

UK Institutions

The Parliament and the Prime Minister

Formed in 1707, the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is the supreme legislative body in the United Kingdom. Parliament has



total power on all the other political bodies in the United Kingdom and its territories. Its head is the Sovereign, currently Queen Elizabeth II, while the Prime Minister is its highest political authority who leads a major political party and has a majority in the House of Commons.

The parliament is composed by the *House of Lords*, and the *House of Commons* who meet in separate chambers in the *Houses of Parliament* Palace, in London by the River Thames.

England is often called "the mother of parliaments", because its democratic institutions set the standards for many democracies in all the world.

In theory, supreme legislative power belongs to the Sovereign, while in practice real power is administered in the House of Commons, formed by MPs (Members of Parliament) elected by the people.

The Sovereign and the Magna Carta

Based on the *Magna Carta* (written in 1215!) the British monarchy is a constitutional one, with overseas territories. The present monarch, Elizabeth II, has reigned since 1952. She and the Royal Family undertake various official, ceremonies and represent the UK all over the world.

Being a constitutional monarch, means that the Queen has to respect decisions and laws approved in Parliament,

Limiting the powers of the monarch and stating his/her position before the law, the *Magna Carta* influenced the development of the common law and many constitutional documents, including the United States Constitution.

The Commonwealth of Nations.

After World War II, colonies and dominions became independent of Britain, causing the end of the British Empire. George VI and his successor, Elizabeth II, then adopted the title of *Head of the Commonwealth* as a symbol of a new free association of independent countries, with common economical interests.

At present, 54 independent countries (the largest being Canada, Australia and India) are part of the Commonwealth.

Now answer these questions

1. How old is the British Parliament?
2. How many Houses does it have?
3. Who are MPs and where do they meet?
4. What is the "mother of all parliaments" and why is it called so?
5. Who has real power in the British political world and why?
6. Who's the actual British Sovereign?
7. What is her real role in British society?
8. What is the Magna Carta and what did it influence?
9. What is the *Commonwealth of Nations* and how many members states does it have?
10. Do you know any other modern monarchy? Which ones? Which members of those Royal Families do you know?