

The BRITISH monarch

A monarchy is a form of government where a king or a queen, called the sovereign, is Head of State. The British Monarchy, the oldest form of government in the United Kingdom, is a constitutional monarchy. This means that the sovereign's powers are quite limited and they are defined by the elected Parliament and the country's constitution. Yet the ruling monarch does have a number of unique powers and privileges.

The monarch of Great Britain cannot make and pass legislation but they must formally approve of laws. If they have not signed a law, it cannot be passed. For example, traditionally it has been the male members of the royal family who inherited the throne. They did so ahead of their sisters, no matter who was born first. But the monarch has recently agreed to a new law

changing this. Now, the firstborn child will always become monarch, whether they are a male or a female. Moreover, the monarch enjoys crown immunity. Having crown immunity means that the reigning monarch is completely above the law, cannot commit a legal offence and therefore cannot be subject to legal prosecution. This privilege extends to those who serve the crown, including prime ministers. For instance, the monarch can drive as fast as they want without getting a speeding ticket!

Another power of the sovereign is that of being able to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and other ministers. Though the prime minister is democratically chosen through a general election, the monarch is put in the position to elect a prime minister in the event of a hung parliament, that is if no single political party wins an overall majority in the House of Commons. The monarch can also summon, prorogue or dissolve Parliament. This means they can call the members of

the Parliament to meet, they can temporarily stop the activities of the Parliament or they can end a Parliament.

In the military, the monarch has the power to command the armed forces of the United Kingdom. They can declare war and make peace and also give their formal consent to treaties between countries. In civic matters, the powers of the sovereign include regulating the Civil Service and issuing passports. The sovereign also has the power to appoint bishops and archbishops of the Church of England.

Being the monarch of the United Kingdom comes with certain prerogatives. The monarch can drive without a licence and does not need a passport to travel abroad. The British sovereign is not legally obliged to pay taxes. The royal family does pay taxes voluntarily, though, to set a good example. One odd privilege the monarch enjoys is that of owning all the unclaimed swans on the River Thames as well as all the dolphins, whales and sturgeons in British waters. The monarch

celebrates their birthday two times a year. This tradition started in 1748, when King George II wanted to have a big public celebration for his birthday. This was in November, though, when the weather was quite cold and unsuitable for a celebratory parade. So, the king decided to have a second official birthday in June, when the conditions would be perfect for outdoor festivities to take place. Since then, the ruling monarch celebrates their actual birthday privately with their family and their official birthday in May or June.

The ruling king or queen of Great Britain has unique powers, responsibilities and privileges. Above all, he or she acts a symbol of something permanent in an ever-changing world.

Mark the statements below as **T** (True) or **F** (False).  Correct the false statements.

1 All laws have to be approved by the monarch.

T

F

2 Only the royal family has crown immunity.

T

F

3 The prime minister is in charge of the military.

T

F

4 The monarch never pays taxes.

T

F

5 The monarch legally owns a number of marine animals.

T

F

6 Holding biannual birthday celebrations for the monarch is an old custom.

T

F

Complete the sentences using the words below. 

prerogatives

hung

prosecution

elected

constitution

approved

obliged

1 The powers of the British king or queen are decided by the _____ of Great Britain. 

2 No laws can be passed unless the monarch has _____ of them first. 

3 The sovereign is not _____ to pay taxes but does so anyway. 

4 It is the monarch's duty to select a prime minister if there is a _____ Parliament. 

5 The monarch will never have to face legal _____ as they are above the law. 

6 One of the sovereign's _____ is being allowed to drive without a licence. 

7 The prime minister of the country is _____ through a general election. 

Read the text again and answer the questions. 

Check these words

- *define* • *ruling* • *inherit* • *reigning* • *subject to*
- *legal prosecution* • *dismiss* • *consent* • *treaty* • *regulate*

1 What is a constitutional monarchy? 

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2 How is the monarch involved in the process of making laws? 

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3 What is crown immunity? 

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4 When can the monarch elect a prime minister? 

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5 What is the monarch's role in the military? 

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6 What are some of the privileges the monarch has? 

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