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Lesson Four

The British Government (part B)

The Legislature

Parliament, Britain's **legislature**, is made up of **the House of Commons, the House of Lords** and the Queen in her constitutional role. They meet together only on occasions of symbolic importance 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.

The main functions of Parliament are **to pass laws**, to **scrutinize** government policy and administration, to **debate** the major issues of the day.

The House of Lords consists of **peers and peeresses** of England, Scotland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom who **inherited** their peerage and their title or were **appointed** by government 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 of Commons **consists of** 651 **Members of Parliament (MPs)** directly elected by **voters** in each of Britain's 651 **parliamentary constituencies**.

When a **Bill** completes all its parliamentary stages, it needs **Royal Assent** from the Queen before it can become law. Bills that receive Royal Assent become **Acts of Parliament**. Although the Queen can give Royal Assent in person, this has not happened since 1854. The Queen's agreement to give her Assent to a Bill is automatic. The last time Royal Assent was refused was in 1707 when Queen Anne refused her Assent to a Bill for settling the militia in Scotland.

The Executive



Logo of Her Majesty's Government

Her Majesty's Government is the body of ministers responsible for the conduct of national affairs. **The Prime Minister** is appointed by the Queen, and all other ministers are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Most ministers are members of **the Commons**, although the Government is also fully represented by ministers in the Lords.

The Cabinet is composed of about 20 ministers, although the number can vary. 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 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.



James Gordon Brown the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The Judiciary

The **Lord Chancellor** is head of the judiciary in England and Wales. His responsibilities include court procedure and, through the Court Service, the administration of the higher courts and many tribunals in England and Wales. He recommends all judicial appointments to the Crown - other than the highest, which are recommended by the Prime Minister - and appoints **magistrates**.

Summary or less serious **offences**, which make up the vast majority of criminal cases, **are tried** in England and Wales by unpaid **lay magistrates - justices of the peace (JPs)**, although in areas with a heavy workload there are a number of full-time, **stipendiary magistrates**. More serious offences are tried by **the Crown Court**, presided over by a judge sitting with a jury of citizens.

Appeals from **the magistrates' courts** go before the Crown Court or the High Court. Appeals from **the Crown Court** are made to **the Court of Appeal** (Criminal Division). The House of Lords is the final appeal court in all cases.

Magistrates' courts have limited civil jurisdiction. The cases are normally **tried** by judges sitting alone. The High Court cover civil cases and some criminal cases, and also deal with the appeals. Appeals from **the High Court** are heard in the Court of Appeal, and may go on to the House of Lords, the final court of appeal.

The judicial functions of the House of Lords will be taken over by the Supreme Court which was established by Part III of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005. The Lord Chancellor has announced that it will start work in October 2009 once its new **premises** are ready.

Glossary

Act of Parliament	- ustawa parlamentarna
allocation	- przydział
to appoint	- powołać (kogoś na stanowisko)
Bill	- project ustawy
the Cabinet	- gabinet ministrów, Rada Ministrów
Commons	- Izba Gmin
Court of Appeal	- Sąd Apelacyjny
Crown Court	- Sąd Koronny
to debate	- omawiać
Her Majesty's Government	- Rząd Jej Królewskiej Mości
High Court	- Sąd Najwyższy
House of Commons	- Izba Gmin
House of Lords	- Izba Lordów
to inherit	- odziedziczyć

justice of the peace (JP)	- sędzia pokoju
lay magistrate	- społeczny sędzia pokoju
magistrate	- sędzia pokoju
Lord Chancellor	- Lord Kanclerz
magistrates' courts	- sąd pokoju dla drobnych wykroczeń
Members of Parliament (MP)	- poseł
parliamentary constituency	- okręg wyborczy
to pass laws	- przyjąć ustawę
peers and peeresses	- członkowie I członkinie Izby Lordów (parowie)
to preside over	- przewodniczyć
premises	- siedziba
Prime Minister	- Premier
Royal Assent	- zgoda królewska
to scrutinize	- kontrolować
stipendiary magistrate	- zawodowy sędzia pokoju
summary offence	- występki
to summon	- wezwać
to try	- sądzić
voter	- wyborca

Exercises

Reading Comprehension

Answer the question below in full sentences.

1. What are the main functions of British Parliament?
2. How are the MP's elected in Great Britain?
3. Who can become a peer or a peeress in Great Britain?
4. Who is the Cabinet composed of?
5. How are less serious offences tried in Great Britain?
6. How are more serious offences tried in Great Britain?
7. What is the final court of appeal for all cases in Great Britain?
8. What will be the final court of appeal for all cases in Great Britain after 2009?

Understanding the British Judicial System.

Match the terms below with the descriptions.

Court of Appeal	magistrate	Royal Assent	summary offence	Crown Court
peer	stipendiary	magistrate	Lord Chancellor	MP (Member of Parliament)

a A minor official, such as a justice of the peace, having administrative and limited judicial authority.

The term is _____

b A paid magistrate (appointed by the Home Secretary) dealing with police cases

The term is _____

c A petty crime, or a less serious offence that can be proceeded with summarily

The term is _____

d A member of the British House of Lords

The term is _____

e A member of the Commons

The term is _____

f A court to which appeals are made on points of law resulting from the judgment of a lower court.

The term is _____

g A local criminal court in England and Wales

The term is _____

h In England, the agreement of the monarch to a Bill which has passed both houses of Parliament, after which it becomes law.

The term is _____

i The Cabinet minister who is the head of the judiciary and Speaker of the House of Lords

The term is _____

Lexis

1. **Synonyms.** Paraphrase the sentence from the text above using the following synonyms of the bolded phrase.

compose **comprise** **make up**

The House of Commons **consists of** 651 Members of Parliament (MPs).

2. **Decipher the abbreviations.**

PM _____

MP _____

JP _____

HMG _____

3. **The odd one out.** In each group, three of the words belong to the same subject area but there is one word that does not belong. Circle the odd word.

elections

JP

PM

Parliament

Bill

constituency

Lord Chancellor

ministers

The Queen

Act

MP's

Lay magistrate

Cabinet

Lord Chancellor

Royal Assent

peers

Stipendiary magistrate

legislature

The Cabinet

Royal Prerogative

Answers

Reading Comprehension

1. The main functions of Parliament are to pass laws, to scrutinize government policy and administration, to debate the major issues of the day.
2. British MP'S are elected directly by voters in each of Britain's 651 parliamentary constituencies.
3. Peers inherit their peerage and their title or are appointed by government.
4. The Cabinet is composed of about 20 ministers, most of whom are members of the Commons and the Lords, presided over by the Prime Minister.
5. Summary or less serious offences are tried in England and Wales by unpaid lay magistrates - justices of the peace (JPs), although in areas with a heavy workload there are a number of full-time, stipendiary magistrates.
6. More serious offences are tried by the Crown Court, presided over by a judge sitting with a jury of citizens.
7. The House of Lords is the final court of appeal in Great Britain.
8. The judicial functions of the House of Lords will be taken over by the Supreme Court in 2009.

Understanding the British Judicial System.

magistrate, stipendiary magistrate, summary offence, peer, MP (Member of Parliament), Court of Appeal, Crown Court, Royal Assent, Lord Chancellor

Lexis

1. The House of Commons **is composed of / comprises / is made up of** 651 Members of Parliament (MPs).
2. PM (Prime Minister), MP (Member of Parliament), JP (Justice of the Peace), HMG (Her Majesty's Government)
3. Peers; Lord Chancellor; legislature; The Queen; Royal Prerogative