**Constitutional Monarchy**

Britain is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch – Queen Elisabeth II as a head of state. The British constitution, isn’t set out in a single document. Instead it is made up of a combination of laws and conventions.

A thousand years ago the Anglo-Saxon kings consulted the Great Council before taking important decisions. Between 1066 and 1215 the king ruled alone, but in 1215 the nobles forced king John to accept Magna Carta, which took away some of the king’s powers. In later centuries this was seen as the 1st occasion on which the king was forced to take advice. In 1264 the 1st parliament of nobles met together. Since then the British constitution has grown up slowly as the result of countless Acts of parliament. Then, parliament invited William and Mary to become Britain’s 1st constitutional monarchs. A constitutional monarch is one who can rule only with the support of parliamentary. The Bill of Rights was the 1st legal step towards constitutional monarchy. This Bill prevented the monarch from making laws or having an army without Parliament’s approval. Since 1689 the power of parliament has grown, while the power of the monarch has become weaker. The UK is a constitutional monarchy: the head of the state is a king or a queen. In practice, the Sovereign reigns, but doesn’t rule. The present Sovereign is Queen Elisabeth II. Today the Queen isn’t only head of state, but also an important symbol of national unity. In law the Queen is head of the executive, head of the judiciary, the commander-in-chief of all the armed forces of the Crown and the established Church of England. The monarchy’s absolute power has been progressively reduced, the Queen is impartial and acts on the advise of her ministers. The Queen and the Royal family continue to take part in many traditional ceremonies. Their visits to different parts of Britain and to many other countries attract considerable interests and publicity.

The proceedings of both Houses of Parliament are broadcast on television and radio. General elections to choose Members of Parliament must be held at least every five years. Today every man and woman aged 18 has the right to vote.

The Government is formed by the party with majority support in the Commons. The party in power determines the home and foreign policy of the country. The Queen appoints its leader as Prime Minister. As head of the Government the Prime Minister appoints about 100 ministers, of whom about 20 are in the Cabinet – the serious group which takes major policy decisions. Ministers are collectively responsible for their own departments. The second largest – party forms the official oppositions with its own leader and “shadow cabinet”. The opposition has a duty to challenge government policies and to present an alternative programme.