

What are the institutions of the British Constitution?

There are many institutions that make up the British constitution. They work together to share power and enforce the democratic values required for a fair society. The Monarch, our King is known as the Head of State. They **inherit** their power through the family line. For example, our current Monarch is King Charles III our next Monarch will be Prince William, the Prince of Wales. He is Charles' first born child and he will become King. In the UK we have what is known as a **constitutional Monarchy** which means that most of the Monarch's powers have been transferred to the government. The Monarch is a national symbol.

The legislature is made up of two houses the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Each house has separate roles. **The House of Commons** is made up of 653 Members of Parliament or MP's. Each of these MP's represents a constituency (an area of voters approximately 65,000). They are elected at General Elections and stay in post until the next election. The MP's in the Commons represents a political party and the party which has the most MP's (a majority) is the one invited to form a Government. The Commons make laws and pass them on to the House of Lords.



The House of Lords is the second chamber of parliament. Their members are not elected. It is made up of life peers who are appointed by the Prime Minister and hereditary peers who inherited their position from their mother or father. They are appointed for the remainder of their life and are given the title of Lord or Lady.

There are also religious leaders such as bishops in lords. They are unpaid however they do receive a daily allowance for expenses. The Lords can delay bills and make amendments to bills passed from the House of Commons. All bills go through the Lords and then to the King.



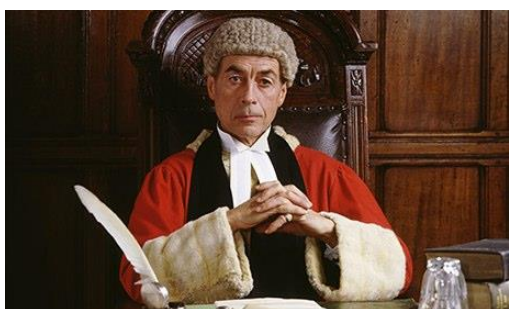
Parliamentary sovereignty is a principle of the UK constitution. It makes Parliament the supreme legal authority in the UK, which can create or end any law. Generally, the courts **cannot** overrule its legislation and **no** Parliament can pass laws that future Parliaments cannot change. This is because Parliament is not binding. Therefore, Parliament has the right to make or unmake any law whatsoever because it is sovereign (independent and autonomous).

The political party who forms the government is led by the **Prime Minister** who is the leader of the winning party. There is also the cabinet which is made up of around 20 senior members of government. **The cabinet** members are appointed by the Prime Minister. They decide on government policy and manage the work of government departments. Meetings are private. Each of these cabinet members are responsible for the departments of the state such as; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary, the Education Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Home Secretary. The role of the Cabinet is to direct government policy and make decisions about national issues. Cabinet ministers spend a lot of time discussing current national problems and how these can be solved. In Cabinet meetings, ministers also present bills (proposed laws) from their government departments.

The political system in the UK is based upon competing political parties such as; the Conservatives, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish

National Party amongst some. Each party presents a **manifesto** which outlines their policies so that people can decide who to vote for. These parties stand against each other in elections and campaign for votes. As mentioned before the party with the most MP's voted into parliament form the government. The party with the second largest number are known as His Majesty's Loyal

Opposition party and they form a **shadow cabinet**. The opposition holds the government to account through debating in parliament and scrutinising (looking



very closely) their policies.

The laws which are introduced are upheld by a number of institutions including the police and the judiciary. The judiciary is the organisation of **judges** who operate the



different courts in British society. They are appointed by a panel and are not able to be influenced by other bodies such as the government and the media. Judges stay in post until they resign or retire. Their role is to interpret and enforce the laws.

The Police are another part of law enforcement. They are split up into divisions around the UK and are accountable to (have to answer to) the Police and Crime Commissioners. In London and Manchester they answer to the mayor. There is no central police force in the UK. The police are not connected to political parties and are servants of the crown. There are various police roles which all work together to uphold the law.



The **civil service** is the name for those people who work for the government and are responsible for carrying out the government's policies. The most senior civil servants work with government ministers and offer advice. There are 3 main principles which underpin the civil service. Firstly, civil servants must be **impartial** and serve the crown and not the government. Therefore they are not permitted to campaign for Political Parties. Secondly, civil servants are **anonymous** individuals who should not be identified or associated with specific policies. The third principle is **permanence** which means that civil servants must stay in their posts (their job role) when the government changes. They are expected to serve whoever is in government which is why it is important they remain impartial.



Finally, the role of the citizen is equally as important. Many freedoms and rights lie within the different parts of our constitution. If citizens are unhappy with the government they can use their **vote** to try and change the government during elections. In addition it is within a citizen's rights to stand for election themselves and put forward their own ideas.