

What is Constitutional Reform?

Constitutional reform is the act of modernising the way a country is run. The need for the constitution to be periodically reviewed and reformed is a result of a variety of factors including:

- Fears about parliamentary sovereignty and the impact of EU membership
- Corruption and sleaze associated with the House of Commons
- Fairness of the electoral system
- Future of the House of Lords
- Erosion of civil liberties
- Increasing number of unelected quangos

Constitutional Reform under Tony Blair 1997-2007

<i>Scotland</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referendums took place in 1997 - majority (74.3%) voted yes on 60% turnout • Scotland Act 1998 - ability to raise/lower UK income tax by 1% (nicknamed 'tartan tax') • Scottish Parliament established 1999
<i>Wales</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referendums took place in 1997 - in Wales the turnout was only just over 50% and of those who turned out to vote - only 50.3% of them voted yes • Government of Wales Act 1998 • Welsh National Assembly established 1999
<i>Northern Ireland</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) - a Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) was established with powers of primary legislation, education, health etc [however defence and foreign policy, relations with Irish Republic, economic policy, social policy and taxation = all still with Westminster]
<i>Electoral Reform</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Transferable Vote (STV) introduced for local elections in Scotland (1997) and elections to Northern Ireland Assembly (1999) • Additional Member System (AMS) introduced for elections to Scottish Parliament (1999), Welsh Assembly (1999) and Greater London Assembly (2000) • Regional list system introduced for elections to EU parliament (1999)
<i>Freedom Of Information</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of Information Act (2000) - right for citizens to see information about themselves held by public bodies [actually only came into force in 2005]
<i>Human Rights</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HUMAN RIGHTS ACT (1998) - made the ECHR part of British law = binding on virtually all public bodies, in virtually all circumstances and can be enforced by any British court of law [came into force in 2000]
<i>London and Local Government</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater London Authority Act 1999 • Greater London Assembly established in 2000 (including position of elected Mayor of London)
<i>Parliamentary Reform</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House of Lords Act (1999) removed all but 92 hereditary peers in the House of Lords • Replaced the two 15-minute sessions with a single 30-minute session. The allocated number of questions in each session for the Leader of the Opposition was doubled from three to six, and the leader of the third-largest party was given two questions.
<i>The Judiciary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The position of the Lord Chancellor was retained but its holder no longer presides over the House of Lords and is no longer head of the courts system • Lord Chief Justice (a non-political post) became head of the judicial system • The post of Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs was created in the cabinet (to advise the cabinet on constitutional issues) • A new Judicial Appointments Commission was set up to propose candidates for

	promotion to senior judicial positions - this ensures that there is no political influence over the decision and can prevent politically motivated appointments
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Constitutional Reform under Gordon Brown 2007-2010

<i>Wales</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> February 2010 the WA voted in favour of holding a referendum on the issue of enabling the Assembly to pass primary legislation
<i>Northern Ireland</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St Andrew's Agreement (2007) new NI Executive takes office Further breakthrough in February 2010 all parties agreed to transfer of law and order and security issues to the Northern Ireland Executive = highly significant event
<i>Parliamentary Reform</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MP Expenses Scandal (2009) prompted a new system whereby the issue of expenses and MPs pay was placed in the hands of an independent commission
<i>The Judiciary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supreme Court replaces the House of Lords as the final court of appeal and constitutional court of the UK (2009)

Constitutional Reform under The Coalition 2010-present

<i>Scotland</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referendum on Scottish Independence planned for Thursday 18 September 2014 (although polls suggest that this would produce a 'No' vote - however the new London Govt may change opinion as most Scots are still very anti Conservative)
<i>Wales</i> DEVOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referendum on additional law-making powers for Welsh Assembly on 3 March 2011. The Welsh electorate voted in favour of the proposal that full law-making powers should be devolved to the Welsh government. Following the affirmative result, the Assembly has approved an order which brought the new powers into force on 5 May 2011.
<i>Electoral Reform</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 speeds up changes to the way people register to vote in Great Britain, moving from a Household Registration system to Individual Electoral Registration. Referendum to change from the first-past-the-post system to the alternative vote (AV) system for general elections in May 2011. Overwhelming No vote to retain old system.
<i>Human Rights</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition investigating the repeal of the HRA 1998 and replacing it with a Bill of Rights
<i>London and Local Government</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cities given option of establishing directly elected mayors (some like Liverpool without a referendum, others have voted in favour in a referendum like Bristol and others have rejected the idea in a referendum like Birmingham)
<i>Parliamentary Reform</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011-12 fixes the length of Parliamentary terms to 5 years. Boundary Commission still looking at reducing the number of MPs and ensuring constituencies are more equal in size.
<i>EU Referendum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2016 Britain voted to exit the European Union