

# ■■■ THE UK POLITICAL SYSTEM

Revision Sheet for Business School Entrance Exams | Updated February 2026

## ■ CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY & PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

**Type:** Uncodified (unwritten) constitution based on conventions, statutes, and common law

**Key Principle:** Parliamentary Sovereignty - Parliament is the supreme legal authority

## ■ HEAD OF STATE VS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

■ HEAD OF STATE	■■ HEAD OF GOVERNMENT
<b>Position:</b> Monarch <b>Role:</b> Ceremonial and symbolic <b>Appointment:</b> Hereditary <b>Powers:</b> Mostly symbolic (Royal Assent, dissolving Parliament, appointing PM)	<b>Position:</b> Prime Minister <b>Role:</b> Executive leader <b>Appointment:</b> Leader of majority party <b>Powers:</b> Runs government, proposes legislation, represents UK
<b>CURRENT:</b> King <b>Charles III</b> (since September 2022)	<b>CURRENT:</b> <b>Keir Starmer</b> (Labour, since July 2024)

## ■■■ THE PARLIAMENT (BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE)

■■■ HOUSE OF COMMONS	■ HOUSE OF LORDS
<b>Members:</b> 650 MPs (Members of Parliament) <b>Election:</b> Directly elected by citizens <b>Term:</b> Maximum 5 years <b>Voting system:</b> First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) <b>Role:</b> Primary legislative chamber, can override Lords	<b>Members:</b> ~800 Lords (unelected) <b>Composition:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Life Peers (appointed)</li><li>• Hereditary Peers (92)</li><li>• Bishops (26)</li></ul> <b>Role:</b> Reviews and amends legislation, cannot block bills indefinitely
<b>CURRENT SPEAKER:</b> <b>Sir Lindsay Hoyle</b>	<b>LORD SPEAKER:</b> <b>Lord McFall of Alcluith</b>

## ■ MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES

■ LABOUR PARTY	■ CONSERVATIVE PARTY	■ LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
<b>Color:</b> Red <b>Ideology:</b> Centre-left to left-wing <b>Values:</b> Social justice, workers' rights, public services <b>Leader:</b> Keir Starmer	<b>Color:</b> Blue <b>Ideology:</b> Centre-right to right-wing <b>Values:</b> Free market, low taxes, tradition <b>Leader:</b> Kemi Badenoch	<b>Color:</b> Orange/Yellow <b>Ideology:</b> Centrist, liberal <b>Values:</b> Individual freedom, EU relations, electoral reform <b>Leader:</b> Ed Davey

**Other significant parties:** Scottish National Party (SNP), Plaid Cymru (Wales), Democratic Unionist Party (DUP - Northern Ireland), Sinn Féin, Green Party, Reform UK

## ■ THE CABINET (EXECUTIVE)

The Cabinet is composed of senior government ministers, chaired by the Prime Minister. It makes key government decisions.

<b>Prime Minister:</b> Keir Starmer
<b>Chancellor of the Exchequer:</b> Rachel Reeves (finance minister)
<b>Foreign Secretary:</b> David Lammy
<b>Home Secretary:</b> Yvette Cooper (internal affairs)
<b>Defence Secretary:</b> John Healey

## ■■ ELECTORAL SYSTEM

<b>System:</b> First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) for House of Commons
<b>Voting age:</b> 18 years old
<b>Constituencies:</b> 650 electoral districts across the UK
<b>How it works:</b> Candidate with most votes in each constituency wins the seat
<b>Criticism:</b> Can produce disproportionate results; winner doesn't need majority
<b>Government formation:</b> Party with most MPs forms government (usually needs 326+ seats for majority)



## DEVOLUTION: POWER TO THE NATIONS

The UK has devolved powers to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, giving them their own parliaments/assemblies.

SCOTLAND	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND
<b>Body:</b> Scottish Parliament <b>Members:</b> 129 MSPs <b>First Minister:</b> John Swinney (SNP) <b>Powers:</b> Education, health, justice, some taxation	<b>Body:</b> Welsh Parliament (Senedd) <b>Members:</b> 60 MSs <b>First Minister:</b> Eluned Morgan (Labour) <b>Powers:</b> Education, health, some taxation	<b>Body:</b> Northern Ireland Assembly <b>Members:</b> 90 MLAs <b>First Minister:</b> Michelle O'Neill (Sinn Féin) <b>Powers:</b> Health, education, justice (power-sharing)

## THE SUPREME COURT

<b>Established:</b> 2009 (replaced Law Lords in House of Lords)
<b>Members:</b> 12 Justices
<b>President:</b> Lord Reed
<b>Role:</b> Highest court of appeal; reviews compatibility with human rights law
<b>Key difference from US:</b> Cannot strike down Acts of Parliament (Parliament is sovereign)

## ■ CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION (2024-2025)

- General Election:** July 4, 2024 - Labour won landslide victory
- Government:** Labour majority (412 seats out of 650)
- Opposition:** Conservative Party (121 seats) - worst result in party history
- Key context:** First Labour government since 2010; ended 14 years of Conservative rule
- Brexit:** UK left EU on January 31, 2020; still adapting to new relationship

## ■ KEY FEATURES OF THE UK SYSTEM

- ✓ Uncodified constitution (no single written document)
- ✓ Parliamentary sovereignty (Parliament has supreme legal authority)

- ✓ Constitutional monarchy (ceremonial monarch + elected government)
- ✓ Westminster system (model used by many Commonwealth countries)
- ✓ Bicameral Parliament (Commons and Lords)
- ✓ First-Past-The-Post electoral system
- ✓ Collective Cabinet responsibility (ministers must publicly support Cabinet decisions)
- ✓ Shadow Cabinet (Opposition forms alternative government structure)