



***UNITED KINGDOM***  
***OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND***  
**PRZYGOTOWANIE DO OLIMPIAD JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO**

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INDEKS W KIESZENI

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**United Kingdom of Great  
Britain and Northern Ireland**

*Przygotowanie do Olimpiad*

*Języka Angielskiego*

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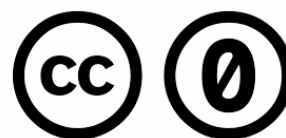
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Wydanie I

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# Chapter 2.

## POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE UK

### 2.1 CONSTITUTION

The constitution of the United Kingdom is **uncodified**, meaning there is no single written document described as the constitution. It consists of **a combination of statute law, common law, constitutional conventions and international treaties**. Its key principles include parliamentary sovereignty, meaning Parliament is the supreme legal authority and can create or repeal any law, the Rule of Law, which ensures that everyone, including the government, is subject to the law and constitutional monarchy, which states that the monarch’s powers are mostly ceremonial while elected officials exercise real authority.

Key reforms to the UK constitution over time include:		
<b>Acts of Union</b>	1536, 1543	Fully integrated Wales into England and gave it representation in the English Parliament.
<b>The Bill of Rights</b>	1689	Established Parliamentary supremacy over the monarch and set out basic rights, such as free elections and freedom of speech in Parliament.
<b>The Act of Settlement</b>	1701	Determined the succession to the English throne, ensuring only Protestants could inherit it.
<b>The Treaty and Acts of Union</b>	1706–1707	United England and Scotland into the Kingdom of Great Britain, creating a single Parliament at Westminster.
<b>Act of Union</b>	1800	United Great Britain and Ireland into the United Kingdom.
<b>The Parliament Acts</b>	1911, 1949	Limited the power of the House of Lords, allowing the elected House of Commons to override its veto in most cases.
<b>The European Communities Act</b>	1972	Enabled the UK to join the three European Communities (the European Economic Community, the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Coal and Steel Community), giving EU law direct effect in domestic law.

<b>The Human Rights Act</b>	1998	Incorporated the European Convention on Human rights into UK law.
<b>The House of Lords Act</b>	1999	Significantly reduced the size of the House of Lords by removing most hereditary peers.
<b>The European Union Withdrawal Act</b>	2018	Provided legal framework for the UK's exit from the EU, repealed the European Communities Act and converted EU law into domestic law.

## 2.2 PARLIAMENT

The Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, based at the Palace of Westminster in London, is the supreme legislative authority of the UK. It consists of three parts, each with a distinct role, all of which are required for legislation to become law.

**The House of Commons** is composed of 650 publicly elected Members of Parliament, each representing a constituency. It is the lower chamber and the most powerful part of Parliament, as certain types of bills may be presented to the Monarch without the consent of the House of Lords. The Commons debates and passes legislation, controls taxation and scrutinises the



government through mechanisms such as Prime Minister's Questions and parliamentary committees. Most importantly, the government is formed by the party that holds a majority in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister must be a member of it.

**The house of Lords** is the upper chamber of the UK Parliament, whose members are not chosen by the public. Life peers are appointed by the Monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister, hereditary peers inherit their titles and the Lords Spiritual are bishops of the Church of England. Since the House of Lords Act, only 92 hereditary peers are allowed to remain. The total number of members fluctuates between approximately 750 and 800, making the House of Lords larger than the lower chamber. Its main role is to scrutinise, revise and improve legislation passed by the House of Commons by examining bills and proposing amendments. However, the upper chamber's powers are limited as it cannot block money bills and can only delay most other legislation, with the House of Commons retaining final authority.

**The Monarch** is formally part of Parliament and performs largely ceremonial duties. One of the Monarch's key functions is to open Parliament each year at the State Opening, during which a speech outlining the government's legislative agenda is delivered. Royal assent must be given to all bills passed by



both Houses before they can become law. Although royal assent could be refused, in practice it is always granted, reflecting the principle of constitutional monarchy.

## 2.3 GOVERNMENT

The UK government's role is running the country on a day-to-day basis. As the executive authority, it is responsible for developing and implementing policies, managing the economy, deciding on taxation and public spending as well as providing public services. The government's decisions are scrutinized by Parliament, particularly the House of Commons. This distinguishes the government's executive role from Parliament's legislative role.

**The Prime Minister** is the leader of the UK government and is formally appointed by the Monarch after a general election. They are usually the leader of the largest political party in Parliament. The Prime Minister's main responsibility is to set government policy and oversee its implementation. They select



ministers from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords to work in government and chair weekly Cabinet meetings, where the government's priorities are discussed. When disagreements arise, the Prime Minister has the final say. To remain in office, the Prime Minister must maintain the support of their party, if that support is lost, they can be replaced.

**The Cabinet** is made up of the highest-ranking ministers in the government, chosen by the Prime Minister. Each Cabinet minister is responsible for a specific department, such as health or education and oversees its policies and operations. The Cabinet meets regularly to discuss major government decisions and coordinate policy across departments. Cabinet ministers operate under collective responsibility. They must publicly support government decisions even when their personal opinions differ.

## 2.4 MONARCH



The Monarch, whose role is mostly **ceremonial and symbolic**, is the head of state in the United Kingdom. Official duties include opening Parliament each year, receiving foreign ambassadors and representing the country at state events. The Monarch also formally appoints the Prime Minister and gives Royal Assent to laws passed by Parliament, which is required for a bill to become law. Although these powers are significant in theory, **the Monarch acts on the advice of the Prime Minister and the government ministers**. In addition, the Sovereign grants honours to recognise people for their service or achievements.

These include knighthoods and damehoods, which are purely honorary, and life peerages, which give someone a title in the House of Lords. Through these roles, the Monarch serves as **a symbol of national unity and stability**.

## 2.5 POLITICAL PARTIES

**The Conservative Party**, officially the Conservative and Unionist party, or less formally, the Tories, is one of the UK's two major political parties. It is generally considered centre-right and supports free markets, low taxes and "traditional British values". Although sometimes criticised



for favouring the wealthy, the party has loyal support among older age groups and in rural areas of England. Notable Conservative Prime Ministers include Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher.



**The Labour Party** is the other main political party in the UK. It is considered centre-left and was founded in the early 20th century to represent the working class and trade unions. The party mainly supports public services, which include the National Health Service, workers' rights, higher wages and policies to reduce social and economic inequality. Labour's support is strongest among younger voters, urban populations and union members. Notable Labour Prime Ministers are Clement Attlee and Tony Blair.

**The Liberal Democrats** were formed in 1988 after the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party merged. They are a centrist alternative to the country's two dominant parties. The Lib Dems have voiced support for civil liberties, electoral reform, environmental protection, as well as progressive policies on education and healthcare. Although the party has never held Prime Ministership, it has influenced government policy, most notably during the 2010-2015 coalition when its leader, Nick Clegg, served as Deputy Prime Minister.



**The Scottish National Party** is a centre-left party holding the majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament. It also has representation in the UK Parliament, where it advocates for Scottish interests. The SNP campaigns for Scottish independence and supports social-democratic policies, which include environmental protection and strong public services. It has played a major role in promoting devolution and independence referendums. Notable SNP leaders include Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon.

#### **Other prominent UK political parties include:**

- **The Green Party**, which focuses on environmental issues and progressive social policies;
- **Plaid Cymru**, the Welsh nationalist party that supports Welsh independence;

- **The Democratic Unionist Party**, which backs Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK;
- **Sinn Féin**, which advocates for Northern Ireland to join the Republic of Ireland.

## 2.6 ELECTORAL AND LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The UK **electoral system** is mainly focused on general elections, in which voters elect Members of Parliament. By law, a general election must be held within **five years** of the previous one, however, an election can be called earlier if the Prime Minister requests one and Parliament agrees, or if the government loses a vote of confidence in the House of Commons and no alternative government can be formed. Interestingly, since 1935 every general election has been held on a Thursday, even though there is no statutory requirement for this. To vote, individuals must be aged 18 or over, be registered to vote and be British, Irish or a qualifying Commonwealth citizen. The UK is divided into 650 constituencies, each of which elects a single MP to sit in the house of Commons. The voting system used is First-Past-The-Post. Each voter selects one candidate and the individual with most votes wins, even if they do not gain an absolute majority.

The **legislative process** takes place in Parliament. Most laws are introduced by the government as government bills, but individual MPs or members of the House of Lords can also propose bills. A bill can begin in either house, except for financial bills, which must start in the House of Commons. The First Reading is a formal introduction of the bill, with no debate. A full debate on the bill's principles is part of the Second Reading and is followed by a vote. Afterwards, during the Committee Stage, the bill is examined in detail, line by line, by a smaller group of MPs, who can propose amendments. In the Report Stage, the committee reports back to the full House and further amendments can be considered. The final version of the bill is debated on in the Third Reading.

Once a bill completes all stages in one House, it moves to the other House and undergoes the same process. If the two Houses disagree, the bill may pass back and forth, which is known as "ping pong", until an agreement is reached. In rare cases, the House of Commons can override the House of Lords. Once both houses agree on the final version, the bill is sent to the Monarch for Royal Assent, at which point it becomes an Act of Parliament and part of UK law.

## 2.7 NATIONAL SYMBOLS

**The Union Jack** is UK's national flag. It symbolizes the union of its constituent countries by combining three crosses: the red cross of St George, the patron saint of England, the white diagonal cross of St Andrew, representing Scotland and the red diagonal cross of St Patrick, associated with Ireland. The flag was first created in 1606



following the Union of the Crowns, when English and Scottish flags were combined. The current design was formed in 1801 after the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland. As Wales and England had already been united before the Union Flag was created, Wales is not represented on the flag.

- **The flag of England** is a red upright cross on a white background;
- **Scotland's flag** is a white diagonal cross on a blue field;
- **The Welsh flag**, which is not featured in the Union Jack, features a red dragon on a horizontally divided green and white background;
- **The Union Jack** is the only official flag of **Northern Ireland**, however historically it has been represented by **the Ulster Banner**, which is a red cross on a white background with a crowned six-pointed star and a red hand in the centre.

The national anthem of the United Kingdom is **“God Save the King”**, which is used officially across all four constituent countries at state occasions, royal events and international ceremonies. It was performed publicly for the first time in 1745 during the reign of King George II and became established as the national anthem in early nineteenth century. Although the UK has a single official anthem, the individual nations within the country have their own national songs used at sporting events and cultural occasions. Scotland uses “Flower of Scotland”, written in the 1960s by Roy Williamson, Northern Ireland's national song is “Londonderry Air” and Wales is represented by “Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau”, meaning “Land of My Fathers”.

Each country within the UK has its own national flower or plant, while Scotland and England are also represented by national animals. Both types of symbols can be referred to as **national emblems**.

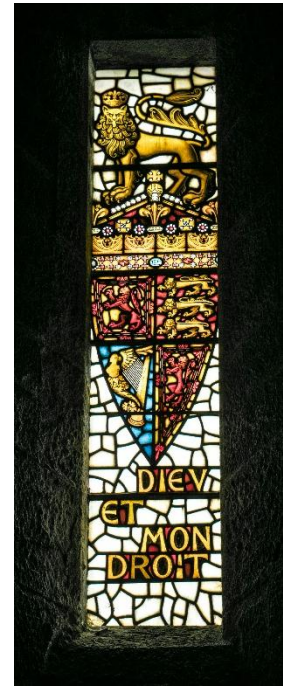
ENGLAND		SCOTLAND	
<b>Tudor rose</b>	The symbol originates from the Wars of the Roses, a series of civil wars in the 15th century between the House of Lancaster, represented by a red rose, and the House of York, associated with a white one. When Henry VII of Lancaster married Elizabeth of York, the Tudor rose with both white and red petals was created to symbolize the unity of the two houses.	<b>Thistle</b>	According to legend, during a surprise attack by Norse invaders on Scotland, one of the attackers stepped on a thistle and cried out in pain, alerting the Scots to the danger. The plant subsequently became a symbol of protection, courage and resilience.
<b>Lion</b>	It is a traditional symbol of England, the monarchy and the UK as a whole. The animal, which appears on the Royal Coat of Arms, coins and government buildings, represents strength, courage and royalty.	<b>Unicorn</b>	In Scottish mythology, the animal was believed to be a strong, untameable creature, reflecting Scotland's desire of freedom. It appears alongside the lion in the Royal Coat of Arms and represents purity, power and independence.
WALES		NORTHERN IRELAND	
<b>Daffodil</b>	The flower is closely associated with St David's Day, the National Day of Wales and became linked with the country in the 19th century. It is a symbol of Welsh culture and national pride.	<b>Shamrock</b>	By tradition, St Patrick used the three-leafed shamrock to explain the Christian Holy Trinity. As St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, the plant has since become a symbol of Irish heritage and identity.
<b>Leek</b>	The plant has been a symbol of Wales since the 7th century. According to tradition, Welsh soldiers would wear leeks in their helmets to set themselves apart from their enemies in battle.		

**The Royal Coat of Arms** is a symbol of the United Kingdom and the monarchy. It features multiple lions representing England, along with the unicorn for Scotland. Symbols representing Ireland include a harp, which appears on the shield. The coat of arms also the motto "Dieu et

mon droit”, meaning “God and my right”, which reflects the divine right of the monarch to rule. The emblem appears on government buildings, official documents and coins.

**Royal mottos** include:

- the aforementioned “Dieu et mon droit”;
- “Honi soit qui mal y pense”, a phrase in medieval French meaning “Shame on him wh thinks evil of it”; it is the motto of the Order of the Garter, the highest order of chivalry in the UK;
- “Nemo me impune lacessit”, which is Latin for “No one provokes me with impunity”; the motto is closely associated with the Scottish Crown and the Order of the Thistle, and appears in the badge of the Royal Regiment of Scotland.



## CHAPTER 2 - EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

**What is the principle of parliamentary sovereignty?**

- Parliament can make or repeal any law and cannot be overruled by any other body.
- The Monarch has the final say over laws.
- Courts can overrule Parliament on any law.
- Only the House of Lords can make laws.

**Which of the following powers belongs to the House of Lords?**

- Initiating money bills.
- Scrutinizing, revising, and suggesting amendments to legislation.
- Forming the government.
- Dissolving Parliament.

**How is the UK government formed?**

- By the Monarch alone.
- By the party that holds a majority in the House of Commons.
- By the House of Lords.
- By a public referendum.

**What is the first step in passing a law in the UK?**

- A. Approval by the Monarch.
- B. Approval by the Cabinet.
- C. Public referendum.
- D. Introduction and debate of a bill in the House of Commons or Lords.

**How are Members of the House of Lords chosen?**

- A. Elected by the public.
- B. Nominated by the Prime Minister only.
- C. Chosen by the House of Commons.
- D. Appointed as life peers, hereditary peers, or Lords Spiritual.

*Answers: A, B, B, D, D*

- Explain what it means that the UK has an uncodified constitution.
- What is the role of the Monarch in the UK Parliament?
- Give two examples of UK national symbols and explain their significance.

Przedstawiamy **kompleksowe opracowanie** zagadnień z zakresu **kultury i historii Wielkiej Brytanii**, przygotowane z myślą o uczniach startujących w Olimpiadzie Języka Angielskiego oraz Olimpiadzie Języka Angielskiego Juniorów. Publikacja łączy **opracowanie teoretyczne z przykładowymi zadaniami**, które pomogą skutecznie przygotować się do konkursów językowych.

Materiał obejmuje najważniejsze zagadnienia dotyczące **historii, społeczeństwa, polityki oraz życia kulturalnego Wielkiej Brytanii**. Treści zostały opracowane w **przejrzysty i uporządkowany sposób**, tak aby ułatwić systematyczne przyswajanie wiedzy wymaganej na kolejnych etapach olimpiady.

Publikacja zawiera również zestaw różnorodnych **zadań sprawdzających**, które pozwalają utrwalić zdobyte informacje. Dzięki nim uczniowie mogą sprawdzić swój poziom przygotowania, a także lepiej zrozumieć charakter pytań pojawiających się w konkursach językowych. Sprawdźcie sami, a nie zawiedziecie się!

Wydawnictwo



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