

# AQA Citizenship Studies



GCSE



Joan Campbell  
Sue Patrick

Nelson Thornes



## 11.4 Politicians and the media

“Politicians and the media have a lot to answer for ... The remedy is simple: governments should play it straight, and the media should play it fair.”

Tony Wright MP Chair of the Commons Public Accounts Committee  
(from [www.guardian.co.uk/politics](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics))

The relationship between politics and the media has never been easy. They have different jobs so it does not matter if the relationship is one of occasional conflict. Politicians and journalists should be open and honest and not be influenced by media owners who have a purely commercial interest in the outcome of events.

Politicians are often critical of the way the media reports politics claiming that they over-simplify issues, exaggerate the impact and focus too much on scandals or disagreements between politicians.

The media often accuse politicians, particularly the government, of over-complicating matters and trying to manipulate the media for their own benefit.

### Objectives

To investigate how politicians and other groups use the media.

### Information

Political parties use the television to make party political broadcasts and buy space in newspapers and magazines to promote party policies and campaigns.

Individual politicians use the media to highlight personal and party policy. In 2008, Conservative leader, David Cameron, used the media to show his commitment to green issues by summoning the media to photograph and film him cycling to the House of Commons. This backfired in two ways:

- 1 It was found that he cycled to work but then had his car follow with his briefcase. This caused much comment and criticism and required the Conservative Party to speak in his defence.
- 2 He was seen to ignore red lights and cycle the wrong way up a one-way street.

This gave an opportunity for political opponents and interest groups to criticise his behaviour. Mr Cameron apologised for his mistakes.

- Do you think politicians should pull publicity stunts like this one? Did Mr Cameron make his point or was it lost in the criticism? Discuss in groups.
- Look at the national media. Choose an article that shows a politician using the media to make a point. Write a report about the incident. Was the event successful?



A David Cameron cycles to parliament

### Politicians and the internet

Is this the future? There is no denying that the internet has the potential to change the way that politicians do their job. It can open up the opportunity for comment to the general public. However, it will only succeed if the internet is universally available and the system is used and read regularly.

### How other agencies use the media

The media is essential to success in any campaign. Whether you are a person trying to bring about change in your local community or whether you are an international organisation, you will need to use some form of media to bring your point to the attention of the wider public and find a response to your appeal.

The Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) community and charities consider the media to be important in their efforts to effect change and influence public opinion. They believe that good relationships with journalists are an integral part of any effective media outreach campaign. The media can help these organisations by:

- creating an environment of political pressure
- conveying general information
- serving as a public education tool
- countering popular misconceptions
- comment on an issue, and
- providing an alternative viewpoint.

NGOs develop a clear and specific message that includes:

- the situation the campaign is addressing
- the solution the group proposes
- the action that the public can take to help solve the problem.

Individuals can make a difference too. Working together, like-minded people can change society's views and make changes to procedures and laws.

### Families Need Fathers

In May 1974, two fathers, Alick Elithorn and Keith Parkin, got together and decided to do something about the problems they faced with family law during the breakdown of their marriages. They knew that a change in society would require concerted effort by a group of like-minded people. So they founded an organisation and called it Families Need Fathers (FNF).

The *Guardian* supplied the opportunity for this charity to launch its message in June 1974. Today, the organisation is principally concerned with the problems of maintaining a child's relationship with both parents during and after family breakdown and it is the principal society providing advice on children's issues for separated and divorced parents.



B A new father

### Activity

- Do you think politicians and the citizens they represent will use this new technology as a means of interaction? What are the benefits of internet communication? Discuss.
- Go to [www.adampriceblog.org.uk](http://www.adampriceblog.org.uk) to see how this Plaid Cymru member uses his blog.

### Information

NGOs give advice on how to issue a press release and hold a radio and television interview. All major NGOs and charities have websites to give details of their activities and campaigns.