

# CLL

# Content and Language Integrated Learning

[illegible]

## 2

# The British Political System

## In this module you will learn about:

- The British political system
- The Queen and the Parliament
- How laws are made in the UK
- Terms, verbs and expressions related to the topic and to law in general

## Warm-up

Answer the following questions.

1. What type of government does the UK have?

.....  
 .....

2. The UK Parliament is composed of two houses. Can you name them?

.....  
 .....

3. Can you mention one of the main functions of the Queen?

.....  
 .....

## Hands on Activity

In the UK the making of a law involves many stages, starting with the initial drafting until it finally gets the Royal Assent and becomes a law.

Divide the class into two groups. One group represents the government and the other group represents the opposition.

The title of the law is 'Raise the compulsory school leaving age'.

The members of the government want to introduce it and must think of three or more reasons why it will improve life in the country.

The members of the opposition have to check that the law is a good idea and must think of three or more possible problems with the new law.  
When you have finished fill in the grid below.

Title of the law: .....

Advantages	Disadvantages

## Reading

### Government and Parliament in the UK

The UK is a parliamentary democracy government and it is voted into power by the people, to act in the interests of the people. Every adult has the right to vote – this is known as ‘universal suffrage’.

Alongside this system, the UK is also a constitutional monarchy. This is a situation where there is an established monarch, who remains politically impartial and with limited powers.

Government and parliament are often confused. 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.

The government is in charge of managing the country and deciding how taxes are spent. Different government departments have responsibility for separate areas of business for example, the Department of Health or the Department of Transport.

Led by the Prime Minister, the UK government is formed by the political party (or coalition of parties) with the greatest representation in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister selects a team of MPs and members of the House of Lords making them Ministers of the different departments to help run the country. All the other MPs and members of the House of Lords are responsible for keeping an eye on government and continuing the work of Parliament.

Parliament is the highest legislative authority in the

UK. It has the responsibility for checking the work of government by examining and enabling the government to raise taxes. It is also involved in debating on and approving new laws. It is known as the ‘Legislature’.

Parliament is made up of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Queen.

The House of Commons contains all of the 650 members of Parliament or MPs. Each MP represents a different part of the country and an MP’s political area is called a constituency, they are voted into office every 5 years.

The House of Lords has around 800 members and it is made up mostly of life **peers** and also includes hereditary peers and bishops. They are not elected by the population at large, but are appointed by the Monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Along with the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the Monarchy – also referred to as the Crown – is an integral part of the institution of Parliament. The Queen plays a constitutional role in opening and dissolving Parliament and approving Bills before they become law.

Over time, the power of the monarchy has been reduced and today it’s **broadly** ceremonial.

The work of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords is very similar.

Both Houses of Parliament hold debates in which Members discuss government policy, propose new laws and current **issues**.



Debates are designed to assist MPs and Lords to reach an informed decision on a subject. Votes are often held to conclude a debate, which may then involve passing or rejecting a proposed new law (legislation) or simply registering their opinion on a subject. All debates are recorded verbatim in a publication called 'Hansard' which is available online or in print.

Scotland has its own parliament, Wales an elected Assembly, and Northern Ireland also has an elected Assembly, which sit in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast respectively. All three countries remain part of the United Kingdom and have continued representation in the Parliament at Westminster in London. In the UK reserved matters and excepted matters are

areas of policy where the UK Parliament has power or jurisdiction to make laws in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This gets complicated as the three countries have all passed legislature to free themselves up of too much control.



### GLOSSARY

**peer:** in Britain, a person who has a high social position and any of a range of noble titles

**broadly:** in general

**issue:** an important topic or problem for debate or discussion

### 1 Complete the following sentences. Your answers must be related to the concepts contained in the text.

1. The primary roles of the Government are: .....
2. The roles of Parliament include: .....
3. The business of Parliament takes place in two Houses: ..... one contains ..... while the other is made up of .....
4. The Queen's role consists in .....
5. The goal of debates is to .....
6. .... is the verbatim printed report of proceedings of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
7. Despite the fact that Scotland has its own ..... Wales and Northern Ireland also have an ..... they are part of the UK.

### 2 Replace the verbs in bold with the correct synonym. Choose from the ones given. Remember to use the correct tense of the verb.

*compose of help end establish control allow comprise diminish*

1. The government is in charge of managing the country and **deciding**/..... how taxes are spent.
2. Parliament has responsibility for **checking**/..... the work of government and examining, **enabling**/..... the government to raise taxes, debating and approving new laws.
3. Parliament **is made up of**/..... the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Queen.

4. Over time the power of the monarchy **has been reduced**/..... and today it's broadly ceremonial.
5. Debates are designed **to assist**/..... MPs and Lords to reach an informed decision on a subject.
6. Votes are often held **to conclude**/..... a debate.

### 3 Research Paper. In pairs carry out a research paper about the General Elections in the UK.

Visit <http://www.parliament.uk/education/about-your-parliament/general-elections/> and find out more about it. Focus on the following elements:

- Where and when do they take place
- The purpose of the General Elections
- What happens if there is no overall majority (so-called 'hung parliament')

When you have finished write down the differences between the General Elections in the UK and in your country.

### Interesting fact

In the House of Commons' speeches must be made in English, but a quotation in another language has been allowed.

The House resolved on 5 June 1996 that, 'whilst English is and should remain the language of this House, the use of Welsh be permitted in parliamentary proceedings held in Wales, subject to the conditions set out in the Third Report from the Select Committee on Procedure'.

In 2001 the House agreed to the Procedure Committee's further recommendation that witnesses before select committees at Westminster should be able to give evidence in Welsh. The Welsh Affairs Committee took evidence in Welsh at Westminster for the first time on 9 April 2003.

### Reading

#### The Queen in Parliament

The Queen has an important formal and ceremonial relationship with Parliament.

The phrase 'Crown in Parliament' is used to describe the British legislature, which consists of the Sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Of these three different elements, the Commons, a majority which normally supports the elected Government of the day, has the dominant political power. The role of the Sovereign in the enactment of legislation is today purely formal, although The Queen has the right 'to be consulted, to encourage and to **warn**' her ministers via regular audiences with the Prime Minister.

The Sovereign's assent is required to all bills passed by Parliament in order for them to become law. Royal Assent (consenting to a measure becoming law) has not been refused since 1707.

It is also a long established convention that The Queen is asked by Parliament to provide consent (which is different to assent) for the debating of bills which would affect the prerogative or interests of the Crown. Consent has not been **withheld** in modern times, except on the advice of Government.

The Queen also plays an important role in the ceremonial opening and dissolving of Parliament.

In the annual State Opening of Parliament ceremony, The Queen opens Parliament in person, and addresses both Houses in The Queen's Speech. →

Neither House can proceed to public business until The Queen's Speech has been read.

This speech is **drafted** by the Government and not by The Queen. It **outlines** the Government's policy for the coming session of Parliament and indicates **forthcoming** legislation.

In addition to opening Parliament, only The Queen can **summon** Parliament, prorogue (discontinue without dissolving it) or dissolve it.

When a Prime Minister wishes to dissolve Parliament and call a general election, he or she is obliged to seek the permission of the Sovereign to do so. For this purpose, the Prime Minister usually travels to Buckingham Palace before announcing a general election. Since the Parliament Act of 1911, the life of the United Kingdom Parliament extends to five years, unless dissolved sooner by the Sovereign at the request of the Prime Minister.

Parliament is commonly dissolved 25 working days before a general election. However the Government does not resign when Parliament is dissolved. Government ministers remain in charge of their departments until after the result of the election is known and a new administration is formed.



### GLOSSARY

**warn:** to give someone cautionary advice about something

**withhold (withheld, withheld):** to refuse to give something

**to draft:** to prepare a preliminary version of (a document)

**outline:** to give the summary of

**forthcoming:** about to happen

**summon:** to order someone to be present

## 1 Provide the information required.

### 1. List the Queen's main roles in Parliament.

- a. ....
- b. ....
- c. ....
- d. ....

### 2. Say when does the Queen give assent and when consent.

- .....
- .....
- .....

### 3. Briefly describe the annual State Opening of Parliament ceremony (what happens during the ceremony, why is it important, etc.).

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

## 2 Place the terms below next to the correct verb. When you have finished translate the word associations you have found with the help of your dictionary.

*parliament consent a bill an election a role a law*

1. pass ..... : .....
2. become ..... : .....
3. provide ..... : .....
4. play ..... : .....
5. open, dissolve ..... : .....
6. call ..... : .....

**3 Group work. Discuss the following questions.**

1. Why does the monarchy still exist in the UK?
2. If Great Britain is a democracy, isn't maintaining a royal family simply antiquated?
3. What would happen if the Monarchy was abolished?

**Interesting fact**

If there is something you want to tell or ask the Queen, you can write to Her Majesty at the following address:

*Her Majesty The Queen*  
*Buckingham Palace*  
*London SW1A 1AA*

If you wish to write a formal letter, you can open with 'Madam' and close the letter with the form 'I have the honour to be, Madam, Your Majesty's humble and obedient servant'.

This traditional approach is by no means obligatory. You should feel free to write in whatever style you feel comfortable.

**4 Fill in the grid with the correct information. You can use your textbook for help.**

	United Kingdom	Italy
Government type		
Structure of Parliament		
Head of State		
Roles of the Head of State		

## Listening



① How are laws made in the UK? Listen to the passage and complete the following sentences.

1. A ..... is a proposal for a new law or to change an existing law.
2. A proposal called a ..... is published and presents the Government's ideas for future policy.
3. Once findings are gathered a ..... is published which outlines a firmer plan of Government policy.
4. Once agreed upon, a Bill is drawn up and the Minister responsible for the policy introduces the Bill to ..... for debate.
5. .... comment on, debate or amend the Bill through several stages.
6. When a Bill has been agreed upon by both Houses it is passed to the Monarch who gives ..... and the Bill becomes law, this is called an .....

② Think of the law-making procedure in your country. Briefly describe it focusing on the differences and similarities between what happens in your country and in the UK.

Use the lexicon given.

First, .....

.....

Then .....

.....

After that .....

.....

Finally .....

.....

Instead of .....

.....

While .....

.....

In the same way .....

.....

## Revision time!

Summarize the information contained in this module.

Focus on the following elements:

1. What is the difference between the government and the Parliament.

.....

.....

.....



2. What is the role of the Queen.

- a. ....
- b. ....
- c. ....
- d. ....

3. What are the main differences between the political system in the UK and Italy.

.....

.....

.....

.....

### Online Resources

The website of the UK government:

<https://www.gov.uk>

The website of the UK Parliament:

<http://www.parliament.uk/>

The official website of the British Monarchy:

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/>