

## Why are human rights important?

Human rights are important in the relationships that exist between individuals and the government that has power over them. The government exercises power over its people. However, human rights mean that this power is limited. States have to look after the basic needs of the people and protect some of their freedoms. Some of the most important features of human rights are the following:

- They are for everyone.
- They are internationally guaranteed.
- They are protected by law.
- They focus on the dignity of the human being.
- They protect individuals and groups.
- They cannot be taken away.

## Human rights declarations

Some basic human rights have been written down and agreed to by many states. The most famous text is the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** which the UN General Assembly approved on 10 December 1948. International Human Rights Day is now celebrated on 10 December every year. The statement of principles in the Declaration has had a great influence all over the world, although governments are not forced by law to obey them. However, many lawyers would argue that because of the way the international world works, human rights have become legally binding and that governments now do have to obey some of the principles.

Some of the human rights and freedoms listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other treaties (often called covenants, conventions or guidelines) include:

- The right to life.
- Freedom from discrimination.
- The right for everyone to be treated equally by the law.

- Freedom to have privacy in the family, home or with personal correspondence.
- Freedom of association, expression, assembly (gathering in groups) and movement.
- The right to seek and enjoy asylum (a safe home).
- The right to a nationality.
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- The right to vote and take part in government.
- The right to fair working conditions.
- The right to adequate food, shelter, clothing and social security.
- The right to health.
- The right to education.
- The right to property.
- The right to participate in cultural life.
- The right to development.
- Freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention.
- The right to a fair trial.



When the Declaration was created, most states agreed to it. However, some countries did not sign the Declaration. At the time, South Africa was dominated by white people who did not want equal rights for black people and so did not sign. Saudi Arabia also opposed the Declaration for religious reasons. One of the Articles (18) allows humans the freedom to change and practise the religion of their choice. Laws in Saudi Arabia mean that the practise of Christianity is forbidden and the right to change your religion from Islam to another

## What does Parliament do?

Parliament in the UK actually consists of the Queen, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. All three combine to carry out the work of Parliament, although when people talk about Parliament they really mean the House of Commons. Parliament has the following roles:

- It debates current affairs and makes laws.
- It examines the work of the Government on behalf of the people. They might do this by questioning or debating with the Government.
- It controls the finance, that is, the House of Commons gives permission for the Government to collect taxes and it decides how the money should be spent.
- It protects the interests and rights of individuals. We elect Members of Parliament to represent an area. These areas are known as **constituencies** (see page 40).
- It examines new proposals made by the European Union (see *Chapter 7*).

**Westminster**, where we find Parliament in London, is often used instead of Parliament.

## What is the difference between Parliament and Government?

You find the Government inside Parliament. The Government is like the management of the country that makes the big decisions, but these decisions have to be approved by Parliament. The Government consists of approximately 100 members of the political party which has the majority of seats in the House of Commons. It prepares new policies and laws.

## How does Government function in Britain?

Ministers and civil servants (the executive) usually prepare new **policies**. The policy is then presented to Parliament (the legislature) as a **Bill** which is a written document. The judiciary might be used if the policy is not put into practice.

## From a Bill to an Act of Parliament

The process of taking a Bill to an Act of Parliament is as follows:

- **First Reading** – This is the formal announcement of the Bill and all its clauses by the Speaker (see page 31). The Speaker also fixes the date for the Second Reading.
- **Second Reading** – This is the stage when MPs debate the general principles of a Bill. Some modifications to the Bill can be discussed before a vote is taken. This is a crucial stage in the passage of a Bill.
- **Division** – This is when MPs vote on the aims of the Bill. If a Bill does not receive a majority of votes, it can be thrown out at this stage.
- **Committee Stage** – This is when MPs debate the finer details. MPs can propose and agree amendments to improve the Bill.
- **Report Stage** – This is when the final amended Bill is drafted and the findings of the Committee are reported back to Parliament. At the end of the Report Stage, a final Bill is drafted taking all the proposed amendments into consideration.
- **Third Reading** – This is when MPs have the opportunity to discuss and vote on the final Bill. A final vote is taken and the whole procedure is repeated in the House of Lords.
- **Royal Assent** – A Bill becomes law. The Royal Assent has not been refused since 1707.

*What part of 'No' did you not understand?*



# 6 Employment and money

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## Employment

People who make their living by working for someone else or a company (known as an **employer**) are called **employees** because they are in employment. Those who make their living by providing goods and services without working for an employer are known as **self-employed**. If people lose their jobs and are unable to find paid work, they are known as **unemployed**.

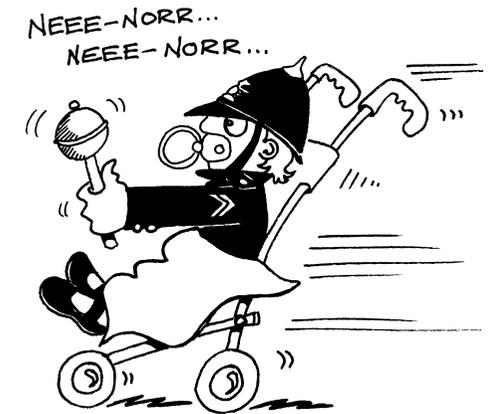
Employers and employees have rights protected by law. Since 1994, both part-time and full-time employees have the same rights.

Employment rights include:

- Employees are protected by **disability, race and sex discrimination laws**.
- Employees have to be given notice if they are asked to leave once they have worked for more than a month. After two months, employees should receive the **terms and conditions** of their jobs in writing.
- Employees are entitled to **redundancy pay** if they are made redundant and have worked for the employer for two years or more.
- Employees are able to claim for **unfair dismissal** if they have worked for an employer for at least a year and feel that they have been unfairly sacked.
- All employees aged 18 or over are entitled to receive at least the **minimum wage** which is £3.50 per hour (£4.10 for employees aged 22 years and over).
- An employer must make sure that the **workplace is safe** as the employer has a legal responsibility to follow all safety procedures.
- All employees over the age of 16 have the right to at least four weeks' **paid holiday** a year as long as they have worked for at least 13 weeks.

## How old do you have to be to work?

Children aged 14 or over can be employed in light work only. Those under 14 years of age can only be given very light work such as paper rounds that are supervised by a parent. If you are under school leaving age, you cannot work before 7 am or after 7 pm, and you should not work for more than two hours on a school day.



*Is it me... or are policemen getting younger?*

## What are apprenticeships?

Modern apprenticeships or traineeships are a form of training for people who wish to follow careers such as being a technician, accountant, junior manager or craftsman. You receive some pay (at least £40 per week, although the minimum wage does not always apply to apprenticeships) whilst you are trained.

## What should the 'terms and conditions' tell you?

Terms and conditions should tell you about how you are going to be trained, your pay, the date you began to work and your working hours. It should also contain details about sick pay and pensions, information about the company's disciplinary procedures and the amount of notice you need to give if you wish to leave. If you are at all concerned about your terms and conditions, or about equal opportunities in your job, you should visit the local Citizens Advice Bureau or your careers office at school.

## What makes people different?

There are many things that make us similar to other people but we also form our own identities by noticing the differences between us and others. Some of the ways in which we make a distinction between people are as follows: gender, age, race/ethnicity, skin colour, religion, sexuality, family, language/nationality, wealth and accent/the town or area where someone is from.

Some people argue that we should not differentiate between people or categorise them (label people in a certain way). This is because some people are **prejudiced** against others because of one of the above reasons, ie because someone is white or black, rich or poor. People are sometimes prejudiced or **racist**, which means aggressive towards people because of their race.

This is often because they do not understand people's differences and similarities. Racism is a particularly dangerous force in society. Recently, there have been violent clashes between white, Asian and Afro-Caribbean people in Oldham, Bradford, Burnley and Brixton because of racial differences. Differences can cause arguments and violence, yet they can also benefit people.



*So this is your new friend... I didn't realise he was... er... so tall!*

## What groups people together?

Britain is a diverse society. People have multiple identities (for example, you might be female, young, white and Jewish) and, in order to live peacefully, we try to respect and appreciate each other's differences. There are many **communities** in Britain, where you find people with things in common grouped together. You can also find

**nationalism** in Britain, where people express their **patriotism** (loyalty) about being **British** (or English or Scottish, etc). Being 'British' often implies that you share a **common culture** with the population of Britain. In other words, people feel that they are included in a country's society.

However, not everyone in Britain is patriotic, and some people think that nationalism is quite a dangerous thing. Yet, nationalism has many meanings, not all of them negative. For example, it can just be the belief that a nation should be independent and have its own government. If you are a member of a nationalist party or pressure group, you probably believe that national unity and national identity should take priority over membership of any other group.

Other people see themselves as members of certain communities. These can be geographical (eg your village, your town or your county), political (eg a pressure group), economic (financial), religious or social (eg a drama society). A community is a voluntary group of people who have certain interests or characteristics in common. You or your family are probably involved in a community of some kind, whether it be a neighbourhood-watch group or a local football club. **Families** are also very important for grouping people.

## What is the Commonwealth?

As British citizens we are also part of the European Union and the **Commonwealth**. The Commonwealth is a family of nations who help each other's development and share ideas and experiences. It has 54 members found on every continent including India, Australia and Canada, although members are mainly



*If it's really a Commonwealth, how come you're so rich and I'm so poor?*