

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

PLAN

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United Kingdom

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** (commonly known as the **United Kingdom**, the **UK**, or **Britain**)^[7] is a country^{[8][9]} to the north-west of mainland Europe. It comprises the island of Great Britain, the north-east part of the island of Ireland and many small islands. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with a land border, sharing it with the Republic of Ireland.^{[10][11][12]} Apart from this land border, the UK is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the English Channel and the Irish Sea. The largest island, Great Britain, is linked to France by the Channel Tunnel.

The United Kingdom is a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy comprising four constituent countries — England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The head of state, Elizabeth II, is also monarch of the other Commonwealth realms. The Crown Dependencies of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, formally possessions of the Crown, are not part of the UK but form a federacy with it.^[13] The UK has fourteen overseas territories,^[14] all remnants of the British Empire, which at its height encompassed almost a quarter of the world's land surface. It is a developed country, with the fifth-largest economy in the world by nominal GDP.

Britain was the world's foremost power during the 19th and early 20th century,^[15] but the economic cost of two world wars and the decline of its empire in the latter half of the 20th century diminished its leading role in global affairs. The UK

nevertheless retains major economic, cultural, military and political influence today and is a nuclear power, with the second highest defence spending in the world. It holds a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, and is a member of the G8, NATO, the European Union and the Commonwealth of Nations.

History

History of the United Kingdom



The Battle of Waterloo marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

England and Scotland had existed as separate sovereign and independent states with their own monarchs and political structures since the 9th century. The once independent Principality of Wales fell under the control of English monarchs from the Statute of Rhuddlan in 1284. Under the Acts of Union 1707, England (including Wales) and Scotland, which had been in personal union since the Union of the Crowns in 1603, agreed to a political union in the form of a unified Kingdom of Great Britain.^[16] The Act of Union 1800 united the Kingdom of Great Britain with the Kingdom of Ireland, which had been gradually brought under English control between 1541 and 1691, to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801.^[17] Independence for the Irish Free State in 1922 followed the partition of the island of Ireland two years previously, with six of the nine counties of the province of Ulster remaining within the UK, which then changed to the

current name in 1927 of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.^[18]

Britain played an important part in the Age of Enlightenment with philosophical and scientific input and a literary and theatrical tradition. Over the next century the United Kingdom played an important role in developing Western ideas of parliamentary democracy with significant contributions to literature, the arts and science.^[19] The UK-led Industrial Revolution transformed the country and fuelled the British Empire. During this time, like other Great Powers, the UK was involved in colonial exploitation, including the slave trade, while the passing of the 1807 Slave Trade Act also made the UK the first nation to prohibit trade in slaves.



The British Empire in 1897

After the defeat of Napoleon in the Napoleonic Wars, Britain became the principal naval power of the 19th century. At its peak the British Empire controlled large amounts of territory in Asia, Africa, Oceania and America.

In the 19th century the country played an important role in the development of parliamentary democracy, partly through the emergence of a multi-party system. At the end of the Victorian era the United Kingdom lost its industrial leadership, particularly to the German Empire, which surpassed the UK in industrial production and trade in the 1890s, and to the United States.

Britain remained an eminent power and its empire expanded to its maximum size by 1921, gaining the League of Nations mandate over former German and Ottoman colonies after World War I.

After World War I, the world's first large-scale international broadcasting network, the BBC, was created. In 1924 the country's Labour movement, which had been gaining strength since the late 1890s, formed the first Labour government. Britain fought Nazi Germany in World War II, with its Commonwealth allies including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India, later to be joined by further allies such as the United States. Wartime leader Winston Churchill and his peacetime successor Clement Atlee helped create the post-war world as part of the "Big Three". World War II left the United Kingdom financially damaged. Loans taken out during and after World War II from both Canada and the Great Britain were economically costly but, along with post-war Marshall aid, the UK began the road to recovery.

The immediate post-war years saw the establishment of the British Welfare State and one of the world's first and most comprehensive health services, while the demands of a recovering economy brought people from all over the Commonwealth to create a multi-ethnic Britain. Although the new post-war limits of Britain's political role were confirmed by the Suez Crisis of 1956, the international spread of the language meant the continuing impact of its literature and

culture, while at the same time from the 1960s its popular culture found influence abroad. Following a period of economic stagnation and industrial strife in the 1970s after a global economic downturn, the 1980s saw the inflow of substantial oil revenues, and the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, under whom there was a marked break with the post-war political and economic consensus. Her supporters credit her with economic success, but her critics blame her for greater social division. From 1997 onward these trends of growth largely continued under the leadership of Tony Blair.

The United Kingdom has been a member of the European Union since 1973. The attitude of the present Labour government towards further integration with this organisation is mixed,^[20] with the Conservative Party favouring a return of some powers and competencies to the state,^[21] and the Liberal Democrats supportive of current engagement.

Government and politics

Politics of the United Kingdom and Monarchy of the United Kingdom



Queen Elizabeth II.

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy with Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as head of state; the monarch of the UK also serves as head of state of

fifteen other Commonwealth countries, putting the UK in a personal union with those other states. The UK has a parliamentary government based on strong democratic traditions: the Westminster system has been emulated around the world—a legacy of the British Empire.

The UK's constitution governs the legal framework of the country and consists mostly of written sources, including statutes, judge made case law, and international treaties. As there is no technical difference between ordinary statutes and law considered to be "constitutional law," the British Parliament can perform "constitutional reform" simply by passing Acts of Parliament and thus has the power to change or abolish almost any written or unwritten element of the constitution. However, no Parliament can pass laws that future Parliaments cannot change.^[22] The United Kingdom is one of the three countries in the world today that does not have a codified constitution (the other two being New Zealand and Israel).^[23]

The position of Prime Minister, the UK's head of government, belongs to the current leader of the political party that can obtain the confidence of a plurality in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister and their Cabinet are formally appointed by the Monarch to form Her Majesty's Government. However, the Prime Minister chooses the Cabinet, and by convention, the Queen respects the Prime Minister's choices. The Cabinet is traditionally drawn from members of the Prime Minister's party in both legislative houses, and mostly from the

House of Commons, to which they are responsible. Executive power is exercised by the Prime Minister and Cabinet, all of whom are sworn into Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, and become Ministers of the Crown. Gordon Brown, leader of the Labour Party, has been Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service since 27 June 2007.

The Parliament is the national legislature of the United Kingdom; housed in the Palace of Westminster, it is the ultimate legislative authority in the UK, according to the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty. However,



questions over sovereignty have been brought forward due to the UK's membership within the European Union.^[24]

The parliament is made up of the Queen and two houses: an elected House of Commons and an appointed House of Lords. Each member in the House of Commons is elected by simple plurality in a constituency; general elections are called by the Monarch when the Prime Minister so advises. There is no minimum term for a Parliament, but a new election must be called within five years of the last general election.

The Houses of Parliament

The UK's three major political parties are the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, and the Liberal Democrats. Other



parties such as the Democratic Unionist Party, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Unionist Party, and Sinn Féin (from Northern Ireland) hold most of the remaining seats in the House. In accordance with party policy, no elected Sinn Féin Member of Parliament has ever attended the House of Commons to speak in the House on behalf of their constituents. However, the current five Sinn Féin MPs have since 2002 made use of the offices and other facilities available at Westminster.^[25]

Manchester Town Hall. Many towns and cities reflect their "civic pride" with public buildings.

Constituent Country	Population	Subdivisions
<u>England</u>	50,431,700	<u>Regions</u> <u>Metropolitan</u> and <u>non-metropolitan</u> <u>counties</u> <u>Lieutenancy areas</u>
<u>Scotland</u>	5,094,800	<u>Council areas</u> <u>Lieutenancy areas</u>
<u>Wales</u>	2,958,600	<u>Unitary authorities</u> <u>Lieutenancy areas</u>
<u>Northern Ireland</u>	1,724,400	<u>Districts</u> <u>Traditional counties</u>

Historically, the four nations were divided into counties as areas for local government administration. Although these are still used to some extent for this purpose and as geographical areas, they are no longer the sole basis for local government administration.

In recent years, England has, for some purposes, been divided into nine intermediate-level Government Office Regions. Each region is made up of counties and unitary authorities, apart from London, which consists of London boroughs. Although at one point it was intended that these regions would be given their own elected regional assemblies, the plan's future is uncertain following a rejection, by referendum, of a proposed assembly in the North East region.

City status is governed by Royal Charter. There are sixty-six British cities: fifty in England; six in Scotland; five in Wales; and five in Northern Ireland.

The Crown has sovereignty over the Isle of Man and the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey. Collectively, these three territories are known as the Crown dependencies, lands owned by the British monarch but not part of the United Kingdom. They are also not part of the European Union. However, the Parliament of the United Kingdom has the authority to legislate for the dependencies, and the British government manages their foreign affairs and defence.

The UK also has fourteen overseas territories around the world, the last remaining territories of the British Empire. The

overseas territories are also not considered part of the UK, but in most cases the local populations have British citizenship and the right to abode in the UK. This has been the case since 2002.

Law



Law of the United Kingdom

Scottish Parliament is the national legislature of Scotland

The United Kingdom has three distinct systems of law. English law, which applies in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland law, which applies in Northern Ireland, are based on common-law principles. Scots law, which applies in Scotland, is a hybrid system based on both common-law and civil-law principles. The Act of Union 1707 guarantees the continued existence of a separate law system for Scotland.

The Appellate Committee of the House of Lords (usually just referred to, as "The House of Lords") is the highest court in the land for all criminal and civil cases in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and for all civil cases in Scots law. Recent constitutional changes will see the powers of the House of Lords transfer to a new Supreme Court of the United Kingdom.^[26]

In England and Wales, the court system is headed by the Supreme Court of Judicature of England and Wales, consisting of the Court of Appeal, the High Court of Justice (for civil cases)

and the Crown Court (for criminal cases). In Scotland the chief courts are the Court of Session, for civil cases, and the High Court of Justiciary, for criminal cases, while the sheriff court is the Scottish equivalent of the county court.

The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, comprising the same members as the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords, is the highest court of appeal for several independent Commonwealth countries, the UK overseas territories, and the British crown dependencies.

Foreign relations

: *Foreign relations of the United Kingdom*

The United Kingdom is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a member of the G8 and NATO, and a member state of the European Union. The UK has a "Special Relationship" with the United States. Apart from the US and Europe, Britain's close allies include Commonwealth nations and other English speaking countries. Britain's global presence and influence is further amplified through its trading relations and its armed forces, which maintain approximately eighty military installations and other deployments around the globe.^[27]

Geography

Geography of the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is in Western Europe. It comprises the island of Great Britain (most of England, Scotland and Wales) and the north-eastern one-sixth of the island of Ireland (Northern Ireland) , together

with many smaller islands. The mainland areas lie between latitudes 49° and 59° N (the Shetland Islands reach to nearly 61° N) , and longitudes 8° W to 2° E. The Royal Greenwich Observatory, near London, is the defining point of the Prime Meridian. The United Kingdom has a total area of approximately 245,000 square kilometres (94,600 sq mi). The UK lies between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea, and comes within 35 kilometres (22 mi) of the north-west coast of France, from which it is separated by the English Channel. Northern Ireland shares a 360 kilometres (224 mi) land boundary with the Republic of Ireland. The Channel Tunnel ("Chunnel") now links the UK with France beneath the English Channel.

Climate

Climate of the United Kingdom

All parts of the United Kingdom have a temperate climate, with plentiful rainfall all year round. The temperature varies with the seasons but seldom drops below $-10\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($14\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$) or rises above $35\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($95\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$). The prevailing wind is from the south-west, bearing frequent spells of mild and wet weather from the Atlantic Ocean. Eastern parts are most sheltered from this wind and are therefore the driest. Atlantic currents, warmed by the Gulf Stream, bring mild winters, especially in the west, where winters are also wet, especially over high ground. Summers are warmest in the south east of England, being closest to the European mainland, and coolest in the north. Snowfall can

occur in winter and early spring, though it rarely settles to any great depth away from high ground.

Absolute temperature ranges:

- England: 38.5 °C (101.3 °F) on 10 August 2003 at Brogdale, near Faversham, Kent, to −26.1 °C (−15 °F) on 10 January 1982 at Edgmond, near Newport, Shropshire.

- Wales: 35.2 °C (95.4 °F) in Hawarden Bridge, Flintshire on 2 August 1990, to −23.3 °C (−9.9 °F) in Rhayader, Radnorshire on 21 January 1940.

- Scotland: 32.9 °C (91.2 °F) at Greycrook, Scottish Borders on 9 August 2003 to −27.2 °C (−17 °F) recorded at Braemar, Aberdeenshire, on 11 February 1895 and 10 January 1982 and also at Altnaharra, Sutherland, on 30 December 1995.

- Northern Ireland: 30.8 °C (87.4 °F) at Knockarevan, near Belleek, County Fermanagh on 30 June 1976 and at Belfast on 12 July 1983, to −17.5 °C (0.5 °F) at Magherally, near Banbridge, County Down on 1 January 1979.

Demography

Main article: [Demography of the United Kingdom](#)

The populations and percentage of total population in the four nations of the United Kingdom.

Population

At the April 2001 UK Census, the United Kingdom's population was 58,789,194, the third largest in the European Union (behind Germany and France), the fifth largest in the Commonwealth and the twenty-first largest in the world. This

had been estimated up to 60,587,300 by the Office for National Statistics in 2006.^[30] In August 2006 it was confirmed that the UK's population had reached 60 million, then rapidly increased to 60.2 million, largely from net immigration, but also because of a rising birth rate and increasing life expectancy.^[31]

The UK's overall population density is one of the highest in the world. About a quarter of the population lives in England's prosperous south-east and is predominantly urban and suburban,^[32] with an estimated 7,517,700 in the capital of London.^[33] The population of the United Kingdom has now reached 60,587,000 (mid 2006 estimate).^[34]

In 2006 the UK's total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.86 children per woman, below the replacement rate of 2.1. In 2001, the TFR was at a record low of 1.63, but it has increased each year since, and will continue to do so as the share of births from immigrant mothers continues to prod the fertility rate. The TFR was considerably higher during the 1960s 'baby boom', peaking at 2.95 children per woman in 1964.^[35]

Languages of the United Kingdom

Countries where English has *de facto* official or official language status.

Though the UK does not have a de jure official language, the predominant spoken language is English, a West Germanic language descended from Old English, featuring a large number of borrowings from Old Norse and Norman. The other indigenous languages are Scots (which is closely related to

English) and the Insular Celtic languages. The latter fall into two groups: the P-Celtic languages (Welsh and Cornish) ; and the Q-Celtic languages (Irish and Scottish Gaelic and Manx). Celtic dialectal influences from Cumbric persisted in Northern England for many centuries, most famously in a unique set of numbers used for counting sheep (see Yan Tan Tethera).

The English language has spread to all corners of the world (largely due to the British Empire) and has thus become the business language of the world. Worldwide, it is taught as a second language more than any other.^[56] The United Kingdom's Celtic languages are also spoken by small groups around the globe, mainly Gaelic in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Welsh in Patagonia, Argentina.

Recently it has acquired many speakers of Eastern European languages, notably Polish.

Religion in the United Kingdom

While the United Kingdom has a long tradition of Christianity and a link between church and state still remains, in



practice the UK is a predominantly secular society with only 38%^[57] proclaiming a belief in a God. People identify themselves with religion in the UK for both cultural and religious reasons and this is reflected by the disparity between the figures for those proclaiming a belief in a God and those identifying themselves with a particular religion.

Christianity has the largest number of adherents followed by Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism.

Christianity

Westminster Abbey is used for the coronation of all British Monarchs, who are also made the head of the Church of England.

Christianity is the majority religion; there are many Christian churches, denominations, and sects. However, Christianity in the UK is on the decline. The Tearfund Survey^[58] in 2007 revealed 53% identified themselves as Christian compared to 71.6% in the 2001 UK Census.^[59] Only 7% of people in the UK are actually practising Christians. Christianity was first introduced to Britain by the Romans. The direct influence of the Anglican Communion has been on the decline for many years but the Church of England retains a representation in Parliament and the right to draft legislative measures (usually related to religious administration) , through the General Synod, that can be passed into law, but not amended by Parliament. The churches of the Anglican Communion in the rest of the UK were disestablished in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Scotland and northern England were evangelised first, by Celtic missionaries from Ireland, such as Ninian, Columba and Aidan. Augustine was subsequently sent to southern England by Pope Gregory I in 597.

The English Church split from Rome in 1534, during the reign of Henry VIII of England (see English Reformation).

Today, the Church of England is the officially established Christian church in England and senior branch of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The British monarch is required to be a member of the Church of England under the Act of Settlement 1701 and is the Supreme Governor. The senior bishop of Church of England is the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Church of Scotland (known informally as the Kirk) broke with the Roman Catholic Church in 1560 (see Calvinism and Scottish Reformation). Today it is a Presbyterian church, recognised as the national church of Scotland, and not subject to state control. The British monarch is an ordinary member, and is required to swear an oath to "defend the security" of the Church at the coronation. The Scottish Episcopal Church, which is part of the Anglican Communion, dates from the final establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland in 1690. Further splits in the Church of Scotland, especially in the nineteenth century, led to the creation of various other Presbyterian churches in Scotland, including the Free Church of Scotland.

In the 1920s, the Church in Wales was separated from the Church of England and became disestablished (lost its status as the state religion). However the Church in Wales remains in the Anglican Communion. Methodism and other independent churches are traditionally strong in Wales.

The Anglican Church of Ireland was disestablished in the nineteenth century. It covers the entire island of Ireland (both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland). In Northern

Ireland the Catholic Church in Ireland is the largest single denomination, although Protestants are in the majority overall. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is the largest Protestant denomination and is in terms of theology and history closely linked to the Church of Scotland

The Roman Catholic Church is the second largest denomination of Christianity in the UK. After the Protestant Reformation, strict laws were passed against Catholics; these were removed by the Catholic Emancipation laws in 1829. There are separate Catholic hierarchies for England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

Other large Christian groups include the Methodists (founded by John Wesley in London) and the Baptists. There are also growing Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, many of which have flourished with immigration from around the Commonwealth and beyond.

Islam

Muslims in the United Kingdom are believed to number 1.8 million .^[60] Mosques are present in most regions: The biggest groups are of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi origin. More recently, refugees from Somalia, Northern Cyprus, the Balkans and Arab countries have increased Britain's Muslim population. The 2006 controversy over the burqa, brought up in comments by politician Jack Straw, reflects a split between some Britons questioning the extent to which traditionalist forms of Islam are compatible with British society, and others who believe that

wearing the veil is compatible with Muslim integration in Britain.^[61]

Other religions

Religions of Indian origin, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are followed in Britain. As of the 2001 census, there are about 560,000 Hindus and 340,000 Sikhs. Buddhism is practised by about 150,000^[62] It is likely that these figures have increased since 2001. One non-governmental organisation estimates that there are 800,000 Hindus in the UK.^[63] Leicester houses one of the world's few Jain temples that are outside of India.

There are approximately 270,000 Jews in Britain, according to the 2001 census.^[64]

390,127 individuals proclaimed themselves as "Jedi Knight" in the 2001 census, though this is largely due to an Internet campaign to make it an official religion^[citation needed].

No religion

The United Kingdom has a large and growing atheist and agnostic population with 13,626,000 (23.2% of the UK population) either claiming no religion or not answering the question on religion at the 2001 census.^[65]

Economy of the United Kingdom

London is a major centre for international business and commerce and is the leader of the three "command centres" for the global economy (along with New York City and Tokyo).^[66] For over twenty-five years, the British economy has

corresponded with what has been described by some since the 1980s as the Anglo-Saxon model, focusing on the principles of liberalisation, the free market, and low taxation and regulation. Based on market exchange rates, the United Kingdom is the fifth largest economy in the world,^[67] and the second largest in Europe after Germany.

The British started the Industrial Revolution, and, like most industrialising countries at the time, initially concentrated on heavy industries such as shipbuilding, coal mining, steel production, and textiles. The empire created an overseas market for British products, allowing the United Kingdom to dominate international trade in the 19th century. However, as other nations industrialised and surplus labour from agriculture



began to dry up, coupled with economic decline after two world wars, the United Kingdom began to lose its economic advantage. As a result, heavy industry declined, by degrees, throughout the 20th century. The British service sector, however, has grown substantially, and now makes up about 73% of GDP.^[68]

The Bank of England; the central bank of the United Kingdom.

The service sector of the United Kingdom is dominated by financial services, especially in banking and insurance. London is the world's largest financial centre with the London Stock Exchange, the London International Financial Futures and

Options Exchange, and the Lloyd's of London insurance market all based in The City. It also has the largest concentration of foreign bank branches in the world. In the past decade, a rival financial centre in London has grown in the Docklands area, with HSBC and Barclays Bank relocating their head offices there. Many multinational companies that are not primarily UK-based have chosen to site their European or rest-of-world headquarters in London: an example is the US financial services firm Citigroup. The Scottish capital, Edinburgh, also has one of the large financial centres of Europe.^[69]

Tourism is very important to the British economy. With over 27 million tourists a year, the United Kingdom is ranked as the sixth major tourist destination in the world.^[70]

The British manufacturing sector, however, has greatly diminished, relative to the economy as a whole, since World War II. It is still a significant part of the economy, but only accounted for one-sixth of national output in 2003.^[71] The British motor industry is a significant part of this sector, although it has diminished with the collapse of MG Rover and most of the industry is foreign owned. Civil and defence aircraft production is led by the United Kingdom's largest aerospace firm, BAE Systems, and the continental European firm EADS, the owner of Airbus. Rolls-Royce holds a major share of the global aerospace engines market. The chemical and pharmaceutical industry is also strong in the UK, with the world's second and

sixth largest pharmaceutical firms (GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca, respectively) ^[72] being based in the UK.

The creative industries accounted for 7.3% GVA in 2004 and grew at an average of 5% per annum between 1997 and 2004. ^[73]

The United Kingdom's agriculture sector accounts for only 0.9% of the country's GDP. ^[74]

The UK has a small coal reserve along with significant natural gas, and oil reserves, although the natural gas and oil reserves are diminishing.

Government involvement throughout the economy is exercised by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (currently Alistair Darling) who heads HM Treasury, but the Prime Minister (currently Gordon Brown) , is First Lord of the Treasury; the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the Second Lord of the Treasury. However since 1997, the Bank of England, headed by the Governor of the Bank of England, has control of interest rates and other monetary policy.

Currency

See also: Banknotes of the pound sterling and pound sterling

The currency of the UK is the pound sterling, represented by the symbol **£**. The Bank of England is the central bank, responsible for issuing currency. Banks in Scotland and Northern Ireland retain the right to issue their own notes, subject to retaining enough Bank of England notes in reserve to

cover the issue. The UK chose not to join the Euro at the currency's launch, and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has ruled out membership for the foreseeable future, saying that the decision not to join had been right for Britain and for Europe.^[75] The government of former Prime Minister Tony Blair had pledged to hold a public referendum for deciding membership should "five economic tests" be met. In 2005, more than half (55%) of the UK were against adopting the currency, whilst 30% were in favour.^[76]

Culture

Culture of the United Kingdom

Cinema

Cinema of the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been influential in the development of cinema, with the Ealing Studios claiming to be the oldest studios in the world. Despite a history of important and successful productions, the industry is characterised by an ongoing debate about its identity, and the influences of American and European cinema. Famous films include the Harry Potter and Ian Fleming's James Bond series which, although now made by American studios, used British source materials, locations, actors and filming crew.



Education

King's College, part of the University of

Cambridge, England.

Further information: Education in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's official literacy rate (99%) is normal by developed country standards. Universal state education was introduced for the primary level in 1870 and secondary level in 1900 (except in Scotland where it was introduced in 1696, see Education in Scotland).^[86] Education is mandatory from ages five to sixteen (15 if born in late July or August).

The majority of children in the UK are educated in state-sector schools, only a small proportion of which select on the grounds of academic ability. Around 7% of children in the UK are educated privately, the vast majority at the anachronistically named public schools. The products of public schools make up about 50% of students at the leading universities of Cambridge and Oxford, as well as the majority of doctors, judges and business leaders. State schools which are allowed to select pupils according to intelligence and academic ability can achieve comparable results to public schools: out of the top ten performing schools in terms of GCSE results in 2006 two were state-run grammar schools.

Some of the UK's 138 university level institutions are internationally renowned, especially those of Cambridge, Oxford, and London.^[87] In the 2006 THES - QS World University Rankings,^[88] 30 UK institutions were ranked amongst the top 200 universities in the world.

Fewer citizens of the UK are able to speak a foreign language than in any other EU country except Ireland. This has caused fear that the poor language skills in the UK will have a negative effect on business, and has led to calls for languages to be given priority in education.^{[89][90]}

Literature

Main article: British literature



The Chandos portrait, believed to depict the famed playwright William Shakespeare.

The English playwright and poet William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language.^{[91][92][93]}

Among the earliest British writers are Geoffrey of Monmouth (12th century) , Geoffrey Chaucer (14th century) , and Thomas Malory (15th century). In the 18th century, Samuel Richardson is often credited with inventing the modern novel. In the 19th century, there followed further innovation by Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, the social campaigner Charles Dickens, the naturalist Thomas Hardy, the visionary poet William Blake and romantic poet William Wordsworth. Twentieth century writers include the science fiction novelist H. G. Wells, the controversial D. H. Lawrence, the modernist Virginia Woolf, the prophetic novelist George Orwell and the poet John Betjeman. Most recently, the children's fantasy Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling has recalled the popularity of J.R.R. Tolkien.

Scotland's contribution includes the detective writer Arthur Conan Doyle, romantic literature by Sir Walter Scott, the epic adventures of Robert Louis Stevenson and the celebrated poet Robert Burns. More recently, the modernist and nationalist Hugh MacDiarmid and Neil M. Gunn contributed to the Scottish Renaissance. A more grim outlook is found in Ian Rankin's stories and the psychological horror-comedy of Iain Banks. Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, is UNESCO's first worldwide city of literature.

In the early medieval period, Welsh writers composed the Mabinogion. In modern times, the poets R.S. Thomas and Dylan Thomas have brought Welsh culture to an international audience.

Many authors from other nationalities, particularly from Ireland, or from Commonwealth countries, have also lived and worked in the UK. Significant examples through the centuries include Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, George Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and more recently British authors born abroad such as Kazuo Ishiguro and Sir Salman Rushdie.

In theatre, Shakespeare's contemporaries Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson added depth. More recently Alan Ayckbourn, Harold Pinter, Michael Frayn, Tom Stoppard and David Edgar have combined elements of surrealism, realism and radicalism.

Further information: English literature, Scottish literature and Welsh literature

Symbols



The Statue of Britannia in Plymouth.

• The flag of the United Kingdom is the Union Flag commonly known as the "Union Jack". It was created by the superimposition of the flags of England (St George's Cross) and Scotland (Saint Andrew's Cross) , with the Saint Patrick's cross, representing Ireland, being added to this in 1801.

Flag	Country	Patron saint	Flower
	<u>England</u>	<u>St. George</u>	<u>Red and White Rose</u>
	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>St. Andrew</u>	<u>Thistle</u>
	<u>Wales</u>	<u>St. David</u>	<u>Leek/Daffodil</u>
	<u>Northern Ireland</u>	<u>St. Patrick</u>	<u>Shamrock/Flax</u>

There is no official National flag of Northern Ireland following the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 or any unofficial flag universally supported in Northern Ireland. The use of various flags in Northern Ireland is contentious. However, the Ulster Banner is often used for sporting events. See Northern Ireland flags issue and The Union Flags and flags of the United Kingdom

.The national anthem of the United Kingdom is "God Save the King", with "King" replaced with "Queen" in the lyrics

whenever the monarch is female. The anthem's name, however, remains "God Save the King".^[102]

- Britannia is a personification of the United Kingdom, originating from the Roman occupation of southern and central Great Britain.^[103] Britannia is symbolised as a young woman with brown or golden hair, wearing a Corinthian helmet and white robes. She holds Poseidon's three-pronged trident and a shield, bearing the Union Flag. Sometimes she is depicted as riding the back of a lion. At and since the height of the British Empire, Britannia has often associated with maritime dominance, as in the patriotic song Rule Britannia.

BRITISH HOLIDAYS

Most of the holidays celebrated in the Great Britain are also celebrated in many other countries: Christmas, Easter and New Year's Day form part of the holiday tradition throughout ' most of Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Other "holidays were brought to the Great Britain by members of different ethnic groups who immigrated to North America.

January. New Year's Day marks the beginning of a new year and the end of the "holiday season", the period from Thanksgiving (late November) to Christmas (December 25). Schools, government offices" and most businesses are closed. People celebrate the arrival of the New Year.

Martin Luther King's birthday is celebrated on the third Monday of the month. King became a black leader of national importance.

February, Valentine's Day (February 14) is one of popular holidays with school children.

Presidents' Day (third Monday in February) is a day when English honour men who were the Presidents of the United States. Federal offices are closed on this holiday, but schools and most businesses are open. They observe Lincoln's birthday (February 12) and Washington's birthday (February 22).

March. Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, celebrated to honour the patron saint of Ireland, has become a day for wearing symbolic green clothing. In New York, the home of large numbers of Irish immigrants St. Patrick's Day is widely celebrated.

April. April Fool's Day (April 1) is a day on which people traditionally joke.

Easter is the most important of Christian holidays. It is a religious holiday.

May. May Day (May 1) is not celebrated in the Great Britain as a day honoring the worker, as it is in other parts of the world. It is celebrated as the beginning of spring.

Mother's Day, the second Sunday in May, is traditionally the Day English honour mothers and grandmothers with visits, cards, gifts, and so on.

Memorial Day, the last Monday in May, is a federal holiday. This is officially the day for honoring all English who died in wars and for many families. It has become a day for

visiting and placing flowers on the graves of other family members as well.

The family eats a large traditional dinner. The table is always loaded with many different kinds of delicious food.

People usually buy new clothes to wear on Easter Sunday. Another custom at Easter is decorating eggs.

May Day is celebrated in Great Britain with singing and dancing round a Maypole. It is an old British folk tradition. It's usually observed in small towns and villages. Early in the morning young people go into the woods tree, cut off its branches, and bring it home. Then it is decorated with flowers and garlands. The tree (the Maypole) becomes the centre of dances. It may stand for 15 years. Before each May Day the tree is repainted and the garlands are renewed.

There is a holiday which people celebrate in the USA to honor workers. It is Labor Day, the 1st Monday in September. It was celebrated for the first time in 1894, when workers began to get together in unions. They for an 8 hour work day, better pay, and safer workplaces. Today this holiday is observed in different ways. Sometimes workers take part in parades, or hold meetings and demonstrations. More often, people go on picnics and have outdoors. It is the last holiday when the weather is warm, and people don't work for three days, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, The school year usually begins after Labor Day.

All mothers are honored on Mother's Day, In Great Britain it is the last Sunday in March. In the USA it is the second Sunday in May. It is a day of rest for the mother of the family. Her children often give flowers or some other presents to their mother. A British tradition is to eat a fruit cake on Mother's Day.

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