The overall structure of the education and training system and the legislative framework.

**STRUCTURE:**

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) is the Government Department responsible for policy on education and training in England. It was created by the merger of the former Employment Department and Department for Education in July 1995. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment is a Cabinet Minister in Her Majesty Government. With the help of six other ministers, he (or she) is responsible to Parliament for developing and administering policies on education, training and employment.

The Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland are also Cabinet Ministers who exercise broadly similar responsibilities in their respective countries.

The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) is the Government Department responsible for policy on education and training in Scotland. It was created by the merger of the former Scottish Office Education Department and The Scottish Office Industry Department in October 1995. The Minister of State for Education and Industry is part of the ministerial team working with the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Cabinet Minister with overall responsibility for Scottish affairs.

The Government helps set the framework for the education and training system and works in partnership with other central and local bodies to implement those policies. It also provides funds for many of the public bodies involved in education and training.

**EDUCATION & TRAINING SYSTEM:**

While the education and training systems of England, Wales and Northern Ireland are broadly similar, the education system in Scotland has always been a completely separate system with its own laws and practices. Differences in education and training across Britain are particularly marked in the school systems. At the higher education level and for training, this is less so.

Historically, education and training enjoys a high degree of autonomy. State-funded schools are funded through local and central government and are responsible for managing around 85 per cent of their budgets and for hiring staff. In the higher education sector, universities are entirely self-governing. The characteristics of the system aim to ensure autonomy, quality assurance and responsiveness to the market.

**COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their children obtain education between their 5th and 16th birthdays. Most children in this age group attend a school, though a small minority are educated by private tuition. In Northern Ireland, compulsory schooling begins at age four.

The aim of policy for schools is to:

- * improve standards through a national system of educational targets, assessment, pupil testing and school inspection. In Scotland there is greater emphasis on self-evaluation by individual schools;
- * increase accountability to parents and tax payers, through the publication of information on schools’ performance and inspection reports;
- * increase the scope of individual schools to make decisions through a devolved school management approach give parents a greater voice in the education of their children.

The Government’s overall aim within education and training is:

- * to support economic growth and improve the nation’s competitiveness and quality of life by raising standards of educational achievement and skills;
- * to promote an efficient and flexible labor market by enhancing choice, diversity and excellence in education and training, and by encouraging lifelong learning.
THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK.

The education systems in Britain are governed by a series of Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments.

The legislation sets out the rights, obligations and powers of individuals and institutions, controls the spending of public money, and lays down penalties for failure to comply with legal obligations. Statutes are enacted by Parliament after debating proposals, usually introduced by the Government, but sometimes by individual Members of Parliament.

A national curriculum has been introduced in schools to give all young people access to a broad and balanced education. Established under the Education Reform Act 1988, this sets out what subjects pupils should study, what they should be taught and what standards they should achieve. Participation in full-time education is compulsory for children between their 5th and 16th birthdays.

In Scotland, there is no prescribed national curriculum, but guidelines on the curriculum provide the framework within which schools work. These guidelines were introduced after consultation and reflect the consensual, pragmatic approach taken towards education in Scotland.

EARLY YEARS PRE-COMPELLSORY EDUCATION & CARE:

The Government is committed to high quality nursery education, child care and family support. By April 1998, all local authorities in England and Wales will have an early years development plan (EYDP) drawn up in discussion with locally representative early years development partnerships. These will set out how every four-year-old will have access to a free, high quality nursery place as well as setting targets for the expansion of places for three-year-olds. EYDPs will also encourage the integration of other early years services, such as child care, designed to meet the needs of parents and children.

Many children under five attend state nursery schools or nursery classes attached to primary schools. Others may attend playgroups in the voluntary sector or in privately run nurseries. In England and Wales, many primary schools also operate an early admission policy where they admit children under five into what are called Nursery provision for three-year-olds in the state sector is funded at the discretion of Local Education Authorities while places for children under three in voluntary or private pre-school settings are paid for largely by parents.

Arrangements in Scotland are broadly similar, although there are differences of detail (for example, there are no reception classes and planning systems differ).

EDUCATION BEYOND SIXTEEN:

After the age of 16, when education is no longer compulsory, young people have a variety of choices. Some 70 per cent stay in education, either at school (usually known as sixth-form education) or at further education (FE) colleges. Others go into work, with the remainder being guaranteed a place on the Government’s training programs for young people.

THE TRAINING SYSTEM

Training in Britain takes place in a free market and is available from a wide range of private and public sector providers. Employers decide what investment to make in skills and individuals are encouraged to take the initiative to develop their skills in a culture of lifelong learning. Competence-based qualifications (National Vocational Qualifications - NVQs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Scottish Vocational Qualifications - SVQs in Scotland) certify an individual’s ability to meet the skills’ standards required at work.

The Government’s main role is to provide guidance and to fund an institutional in which training decisions can be taken. It also funds work-related training, especially for young people, unemployed people, and people with disabilities or special needs.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

About seven per cent of pupils in England attend independent schools, of which there are around 2,270. In Scotland, around four per cent of pupils go to independent schools, of which there are around 114. Independent schools are not funded by the state and obtain most of their finances from fees paid by parents and income from investments. Some of the larger independent schools are known as public schools.

Most boarding schools are independent schools and look after their own day-to-day affairs. However, they are subject to inspection to ensure they maintain acceptable standards of premises, accommodation and instruction.

STATE SCHOOLS

The majority of pupils—over 90 percent—go to publicly funded schools, usually known as state schools. These make no charge to parents. In most areas children aged five to 10 attend primary schools, and move on to secondary schools at 11 for education up to the age of 16 or beyond. Primary schools usually have
both girls and boys as pupils; secondary schools may be either single-sex or co-educational.

**THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

All state schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland must conform to the National Curricula. These set out what subjects pupils should study, what they should be taught and what standards they should achieve. They ensure that pupils cover a broad and balanced range of subjects that helps them to develop the qualities and skills needed in adult and working life.

The period of compulsory education is divided into four key stages, depending on pupil age:
- **Key Stage 1** - Pupils aged 5 to 7
- **Key Stage 2** - Pupils aged 7 to 11
- **Key Stage 3** - Pupils aged 11 to 14
- **Key Stage 4** - Pupils aged 14 to 16

Pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 study English, mathematics, science, design and technology, history, geography, art, music and physical education; at Key Stage 3 they study all these subjects plus a modern foreign language. Pupils at Key Stage 4 must study English, mathematics, science, physical education, technology and a modern foreign language; this gives pupils more choice and the opportunity to pursue further vocational courses if they wish.

**THE QUALIFICATIONS & CURRICULUM AUTHORITY (QCA)**

The QCA is the statutory body which advises the Government on all matters concerned with the curriculum and all aspects of school examinations and assessment in state schools in England. It is also responsible for vocational qualifications. Similar arrangements are in place for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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**Further Education & Higher Education**

Young people who decide to stay on in education at the age of 16 usually move into further education (FE). The majority of students, however, are adults studying part-time. FE is provided by a diverse range of institutions, including:
- sixth forms in secondary schools and sixth form colleges (in England and Wales only);
- general further education colleges;
- agricultural and horticultural colleges;
- art and design colleges; and specialist institutions such as the College of the Sea.

**FEES**

Colleges are free to determine their own policies regarding tuition fees, except for 16- to 18-year-old home and ED students in full-time education, for whom tuition fees are not usually charged.

Students of any age attending part-time courses may be charged tuition fees. Colleges must set out clearly their approach to charging tuition fees, including any arrangements for reducing charges in particular cases. Further education colleges may charge students for examination entries, registration fees, books, equipment and other study material. In addition, all students of any age, whether full-time or part-time, may be charged other fees, for example examination and registration fees. In Scotland, further education colleges operate a discretionary bursary scheme for non-advanced courses and financial assistance may be available.

**QUALITY & STANDARDS IN FURTHER EDUCATION**

Each year the Department for Education and Employment and the Welsh Office publish comparative summaries of results for all colleges and school sixth forms in England and Wales. These enable school pupils and their parents to make informed choices about further education. Colleges of further education are obliged to publish their own information about examination results and students’ career routes. Schools must make this available to all their IS-year-old pupils.

In order to maintain standards and improve the quality of further education, the FEFC inspects all colleges and publishes a quality report on each institution every four years. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, inspection is carried out by the Department of Education and HM of Schools in The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department respectively.

**Further Education Charter**

The Further Education Charter sets out national targets which all colleges are expected to meet. It tells local employers and members of the local community what service they have a right to expect from a college. It also gives advice on what to do if things go wrong.

**HIGHER EDUCATION**

A large proportion of young people (about one third in England and Wales and almost half in Scotland) continue in education at a more advanced level beyond the age of 18. This higher education (I-HE) sector provides a variety of courses up to degree and postgraduate degree level and carries out research. Increasingly the sector is also catering for older students. Over 50 per cent of students are now aged over 25 and many study part-time.
WORK-BASED TRAINING

Young people beyond compulsory school age who do not continue in school or further education have access to work-based training. Training is usually aimed at providing skills and knowledge applicable to a particular job or occupation. The majority of all work-related training is provided or paid for by employers for their employees. The Government’s role is based on partnerships at national, sectoral, and local level to help provide a framework of recognized qualifications, and an effective system for identifying and meeting training needs. Financial support is also provided for training young people, unemployed people, and other priority groups.

For young people there is access to Modern Apprenticeships, Youth Training, and National Traineeships. National Traineeships incorporate many of the design features of Modern Apprenticeships, but focusing on National Vocational Qualifications at Level 2. They will replace much of the current provision under Youth Training.

The Government is developing a range of initiatives designed to get every 16- and 17-year-old on the road to a qualification at National/Scottish Vocational Qualification Level 2, or higher if they are able, including relevant key skills. Measures already in place include the introduction (from September 1991 in England and Wales) of National Traineeships to replace Youth Training; and an enhanced role for the Careers Service in ensuring young people take up their entitlement to continued learning after the age of 16. Further measures, including proposals for a ‘right to study’ for all 16- and 17-year-olds and strategies to tackle disaffection and exclusion were launched in late 1991.

In Scotland, the young people’s training program is called Skillseekers. Skillseekers targets young people aged 16-11 who are looking for a work-based learning alternative to post-compulsory education or employment. It replaced Youth Training in 1995-96 and is delivered by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the two economic development agencies in Scotland, through their network of local enterprise companies (LECs). Skillseeker trainees follow an agreed training plan leading to a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) at Level 2 or 3 and increasingly have employed status while receiving training.

NEW DEAL

The Government is concerned to ensure that unemployed people receive every opportunity to improve their employability and contribute to society. Accordingly, young people between the ages of 18-24 who have been unemployed for more than six months will be offered four options which all include a training element:

* a job with an employer, who will be offered £60 a week for six months to take them on;
* a job with a voluntary sector organization for six months;
* full-time basic skills education or training lasting for up to 12 months, if appropriate;
* work with the environmental task force for six months.

The New Deal is about rights and responsibilities. Benefits sanctions will be applied to young people who unreasonably refuse to take up a suitable option.

The New Deal will also offer employers subsidies to take on people aged 25 or over who have been unemployed for two years or more, as well as offering some over-25s a chance to study full-time for up to a year while remaining on benefit.

The Government’s Welfare to Work proposals also include a comprehensive package of back-to-work help, on a voluntary basis, for lone parents on Income Support, and a boost to training and employment opportunities for disabled people or those on incapacity benefits.

TRAINING FOR WORK

The Training for Work program provides training for unemployed adults. It aims to help long-term unemployed people to get jobs through an appropriate mix of training, guidance, approved qualifications and structured work experience with employers.

The help provided is tailored to individual needs. It is aimed primarily at people who have been unemployed for six months or more, but entry criteria are relaxed for those at a disadvantage in the labour market, for example, people with disabilities, those in need of help with literacy or numeracy, lone parents or returnees to the labour market.
THE OPEN COLLEGE

The Open College provides individuals and employers with open learning courses and support materials. It has a wide range of courses, ranging from basic technology skills to management, many of which give credits towards a recognized qualification. It also provides other services, such as training needs analysis for companies and company-specific training schemes. The Open College was initially funded by the Government but is now self-financing.

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Since it was established in 1969 the Open University has pioneered open and distance learning at university level in Britain and has grown to become the country's largest single teaching institution. Its courses are also available in other European countries. No formal academic qualifications are required to enrol on undergraduate courses, but the standard of its degrees and other qualifications are as high as those of other universities. The Open University Business School is the largest provider of management training in Britain, offering a range of opportunities at different levels, from short, practical courses for both organisations and individuals to higher degrees. In 1995 more than 150,000 students were registered with the Open University, over 10,000 at postgraduate level.

OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

It has greatly enhanced the delivery of open and distance learning (ODL) packages, enabling higher levels of participation and a thriving and developing open learning industry. Technologies used include compact disc technologies, computer networking, virtual reality and telecommunications. A wide range of vocational open learning materials are listed in a national Open Learning Directory. Individuals are also encouraged to make use of ODL through the Open Learning in Libraries initiative. Britain also has a number of well established open and distance learning institutions. The University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland is using broadband technology to provide higher education to a large rural and sparsely populated part of Britain.

CAREERS EDUCATION & GUIDANCE

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, schools, colleges and universities are required by law to provide careers information and guidance for students, to raise their awareness of training and careers opportunities and to help them prepare for working life. Because of the Scottish approach to the curriculum, there is no statutory duty to provide a program of careers education and guidance in Scotland.

The Careers Service in England, Scotland and Wales is a network of local careers service companies which work under contract to the respective Secretaries of State with all schools and colleges. They provide students with comprehensive careers information and guidance on career decisions; referral and placing into education, training and employment. In Northern Ireland, the Training and Employment Agency provides a careers advisory service through its network of local offices.
**Types of Qualifications**

**England, Wales and Northern Ireland**

**General Educational Qualifications**: GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education); GCE A level (General Certificate of Education Advanced level); and AS (Advanced Supplementary) examinations.

- Normally taken at age 15-16, they can be taken in a wide range of subjects. Pupils are tested by assessment of work during the course and examinations at the end of the course. Passes are graded from A to G, C being the highest grade. GCE A levels are the main academic qualification for entry to higher education and are normally taken by pupils at age 18 or over. They are tested mainly by examination at the end of the course.
- GCE AS level examinations are at the same standard as GCE A levels, but each examination covers less content. They were introduced in 1987 to allow GCE A level students to take more subjects and to increase the breadth of their education.

**General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs)** which combine general and vocational education.

GNVQs provide a path into both education and employment. They are broadly based vocational qualifications incorporating the skills required by employers and are designed to develop the skills and understanding needed in vocational areas such as business, engineering or health and social care. They are normally studied in school or college.

**National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)** - Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in Scotland. These qualifications incorporate the competencies required in particular occupations. NVQs are made up of a number of units which set out industry-defined standards of occupational competence. These describe the skills and knowledge people need to be able to perform effectively at work.

**Degrees and Diplomas** are available in a wide range of academic and vocational subjects and are delivered through higher education institutions.

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**Qualifications Framework**

With vocational qualifications, individuals are assessed against these standards largely by observation in the workplace. Practical simulation, oral questioning, practical and written tests, assignments and course work may also be used to demonstrate that the individual can perform tasks to the required standard. NVQs/SVQs slot into a five-level framework:

- **Level 1** - broadly equating to foundation skills in semi-skilled occupations;
- **Level 2** - broadly equating to semi-skilled occupations;
- **Level 3** - broadly equating to technician/skilled/craft/supervisory occupations;
- **Level 4** - broadly equating to technician/junior management occupations; and
- **Level 5** - broadly equating to professional/senior management occupations.

The NVQ/SVQ framework is divided into 11 areas, for example, communications and manufacturing, each relating to a major sector of industry/commerce. Within each of the 11 areas, NVQs/SVQs at various levels up to Level 5 in some instances are available for nearly all occupations.

These qualifications each offer the prospect of progression into higher education or work. Planned changes to the qualifications framework are encouraging greater flexibility between the different routes, with individuals being able to combine elements from each according to their different abilities and aptitudes.

The aim is to broaden A levels and upgrade vocational qualifications, underpinned by rigorous standards and key skills. To get greater consistency and comparability of standards, the Department for Education and Employment plans to rationalise the academic and vocational awarding bodies into three 'unitary' bodies, each offering A levels, GCSEs and GNVQs.
SCHOOLS CURRICULUM

The National Curriculum in England and Wales consists of statutory subjects for 5- to 16-year-olds. Similar arrangements exist in Northern Ireland; in Scotland, content and management of the curriculum are not prescribed by statute.

SCHOOLS

All children and young people between the ages of 5 and 16 in England, Scotland and Wales, and 4 and 16 in Northern Ireland, must, by law, receive full-time education. Over 9.8 million children attend 33,400 state and private schools in Britain. About 93 percent receive free education financed from public funds, and 7 percent attend independent schools financed by fees paid by parents. Boys and girls are taught together in most schools. Most pupils in state secondary schools in England, Scotland and Wales attend mixed ability comprehensive schools. Secondary schools in Northern Ireland are largely selective.

Most state school education in England, Scotland and Wales is provided by local government education authorities and the rest by centrally funded grant-maintained schools, where parents have voted for self-governing status.

Parents have a statutory right to express a preference for a school. National tables are published on the performance of all secondary schools throughout Britain. All state schools have to give parents a written annual report on their child’s achievements. Parents are represented on school governing bodies, which appoint staff and manage school budget.

Each school must be regularly inspected by a team of independent inspectors, working according to agreed national standards. A new framework for schools organization is to be set up, based on a clear distinction between functions that local education authorities must carry out and fund centrally and those for which schools are responsible, using their delegated budget.

All state schools must provide religious education and all state secondary schools are required to provide sex education, although parents have the right to withdraw their children from these classes. The main school examination, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), is taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland at around the age of 16. A separate, but broadly similar, exam system exists in Scotland.

All GCSE and other qualifications offered to pupils in state schools in England and Wales must be approved by the Government. Associated syllabuses and assessment procedures must comply with national guidelines.

EDUCATION AFTER 16

About 70 per cent of 16-year-old pupils choose to continue in full-time education in school sixth forms, sixth-form colleges, further education colleges, universities and other higher education institutions. They study for examinations which lead to higher education, professional training or vocational qualifications. These include the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), mainly taken between the ages of 16 and 18, which is designed to provide a broad-based preparation for a range of occupations and higher education; the academic General Certificate of Education Advanced (A) level examination taken at the age of 18 or 19 after two years’ study, and the Advanced Supplementary (AS) examination.

FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

About 3.6 million students are enrolled in further education. Much of this is work-related and vocational. Students often attend part-time, either by day release or block release from employment or during the evenings. Courses are run by some 550 institutions of further education, many of which also offer higher education courses.

A wide range of national vocational qualifications, designed mainly for people in work, are based on national standards that define the competence, knowledge and understanding that employers need.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education, consisting of degree and equivalent courses, has experienced a dramatic expansion. One in three young people now enters higher education compared with one in six in 1989. The number of postgraduates has increased by over a half in the last decade. There are some 90 universities, which enjoy academic freedom. First degree courses are mainly full time and usually last three years, with longer courses in subjects such as medicine. Universities offer courses in a wide range of subjects, including traditional arts, subjects and science and technology.

Over 95 per cent of students on first degree and other comparable higher education courses receive government awards covering tuition fees and a maintenance grant. Parents also contribute, the amount depending on their income. In addition, student can take out loans to help pay their maintenance costs. The system of student finance is to be reformed from October 1998 in order to share the costs of higher education with those who benefit from it.

Large numbers of people come to Britain from other countries to study. Over 500,000 overseas students attend publicly funded higher and further education institutions in Britain, an increase of around three-quarters in the last ten years.
At the age of 16, prior to leaving school, students are tested in various subjects to earn a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). If they wish to go on to higher education at a university, they take Advanced Level examinations, commonly known as “A” Levels. Scotland has comparable qualifications. About a third of British students leave school as soon as possible after turning 16, usually taking lower-level jobs in the workforce. Those who stay in school past the age of 16 may pursue either further education or higher education. Further education is largely vocational, as is adult education. About 3.5 million people were enrolled in further education programs in 1995. Students may also stay in school until age 18 to prepare for higher education.

The percentage of young people entering universities in Britain is far lower than in the United States, where more than half attend. In Britain the proportion has risen from one in six in 1989 to almost one in three in 1996. In 1995 there were 1.7 million students enrolled in higher education.

Britain has more than 90 universities. British universities can be divided into several categories. The foremost universities are the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, both founded in the Middle Ages. The term Oxbridge is used to refer to both schools as a single entity, much as Americans would use the term Ivy League in reference to the group of prestigious East Coast universities. Scotland has equivalent ancient institutions at Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews. Another type of university is the so-called redbrick variety—old and solid schools built in the 19th century when bricks were the standard building material. The large number of ultramodern universities that sprouted up in the last half of the 20th century are often called cement block and plateglass universities. London has its own great schools, the enormous University of London and its world-famous college, the London School of Economics.
The British Constitution

The British constitution has evolved over many centuries. Unlike the constitutions of most other countries, it is not set out in any single document. Instead it is made up of statute law, common law and conventions. Conventions are rules and practices which are not legally enforceable but which are regarded as indispensable to the working of government; many are derived from the historical events through which the British system of government has evolved.

The constitution can be altered by Act of Parliament, or by general agreement to alter a convention. It is thus adaptable to changing political conditions. Recently it has been changed to allow a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly to be set up.

The organs of government overlap but can be clearly distinguished.

The Parliament at Westminster is the legislature and the supreme authority.

The executive consists of:
- the Government: the Cabinet and other ministers responsible for national policies;
- government departments, responsible for national administration;
- local authorities, responsible for many local services;
- public corporations, responsible for operating particular nationalized industries or other bodies, subject to ministerial control; and
- the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Executives.

The judiciary determines common law and interprets statutes.

The Monarchy

The Monarch’s Role in Government

The Queen is not only head of State, but also an important symbol of national unity. In law she is:
- head of the executive;
- an integral part of the legislature; head of the judiciary;
- commander-in-chief of all the armed forces of the Crown; and
- the ‘supreme governor’ of the established Church of England.

As a result of a long process of evolution, during which the monarchy’s absolute power has been progressively reduced, the Queen acts on the advice of her ministers. Britain is governed by Her Majesty’s Government and the devolved authorities in the name of the Queen. In spite of a trend during the past hundred years towards giving powers directly to ministers, the Queen still takes part in some important acts of government. These include summoning, proroguing - which means stopping Parliament meeting without ending the session - and dissolving Parliament; and giving Royal Assent to Bills passed by Parliament and the Scottish Parliament.

The Queen also formally appoints many important office holders, including government ministers, judges, officers in the armed forces, diplomats, bishops and some other senior clergy of the Church of England.

She is also involved in pardoning people convicted of crimes; and conferring peerages, knighthoods and other honours.

An important function is appointing the Prime Minister: by convention the Queen invites the leader of the political party which commands a majority in the House of Commons to form a government.

She also appoints the First Minister on the recommendation of the Scottish Parliament to head the Scottish Executive and approves his appointment of other ministers.

In international affairs the Queen, as head of State, has the power to declare war and make peace, to recognize foreign states and governments, to conclude treaties and to annex or cede territory.

With rare exceptions - such as appointing the Prime Minister - acts involving the use of ‘royal prerogative’ powers are nowadays performed by government ministers. The ministers and Scottish Executive ministers are responsible to Parliament or the Scottish Parliament and can be questioned about particular policies. Parliamentary authority is not required for the exercise of these prerogative powers, although Parliament may restrict or abolish such rights.

The Queen also holds Privy Council meetings, gives audiences to her ministers and officials in Britain and overseas, receives accounts of Cabinet decisions, reads dispatches and signs state papers. Provision has been made to appoint a regent to perform these royal functions should the Queen be totally incapacitated. (In the event of her partial incapacity or absence abroad, the Queen may delegate certain royal functions to the Counsellors of State, who are members of the royal family.)
The Political Systems

The Powers of Parliament

The three elements which make up the Westminster Parliament - the Queen, the House of Lords and the elected House of Commons - are constituted on different principles.

They meet together only on occasions of symbolic significance such as the state opening of Parliament, when the Commons are summoned by the Queen to the House of Lords. The agreement of all three elements is normally required for legislation, but that of the Queen is given as a matter of course to Bills sent to her.

Parliament can legislate for Britain as a whole, or for any part of the country, except on those areas which have been devolved (see 1.28-33). It can also legislate for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, which are Crown dependencies and not part of Britain. They have local legislatures which make laws on island affairs. As there are no legal restraints imposed by a written constitution, Parliament may legislate as it pleases, subject to Britain's obligations as a member of the European Union. It can make or change any law; and can overturn established conventions or turn them into law.

It can even prolong its own life beyond the normal period without consulting the electorate, though this would have to be agreed by both Houses. In practice, however, Parliament does not assert its supremacy in this way. Its members bear in mind the common law and normally act in accordance with precedent. The validity of an Act of Parliament, once passed, cannot be disputed in the law courts.

The House of Commons is directly responsible to the electorate, and in this century the House of Lords has recognized the supremacy of the elected chamber. The system of party government helps to ensure that Parliament legislates with its responsibility to the electorate in mind.

In carrying out these functions Parliament helps to bring the relevant facts and issues before the electorate. By custom, Parliament is also informed before all important international treaties and agreements are ratified. The making of treaties is, however, a royal prerogative exercised on the advice of the Government and is not subject to parliamentary approval.

The House of Lords

The House of Lords consists of: 90 hereditary peers and peeresses of England, Scotland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom; life peers created to assist the House in its judicial duties (Lords of Appeal or 'law lords'); all other life peers; and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester, and the 21 senior bishops of the Church of England.

The House is presided over by the Lord Chancellor, but questions of procedure are decided on by all present.

The House of Lords processes and revises legislation, and acts as a check on the Government and the House of Commons, through oral and written questions, policy debates and scrutinizing (examining) secondary legislation. It also provides a forum of independent expertise.

The House of Lords also acts as the final Court of Appeal for the United Kingdom in civil cases and for England, Northern Ireland and Wales in criminal cases. This work is carried out by 12 salaried Lords of Appeal in Ordinary (Law Lords) who are life peers and who also take part in the legislative work of the House.

The House of Commons

The House of Commons holds the supreme powers of Parliament.

The House of Commons consists of 659 Members of Parliament (MPs) directly elected by voters in each of Britain's 659 parliamentary constituencies.

Currently there are 121 women and nine black or Asian MPs. Of the 659 seats, 529 are for England, 40 for Wales, 72 for Scotland and 18 for Northern Ireland.

General elections are held after a Parliament has been dissolved and a new one summoned by the Queen.

When an MP dies or resigns, or is given a peerage, a by-election takes place. Members are paid an annual salary of £47,008 - as at July 1999 - and an office costs allowance of up to £50,264. There are also a number of other allowances.
UK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

For electoral purposes Britain is divided into constituencies, each of which returns one member to the House of Commons. To ensure that constituency electorates are kept roughly equal, permanent Parliamentary Boundary Commissions keep constituencies under review. Elections are by secret ballot.

Voters

British citizens, together with citizens of other Commonwealth countries and citizens of the Irish Republic resident in Britain, may vote provided they are aged 18 or over; included in the annual register of electors for the constituency; and not subject to any disqualification.

People not entitled to vote include members of the House of Lords, patients detained under mental health legislation, sentenced prisoners and people convicted within the previous five years of corrupt or illegal election practices.

Voting Procedures

Each elector may cast one vote, normally in person at a polling station. Electors whose circumstances on polling day are such that they cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person at their local polling station - for example, electors away on holiday - may apply for an absent vote at a particular election. Most British people resident abroad may also now apply for absent votes.

Voting is not compulsory: 71.5 per cent of a total electorate of 43.87 million people voted in the general election in May 1997. The simple majority system of voting is used. Candidates are elected if they have more votes than any of the other candidates, although not necessarily an absolute majority over all other candidates.

Candidates

British citizens and citizens of other Commonwealth countries, together with citizens of the Irish Republic, may stand for election as MPs provided they are aged 21 or over and are not disqualified. Those disqualified include un-discharged bankrupts; people sentenced to more than one year's imprisonment; clergy of the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic Church; and peers.

A candidate's nomination for election must be proposed and seconded by two electors registered as voters in the constituency and signed by eight other electors. Candidates do not have to have party backing. A candidate must also deposit £500, which is returned if he or she receives 5 per cent or more of the votes cast. The maximum sum a candidate may spend on a general election campaign is £4,642 plus 3.9 pence for each elector in a borough constituency or 5.2 pence for each elector in a county constituency. All election expenses, apart from the candidate's personal expenses, are subject to the statutory limit.

PRIMER MINISTER

The Prime Minister is also, by tradition, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service. The Prime Minister’s unique position of authority derives from majority support in the House of Commons and from the power to appoint and dismiss ministers. By modern convention, the Prime Minister always sits in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister presides over the Cabinet, is responsible for the allocation of functions among ministers and informs the Queen at regular meetings of the general business of the Government. The Prime Minister’s other responsibilities include recommending a number of appointments to the Queen. These include: Church of England archbishops, bishops and deans and other Church appointments; senior judges, such as the Lord Chief Justice; Privy Counsellors; and Lord-Lieutenants.
The Prime Minister’s Office at 10 Downing Street, the official residence in London, has a staff of civil servants who assist the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister may also appoint special advisers to the Office to assist in the formation of policies.

Departmental Ministers

Ministers in charge of government departments are usually in the Cabinet; they are known as ‘Secretary of State’ or ‘Minister’, or may have a special title, as in the case of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They include, for example, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Ministers of State and Junior Ministers

Ministers of State usually work with ministers in charge of departments. They normally have specific responsibilities, and are sometimes given titles which reflect these functions. More than one may work in a department. For example, in the Department of Education and Employment there are three ministers responsible for employment policy, school standards and lifelong learning respectively, all reporting to the Secretary of State. A Minister of State may be given a seat in the Cabinet and be paid accordingly.

Junior ministers - generally Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State or, where the senior minister is not a Secretary of State, simply Parliamentary Secretaries - share in parliamentary and departmental duties. They may also be given responsibility, directly under the departmental minister, for specific aspects of the department’s work.

Non-Departmental Ministers

The holders of various traditional offices, namely the Lord President of the Council, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Lord Privy Seal, the Paymaster General and, from time to time, Ministers without Portfolio, may have few or no departmental duties. They are thus available to perform any duties the Prime Minister may wish to give them.

THE CABINET

The Cabinet is composed of about 20 ministers, although the number can vary. They are chosen by the Prime Minister and may include departmental and non-departmental ministers. The functions of the Cabinet are to initiate and decide on policy, the supreme control of government and the co-ordination of government departments. The exercise of these functions is vitally affected by the fact that the Cabinet is a group of party representatives, depending upon majority support in the House of Commons.

Cabinet Meetings

The Cabinet meets in private and its proceedings are confidential. Its members are bound by their oath as Privy Counsellors not to disclose information about its proceedings, although after 30 years Cabinet papers may be made available for inspection in the Public Record Office at Kew, Surrey. Normally the Cabinet meets for a few hours each week during parliamentary sittings, and rather less often when Parliament is not sitting. To keep its workload within manageable limits, a great deal of work is carried on through the committee system. This involves referring issues either to a standing Cabinet committee or to an specially set up committee composed of the ministers directly concerned. The committee then considers the matter in detail and either disposes of it or reports upon it to the Cabinet with recommendations for action. The membership and terms of reference of all ministerial Cabinet committees is published by the Cabinet Office. Where appropriate, the Secretary of the Cabinet and other senior officials of the Cabinet Office attend meetings of the Cabinet and its committees.

THE PRIVY COUNCIL

The main function of the Privy Council is to advise the Queen on the approval of Orders in Council, which, by Acts of Parliament, enact subordinate legislation ranging from constitutions of dependent territories to international pollution. Responsibility for each Order, however, rests with the minister answerable for the policy concerned, regardless of whether he or she is present at the meeting where approval is given.

The Privy Council also advises the Sovereign on the issue of royal proclamations, such as those summoning or dissolving Parliament.

There are about 400 Privy Counsellors, consisting of all members of the Cabinet, a number of middle-ranking government ministers, leaders of the opposition parties in both Houses of Parliament, senior judges and some appointments from the Commonwealth.

Local Governments

PRINCIPAL TYPES OF LOCAL AUTHORITY

There are five different types of local authority: county and district councils, London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities. There are 387 local authorities in England, London boroughs, metropolitan boroughs, and unitary authorities are single-tier councils with full responsibility for all local authority services in their area.
The United Kingdom is a parliamentary monarchy—that is, the head of state is a monarch with limited powers. Britain’s democratic government is based on a constitution composed of various historical documents, laws, and formal customs adopted over the years. Parliament, the legislature, consists of the House of Lords, the House of Commons, and the monarch, also called the Crown. The House of Commons is far more influential than the House of Lords, which in effect makes the British system unicameral, meaning the legislature has one chamber. The chief executive is the prime minister, who is a member of the House of Commons. The executive branch also includes Her Majesty’s Government, commonly referred to simply as “the government.” The government is composed of ministers in the Cabinet, most of whom are members of the House of Commons; government departments, each of which is responsible to a minister; local authorities; and public corporations.

The British monarchy stands for the continuity of British history going back to Anglo-Saxon times, and today it serves as a figurehead for the state. In theory, the British monarch has enormous powers, but in reality those powers are limited and the Crown follows the dictates and advice of the ministers in Parliament. The British monarchy has been a hereditary position since the 9th century, although Parliament has stepped in at times to alter the succession, for example, in 1701 when the house of Hannover was selected to replace the Stuart dynasty.

As the official head of state, the monarch formally summons and dismisses Parliament and the ministers of the Cabinet. The monarch also serves as head of the judiciary, commander in chief of the armed forces, and Supreme Governor of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. In reality, the government carries out the duties associated with these functions.

### United Kingdom Government

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### The Constitution

The British Constitution is an unwritten constitution, not being contained in a single legal document. It is based on statues and important documents (such as the Magna Carta), case law (decisions taken by courts of law (such as matters), customs and conventions, and can be modified by a simple Act of Parliament like any other law.

The British Constitution contains two main principles – the rule of law (i.e. that everyone, whatever his or her station, is subject to the law) and the supremacy of Parliament, which implies that there is nobody that can declare the activities of Parliament unconstitutional and that Parliament can, in theory, do whatever it wishes.

There are three bodies that have the power to carry out the constitutional laws, namely 1) the Legislature (the two Houses of Parliament), which makes laws, 2) the Executive (the Government), which puts laws into effect and plans policy, and 3) the Judiciary, which decides on cases arising out of the laws.

### The Monarchy

The British monarch appoints all judges, military officers, diplomats, and archbishops, as well as other church officers. The monarch also bestows honors and awards, such as knighthoods and peerages. In reality, all of these appointments are made upon the advice of the prime minister. The monarch has the right, however, to be consulted on all aspects of national life and review all important government documents. The monarch may also meet with the Privy Council, a now largely ceremonial body made up of Cabinet members that serves...
in an advisory capacity to the monarch. Since Britain is a democracy, the monarchy could potentially be abolished if a majority of the population decides to do so. In the early 21st century the monarchy generally remained popular, despite unpleasant media coverage surrounding the marriages and relationships of the royal family. Only Scotland had a small majority that wanted to make the United Kingdom a republic.

The royal family endorses developments in Britain by performing such ceremonial functions as cutting ribbons, opening businesses, launching ships, and laying cornerstones. Many members of the royal family are involved in charity work and maintain a public presence by visiting shelters, hospitals, and clinics. Because foreigners are attracted to the pageantry of royalty, tourism related to the royal family brings a substantial amount of money into the country.

The Prime Minister

The chief executive of the government is the prime minister. He or she is the leader of the party that holds the most seats in the House of Commons. The monarch goes through the ceremony of selecting as prime minister the person from the House of Commons who is head of the majority party. The prime minister presides over the Cabinet and selects the other Cabinet members, who join him or her to form the government that is part of the functioning executive. Acting through the Cabinet and in the name of the monarch, the prime minister exercises all of the theoretical powers of the Crown, including making appointments. In the past, prime ministers also came from the House of Lords. Today, in the unlikely circumstance that a peer (a member of the House of Lords) is sought as a prime minister by one of the parties, he or she must first resign from the House of Lords and gain election to the House of Commons.

The Cabinet

The Cabinet has about 20 members, or ministers, all of whom must be members of Parliament (MPs). Members of the Cabinet are leaders of the majority party in the House of Commons or, more rarely, members of the House of Lords. Cabinet ministers who head a particular government department, such as the Ministry of Defense, are known as secretaries of state. The prime minister serves as the first lord of the treasury and as minister for the civil service. In addition to the various secretaries of state, the Cabinet includes non-departmental ministers who hold traditional offices—such as the lord president of the council, the paymaster general, and the lord privy seal—and ministers without portfolio, who do not have specific responsibilities but are assigned to specific tasks as needed. The lord chancellor holds a unique position. The lord chancellor’s executive duties as a Cabinet member include being responsible for legal affairs in the United Kingdom, but he or she is also head of the judiciary, which is a separate part of the British government. The prime minister has the power to move members of the Cabinet from post to post, or to drop individuals from the Cabinet entirely. Former Cabinet ministers may retain their positions as members of Parliament.

The Legislative

Parliament comprises three parts: the Crown, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. Over the course of centuries, the seat of power has passed from the Crown to the Lords to its final resting place in the House of Commons. Parliament originated in the great councils called by the Crown during the Middle Ages. Through these meetings, medieval monarchs sought the advice of their subjects, exchanged information about the realm, and gathered petitions. In other words, Parliament originated with the royal wish to gain the approval and sanction of the realm for acts of state. Later, Parliament served to supplement royal revenues by making grants of taxation—that is, by granting the monarch’s request for extra subsidies to pay for wars. The Crown invited all great nobles and church leaders to attend these councils. By the end of the 13th century representatives from the counties, called knights of the shire, and representatives of the towns, called burgesses, were also being summoned to attend regularly. The knights and the burgesses eventually came to sit separately from the nobles and church leaders, in what eventually became the House of Commons. The nobles and church leaders sat in what came to be called the House of Lords.

Parliament is known as Westminster because it is housed in the Palace of Westminster. Parliament’s functions today are to pass laws, to raise enough money through taxation to enable the government to function, to examine the government policy and administration, particularly its financial programs and to debate or discuss important political issues. The life of a Parliament is not fixed, and the government of the day may call for a general election at any time during its five-year term.
The House of Lords

The House of Lords today is more a place of discussion and debate than one of power, and it normally passes legislation already approved by the House of Commons. Its members are not elected. The House of Lords comprises the lords temporal, the lords spiritual, and the law lords. The lords temporal are either hereditary peers or life peers. Life peers are appointed by the monarch for the duration of the person’s lifetime. These appointments are usually made in recognition of outstanding careers or contributions to society. Famous people who have been made peers are former British prime ministers Winston Churchill and Harold Wilson. The lords spiritual include the archbishops of Canterbury and York; the bishops of London, Durham, and Winchester; and the 21 next most senior bishops. The law lords assist in the judicial functions of the House of Lords. The House of Lords is presided over by the Lord Chancellor.

The House of Commons and Legislation

The House of Commons is the source of real political power in the United Kingdom. The main function of the House of Commons is to legislate. There are 659 Members of Parliament in the House of Commons. The House of Commons is presided over by the Speaker who is chosen by a vote of the entire House, although in practice the party leaders consult with their supporters in order to achieve informal agreement beforehand. The Speaker is responsible for the orderly conduct of business, and is required to act with impartiality between Members in the House. Its members are democratically elected by universal suffrage of citizens over the age of 18. Certain groups that are denied the right to vote, however, include members of the House of Lords, some detained mental health patients, sentenced prisoners, and those convicted of corrupt or illegal election practices in the previous five years.

Members of the House of Commons are elected from geographical constituencies determined by population, and each MP represents approximately 60,000 people. Four permanent boundary commissions exist, one each for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Their purpose is to keep the constituencies equal and the boundaries fair. The commissions review the constituencies every 8 to 12 years and recommend changes based on population shifts. The last review was done in 1995. Following the 1997 election, there were 659 constituencies in the United Kingdom: 529 in England, 72 in Scotland, 40 in Wales, and 18 in Northern Ireland.

Elections

For electoral purposes the United Kingdom is divided into constituencies, each one of which elects a Member of Parliament to sit in the House of Commons.

Today there are 659 seats in the Commons, one seat on average for 69,500 electors. All British citizens (including citizens of the Irish resident in the UK) may voted, provided:
- They are aged eighteen or over,
- are registered,
- are not disqualified by insanity.

Political parties

As a result of the electoral system, two parties have usually been dominant in Britain, at different times. Tories and Whigs, Conservatives and Liberals, and since the 1930s, Conservatives and Labour, with one party normally obtaining a majority of seats in the House of Commons and the other having its role limited to criticizing Government policy.

The Conservative Party was formed in the 1830s and was originally the party of church, aristocracy and land owners. It has increasingly been supported by large business interests. The Labour Party was formed in 1892 to represent the workers and was more or less the parliamentary wing of the Trades Unions.
Demographic trends

Britain has a population of about 59 million people, the 17th largest in the world. The great majority, 49.3 million, live in England; Scotland has just over 5 million people, Wales 2.9 million and Northern Ireland about 1.7 million.

The population density is well above the European Union average. England is the most densely populated, with 373 people per sq km, and Scotland the least, with 67 people per sq km. The great majority of people are concentrated in towns and cities, although there has been a trend, especially in the capital London, for people to move away from congested urban centres into the suburbs.

In 1997 there were 726,000 live births in Britain, compared with 633,000 deaths. The birth rate is relatively low at 12.3 live births per 1,000 population. This is in part due to a trend towards later marriage and towards postponing births.

The average age of women having children has risen to over 28 years in England and Wales. There is also a greater preference for smaller families than in the past, which has led to a significant decline in the proportion of families with four or more children. In addition, more widespread and effective contraception has made it easier to plan families.

Elderly people

One of the most significant changes in the age structure of Britain’s population over the last 30 years has been the increasing proportion of people over retirement age (65 for men and 60 for women) - some 11 million today, and their numbers continue to grow. This has important implications for social services provision into the next century.

Most elderly people in Britain live healthy and independent lives. Nearly all want to be a part of the community, living in their own homes. Many view their later years as an opportunity to do the things they never previously had the time for, or to take on new interests or challenges. For instance, adult educational and recreational courses run by local authorities throughout Britain are well attended by older people, and some sports, such as bowls, attract many elderly participants.

Yet a lot of older people - perhaps living alone, in poor health or disabled in some way have important needs. In addition to the large amount of willing help from relatives, neighbours and friends, practical support for Britain’s elderly people is provided by the social services authorities, voluntary organizations and, to a lesser extent, the private sector.

Services for elderly people are designed to help them live at home whenever possible. In fact, only about 5 per cent of people aged over 65 in Britain live in institutional accommodation. These services may include advice and help from visiting social workers, assistance with domestic chores and the provision of meals in the home. Day centres and lunch clubs are very popular among older people as they provide, in addition to a hot meal and facilities such as a laundry, an important focal point for social contact. They may also offer leisure and educational activities, many of which are run by older people themselves. Local authorities and voluntary organizations operate special transport services to enable less mobile elderly people to get to day centres or to visit the shops, the doctor, family or friends.

Life expectancy for men in Britain is about 74 years and for women 79 years (compared with 49 years for men and 52 years for women at the start of the century). The general death rate is 10.4 per 1,000 of the population. There has been a decline in mortality at most ages, particularly among children, reflecting better nutrition, rising living standards, medical advances and improved health measures, wider education and the smaller size of families.

Britain has one of the highest marriage and divorce rates in the European Union. There are 309,000 marriages each year in Britain, of which about 40 per cent are remarriages of one or both parties. Of the population aged 16 or over in England and Wales 55 per cent are married, 28 per cent are single, 9 per cent are widowed and 8 per cent are divorced. The average age for first marriages in England and Wales is now 29 for men and 27 for women.

In England and Wales there are about 14 divorces for every 1,000 married couples.

The average age of spouses at the time of divorce is now about 38 for men and just over 35 for women. Divorce rates are lower in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In common with many other Western European countries, there has been an increase in cohabitation (unmarried couples living together) in Britain. About 14 per cent of non-married men and women aged 16 and over in Great Britain are cohabiting. There is some evidence of a growing number of stable non-married relationships. Over half of all births outside marriage (which account for over one third of live births in Britain) are registered by both parents giving a single address as their place of residence.
There are concessionary fares for resident pensioners on most bus services, and special discounts are available on coach and rail travel. Special housing needs for the elderly are met by local authorities, housing associations, voluntary bodies and the private sector. Sheltered housing schemes may consist of groups of flats or small houses where older people can live independently but still have the support of a resident warden. For those people who are too infirm to continue to live independently there are residential homes providing full board, or nursing homes offering 24-hour personal care.

**Women**

There is a ratio of about 104 females to every 100 males in Britain. There are about 3.5 per cent more male than female births every year.

Because of the higher mortality of men at all ages, there is a turning point, at about 50 years of age, beyond which the number of women exceeds the number of men. This imbalance increases with age so that there are many more women among the elderly. The economic and domestic lives of women have been transformed in Britain during the 20th century. These changes are partly due to the removal of discrimination in political and legal rights which has promoted sex equality. Another major feature has been the increase in the number of women, especially married women, at work. The growth of part-time and flexible working patterns, and training and retraining schemes, has allowed more women to take advantage of employment opportunities. Childcare provision, such as day nurseries and child-minders, has also increased significantly, extending choice and opportunity for women beyond the scope of home and family.

Women now make up over one-third of the workforce in Britain, and about 800,000 run their own businesses. They are increasingly represented in the professions. The proportion of public appointments held by women has risen to 30 per cent, and the number of women Members of Parliament has increased to over 120. Women take up over half of all further and higher education places, and the provision of ‘access’ courses has helped those returning to education.

**Young people**

The home is the central focus of most young people’s lives in Britain, particularly for those who are still attending school. The majority rely upon their home environment as a place of security and upon their parents as the main providers of food, money and other necessary amenities for life - as well as general advice. Young people spend a large proportion of their leisure time in the home with other members of their family or with friends.

After the home, school is the main social environment where children not only receive their formal education but also develop their identities within peer groups. All school children in Britain are encouraged to take up activities which complement their academic and vocational education and help to identify their individual talents, such as sports, drama, music and creative pursuits. Many of these form part of school curricula.

The personal development and informal social education of young people aged 11-25 is also promoted by the Youth Service in Britain. The Service is a partnership between statutory authorities and a large number of voluntary organizations. A recent survey estimated that nearly 6 million young people in this age group are either current or past participants in the Service.

Youth clubs and centres are the most common types of Youth Service provision, encouraging their members to participate in sport, cultural and creative activities, and community service. Some also provide information and counselling. Youth clubs may be branches of national or international bodies or they may be entirely local institutions.

There are many religious groups and churches with specialist youth organizations, as well as uniformed organizations such as the Guides and Scouts Associations and Boys’ and Girls’ Brigades.

**Ethnic minorities**

For centuries people from overseas have settled in Britain, either to escape political or religious persecution or in search of better economic opportunities. The Irish have long formed a large section of the population. Jewish refugees who came to Britain towards the end of the 19th century and in the 1930s were followed by other European refugees after 1945. Substantial immigration from the
other European refugees after 1945. Substantial immigration from the former colonies in the Caribbean and the South Asian sub-continent dates principally from the 1950s and 1960s. There are also sizeable groups from the United States and Canada, as well as Australians, Chinese, Greek and Turkish Cypriots, Italians and Spaniards.

Since 1962 Britain has necessarily imposed controls limiting the number of immigrants to levels the country can absorb, both economically and socially. Immigration Rules set out the requirements to be met by people (excluding British citizens) who seek entry to or leave to remain in Britain. Nationals of European Union member states are not subject to substantive immigration control, and may work in Britain without restriction.

In the 1991 census just over 3 million people (5.5 per cent) described themselves as belonging to an ethnic group other than the white group. About half of the ethnic minority population were born in Britain. A higher proportion is under 16 than for the white group, but a much lower proportion is over pensionable age.

Many members of the black and Asian communities are concentrated in the inner cities, with related problems of deprivation. However, much progress has been made in recent years in tackling racial disadvantage in Britain through equal opportunities policies backed up by anti-discrimination legislation, and through the social, economic and educational initiatives of central and local government.

Many individuals from the minority ethnic communities have achieved distinction in their careers and in public life, and the proportion occupying professional and managerial positions is increasing. There are at present nine minority ethnic Members of Parliament, and the number of minority ethnic councilors in local government is growing.

There has also been an expansion of commercial enterprise, and numerous self-help projects in minority ethnic communities have been established. Black and minority ethnic talents in the arts and in entertainment have increasingly been recognized.

### Employment

Britain has a higher proportion of the adult population in work - 74 per cent - than any other large European country. The labour market has changed considerably in recent years, with a growing proportion of people working in service industries (such as financial services, education, medical services, retailing, catering, transport and communication). Nearly three-quarters of employees now work in the service sector, compared with less than one-fifth in manufacturing. Other major changes have been the rising proportion of women in the workforce and the increase in part-time employment.

**Patterns of Employment**

The workforce in employment in Britain totals 26.2 million. Of these, 22.9 million (12.2 million men and 10.7 million women) are classed as employees in employment, and about 3.1 million are self-employed. The remainder are on work-related government training schemes or unpaid family workers. Recent trends show that part-time employment has increased over the last 12 years by 30 per cent to 5.5 million while the number of full-time jobs has increased by less than 5 per cent. About 40 percent of women in employment work part-time, compared with 6 per cent of men.

The number of employees engaged in service industries in Great Britain is over 17 million. There has been a gradual move away from manual to non-manual occupations, which now account for nearly three-fifths of jobs.
People in Britain

Housing

Largely depending on their means, people in Britain live in a diverse range of accommodation ranging from country mansions to single rooms or hostels in the inner cities. The majority, however, live in houses and (to a lesser extent) flats, either as owner-occupiers or as tenants paying rent. About 19 per cent of houses are detached, 31 percent are semi-detached and 29 percent are terraced. Purpose-built flats or maisonettes make up 15 per cent of the housing stock and converted flats or rooms account for 5 percent.

Owner-occupation more than doubled between 1961 and 1997. The number of owner-occupied homes amounts to over 14 million in England. Most people buy their homes with a mortgage loan, with the property as security. Mortgages are available from building societies, banks and other financial institutions.

There are some 3.6 million houses and flats in the public housing sector. Most of the public housing in Great Britain is provided by local housing authorities. Over one-third of local authority tenants live in purpose-built flats or maisonettes, one-third in terraced houses and about one-quarter in semi-detached houses. Most have the right to buy the homes they occupy if they wish.

Housing associations, which are non-profit making, are now the main providers of additional low-cost housing for rent and for sale to those on low incomes and in the greatest housing need. The housing association sector is expanding rapidly; associations now own, manage and maintain over 950,000 homes and about 65,000 hostel and special needs bed spaces in Great Britain, providing homes for well over a million people. Almost 10 percent of households are rented from private landlords.

Leisure trends

The most common leisure activities among people in Britain are home-based, or social, such as visiting relatives or friends. Watching television is by far the most popular leisure pastime. Nearly every household has a television set, and average viewing time is over 25 hours a week. The majority of households also have a video recorder.

Other regular pastimes include listening to the radio and to recorded music. About 70 per cent of the population listen to local and national radio on an average day. There has been a dramatic rise in the sale of compact discs in recent years. The number of households with a home computer has increased to over one quarter.

Many people in their spare time enjoy reading (over 50 per cent belong to a library), gardening, do-it-yourself home improvements, undertaking voluntary work, going out for a meal or drink or to the cinema. More daily newspapers, national and regional, are sold for every person in Britain than in most other developed countries. On an average day 76 per cent of people over the age of 15 read a national morning paper; 70 per cent read a Sunday newspaper. The British are renowned as animal lovers, and about half of all households have a pet, most commonly dogs and cats.

Eating & drinking habits

Although some traditional meals in Britain, like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding or fish and chips, remain popular, there has
been a significant shift in eating habits among the population over the last decade or so. This is in part due to a greater emphasis on health and convenience considerations.

Consumption of several items, such as packet sugar, eggs, potatoes and fresh green vegetables, has declined substantially. An increase in the consumption of rice and pasta may be partly responsible for the decline in that of potatoes. Consumption of meat - with the exception of that of poultry which is now at a record level - has also fallen. Skimmed milk now constitutes more than half of the total household consumption of liquid milk. There has been a decline in the total consumption of cooking and spreading fats, with large falls in butter and lard usage being offset by rapid rises in the consumption of vegetable and salad oils and reduced fat spreads. A switch in fish consumption away from fresh white fish towards canned fish and shellfish has been evident. There has been a small increase in the intake of fibres.

Britain has a very wide range of restaurants, offering cuisine from virtually every country. Chinese, Indian, Italian and Greek restaurants are among the most popular.

There has been an increase in recent years in the amount of alcohol that people drink, particularly among women. Beer, including lager, is the most popular drink among male drinkers. The largest consumers of alcohol are in the 18 to 24 age range. Table wine has become more popular, although there has been little change in the consumption of stronger wines such as sherry and port.

Many sports, such as athletics, boxing and football, have also been successful in attracting considerable numbers of participants from the ethnic minorities.

The integration in sport of people with disabilities is increasingly encouraged and organizations throughout Britain promote and develop such opportunities. All schools (except those solely for infants) are expected to have a playing field or the use of one, and most secondary schools have a gymnasium. Some have other amenities such as swimming pools and sports halls.

Language variation

English is the main language spoken in Britain, although with many regional variations in terms of accent and phraseology. It is also one of the most widely used in the world; recent estimates suggest that over 337 million people speak it as their first language, with a similar number speaking it as a second language. Modern English derives primarily from one of the dialects of Anglo-Saxon, but has been very greatly influenced by other languages over time.

About one-fifth of the population of Wales speak the Welsh language, which is of Celtic origin. They are concentrated in the rural north and west, where Welsh remains the first language of most of the population. Both the Government and voluntary groups have taken steps to revive the use of Welsh. Bilingual education in schools is encouraged and there has been an extended use of Welsh for official purposes and in broadcasting. In the context of dealing with public authorities and the administration of justice in Wales, Welsh and English are treated on an equal basis. Gaelic, also a language of Celtic origin, is still spoken by some 70,000 people in Scotland; the greatest concentration of Gaelic speakers is in the islands of the Hebrides.

People in the central lowlands of Scotland have for centuries spoken Scots, a dialect derived from the Northumbrian branch of Old English. This has its own recognized literary tradition and has seen a revival in poetry in the 20th century. Many words and phrases from the Scots tongue are retained in the everyday English which is spoken throughout Scotland. Many other languages are spoken by the minority ethnic communities living in Britain.

Interests in sports

There is widespread participation in sport among people in Britain. An estimated 64.5 per cent of people over the age of 16 regularly take part in sports or exercise. The most popular are walking (including rambling and hiking), swimming, snooker/pool, keep fit/yoga and cycling.

Women's participation has grown significantly over the last few years, even into traditionally male-dominated activities like football and rugby.
Modern Holidays & Traditional Holidays

TRADITIONAL SEASIDE HOLIDAYS

The British upper class started the fashion for seaside holidays in the late eighteenth century. The middle classes soon followed them and when they were given the opportunity (around the beginning of the twentieth century), so did the working classes. It soon became normal for families to spend a week or two every year at one of the seaside resort towns which sprang up to cater for this new mass market. The most well-known of these are close to the larger towns and cities.

These seaside towns quickly developed certain characteristics that are now regarded as typical of the “traditional” English holiday resort. They have some hotels where richer people stay, but most families stay at boarding houses. These are small family businesses, offering either ‘bed and breakfast’ or, more rarely, ‘full board’ (meaning that all meals are provided). Some streets in seaside resorts are full of nothing but boarding houses. The food in these, and in local restaurants, is cheap and conventional with an emphasis on fish and chips.

The water is always cold and, despite efforts to clean it up, sometimes very dirty. But for adults who swim, some resorts have wooden huts on or near the beach, known as “beach cabins”, “beach huts” or “bathing huts”, in which people can change into their swimming costumes. Swimming and sunbathing without any clothing is rare. All resorts have various other kinds of attraction, including more-or-less permanent funfairs.

For the evenings, and when it is raining, there are amusement arcades, bingo halls, dance halls, discos, theatres, bowling alleys and so on, many of these situated on the pier. This unique British architectural structure is a platform extending out into the sea. The large resorts have decorations which light up at night. The “Blackpool illuminations”, for example, are famous.

Another traditional holiday destination, which was very popular in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, is the holiday camp, where visitors stay in chalets in self-contained villages with all food and entertainment organised for them. Butlin’s and Pontin’s, the companies which own most of these, are well-known names in Britain. The enforced good-humour, strict meal-times and events such as “knobkerry knees” competitions and beauty contests that were characteristic of these camps have now given way to a more relaxed atmosphere.

MODERN HOLIDAYS IN BRITAIN

Both of the traditional types of holiday have become less popular in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The increase in car ownership has encouraged many people to take caravans holidays. But the greatest cause of the decline of the traditional holiday is foreign tourism. Before the 1960s, only the rich took holidays abroad. By 1971, the British were taking 7 million foreign holidays and by 1987, 20 million. These days, millions of British people take their cars across the channel every year and nearly half of all the nights spent on holidays away from home are spent abroad. Most foreign holidays are package holidays, in which transport and accommodation are booked and paid for through a travel agent. These holidays are often booked a long time in advance. In the middle of winter the television companies run programmes which give information about the packages being offered. People need cheering up at this time of the year! In many British homes it has become traditional to get the holiday brochures out and start talking about where to go in the summer on Boxing Day. Spain is by far the most popular package-holiday destination.

Half of all the holidays taken within Britain are now for three days or less. Every bank-holiday weekend there are long traffic jams along the routes to the most popular holiday areas. The traditional seaside resorts have survived by adjusting themselves to this trend. Only the rich have second houses or cottages in the countryside to which they can escape at weekends. But there are also many other types of holiday. Hiking in the country and sleeping at youth hostels has long been popular and so, among an enthusiastic minority, has pot-holing (the exploration of underground caves). There are also a wide range of “activity” holidays available, giving full expression to British individualism. You can, for example, take part in a “murder weekend”, and find yourself living out the plot of detective story.

An increasing number of people now go on “working” holidays, during which they might help to repair an ancient stone wall or take part in an archaeological dig. This is an echo of another traditional type of “holiday” - fruit picking. It used to be the habit of poor people from the east end of London, for example, to go to Kent at the end of the summer to help with the hop harvest (hops are used for making beer).
Britain is a country governed by routine. It has fewer public holidays than any other country in Europe and fewer than North America. Northern Ireland has two extra ones, however. Even New Year’s Day was not an official public holiday in England and Wales until quite recently but so many people gave themselves a holiday anyway that it was thought it might as well become official. There are almost no semi-official holidays either. Most official holidays occur either just before or just after a weekend, so that the practice of making a ‘bridge’, is almost unknown. Moreover, there are no traditional extra local holidays in particular places. Although the origin of the word ‘holiday’ is ‘holy day’, not all public holidays (usually known as ‘bank holidays’) are connected with religious celebrations.

The British also seem to do comparatively badly with regard to annual holidays. These are not as long as they are in many other countries. Although the average employee gets four weeks’ paid holiday a year, in no town or city in the country would a visitor ever get the impression that the place had ‘shut down’ for the summer break. In fact, about 40% of the population do not go away anywhere for their holidays.

### Dates of festivals & holidays

**Lammas Day**, August 1. A former festival in which bread made from the first harvest of corn was blessed. The predecessor of Thanksgiving Day and Canada’s Harvest Festival. See also Saint Peter.

**Queen’s Birthday**, a Saturday in the middle of June (Jun 14, 2003). The exact date is set by annual proclamation, but is typically the second Saturday of June. Celebrates the birthday of Queen Elizabeth of England.


**Public holidays throughout the United Kingdom are New Year’s Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Day (1st Mon. in May), Spring Bank Holiday (4th Mon. in May), Late Summer Bank Holiday (4th Mon. in Aug.), Christmas, and Boxing Day.**

**IN ENGLAND**

**Guy Fawkes Day**, November 5. Memorializes the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 in which Guy Fawkes and others attempted to blow up the King and Parliament. At the time Catholics who refused to attend services of the Church of England (recusants) were considered traitors and persecuted. When James I ascended the throne the Catholics were hopeful, for he had promised not to collect the fines against the recusants, but instead of keeping his promises he continued to execute the severe laws against them. Fawkes, who was Roman Catholic, joined with veteran conspirators Robert Catesby and others in a plot to blow up the whole Parliament, king and lords included. A vault directly under the House of Lords was conveniently for rent, and Fawkes took it. They filled it with 36 barrels of gunpowder and waited for parliament to meet, which was delayed several times and finally set to be November 5th. In the mean time disagreements broke out among the conspirators because the Catholic lords and members of parliament would be killed in addition to the king and other intended victims. Ten days before Parliament opened, a Catholic lord who was friend to several of the conspiritors received an anonymous tip not to attend, for “they shall receyve a terrible blowe this parleament”. He relayed his message to the king. Despite warnings that all was found out, Fawkes remained determined to see the plot through, but was discovered on the day of the planned plot. To reveal the names of his partners, Fawkes was tortured in accordance with the King’s letter which said, “if he will not otherwise confess, the gentlest tortures are to be first used to him, and so on, step by step, to the most severe, and so God speed the good work.” All the conspirators were hanged if not killed in the act of being taken, and the laws against recusants were made more severe. The fifth of November was ordered to be a day of Thanksgiving by an Act that lasted over two hundred years. The eve of this day is known in some areas of England as Mischief Night, and is a night that young people make pranks. Nigel Pennick writes in The Pagan Book of Days about the custom of burning an effigy of Guy Fawkes on this night.

**Oak Apple Day**, May 29. Celebrates the anniversary of the day in 1660 when King Charles II was restored to the throne after being saved in the Battle of Worcester by hiding in an oak apple tree. Also known as Royal Oak Day. Battle of Britain Day, September 15. Anniversary of the historic World War II air battle in 1940.

**Lord Mayor’s Day**, November 9. The annual installation of the Lord Mayor of the City of London. The Lord Mayor is elected on Michaelmas, September 29, by the aldermen sworn into office on November 8, and installed on the following day. The celebration includes a procession of the Lord Mayor and his retinue from the Guild Hall to the Law Courts, and later to Westminster.

**Mothering Sunday**, Easter - 21 (Mar 30, 2003). Mid-Lent Sunday. An old English custom. Observance includes attending the mother church in which one was baptized, and offering gifts at the altar to the Church, and also to one’s mother, as tokens of love and gratitude.

**Woman Peerage Day**, January 30. Pancake Tuesday, Easter - 47 (Mar 4, 2003). This is a popular name in England for Shrove Tuesday. It is named for the England for Shrove Tuesday. It is named for the custom of eating pancakes on this day in order to use up all the fat in the house before the beginning of Lent. It was once the custom to give the first pancake to the woman with the most questionable virtues: “She that is noted for lying a-bed long, or any other miscarriage, hath the first pancake presented to her at Shrovetide... which most commonly falls to the dog’s share at last, for no one will own it their due.”

**Public holidays** New Year’s Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Day, Spring Holiday, Late Summer Holiday, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Bank Holiday.

**IN SCOTLAND**

**Bannockburn Day**, June 24. On this day in 1314, Robert Bruce drove the English from Scotland, thus gaining its independence.

**The Day After**, January 2.

**Handsel Monday**, first Monday in January (Jan 6, 2003). Celebrates the new year. Highland Games, last Saturday in September (Sep 27, 2003).

**May Day**, May 1. (observed on last Monday in May?)
Public holidays
New Year’s Day (Jan 1-2), Good Friday, May Day, Spring Holiday, Summer Bank Holiday, Christmas, Boxing Day, Bank Holiday. Additional holidays in Edinburgh: Scottish New Year’s Day (Jan 2), Victoria Day (3rd Mon in May), and Autumn Holiday (3rd Mon in Sep).

IN WALES
Saint David’s Day, March 1. Saint David, or ‘Dewi Sant’ in Welsh, is the patron saint of Wales. He is credited with converting Wales to Christianity. This holiday also commemorates King Caswallon’s victory on this day in 640 AD.

IN NORTHERN IRELAND
Orangeman’s Day, July 12. Commemorates a Protestant victory over Roman Catholic forces in the Battle of the Boyne of 1690. Also known as Orange Day.

Guy Fawkes Night

In 1605 King James I was on the throne. As a Protestant, he was very unpopular with Roman Catholics. Some of them planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament on 5th November of that year, when the King was going to open Parliament. Under the I-louse of Lords they had stored thirty-six barrels of gun powder, which were to be exploded by a man called Guy Fawkes. However one of the plotters spoke about these plans and Fawkes was discovered, arrested and later hanged. Since that day the British traditionally celebrate 5th November by burning a dummy, made of straw and old clothes, on a bonfire, whilst at the same time letting off fireworks. This dummy is called a ‘guy’ (like Guy Fawkes) and children can often be seen on the pavements before 5th November saying, ‘Penny for the guy.’ If they collect enough money they can buy some fireworks.

Pancake Day

Ash Wednesday is the day in February when the Christian period of Lent begins. This refers to the time when Christ went into the desert and fasted for forty days. Although not many people actually give up eating during this period, on Pancake Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, they eat lots of pancakes. These are made from flour, milk and eggs, and fried in a hot pan. Some towns also hold pancake races on that day. People run through the streets holding a frying pan and throwing the pancake in the air. Of course if they drop the pancake they lose the race!

Christmas

On the Sunday before Christmas many churches hold a carol service where special hymns are sung. Sometimes carol-singers can be heard on the streets as they collect money for charity. Most families decorate their houses with brightly-coloured paper or holly, and they usually have a Christmas tree in the corner of the front room, glittering with coloured lights. There are a lot of traditions connected with Christmas but perhaps the most important one is the giving of presents. Family members wrap up their gifts and leave them at the bottom of the Christmas tree to be found on Christmas morning. Children leave a long sock or stocking at the end of their bed on Christmas Eve, 24th December, hoping that Father Christmas will come down the chimney during the night and bring them small presents, fruit and nuts. They are usually not disappointed! At some time on Christmas Day the family will sit down to a big turkey dinner followed by Christmas pudding. They will probably pull a cracker with another member of the family. It will make a loud crack and a colour hat, small toy and joke will fall out!

Later in the afternoon they may watch the Queen on television as she delivers her traditional Christmas message to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. If they have room for even more food they may enjoy a piece of Christmas cake or eat a hot mince pie. 26th December is also a public holiday, Boxing Day, and this is the time to visit friends and relatives or be a spectator at one of the many sporting events.
Valentine’s Day has historical roots both in Greco-Roman and Christian history. St. Valentine’s Day is not a religious holiday. Our association of the middle of February with love and fertility dates to ancient times. In ancient Athens, the period between January 14 and February 15 was the month of Gamelion, which was dedicated to the sacred marriage of Zeus and Hera. In ancient Rome, February 15 was Lupercalia, the festival of Lupercus (or Faunus), the god of fertility. As part of the purification ritual, the priests of Lupercus would sacrifice goats and a dog to the god, and after drinking wine, they would run through the streets of Rome striking anyone they met with pieces of the goat skin. Young women would come forth voluntarily for the occasion, believing that being touched by the goat skin would render them fertile. Young men would also draw names from an urn, choosing their “blind date” for the coming year. In 494 AD the Christian church under Pope Gelasius I appropriated the some aspects of the rite as the Feast of the Purification.

In Christianity, at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of them martyrs, are mentioned in the early lives of the saints under the date of February 14. Two of the Valentines lived in Italy in the third century: one as a priest at Rome, the other as bishop of Terni. They are both said to have been martyred in Rome and buried on the Flaminian Way. A third St. Valentine was martyred in North Africa and very little else is known of him. Several legends have developed around one or more of these Valentines, two of which are especially popular. According to one account, Emperor Claudius II outlawed marriage for all young men because he believed unmarried men made better soldiers. Valentine defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young couples and was put to death by the emperor for it. A related legend has Valentine writing letters from prison to his beloved, signing them “From your Valentine.”

However, the connection between St. Valentine and romantic love is not mentioned in any early histories and is regarded by historians as purely a matter of legend. The feast of St. Valentine was first declared to be on February 14 by Pope Gelasius I around 496. It is said the pope created the day to counter the practice held on Lupercalia, but this is not attested in any sources from that era.

**Boxing Day**

Despite its name, Boxing Day, which is celebrated on December 26 in Great Britain, has nothing to do with pugilistic competition. Nor is it a day for people to return unwanted Christmas presents. While the exact origins of the holiday are obscure, it is likely that Boxing Day began in England during the Middle Ages.

Some historians say the holiday developed because servants were required to work on Christmas Day, but took the following day off. As servants prepared to leave to visit their families, their employers would present them with gift boxes.

**Church Alms Boxes**

Another theory is that the boxes placed in churches where parishioners deposited coins for the poor were opened and the contents distributed on December 26, which is also the Feast of St. Stephen.

As time went by, Boxing Day gift giving expanded to include those who had rendered a service during the previous year. This tradition survives today as people give presents to tradesmen, mail carriers, doormen, porters, and others who have helped them.

Boxing Day is celebrated in Great Britain and in most areas settled by the English (the U.S. is the major exception), including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, Boxing Day is generally considered to be the first weekday following Christmas. If Christmas falls on a Friday or a weekend then Boxing Day is the following Monday.

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**St. Valentine’s Day**

Valentine’s Day is a celebration of romantic love occurring annually on February 14. Although it is associated by legend with a Catholic saint named Valentine, modern Valentine’s Day is not a religious holiday. Our Valentine’s Day has historical roots both in Greco-Roman pagan fertility festivals and the medieval notion that birds pair off to mate on February 14. The custom of exchanging cards and other tokens of love on February 14 began to develop in England and France in the 14th and 15th centuries and became especially popular in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. Over the last decade or so, Valentine’s Day observance has spread to the Far East, India, and the Middle East. In Japan, China and Taiwan, distinctive customs have developed to mark the day of love, most of which reflect the commercialistic emphasis of the West. In India and the Middle East, Valentine’s Day has met with a warm reception among many, especially urban youth, but strong consternation from some conservative Hindus and Muslims.

**History of Valentine’s Day**

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