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Ninth Edition

# CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

Alex Carroll

 Pearson

Ninth Edition

# Constitutional and Administrative Law

ALEX CARROLL



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PEARSON EDUCATION LIMITED  
Edinburgh Gate  
Harlow CM20 2JE  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 (0)1279 623623  
Web: [www.pearson.com/uk](http://www.pearson.com/uk)

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First published 1998 (print)  
Second edition published 2002 (print)  
Third edition published 2003 (print)  
Fourth edition published 2007 (print)  
Fifth edition published 2009 (print)  
Sixth edition published 2011 (print)  
Seventh edition published 2013 (print and electronic)  
Eighth edition published 2015 (print and electronic)  
**Ninth edition published 2017** (print and electronic)

© Pearson Education Limited 1998, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2011 (print)  
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ISBN: 978-1-292-17604-8 (print)  
978-1-292-17605-5 (PDF)  
978-1-292-17606-2 (ePub)

#### **British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for the print edition is available from the British Library

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Carroll, Alex, 1947– author.

Constitutional and administrative law / Alex Carroll, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Ninth edition. | Harlow, England : Pearson Education Limited, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

LCCN 2017011135 | ISBN 9781292176048 (Print) | ISBN 9781292176055

(PDF) | ISBN 9781292176062 (ePub)

LCSH: Constitutional law—Great Britain. | Administrative law—Great Britain.

LCC KD3930 .C37 2017 | DDC 342.41—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017011135>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
21 20 19 18 17

Print edition typeset in 9/12pt Stone Serif ITC Pro by SPi Global  
Printed by Ashford Colour Press Ltd, Gosport

NOTE THAT ANY PAGE CROSS REFERENCES REFER TO THE PRINT EDITION

*This book is dedicated to the memory of  
Robert Alan Carroll 1949–2011*



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Extracts on page 6, page 7 from *Town Investments Ltd v Department of the Environment* [1978] AC 359; Extract on page 7 from *D v National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children* [1978] AC 171; Extract on page 30 from *AXA General Insurance Ltd v Lord Advocate* [2012] 1 AC 868; Extract on page 65 from *Liversidge v Anderson* [1942] AC 206; Extract on page 90 from ‘The Principle of Proportionality in the Case-Law of the German Federal Constitutional Court’, Lubbe-Wolff, quoted in *R (Pham) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2015] 1 WLR 1591; Extract on page 103 from *Lee v Bude and Torrington Railway Co* (1871) LR 6 CP 577; Extract on page 104 from *Ellen Street Estates v Minister of Health* [1934] 1 KB 590; Extract on page 105 from *Hunt v London Borough of Hackney*; *Thoburn v Sunderland City Council*; *Harman v Cornwall County Council*; *Collins v London Borough of Sutton* [2003] QB 151; Extract on page 106 from *Phillips v Eyre* (1870) LR 6 QB 1; Extracts on page 106, page 281 from *Burmah Oil v Lord Advocate* [1965] AC 75; Extract on page 120 from *Blackburn v Attorney-General* [1971] 1 WLR 1037; Extracts on page 124, page 125, page 126 from *Jackson v Attorney-General* [2006] 1 AC 262; Extract on page 126 from *Axa General Insurance Ltd & Ors v Lord Advocate & Ors (Scotland)* [2012] 1 AC 868; Extract on page 227 from *Adam v Ward* [1917] AC 309; Extract on page 231 from *Watson v Walter* (1868) LR 4 QB 73; Extract on page 231 from *Cook v Alexander* [1974] QB 279; Extract on page 232 from *Pepper v Hart* [1992] 3 WLR 1032; Extracts on page 232 from *Prebble v Television New Zealand Ltd* [1995] 1 AC 321; Extract on page 237 from *Bradlaugh v Gossett* (1884) LR 12 QBD 271; Extract on page 281 from *Chandler v Director of Public Prosecutions* [1964] AC 763; Extract on page 282 from *Kuwait Airways Corporation v Iraqi Airways Corporation (Nos 4 and 5)* [2002] AC 883; Extract on page 284 from *Council of Civil Service Unions v Minister for Civil Service* [1985] AC 374; Extract on page 285 from *BBC v Johns* [1965] Ch 32; Extract on page 287 from *Attorney-General v De Keyser's Royal Hotel* [1920] AC 508; Extract on page 290 from *Laker Airways v Department of Trade* [1977] QB 643; Extracts on page 290, page 362 from *Council of Civil Service Unions v Minister for the Civil Service* [1985] AC 374; Extract on page 292 from *R (on application of Sandiford) v Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs* [2014] 1 WLR 2697; Extract on page 297 from *Rederiaktiebolaget Amphitrite v R* [1921] 3 KB 500; Extract on page 298 from *Crown Lands Commissioners v Page* [1960] 2 QB 274; Extract on page 299 from *Dunn v R* [1896] QB 116; Extract on page 300 from *Dunn v MacDonald* [1897] 1 QB 401; Extract on page 305 from *Serder Mohammed v Secretary of State for Defence* [2016] 2 WLR 247; Extracts on page 308, page 309 from *Gorringe v Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council* [2004] 1 WLR 1057; Extracts on page 309, page 312 from *X (minors) v Bedfordshire County Council* [1995] 2 AC 633; Extract on page 310 from *Phelps v Hillingdon London Borough Council* [2001] 2 AC 619; Extract on page 310 from *Stovin v Wise* [1996] AC 923; Extract on page 311 from *Connor v Surrey County Council* [2011] QB 429; Extract on page 313 from *Barrett v Enfield London Borough Council* [1999] 3 WLR 79; Extract on page 319 from *Anufrijeva v Southwark London Borough Council* [2004] QB 1124; Extract on page 327 from *Campbell v Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council* [1982] QB 1065; Extracts on page 328 from *Burmah Oil v Bank of England* [1980] AC 1090; Extract on page 328 from *Air Canada v Secretary of State for Trade* [1963] 3 AC 304; Extract on page 328 from *Alfred Crompton Amusement Machines Ltd v Customs and Excise Commissioners (No. 2)* [1974] AC 405; Extract on page 328 from *D v NSPCC* [1978] AC 171; Extract on page 329 from *R (on application of Binyam Mohamed) v Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs* [2011] QB 218; Extract on page 333 from *R v H* [2004] 2 AC 134; Extract on page 342 from *R v Central Criminal Court JJ* (1886) 17 QBD 598; Extract on page 342 from *Ashbridge Investments Ltd v Minister of Housing and Local Government* [1965] 1 WLR 1320; Extract on page 342 from *Padfield v Minister of Agriculture* [1968] AC 997;



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Extract on page 343 from *Anisminic v Foreign Compensation Commission (No. 2)* [1969] 2 AC 147; Extract on page 344 from *R v Cambridge Health Authority, ex parte B* [1995] 1 WLR 898; Extract on page 347 from *White and Collins v Minister of Health* [1939] 2 KB 838; Extract on page 347 from *R v Secretary of State for the Home Department, ex parte Khawaja* [1984] AC 74; Extract on page 348 from *Runa Begum v Tower Hamlets London Borough Council* [2003] 2 AC 430; Extract on page 349 from *R v Northumberland Compensation Appeal Tribunal, ex parte Shaw* [1952] 1 KB 338; Extracts on page 349, page 390 from *O'Reilly v Mackman* [1983] 2 AC 237; Extract on page 351 from *R v Race Relations Board, ex parte Selvarajaran* [1975] 1 WLR 1686; Extract on page 352 from *R v Skinner* [1968] 2 QB 700; Extract on page 353 from *Lavender v Minister of Housing and Local Government* [1970] 1 WLR 1231; Extract on page 354 from *R v Port of London Authority, ex parte Kynoch Ltd* [1919] 1 KB 176; Extract on page 354 from *British Oxygen Co Ltd v Minister of Technology* [1971] AC 610; 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# Preface

This book has been written for students undertaking legal studies at undergraduate level and those pursuing similar courses which include constitutional and administrative law as a core component (e.g. the Postgraduate Diploma in Law). It is intended also to be of use and interest to those who, for whatever purpose, are seeking an easily comprehensible introduction to the legal foundations of the British system of government and to the rights and freedoms to those subject to it. The book's content is based on over thirty years' experience of teaching the subject on A-level, undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Particular attention has been paid to the views of students concerning the strengths and weaknesses of pre-existing and alternative textbooks in this discipline.

As with most law books, many of the legal principles included are explained by reference to particular judicial decisions. The approach taken here has been to discuss those cases which illustrate the principles in issue most clearly or those which exemplify their most recent application.

No attempt has been made to produce an exhaustive reference book covering all those issues which might conceivably fall within the boundaries of the subject. Rather the book concentrates on the subject's key issues and those topics which form the essential core of most constitutional and administrative law syllabi currently taught in further and higher education institutions.

Few legal disciplines have witnessed change and development on the scale, and with the rapidity, that has occurred within constitutional and administrative law within recent years. It follows that much of the subject is concerned with matters of great topicality and modernity. As such, in addition to those learning its elements for mainly academic purposes, it has direct utility for those engaged by the changing fortunes of national and public affairs in general. Change, crisis, and controversy in the process of government, politics, and constitutional development, and any relevant legal intervention or reform which may have followed, all fall within the subject's proper remit.

Some of the more significant recent developments covered, and which have occurred since the last edition of the textbook was published, would include:

- introduction of the new 'English votes for English laws' (EVEL) legislative process;
- implementation of the new system for electoral registration (Individual Electoral Registration);
- re-assessment of the extent of the Crown's legal immunity for acts of state (exercise of prerogative power overseas);
- further judicial consideration of the extent of police liability for negligent performance of their duties;
- review of the content and requirements of the conventional rules regulating the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords (the Strathclyde Review);

- extended use of the power to exclude claimants for legal proceedings involving sensitive aspects of public policy;
- refinement of the meaning of the doctrine of proportionality in the context of English law; EU law, and the law of the European Convention of Human Rights;
- extensions of police powers in relation to communications data;
- the latest anti-terrorist legislation;
- the extent of the executive power to override judicial decisions;
- introduction of new powers enabling a local electorate to ‘recall’ its MP thereby causing a by-election to be held;
- the latest ministerial code of practice.

All of these matters, and other important developments, particularly in the burgeoning case-law relating to human rights, are explained, where relevant, to a level of depth and detail commensurate with their constitutional significance.

Further details relating to the progress and effects of these modern developments will be provided in the spring and autumn updates to this textbook which may be found on the accompanying website.

Constitutional and administrative law cannot be fully understood without reference to the national’s political history and its social and cultural development. This is particularly so in a nation where the constitutional and political systems have been evolving, in a largely uninterrupted fashion, for at least a thousand years. Hence, while every attempt has been made to explain the necessary principles as precisely and succinctly as possible, it has also been the author’s intention to do so in a way which places these in their contextual framework. This approach is intended to give insight into the relationship between the subject and those various political historical and cultural factors which have influenced and shaped its nature and content.

The author is greatly indebted to all those who have helped in the book’s compilation and production. Particular and belated thanks are due to the late Mr R.H. Buckley, one-time Principal Lecturer in Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, for all his help and advice over the year and for exciting the author’s interest in the subject.

*Alex Carroll*

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# Part 1

## Fundamental principles

- 1 Introduction to constitutional and administrative law
- 2 The characteristics of the constitution
- 3 Sources of constitutional and administrative law



# 1

## Introduction to constitutional and administrative law

### Objectives

After reading this chapter you should:

1. Understand what a constitution is.
2. Recognise the difference between 'written' and 'unwritten' constitutions and the historical, cultural and social origins of the British constitution.
3. Understand the institutional terminology of the British constitution and the difference between central and local government.
4. Understand the constitutional development of the 'United Kingdom' and its principal elements.

### What is a constitution?

#### Objective 1

In a purely formal sense a constitution consists of the laws, rules (e.g. conventions) and other practices which identify and explain:

- (a) the institutions of government;
- (b) the nature, extent and distribution of powers within those institutions;
- (c) the forms and procedures through which such powers should be exercised;
- (d) the relationship between the institutions of government and the individual citizen, often expressed in terms of a 'Bill of Rights'.

Hence, for example, the first three articles of the **Constitution** of the United States (1789) – the earliest and perhaps most revered of the modern world's written constitutions – provide for and specify the respective roles and powers of the **Congress (Art I)**; the President (Art II); and the Supreme Court (Art III). The famous American Bill of Rights may be found in the same document in a series of later **amendments** to the original version written in 1787. Thus, for example, Amendment I provides that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the **right** of people peacefully to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.'



## The British constitution

### Objective 2

In the majority of nations, as in the United States, such constitutional prescriptions have been set down or ‘codified’ into a single written document. The constitution may be said, therefore, to exist in a physically tangible form. It is possible to go into a bookshop and buy a copy or to visit the museum or library where the original may be on display albeit closely guarded. This is not the case, however, in the **United Kingdom**. Here the constitution has simply evolved and been added to by Acts of Parliament, **judicial** decisions and the growth of constitutional **conventions** and other political practices. The United Kingdom does not have a constitution, therefore, in the narrow sense of a formal document in which all the fundamental rules relating to the process of government are articulated. For all practical purposes, however, it does possess a body of legal and other rules by which that process is regulated and does, therefore, have a ‘constitution’ in the functional sense.

For details of constitutional conventions, see Chapter 3.

## The cultural dimension

Within the nation-state to which it applies, the constitution will usually be regarded as both the ultimate source of legitimacy and authority for the practice of government and as a framework for the application of that society’s political beliefs concerning how the process of government should be conducted and by whom. Thus, except in those circumstances where a particular form of government has been imposed by force, perhaps by some external authority, a society’s constitutional arrangements will, to a considerable extent, be a product of its **political culture**. Thus the constitution of the United Kingdom seeks to give expression and protection to many of the values and beliefs now generally associated with that form of government often referred to as liberal **democracy**. The values of liberal democracy may be summarised as freedom of thought, expression, association and assembly, and a preference for limited representative and responsible government according to which those in power are answerable:

- (a) in regular **General Elections**: to a fully enfranchised adult population;
- (b) on a day-to-day basis to a Parliament or representative assembly freely created by that electorate;
- (c) in matters of law and **jurisdiction**, to an independent system of courts.

It follows that the authority and status of a constitution may usually be understood as having cultural as well as legal foundations. Hence, in addition to the legal duty of allegiance which it may impose, the constitution will be something which also attracts considerable respect and loyalty in a more personal sense. This will be so because the people in a particular society may often regard the constitution, or at least its physical manifestations – e.g. in the United Kingdom, the Monarch and Parliament – as part of their cultural heritage and identity.

Where it exists this sense of cultural affinity with the nation’s constitutional arrangements will usually contribute to the general level of political stability and order. Perversely, however, this may make the constitution more difficult to change, at least in any abrupt or substantial way, as people tend to be more ‘comfortable’ with that with which they are familiar. This may help to explain, to some extent, the tensions experienced in recent times in the United Kingdom concerning the constitutional implications of greater European integration.

Given the usual close relationship between a constitution and the political culture which it mirrors, it is axiomatic that few constitutions are static or immutable. As a society's expectations and beliefs concerning the process of government evolve, so must its constitution respond and develop. Otherwise it atrophies and becomes increasingly irrelevant to prevailing social and political attitudes. This in turn may lead to dissension and conflict over the validity of the very arrangements through which such dissent is supposed to be channelled and resolved.

## Distinguishing between constitutional law and administrative law

**Constitutional law** deals with the legal foundations of the institutional hierarchy through which the **state** is governed. It concentrates in particular on the rules, both legal and conventional, which explain and regulate the composition, powers, immunities, procedures of, and relationships between, those institutions – hence, for example, the subject's concern with the composition, workings and powers of Parliament, the legal authority and immunities of the executive, and the balance of legal and political power between the two.

Constitutional law also seeks to delineate those individual rights which, according to cultural traditions, are the inalienable attributes of a genuinely free society and upon which the state should not transgress except where an overwhelming **public interest** so requires (e.g. the defence of the realm). Such rights would include the freedom of the person (i.e. from arbitrary **arrest** and detention), freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of speech. These matters are now defined and set out in the Human Rights Act 1998.

**Administrative law**, on the other hand, directs greater attention to the control and regulation of government power by both **public** and **private law** and through the workings of the various **extra-judicial** appeals and complaints procedures created in recent times to supplement the judicial and political mechanisms for dealing with individual grievances against the state. Central to the subject, therefore, is the process of **judicial review**, whereby alleged government excesses may be brought before the courts and condemned as abuses of power and of no legal effect. The subject also deals, *inter alia*, with the jurisdiction and workings of **statutory tribunals** and inquiries which deal largely with appeals against decisions made by central and local government officials, and with the activities of the increasing number of 'ombudspersons' or complaints commissioners dealing with allegations of 'maladministration' in the public services and the execution of **public policy**.

For the law and procedure of judicial review, see Chapters 14–15.

## The terminology of constitutional and administrative law

### Objective 3

Not all of those who come to the study of constitutional and administrative law for the first time will be entirely familiar with its language and terminology. Thus, for example, difficulty may be found in giving exact definition to, and distinguishing between, such concepts as the **Crown**, the **Monarch**, the **government**, Parliament, etc. Such conceptual problems are understandable as not all of these are capable of being given entirely distinctive and particular meanings. It is hoped, however, that the text that follows will help to dispel some of these uncertainties and make for greater comprehension of the institutional context in which the subject operates.

## The Monarch

This is the person who occupies the throne and who, by virtue of which, is recognised by law and tradition as Head of State. For many years the right of succession to the throne currently was determined both by traditional hereditary principles (i.e. is reserved to the eldest male heir and, in the absence of which, to the eldest female) and by conditions laid down by Parliament in various enactments – principally the Act of Settlement 1700. This provided that in the absence of any issue by Queen Anne (1701–14), the right of succession should be confined to the Princess Sophia of Hanover ‘and the heirs of her body being protestants’. It was by virtue of this enactment that the first of the Hanoverian monarchs, George I (1714–27), succeeded to the throne after Queen Anne’s death.

The Succession to the Crown Act 2013 contained provisions seeking to bring to an end the rule giving precedence in the right of succession to the Monarch’s male heirs. The effect of the Act is that, henceforth, succession to the throne will depend on age and relationship to the sitting Monarch, without the reference to gender (s 1). Other major provisions of the Act are as follows:

- 1 A person is not disqualified from succession to the throne as a result of marriage to a Roman Catholic (s 2);
- 2 The Royal Marriages Act 1772, requiring the Monarch’s consent to the marriage of any person in the first six positions of the line of succession, is repealed.

The 2013 Act leaves in place the rule that succession to the throne is limited to confessing members of the Anglican Church (Act of Settlement 1700, s 3).

As Head of State, the executive, legislative and judicial functions of government are all performed in the Monarch’s name and by his or her appointees. The Prime Minister and other Members of the government are the King or Queen’s Ministers. Law is made by the King or Queen in Parliament, i.e. with the consent of the **House of Commons**, Lords and Monarch. The same law is administered in the Royal Courts of Justice by the King or Queen’s judges.

In this personal sense, it is still accepted that ‘the King can do no wrong’. Hence the Monarch may not be prosecuted for any criminal offence or sued for breach of any civil obligation.

More will be said about the constitutional role and status of the Monarch in Chapter 2.

## The Crown

As the following quotation explains, the term has been given various meanings.

The expression ‘the Crown’ may sometimes be used to designate Her Majesty [**HM**] in a purely personal capacity. It may sometimes be used to designate Her Majesty in Her capacity as Head of the Commonwealth. It may sometimes be used to designate Her Majesty in Her capacity as the **constitutional Monarch** of the United Kingdom . . . The expression may sometimes be used in a somewhat broad sense in reference to the functions of government and the administration. It may sometimes be used in reference to the **Rule of Law** . . . The case for the prosecution is the case for the Crown (*per* Lord Diplock, *Town Investments Ltd v Department of the Environment* [1978] AC 359).

For all practical purposes, however, and in terms of everyday usage and understanding, it is the fourth of these meanings which should be preferred. Thus when ‘the Crown’ is spoken of in constitutional law, this is normally for the purpose of referring to all those institutions and, in particular, central government departments and those who work within them (**civil** or ‘Crown’ **servants**), who are responsible for managing public affairs at a national level.

Where . . . we are concerned with the legal nature of the exercise of executive powers of government, I believe that some of the more Athanasian-like features of the debate in your Lordships' House could have been eliminated if instead of speaking of 'the Crown' we were to speak of the 'government' – a term appropriate to embrace both collectively and individually all the Ministers of the Crown and parliamentary secretaries under whose direction the administrative work of government is carried on by the civil servants employed in the various government departments . . . Execution of acts of government that are done by any of them are acts done by 'the Crown' in the fictional sense in which that expression is now used in English public law (*ibid*).

In this institutional rather than personal sense, the Crown is a 'corporation sole'. This means that, unlike the Monarch, it has a definable legal capacity and may sue and be sued in the ordinary courts of law.

## The Sovereign

The word '**Sovereign**' is employed, generally, in one of two senses. First, it may be used as a synonym for the Monarch – i.e. the person who, in purely legal terms, is at the apex of the constitutional pyramid. In this sense the word denotes little in terms of legislative or actual political power, but much in terms of status and symbolism. Second, it is also frequently used to mean that which in terms of legal or political authority has no superior. Hence, in the United Kingdom, Parliament has long been regarded as the 'sovereign' law-making body – i.e. the law as made by Parliament prevails over all other legal rules whatever their source. In the political sense, however, it is often said that it is 'the people' who are sovereign, i.e. the legislative power of Parliament and the authority of the government is derived from the 'will' of the people as expressed through the ballot box.

## The state

English constitutional law contains no exact or fixed definition of the above term. Once again, therefore, a variety of meanings may be attributed to it.

It may be used, for example, to describe the geographical entity over which the institutions of government of a particular society exercise independent political authority. In this sense the state which is referred to as the United Kingdom would be said to consist of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Alternatively, the word may be used to characterise the entire structure of institutions and organisations through which a particular society is regulated and protected.

The state is the whole organisation of the body politic for civil rule and government – the whole political organisation which is the basis of civil government. As such it certainly extends to local and . . . statutory-bodies in so far as they are exercising autonomous rule (*per* Lord Simon, *D v National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children* [1978] AC 171).

## The realm

The fact that the concept of the state does not have any great political or legal significance in the language of English constitutional law is largely due to historical factors and to the ancient nature of the institutions around which the constitution has developed. Just as these have survived, so has the language of those earlier times in which such institutions were founded. Hence, according to what may be called the language of tradition, the territory over which the King or Queen (now the Crown in the form of the central government)

exercised political power by right of succession and/or battle was properly referred to as ‘the realm’. In constitutional law, therefore, the term has a similar meaning to that of ‘the state’ when the latter is used to describe the area over which the government has authority.

## The government

This is yet another term capable of various meanings. It may be used, for example, as a collective noun for all those who hold Ministerial office at any particular time. These will all be persons with seats in the House of Commons (**HC**) or House of Lords (most in the Commons). The number of Ministers of which any government may consist is not fixed, but will usually be in the region of 100 to 130. These will range from the heads of major departments (**‘Secretaries of State’**), to second-rank Ministers, usually referred to as ‘Ministers of State’, down to the more junior Ministers with titles such as ‘Under Secretaries of State’ or ‘Parliamentary Secretaries’.

The ‘government’, in this sense, should not be confused with the political party which ‘won’ the last General Election and holds a majority of the seats in the House of Commons. Hence, after the 2015 General Election, the party ‘in power’ was the Conservatives with 331 MPs and an overall majority of 12. Those given Ministerial office by Mr Cameron became members of the government. Those not chosen remained merely **backbenchers** of the parliamentary **Conservative party**.

The word ‘government’ is also sometimes given a more extensive meaning which includes all of those institutions and persons at a national level who are concerned with the making and execution of policy. In this sense the term is not dissimilar to the institutional meaning of ‘the Crown’ and would encompass all those Ministers and civil servants who comprise the central administration.

Government also has a functional meaning in that it may be used to refer to the process through which the nation’s affairs are regulated and protected. In this sense government means an activity rather than a particular combination of individuals or institutions.

## The Cabinet

This refers to that group of senior Ministers (usually 20 to 24) who meet weekly or twice weekly with the Prime Minister to determine government policy and action. Most of these will be the heads of major government departments (e.g. Foreign Secretary, **Chancellor of the Exchequer**, Secretary of State for the Home Department). Others will have responsibility for a variety of activities which must be discharged effectively if the government is to survive and prosper. Hence the **Cabinet** will usually include Ministers with responsibility for managing government business in the House of Commons (**Leader of the House** of Commons) and in the House of Lords (Leader of the House of Lords). The Deputy Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary to the **Treasury** would also expect to be given Cabinet positions.

## The executive

This is a term used collectively to refer to all those institutions and persons concerned primarily with the implementation of law and policy. Hence all central and local government departments would generally be included as would the police and the armed forces. Precluded from the definition are all those engaged in making law as opposed to enforcing it. Hence it would be improper to regard Parliament or the judiciary as falling within the term’s usual meaning.

## The legislature

When the term is used in domestic constitutional and administrative law, normally it may be understood as referring to the Parliament. For the purposes of enacting legislation the Parliament of the United Kingdom consists of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarch.

Not all law in the United Kingdom is made by Parliament. Many important legal rules are made by the judges and become part of the **common law**. Others are made by government Ministers and local authorities under powers Parliament has delegated to them (delegated or subordinate legislation). In the context of their law-making functions, neither the judges, Ministers nor local authorities should be understood as parts of the legislature.

## The judiciary

Traditionally, in the United Kingdom, the term ‘judiciary’ was accepted as referring to all those employed to preside over a court of law at whatever level within the established legal system. Currently, therefore, and according to this approach, the domestic judiciary would consist of: District Judges (County and Magistrates’ Courts), Circuit Judges (Crown Courts), High Court Judges, Lords Justices of Appeal (Court of Appeal), and the Justices of the Supreme Court.

Consequent, however, on the growth and proliferation of the modern system of administrative tribunals, and their increased importance in terms of the official process for the resolution of disputes, many would now probably regard the above definition as unduly restrictive. It is likely, therefore, that many of those taking this approach would regard the judiciary as properly extending to those senior presiding officers and chairpersons operating professionally within the tribunal system. These would include the Senior President of Tribunals and the Presidents of the various Chambers within the Upper and First Tier tribunals. These are appointed from the ranks of existing High Court judges or through open selection by the Judicial Appointments Board.

For the current system of statutory tribunals and inquiries, see Chapter 22.

## Local government

**Local government** in England and Wales is the responsibility of the elected **councils** which direct the affairs of the various county, district and ‘unitary’ authorities in their provision of essential public services. Such authorities are created by and receive their powers from Acts of Parliament. The employees of local authorities are paid out of local funds and are not civil or crown servants.

Local authorities are funded by local taxation (‘**council tax**’), government grants and through borrowing. In strict constitutional terms, such authorities are not under the direct control of central government. The latter does, however, exercise considerable influence over local government affairs through various statutory procedures, including the inspection of local government services, the requirements for Ministerial consent prior to the implementation of certain decisions (e.g. the application of a **compulsory purchase** order or the closure of a school), the issuing of directions to authorities not fulfilling their statutory obligations and the power to assume responsibility for certain local government functions should an authority be found to be ‘in default’ (see Education Act 1944, s 199). The central government may also seek to exert its will through its control of Treasury grants to local authorities and its ultimate, albeit seldom used, power to withhold moneys where dissatisfied by the standards of service provided by a particular authority.