

BRITAIN

How Government Works



The United Kingdom is a **parliamentary democracy**: government is voted into power by the people, to act in the interests of the people. Every adult has the right to vote, known as “**universal suffrage**”.

The UK is also a **constitutional monarchy**. There is an established monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II, who remains politically impartial and with limited powers.

Government

The government runs the country. It has responsibility for developing and implementing policy and for drafting laws. It is also known as the '*Executive*'.

Parliament

Parliament is the highest legislative authority in the UK. It has responsibility for checking the work of government and examining, debating and approving new laws. It is also known as the 'Legislature'.

Parliament and Government

- People often confuse **Parliament** with **government**. They work closely together as both play a part in forming the laws of the United Kingdom but they are separate institutions, with separate functions.
- In the UK, the Prime Minister leads the **government** with the support of the Cabinet and ministers.

Forming a Government

A **political party** that wins an overall majority in the House of Commons at a general election forms the new government and its leader becomes Prime Minister.

If no party wins a majority of the seats then the largest party may form a minority government or there may be a **coalition government** of two or more parties.

The Prime Minister

The **Prime Minister** is head of the **government**. He is ultimately responsible for all policy and decisions. He:

- oversees the operation of the Civil Service and government agencies
- appoints members of the government
- is the principal government figure in the House of Commons

The Prime Minister is **David Cameron MP** and he is based at Number 10 Downing Street in London.



The Deputy Prime Minister

- The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, MP is the deputy head of government.
- He is the leader of the Liberal Democrats and was appointed Deputy Prime Minister when the coalition government was formed following the 2010 general election.
- His office is part of the Cabinet Office at 70 Whitehall.



The coalition



The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government was formed on 10 May 2010. The coalition agreement sets out a joint programme for government to "*rebuild the economy, unlock social mobility, mend the political system and give people the power to call the shots over the decisions that affect their lives*".

The Cabinet



The Cabinet is made up of the senior members of government. Every Tuesday during Parliament, members of the Cabinet (Secretaries of State from all departments and some other ministers) meet to discuss what are the most important issues for the government.

The Ministers

01 Prime Minister + **21** Cabinet ministers
+ **100** Other ministers = **122** Total ministers

Ministers are chosen by the Prime Minister from the members of the **House of Commons** and **House of Lords**.

They are responsible for the actions, successes and failures of their departments.

Government departments and agencies

Departments and their agencies are responsible for putting government policy into practice.

24 Ministerial departments

22 Non-ministerial departments

300+ Agencies and other public bodies

Other public bodies

These have varying degrees of independence but are directly accountable to ministers. There are 4 types of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs):

- 1) **Executive** NDPBs do work for the government in specific areas - for example, the Environment Agency.
- 2) **Advisory** NDPBs provide independent, expert advice to ministers - for example, the Committee on Standards in Public Life.
- 3) **Tribunal** NDPBs are part of the justice system and have jurisdiction over a specific area of law - for example, the Competition Appeal Tribunal.
- 4) **Independent monitoring boards** are responsible for the running of prisons and treatment of prisoners - for example, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.

Government departments

- Some departments, like the **Ministry of Defense**, cover the whole UK. Others don't; (the Department for Work and Pensions doesn't cover Northern Ireland). This is because some aspects of government are **devolved** to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- **Non ministerial departments** are headed by senior civil servants and not ministers. They usually have a regulatory or inspection function like the Charity Commission.

Executive agencies

- These are part of government departments and usually provide government services rather than decide policy - which is done by the department that oversees the agency.
- An example is the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, overseen by the Department for Transport.

Civil Service

The Civil Service does the practical and administrative work of government. It is coordinated and managed by the Prime Minister, in his role as Minister for the Civil Service.

Around half of all civil servants provide services direct to the public, including:

- paying benefits and pensions
- running employment services
- staffing prisons
- issuing driving licences

What is a policy?

- A policy is a statement of what the government is trying to achieve and why. Govern where the government stands on broad political issues.
- On GOV.UK you can see all the policies and find out exactly what policy is the sum of all the individual policies – as a whole they help to define what we are doing, who's involved, who we're working with (partner organizations) and who we've asked (consultations).
- There are currently **224** policies on GOV.UK

Devolved government

- In **Scotland, Wales** and **Northern Ireland** devolved administrations are responsible for many domestic policy issues, and their Parliaments/Assemblies have law-making powers for those areas.
- Areas the Scottish Government, Welsh Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive are responsible for, include:
 - health
 - education
 - culture
 - the environment
 - transport

Local government

Councils make and carry out decisions on local services. Many parts of England have 2 tiers of local government:

1. county councils
2. district, borough or city councils

In some parts of the country, there's just one tier of local government providing all the functions, known as a '**unitary authority**'. This can be a city, borough or county council – or it may just be called 'council'. As well as these, many areas also have parish or town councils.

Parliament

- Parliament is the highest legislative authority in the UK. It has responsibility for checking the work of government and examining, debating and approving new laws. It is also known as the “**Legislature**”.
- Parliament is separate from government and is made up of the **House of Commons** and the **House of Lords**.
- Its role is to:
 - look at what the government is doing
 - debate issues and pass new laws
 - set taxes
- There are **650** elected **MPs** in the House of Commons.

House of Commons



- The UK public elects **650** Members of Parliament (MPs) to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons.
- MPs consider and propose new laws, and can scrutinize government policies by asking ministers questions about current issues either in the Commons Chamber or in Committees.

House of Lords

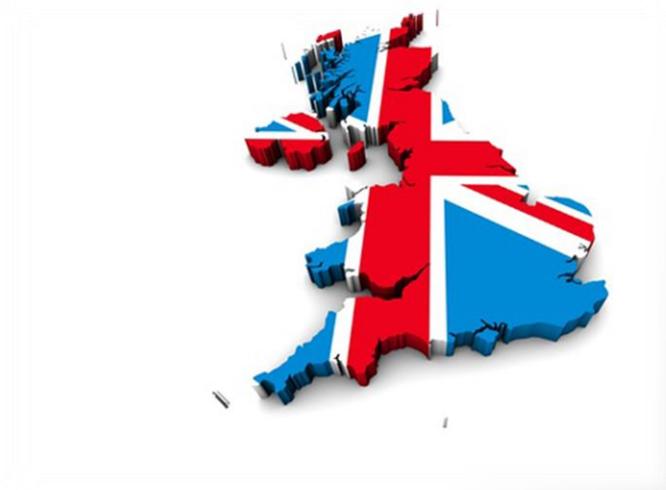
- The House of Lords committees investigate public policy, proposed laws and government activity. Committees are small groups of members (usually **12** in total) who meet outside the chamber and are appointed to consider specific policy areas.
- Members of the Lords help to make and shape laws and hold the government to account. Many members remain active in their careers and draw on this experience in their work in the House.

Legislation

- Laws go through several stages before they are passed by Parliament. The House of Commons and the House of Lords work together to make them.
- They can include:
- **Acts of Parliament**
- **Draft legislation**

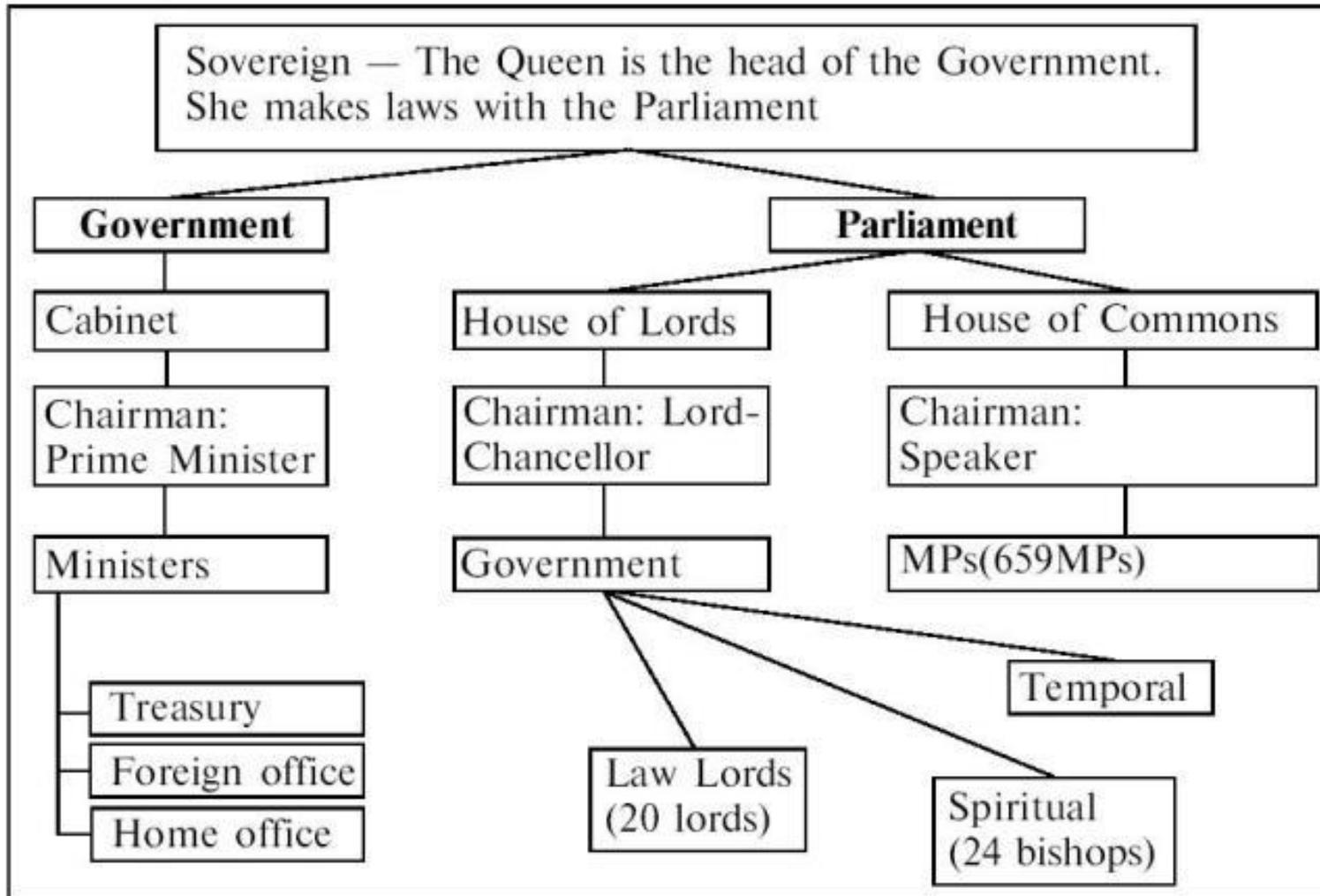
Acts of Parliament

These are bills which have been approved by the Commons, the Lords, and The Queen. The relevant government department is responsible for putting the act into practice.



Draft legislation

- **White papers** outline proposals for new laws. Green papers ask for public comments before the white paper is published.
- **Bills** are proposals for new laws or changes to existing ones. Once agreed by Parliament, they have to be approved by The Queen before becoming law.



<https://www.gov.uk/government/how-government-works#who-runs-government>