Lingua Inglese I
Political Science

M. Antonietta Marongiu

Britain past and present: history, language and institutions

Unit 5
Unit 5

Parliament, politics and power
Legislative power in the United Kingdom is held by Parliament with the sovereign at its head and two houses or chambers, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The House of Commons (or lower house) is presided over by the Speaker and the House of Lords (or upper House) is presided over by the Lord Chancellor. The two Houses meet in the Palace of Westminster, or rather the Houses of Parliament. The British monarch cannot take part in the debates.
Complete the chart

PARLIAMENT

- the sovereign

House of **Commons**

- Speaker of the House

House of **Lords**

- Lord Chancellor (ˈtʃænsələr)
Houses of Parliament
‘The Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled’ is the official name for the **House of Commons**, the dominant and by far the most important of the two chambers. Its 646 members are called ‘**Members of Parliament**’, or **MPs** for short, and are directly elected by the British people at **general elections**. Each member is elected by electoral districts called ‘**constituencies**’.
The main function of the **House of Commons** is to legislate. **The Speaker of the House**, the chief officer of the House, presides over meetings and keeps order during debates. The Speaker is elected by MPs at the beginning of each new Parliament, and cannot take part in debates or vote. The leaders of the **Government** (formed by the majority party) and of the **Opposition** (the minority party) sit on the front benches opposite each other in the House of Commons.
The House of Commons Chamber was rebuilt after it was damaged during the Second World War. It was built in a style that was in keeping with the Chamber that had been destroyed. The layout of the Chamber consists of two sets of green benches that are opposite to each other. There is a table in the middle and the Speaker's Chair at one end. The Government and Opposition MPs sit facing each other. The Chamber is actually quite small and there is only room for 427 MPs to sit down when there are 646 MPs in total.
Complete the chart

House of Commons

Speaker of the House

Majority party Leaders of Government

Minority party Opposition
As the name indicates, the House of Commons originally came into being in order to represent the voice of the common people. This is the reason why it is called the lower house and is an elected chamber. Each member of the House of Commons represents the constituency which elected him/her through the first-past-the-post electoral system. Members hold their seats until Parliament is dissolved, which occurs within a maximum of five years since the previous elections. The House of Commons was originally less powerful than the House of Lords, but under the Parliament Act 1911, the Lords' power was limited to delaying the passage of a bill, and the power of the House of Commons increased considerably.
Lords Temporal and Lords Spiritual sit in the House of Lords.

The Lords Temporal (members of the Peerage) are hereditary peers and peeresses (aristocrats with inherited titles), Law Lords (judges for life) and Life Peers. ‘Life Peer’ is a non-hereditary title conferred by the Queen.

The Lords Spiritual are Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England who also sit in the House of Lords.

On the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the monarch appoints the Lord Chancellor, or the guardian of the Great Seal which symbolises the sovereign's approval of important state documents.
The House of Lords
The Lord Chancellor

The Great Seal of England
The Archbishop of Canterbury delivers a speech on the occasion of Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in the House of Lords.
Judges wear horsehair wigs. Wigs confer dignity and solemnity.
Members of the House of Lords are not elected by the people but are appointed by the Prime Minister, in the name of the Queen, as special recognition for services to the country. This House does not have a fixed number of members and indeed underwent major reform with the **House of Lords Act 1999**. The Act ruled that only 92 hereditary peers were to remain in the House. Before this date, there were several hundred members who held their seats by virtue of their family lineage, i.e. it was a right of birth. Tony Blair, the Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, promised to reform the House of Lords and on 7 March 2007 the House of Commons actually voted in favour of replacing the Lords with an elected chamber, though the House of Lords rejected the proposal.
Hereditary peers

92 peers still exercising their anachronistic birthright
The role of the House of Lords is limited to examining and debating bills passed by the other House. They can vote on, put forward amendments and delay bills for a maximum of 12 months, but they cannot block legislation. Bills must pass through both Houses and then receive the Queen’s assent before becoming Acts of Parliament. The House of Lords also holds judicial power, since it represents the Supreme Court of Appeal in civil and criminal cases. The Lord Chancellor is responsible for the good functioning of the courts. There is therefore an overlap between the House of Lords’ legislative role and its function in the UK’s judicial system as a ‘court of last resort’.
Complete the chart

House of Lords

Lord Chancellor

Lords Temporal

hereditary peers & peeresses

Life Peers

Law Lords

Lords Spiritual

bishops

Archbishops
Comprehension questions (1)

1) What are the two Houses of the British Parliament?
2) What are their main tasks?
3) Which House is the most powerful and why?
4) Where do the two Houses meet?
5) What does the House of Commons consist of?
6) What does ‘MPs’ mean?
7) What does the House of Commons do?
Comprehension questions (2)

8) How are MPs elected?
9) How many MPs are there in the House of Commons?
10) What can the House of Lords do?
11) What did the House of Lords Act 1999 do?
12) How many hereditary peers are there in the Lords now?
13) Is the Queen allowed to take part in parliamentary meetings?
Read the following text and say what the underlined words refer to.
The division of the three types of power in the United Kingdom is only theoretical. Legislative power is held by Parliament and executive power is held by the **Prime Minister**, the head of Government and his or her **Cabinet of Ministers**. The Prime Minister is the leader of the party **which** wins the elections and obtains the majority of votes in the House of Commons. Generally, he or she is a Commoner, so this creates a special link between the government and Parliament, since the members of the executive are also members of the House of Commons, the legislative body. **This overlapping** of roles allows the Prime Minister to exert control over both the legislature and the executive.
Executive power (2)

The Cabinet consists of about 20 to 23 senior government Ministers who have responsibilities in specific areas. Their duties involve making and carrying out government policy, putting laws into effect and representing the interests of the people in Parliament. The Ministers are chosen by the Prime Minister and are drawn principally from the House of Commons (sometimes from the House of Lords). They are put in charge of government departments such as Health, Education, Home or Foreign Affairs, Culture, Media and Sport, Treasury, Transport, Energy and Climate Change, Work and Pensions, Children, Schools and Families, etc. The title commonly used for many government ministers in the UK is ‘Secretary of State for.....’. There are also some Junior Ministers who play a supporting role but do not head a department.
Traditionally, the members of Cabinet met on Thursdays but following the appointment of Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2007, they now meet weekly on Tuesday mornings to discuss and make decisions on the most important issues of government policy. The Cabinet meets at the Prime Minister’s residence and office at 10, Downing Street. The Cabinet minister responsible for economic and financial affairs, known as the Chancellor of the Exchequer (/ɛksˈtʃɛkə/), has his official residence at number 11 in the same street.
Comprehension questions (1)

1) Are the three powers distinct in the United Kingdom?
2) Who is the Prime Minister?
3) How is Government formed?
4) Which party forms the Government?
5) Who becomes Prime Minister?
6) What is the Cabinet?
7) How many government Ministers are there in the Cabinet?
8) Are the government Ministers elected?
The division of the three types of power in the United Kingdom is only theoretical.

The Prime Minister is the head of Government, and together with the Cabinet of Ministers he or she holds executive power.

The Government is formed by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers.

The majority party forms the Government.

The leader of the majority party in the House of Commons is appointed Prime Minister.

The Cabinet of Ministers is the group of Ministers put in charge of government departments.

There are 20-23 government Ministers in the Cabinet.

The government Ministers are chosen by the Prime Minister.
9) How long does a Minister’s term of office last? 
10) How often do MPs meet? 
11) What do MPs do when they meet? 
12) Who lives at no.10, Downing Street? 
13) Name some of the Government Departments in Britain. 
14) Who is the Chancellor of the Exchequer? 
15) Where does the Chancellor of the Exchequer live? 
16) In what sense is there an overlap between legislative and executive power? How do they overlap?
9) A Minister’s term of office lasts 5 years.
10) MPs meet weekly on Tuesday.
11) MPs discuss and make decisions on the most important issues of government policy when they meet.
12) The Prime Minister lives at no.10, Downing Street.
13) Government Departments in Britain: Health, Education, Home or Foreign Affairs, Culture, Media and Sport, Treasury, Transport, Energy and Climate Change, Work and Pensions, Children, Schools and Families, etc.
14) The Chancellor of the Exchequer is the Cabinet minister responsible for economic and financial affairs.
15) The Chancellor of the Exchequer lives at no.11, Downing Street.
16) There is an overlap between legislative and executive power because the members of the executive (the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers) are also members of the House of Commons, the legislative body.
No separation of powers...
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>voting district, electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>argument, discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>confirmation, positive opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>nominated, selected for a job, a duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>proposed law, a statute in draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>a statement added to a bill or constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>direct descent from an ancestor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>a ‘court of last resort’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>a plan of action adopted by a government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>the government department that administers finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>committee of ministers who deal with political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency</td>
<td>voting district, electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>argument, discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assent</td>
<td>confirmation, positive opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>nominated, selected for a job, a duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>proposed law, a statute in draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act of Parliament</td>
<td>a statement added to a bill or constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hereditary</td>
<td>direct descent from an ancestor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court of Appeal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>a plan of action adopted by a government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Exchequer</td>
<td>the government department that administers finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>committee of ministers who deal with political issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
True or false? (1)

1. The term ‘Life Peers’ indicates members who hold their titles for a lifetime.
2. People vote for the candidate they want to be represented by in Parliament.
3. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is responsible for foreign policy.
4. There are now 92 Hereditary Peers sitting in the House of Lords.
5. House of Commons’ meetings are presided over by the Queen.
6. The House of Lords is an assembly of elected members who make the laws.
7. The House of Lords is the most powerful chamber in Parliament.
8. The leader of the party who wins most seats becomes Prime Minister.
9. The Lords cannot make changes to a bill passed by the House of Commons.
1. The term ‘Life Peers’ indicates members who hold their titles for a lifetime. ✔
2. People vote for the candidate they want to be represented by in Parliament. ✓
3. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is responsible for foreign policy. ✗
4. There are now 92 Hereditary Peers sitting in the House of Lords. ✓
5. House of Commons’ meetings are presided over by the Queen. ✗
6. The House of Lords is an assembly of elected members who make the laws. ✗
7. The House of Lords is the most powerful chamber in Parliament. ✓
8. The leader of the party who wins most seats becomes Prime Minister. ✓
9. The Lords cannot make changes to a bill passed by the House of Commons. ✗
True or false? (2)

10. The party that wins most seats wins the elections and forms Parliament.

11. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet hold executive power.

12. Tony Blair put forward a proposal to make the House of Commons a hereditary house.

13. Tony Blair lived at no.11, Downing Street.

14. The Cabinet now meets on Thursdays.

15. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is not responsible for money and finance.

16. The Chancellor of the Exchequer lives next to the Prime Minister.

17. The Supreme Court of Appeal is considered to be a ‘court of last resort’.

18. The House of Lords also holds executive power.
10. The party that wins most seats wins the elections and forms Parliament. ✔️ No 🗞️
11. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet hold executive power. ✔️ No 🗞️
12. Tony Blair put forward a proposal to make the House of Commons a hereditary house. No ✔️ 🗞️
13. Tony Blair lived at no.11, Downing Street. No ✔️ 🗞️
14. The Cabinet now meets on Thursdays. No ✔️ 🗞️
15. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is not responsible for money and finance. No ✔️ 🗞️
16. The Chancellor of the Exchequer lives next to the Prime Minister. ✔️ No 🗞️
17. The Supreme Court of Appeal is considered to be a ‘court of last resort’. ✔️ No 🗞️
18. The House of Lords also holds executive power. No ✔️ 🗞️
The United Kingdom has a (1) ______________ monarchy, where there is a monarch, the Queen, who has no real (2) ______________ even if she is the (3) ______________ and the symbol of the country. She represents the United Kingdom before the world, but real power lies in the hands of the (4) ______________, that is to say the Prime Minister and his government team.

A bill passed by Parliament must receive the monarch’s (5) ______________ before it can become an (6) ______________ of Parliament. A parliament can last up to a maximum of five years. (7) ______________ meet in the House of Commons, with the Opposition, to (8) ______________ general interest matters and to approve new laws, but the Queen cannot take part in the Parliamentary meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>absolute</td>
<td>constitutional</td>
<td>powerful</td>
<td>elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>head of state</td>
<td>power</td>
<td>function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Commander</td>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>head of state</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>Cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>greetings</td>
<td>permission</td>
<td>sign</td>
<td>signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>law</td>
<td>Act</td>
<td>bill</td>
<td>elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>MPs</td>
<td>Lords</td>
<td>Life Peers</td>
<td>Chancellors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>talk</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td>approve</td>
<td>discuss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The United Kingdom has a **constitutional** monarchy, where there is a monarch, the Queen, who has no real **power** even if she is the **head of state** and the symbol of the country. She represents the United Kingdom before the world, but real power lies in the hands of the **executive**, that is to say the Prime Minister and his government team.

A bill passed by Parliament must receive the monarch's **signature** before it can become an **act** of Parliament. A parliament can last up to a maximum of five years. **Legislative** meet in the House of Commons, with the Opposition, to **approve** general interest matters and to **discuss** new laws, but the Queen cannot take part in the Parliamentary meetings.
Rewrite the following sentences without changing the meaning.

1) The British Parliament is bicameral.
2) The House of Commons is a democratically elected chamber.
3) The House of Commons makes laws.
4) The House of Lords is made up of appointed members.
5) Only 92 hereditary peers have retained their seats in the House of Lords since the House of Lords Act 1999.
6) The House of Lords cannot block a bill.
7) Ministers are drawn from the two Houses.
Rewrite the following sentences without changing the meaning.

1) The British Parliament has two chambers.
2) The members of the House of Commons are elected directly by the people.
3) The House of Commons is the legislative chamber.
4) The members of the House of Lords are appointed or are hereditary peers.
5) The House of Lords Act 1999 has drastically reduced the number of hereditary peers to 92.
6) The House of Lords can only delay legislation.
7) Ministers come from the two Houses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>constituency</td>
<td>kan'stitjuənsi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legislative</td>
<td>'ledʒɪslətɪv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chamber</td>
<td>'tʃeɪmbə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chancellor of the Exchequer</td>
<td>'tʃænsələr əv dɪ ɪks'tʃekə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lineage</td>
<td>'lɪnɪdʒ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasury</td>
<td>'treʒəri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Court of Appeal</td>
<td>su'prɪm kɔ:t əv ə'pi:l</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Matching: how do you pronounce these words?

| temporal               | 'spiritjuəl          |
| citizen               | 'sɪtɪzn               |
| inherit               | 'heərɪt               |
| spiritual             | 'spɪrɪtjuəl          |
| honourable            | 'hɒnərəb(ə)l         |
| minority              | 'mɪnɪərɪtı            |
| cabinet               | 'kæbɪnət             |
| birth                 | 'bɜːθ                 |
| aristocrat            | 'ærɪstəkræt          |
| majority              | 'meɪnstrərɪ           |
| judiciary             | 'bɛθ                  |
| bench                 | 'bɛntʃ                |
| health                | 'hɛθ                  |
| achieve               | 'ədvaɪs              |
| passage               | 'pəsɪdʒ              |
| peer                  | 'piː          |
| junior                | 'sɪnɪə(r)             |
| lower                 | 'plaɪər            |
| upper                 | 'pərɪdʒ              |
| senior                | 'sɪnɪər               |
| peeress               | 'pɪərəs               |
| peerage               | 'pɪəræɡ             |

pronounce these words?
How a bill becomes an Act of Parliament in the UK

- First Reading: the bill is introduced formally by one of the Houses
- Second Reading: MPs debate and vote on the general principles of the bill
- Committee Stage: a committee (small group of MPs) studies and analyzes the bill in detail and suggests changes and amendments
- Report (or Consideration) Stage: the bill is examined closely and the committee reports to the House what changes or amendments should be made
- Third Reading: final debate on the bill; no further changes can be made
- Passage to the Other House: the bill is sent to the other House for debate
- Consideration Stage: the House in which the bill originated considers the amendments made by the other House
- Royal Assent: the monarch officially signs the bill; it becomes an Act of Parliament
1) Il Parlamento inglese è composto da due camere.
2) Le due camere si riuniscono nel palazzo di Westminster.
3) La Camera dei Comuni in origine era meno importante della Camera dei Lords.
4) Il Grande Sigillo è il simbolo dell’approvazione del monarca di importanti documenti e degli Atti del Parlamento (leggi).
5) Molti inglesi preferirebbero una Camera dei Lords eletta dal popolo.
6) Un disegno di legge deve essere discusso da entrambe le camere prima di diventare legge.
1) The **British Parliament** has two houses or chambers.
2) The two Houses meet in the **Palace of Westminster**.
3) The House of Commons was originally less powerful than the House of Lords.
4) The **Great Seal** symbolises the sovereign's approval of important state documents and of the Acts of Parliament.
5) Many British are in favour of a **House of Lords** elected by the people.
6) **Bills** must pass through both Houses before becoming Acts of Parliament.
7) La Camera dei Lords non può bloccare un disegno di legge, ma può ritardare la sua approvazione di un anno.
8) La Camera dei Lords è presieduta dal Lord Cancelliere.
9) Un disegno di legge passa attraverso vari stadi prima di diventare legge.
10) Dopo aver ricevuto l’assenso reale da parte del monarca, il disegno di legge diventa ufficialmente un Atto del Parlamento.
11) Ogni membro del Parlamento rappresenta la circoscrizione (distretto elettorale) che lo ha eletto tramite il sistema maggioritario.
7) The House of Lords cannot block a bill, but they can delay the bills’ approval for a maximum of a year.
8) The House of Lords is presided over by the Lord Chancellor.
9) A bill passes through different stages before becoming an Act.
10) After obtaining the monarch’s Royal Assent, the bill becomes an Act of Parliament.
11) Each Member of Parliament represents the constituency (electoral district) where they were elected with majority system.
12) In ogni circoscrizione viene eletto un membro del Parlamento: ecco perché ci sono tanti membri quante sono le circoscrizioni.
13) Il Primo Ministro è il leader del partito che vince le elezioni.
14) Il Primo Ministro è eletto dal popolo e poi nominato ufficialmente dal sovrano.
15) Dopo le elezioni, il Primo Ministro forma il suo Gabinetto dei Ministri.
16) I ministri del governo (Gabinetto) sono scelti fra i membri della Camera dei Comuni e a volte fra quelli della Camera dei Lords.

18) Attualmente i ministri si riuniscono ogni martedì mattina.

19) Il Cancelliere dello Scacchiere è il ministro del Tesoro e delle Finanze.

20) L’espressione ‘Downing Street’ è spesso usata per indicare il governo inglese.
Any questions?