Your notes

GCSE Citizenship Studies: revision notes

# Parliament and how laws are made

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## The two Houses

- The House of Commons has 650 elected Members of Parliament (MPs), one for each constituency. It is the more powerful house.
- The House of Lords is unelected. Most members are life peers appointed for their expertise, plus some Church of England bishops. It revises and scrutinises laws.
- The **Speaker** chairs debates in the Commons and is politically neutral.
- The government is formed by the largest party. The largest party not in government is the **official opposition**, which challenges the government.

## How a bill becomes law

- A **bill** is a proposed law. Most are government **bills**; backbench MPs can introduce Private Members' **Bills**.
- Stages: first reading (introduced), second reading (main debate), committee stage (examined line by line), report stage (amendments), third reading (final vote). Then the same stages in the other House.
- Finally, the monarch gives **Royal Assent**, and the **bill** becomes an **Act of Parliament**.
- The Lords can delay most **bills** by about a year, but can't block them forever, because the Commons is elected.

## Scrutinising the government

- Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) happen every Wednesday when Parliament is sitting.
- **Select committees** investigate government departments. Debates and written questions also hold ministers to account.

- Frontbenchers are ministers and shadow ministers; **backbenchers** are other MPs. **Whips** make sure MPs vote with their party.

## Guernsey

- Guernsey is a Crown Dependency, not part of the UK. It makes its own laws in the States of Deliberation, and the UK is responsible for its defence and international relations.

## Key terms

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bill** | A proposed law. |
| **Act of Parliament** | A bill that has passed through Parliament and received Royal Assent. |
| **Royal Assent** | The monarch's formal approval of a bill. |
| **Backbencher** | An MP who isn't a minister or shadow minister. |
| **Select committee** | A group of MPs or peers that investigates government departments. |
| **Official opposition** | The largest party not in government. |
| **Whip** | An MP who makes sure party members vote with the party. |
| **Speaker** | The politically neutral chair of the House of Commons. |

## Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. How many MPs are in the House of Commons?
2. What is a bill?
3. What happens at the second reading of a bill?
4. What is the final stage before a bill becomes law?
5. What is the main role of the House of Lords?
6. When is Prime Minister's Questions held?
7. What is a backbencher?
8. What is a select committee?

### Answers

1. 650
2. A proposed law
3. The main debate on its general principles
4. Royal Assent
5. To revise and scrutinise laws
6. Every Wednesday when Parliament is sitting
7. An MP who isn't a minister or shadow minister
8. A group that investigates government departments

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## What to do next

**Practise 10 questions on this topic**

**Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes**

**Read the lesson, one step at a time**

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