2. Constitutional Organisations, Institutions, and Roles

Titles in the Complete series combine extracts from a wide range of primary materials with clear explanatory text to provide readers with a complete introductory resource. This chapter describes the UK’s main constitutional bodies or offices and their roles. The state’s institutions and offices are linked to the three main powers at work within it: executive power, legislative power, and judicial power. The Queen is the head of state for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and heads the three branches of the state, although she is a constitutional monarch and her power is subject to constitutional limits. The executive is an umbrella term that describes two different entities: the political executive and the wider machinery of the government. The political executive contains the Prime Minister and government ministers. The wider machinery of government involves the collection of people who keep the country running, which includes the civil service, the police, the armed forces, members of executive agencies such as the Prison Service
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and the welfare benefits system. Parliament is the body tasked with law-making, the scrutiny of Bills, and holding the executive accountable. The courts oversee the operation of the rule of law by reviewing actions, omissions, and decisions taken by the executive to ensure that they are legal, rational, and procedurally proper, and comply with the terms of the Human Rights Act 1998. The chapter concludes with a discussion of elections to the Westminster Parliament—the mechanism through which MPs are elected and other ways in which those elections could be run.

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