

UK POLITICAL SYSTEM

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a **constitutional monarchy**. This means that Great Britain is governed by the Parliament and the Queen is **Head of State**.

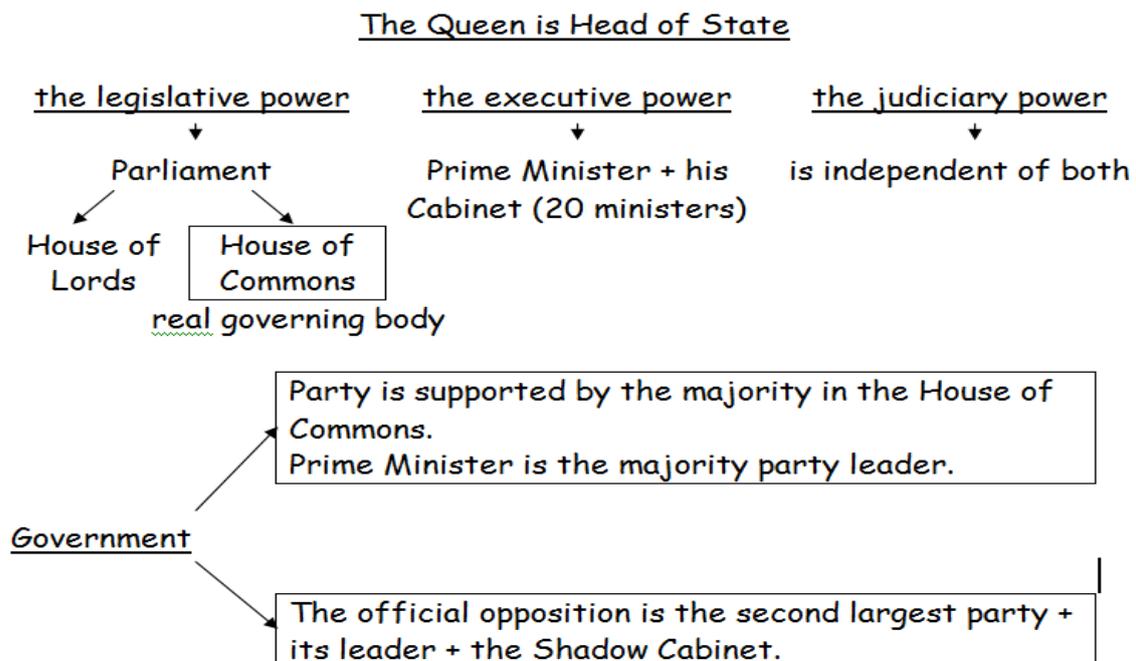
The legislative power in the country is exercised by the Houses of Parliament. The British Parliament consists of two chambers: **the House of Lords** and **the House of Commons**. The House of Lords is composed of hereditary and life peers and peeresses. The members of the House of Commons are elected by the people. They are elected from the **constituencies** in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The House of Commons is **the real governing body** of the United Kingdom.

The executive power is exercised by the **Prime Minister** and his **Cabinet**. The government is usually formed by the political party which is supported by the majority in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister is **the majority party leader** and is appointed by the Queen. The Prime Minister chooses a team of ministers; twenty of the ministers are in the Cabinet.

The second largest party becomes **the official opposition** with its own leader and **the Shadow Cabinet**. The two leading parties in Great Britain are the Conservative Party (the Tories) and the Labour Party.

The judiciary branch of the government determines common law and is independent of both the legislative and the executive branches.

There is no **written constitution** in Great Britain, only **precedents** and traditions.



The press

1. Newspapers

The UK's national **daily newspapers** are commonly identified as either “quality” (that is, publishing serious, news-led journalism) or “tabloid” (devoted more to populist muck-raking and celebrity/royal gossip). On the quality side are the left-leaning *Guardian*, broadly centrist *Independent*, right-leaning *Times* and staunchly Conservative *Daily Telegraph*, along with the business-minded *Financial Times*. All are outsold by the tabloids, led by the right-wing *Sun* and left-ish *Daily Mirror*, along with the tub-thumping, frequently xenophobic *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*.

All of these appear Monday to Saturday only. On Sundays, each gives way to a sister title from the same stable. Most are identifiable (ie *Sunday Times*, *Independent on Sunday* and so on), though the *Guardian* becomes ^[SEP]the *Observer* – England's oldest Sunday newspaper – and the *Sun* mutates into ^[SEP]the laughably mistitled gossip-rag *News of ^[SEP]the World*.

You'll also see mostly weekly **local newspapers** along with racks of **magazines** from the parochial to familiar global titles. One to look out for is the satirical bi-weekly *Private Eye*, which prides itself on printing the stories the rest of the press won't touch, and on riding the consequent stream of libel suits. Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans in London should look out for the weekly free magazine *TNT*, which provides news from home as well as classified ads.

2. TV

The UK has five terrestrial **TV channels** available pretty much everywhere: BBC1 and BBC2 (www.bbc.co.uk), ITV1 ([www.itv\[SEP\].com](http://www.itv[SEP].com)), Channel 4 (www.channel4.com) and Five (www.five.tv). Most hotels – and a fair sprinkling of other forms of tourist accommodation – will offer **cable** or, more frequently, **satellite** channels as well.

3. Radio

The BBC runs five analogue **radio** stations. All are available nationwide, though the exact frequency varies according to your location: Radio 1 (chart and urban music; 97–99FM), Radio 2 (light pop and specialist music; 88–91FM), Radio 3 (classical music; 90–93FM), Radio 4 (current affairs and serious speech; 92–95FM) and Five Live (rolling news and sport; 693 or 909 AM). Other national stations include Classic FM (light classical music; 100–102FM), Absolute (pop music; 1215 AM plus 105.8FM in London) and TalkSport (sports phone-ins; 1053 or 1089 AM). There's also a host of local stations in each area, both BBC (mostly speech-led) and commercial (almost entirely music-led).

All these can also be picked up **digitally** – either online, or through a digital TV, or with a special DAB digital radio – which also gives you access to countless more digital-only stations, from classic rock to Christian worship.

EDUCATION IN THE UK

The education system is divided into nursery (ages 3–4), primary education (ages 4–11), secondary education (ages 11–18) and higher education (ages 18+).

Full-time education is compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 16, either at school or otherwise, with a child beginning primary education during the school year he or she turns 5. At the age of 16, students sit national exams at the age of 16 known as GCSEs. An exam in each subject is taken so you normally leave school with 10 GCSEs which are graded from A* - F.

Students may then continue their secondary studies for a further two years (sixth form), leading most typically to A-level qualifications, although other qualifications and courses exist, including Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications or apprenticeships. The leaving age for compulsory education was raised to 18 by the Education and Skills Act 2008. The change will take effect in 2013 for 16-year-olds and 2015 for 17-year-olds. Public schooling and sixth form education is paid for by taxes. England also has private schools and boarding schools where students go to school and live in residency there.

All public schools in England are required to follow the National Curriculum, which is made up of twelve subjects. The core subjects—English, Mathematics and Science—are compulsory for all students aged 5 to 16. A range of other subjects, known as *foundation* subjects, are compulsory in one or more school years. They include Art & Design, Citizenship, Design & Technology, Geography, History Information & Communication Technology, Modern Foreign Languages, Music and Physical Education

Higher education often begins with a three-year bachelor's degree (some courses are 4 years for example modern languages has a compulsory year abroad) Postgraduate degrees include master's degrees and PhDs that usually take at least three years. Universities require a Royal Charter in order to issue degrees, and all but one are financed by the state via tuition fees, which cost up to £9,000 a term for English, Welsh and EU students. Oxford and Cambridge are the most famous universities in England and only accept exceptional students.