 44 million voters who are located in 650 constituencies throughout the United Kingdom: 18 in Northern Ireland, 40 in Wales, 59 in Scotland and 533 in England. The constituencies are divided between the counties (mainly rural) and the boroughs (mainly urban). Generally there are around 70,000 eligible voters in each constituency, but this varies considerably. In the constituency of Na h-Eileanan an Iar (formerly the Western Isles) right in the far north west of Scotland, there are fewer than 22,000 voters, whereas at the other end of the country, the Isle of Wight has over 130,000 voters. The smallest constituency is Islington North in London with an area of 7.25 square kilometres, an easy job for Jeremy Corbyn MP to know every nook and cranny. Not so easy for Charles Kennedy MP who serves the largest constituency, Ross, Skye and Lochaber in north-west Scotland where he has a whopping 12,000 square kilometres to cover.

What day do voters go to the polls? It is always on a Thursday - because it's tradition. The last election not held on a Thursday was over 80 years ago in October 1931. How many voters are expected to turn out in this election? As in many western countries, the voter turnout at general elections has been steadily falling – the peak was in 1950 when almost 84% of eligible voters marked their cross on the ballot paper. In 2001, there were only 60% who bothered to vote. This has increased slightly in the past two elections to 65% in 2010. However, as the race between the two main parties, the Conservatives and the Labour party (similar to the

German SPD), is very close, pundits are expecting an increased turnout in May.

And what are the main issues that voters are concerned about? Immigration is important, and this is something that the UK Independence Party (UKIP) is making a big noise about; the National Health Service (NHS) is a major concern for an aging population – and it also happens to be the UK's biggest employer; education; the economy; housing; the environment and social services.

A single party majority? A single party minority? A coalition? No one is clear what the results will be – but you can bet that the horse that is first past the post in the early hours of Friday 8th May will sooner or later be given the keys to 10 Downing Street.

If you would like to watch a short video about the UK general election, click here.

And if you would like to keep up to date on the election predictions, then click here.

And if you would like to use the UK general election as a topic in your lesson, we have provided you with two activities. You'll find them in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes

Activity 1: Cheerful Chope (level B1 upwards, 15 minutes)

- Ask students what is happening in the UK on Thursday 7 May. (The general election.)
- On the board write the following words: *Conservative, constituency, general election, Labour, majority, to vote*. The underlined syllable shows the stressed syllable. Give translations: *konservative Partei, Wahlbezirk, landesweite Wahlen, Arbeiterpartei, Mehrheit, wählen*.
- Explain that *to vote* is the verb and the person who votes is *a voter*; *constituency* is the noun and the *constituent* is the person who lives in the *constituency*.
- Say the words together, making sure that students have the correct word stress.
- **Give each student a copy of Cheerful Chope** (pronounced like the start of *chop* and the end of *soap* [ʧəʊp]).

Network Now

* Write these words on the board and translate them: choked = *pikiert*, chap = *Kerl*.
* Model the text first, emphasising stress and correct pronunciation. Watch out for the /tʃ/, /θ/, /v/ and /dʒ/.

  Write these IPA symbols on the board and tell students to identify the words in the text with these sounds. (Direct students to the phonetic alphabet in their *Network Now* coursebook if necessary.)

  Key: /tʃ/ Christ<u>ch</u>ur<u>ch</u>, <u>Ch</u>ope, <u>ch</u>eerful, <u>ch</u>ap, <u>ch</u>oked; /θ/ <u>th</u>irty <u>th</u>ousand; /v/ <u>v</u>oted, Conser<u>v</u>ati<u>v</u>e, <u>v</u>oters; /dʒ/ <u>g</u>eneral, hu<u>g</u>e, ma<u>j</u>ority
* Practise these words together.
* With the whole class, read out the complete text and try to get a good rhythm.
* In pairs, students read the text to each other.
* Ask students to find other words which include the sounds /tʃ/, /θ/, /v/ and /dʒ/. Encourage the use of dictionaries.

Activity 2: Constituencies (level A1 upwards, 15 minutes)

* If possible, bring in the *Network Now* map of the UK or another UK map.
* Ask students what is happening in the UK on Thursday 7 May. (The general election.)
* On the board write *constituency* and *general election* and explain their meanings. (See page 1 and 2 for more information.)
* Tell students that voters from the 650 constituencies in the UK will be voting on 7 May. Ask students: *How many constituencies do you know?*
* Tell students to work in pairs. One of them should write the word *CONSTITUENCY* vertically on a piece of paper. Write the word (vertically) on the board as a model.
* Explain that each pair should try to think of any of the 650 constituencies (or any towns and cities) in the UK that begin with each of the letters.
* You might like to start the activity with the last letter *Y - YORK* and add it to the vertical *CONSTITUENCY* on the board.
* Remind students of east, north, south which could be added to the front of a city name, for example *West Birmingham*.
* If students can't think of a town or city beginning with the correct letter, then the city could have the letter in second or third position. Write *So**u**thampton* across the letter *U* as an example.
* Give students 5 minutes to complete the activity.

- Check answers together: 2 points for a constituency nobody else has thought of; 1 point if another pair has the same answer; no points for no city.
  Key: Possible answers: **C**oventry, **C**anterbury, **C**ambridge; **O**xford; **N**orwich, **N**orthampton, **N**orth (Manchester); **S**tockport, **S**heffield, **S**outhampton, **S**tratford-on-Avon, **S**outh (Birmingham); **T**wickenham, **T**hurso; **I**nverness, **I**sle of Wight; **T**orquay; **U**xbridge (or L**u**ton, So**u**thampton, Bo**u**rnemouth); **E**dinburgh, **E**astbourne, **E**xeter, **E**ast (Liverpool); **N**orwich, **N**ewcastle, **N**ottingham, **N**orth (Bristol); **C**arlisle, **C**hester, **C**ardiff; **Y**ork

Worksheet

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Cheerful Chope

At the last general election, nearly thirty thousand constituents in the constituency of Christchurch voted for Christopher Chope. Conservative voters were cheerful because the chap won a huge majority. Labour voters were choked.

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