United Kingdom

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*This article is about the modern sovereign state. For the island, see*[*Great Britain*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain)*. For other uses, see*[*United Kingdom (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_(disambiguation))*and*[*UK (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_(disambiguation))*.*

[Page semi-protected](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Protection_policy#semi)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **United Kingdom of GreatBritain and Northern Ireland**[[show]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) | | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | [A flag featuring both cross and saltire in red, white and blue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg) | [Coat of arms containing shield and crown in centre, flanked by lion and unicorn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Coat_of_Arms_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg) | | [Flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom) | [Royal coat of arms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_coat_of_arms_of_the_United_Kingdom) [[nb 1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-1) | | | |
| **Anthem:**"[God Save the Queen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Save_the_Queen)"[[nb 2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-3)  http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.25wmf19/resources/assets/file-type-icons/fileicon-ogg.png  MENU  0:00 | | |
| [Two islands to the north-west of continental Europe. Highlighted are the larger island and the north-eastern fifth of the smaller island to the west.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:EU-United_Kingdom.svg)  Location of the  United Kingdom  (dark green)  – in [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe)  (green & dark grey) – in the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union)  (green) | | |
| **Capital** and largest city | | [London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London) http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/55/WMA_button2b.png/17px-WMA_button2b.png[51°30′N 0°7′W](http://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagename=United_Kingdom&params=51_30_N_0_7_W_type:country) |
| **Official language** and national language | | [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) |
| **Recognised regional languages**[[nb 3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-5) | | * [Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scots_language) * [Ulster‑Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Scots_dialects) * [Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_language) * [Cornish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornish_language) * [Scottish Gaelic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Gaelic) * [Irish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_language) |
| [**Ethnic groups**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups) ([2011](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_Census_2011)) | | * 87.1% [White](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_people) * 7.0% [Asian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Asian) * 3.0% [Black](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_British) * 2.0% [Mixed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed_(United_Kingdom_ethnicity_category)) * 0.9% others |
| [**Demonym**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demonym) | | * [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_people) * Briton |
| [**Government**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_United_Kingdom) | | [Unitary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_state) [parliamentary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system" \o "Parliamentary system)[constitutional monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) |
| - | [Monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom) | [Elizabeth II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II) |
| - | [Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_the_United_Kingdom) | [David Cameron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Cameron) |
| **Legislature** | | [Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_the_United_Kingdom) |
| - | [Upper house](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_house) | [House of Lords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lords) |
| - | [Lower house](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_house) | [House of Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons_of_the_United_Kingdom) |
| [**History**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_Kingdom) | | |
| - | [Acts of Union of England and Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_of_England_and_Scotland) | 1 May 1707 |
| - | [Acts of Union of Great Britain and Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_of_Great_Britain_and_Ireland) | 1 January 1801 |
| - | [Irish Free State Constitution Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Free_State_Constitution_Act_1922) | 5 December 1922 |
| - | [EEC accession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_enlargement_of_the_European_Economic_Community)[[nb 4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-6) | 1 January 1973 |
| [**Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom) | | |
| - | Total | 243,610 km2 ([80th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_dependencies_by_area)) 94,060 sq mi |
| - | Water (%) | 1.34 |
| [**Population**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_Kingdom) | | |
| - | 2013 estimate | 64,100,000[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-pop_estimate-7) ([22nd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population)) |
| - | 2011 census | 63,181,775[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-pop_census-8) ([22nd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population)) |
| - | Density | 255.6/km2 ([51st](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sovereign_states_and_dependent_territories_by_population_density)) 661.9/sq mi |
| [**GDP**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product) ([PPP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purchasing_power_parity)) | | 2013 estimate |
| - | Total | $2.378 trillion ([8th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP))) |
| - | Per capita | $38,309[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-imf2-9) ([21st](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)_per_capita)) |
| [**GDP**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product) (nominal) | | 2013 estimate |
| - | Total | $2.490 trillion ([6th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal))) |
| - | Per capita | $40,879[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-imf2-9) ([24th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)_per_capita)) |
| [**Gini**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gini_coefficient) (2012) | | positive decrease 32.8[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eurogini-10) medium **·** [33rd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_income_equality) |
| [**HDI**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index) (2013) | | Steady 0.892[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-HDI-11) very high **·** [14th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index) |
| **Currency** | | [Pound sterling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pound_sterling) ([GBP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_4217)) |
| **Time zone** | | [GMT](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenwich_Mean_Time) ([UTC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coordinated_Universal_Time)​) |
| - | Summer ([DST](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daylight_saving_time)) | [BST](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Summer_Time) ([UTC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coordinated_Universal_Time)+1) |
| **Date format** | | dd/mm/yyyy ([AD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anno_Domini)) |
| **Drives on the** | | [left](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right-_and_left-hand_traffic) |
| [**Calling code**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telephone_numbers_in_the_United_Kingdom) | | [+44](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telephone_numbers_in_the_United_Kingdom) |
| [**ISO 3166 code**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_3166) | | [GB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_3166-2:GB) |
| [**Internet TLD**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_code_top-level_domain) | | [.uk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.uk) |

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

**[i](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United_Kingdom_pronunciation.ogg" \o "File:United Kingdom pronunciation.ogg)**[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ɡreɪt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key) [ˈbrɪtən](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key) [ə](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English" \l "Key" \o "Help:IPA for English)[nd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key) [ˈnɔrðərn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key) [ˈaɪərlənd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English), commonly known as the **United Kingdom** (**UK**) or **Britain**, is a [sovereign state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state) in[Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe). Lying off the north-western coast of the [European mainland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Europe), the country includes the island of [Great Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain)—a term also applied loosely to refer to the whole country—the north-eastern part of the island of [Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland) and many smaller islands.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-12) [Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland) is the only part of the UK that shares [a land border](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland%E2%80%93United_Kingdom_border) with another state (the [Republic of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland)).[[nb 5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-13) Apart from this land border, the UK is surrounded by the [Atlantic Ocean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean) to its west and north, the [North Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea) to its east and the [English Channel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Channel) to its south. The [Irish Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Sea)lies between Great Britain and Ireland. The UK has an area of 93,800 square miles (243,000 km2), making it the [80th-largest sovereign state in the world](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_area) and the [11th-largest in Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_European_countries_by_area).

The United Kingdom is the [22nd-most populous country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population), with an estimated 64.1 million inhabitants.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-pop_estimate-7) It is a [constitutional monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) with a [parliamentary system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system) of governance.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-14)[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-15)Its [capital city](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_city) is [London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London), an important [global city](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_city) and [financial centre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Financial_centre) with an urban population of 10,310,000, the fourth-largest in Europe and [second-largest in the European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Largest_urban_areas_of_the_European_Union).[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-16) The current [monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom)—since 6 February 1952—is [Queen Elizabeth II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II). The UK consists of [four countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Countries_of_the_United_Kingdom): [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England), [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland), [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales), and [Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland).[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-page823-17) The latter three have [devolved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution_in_the_United_Kingdom) administrations,[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-devoladmins-18) each with varying powers,[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-19)[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-20) based in their capitals, [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh), [Cardiff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff), and [Belfast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast), respectively. [Guernsey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guernsey), [Jersey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jersey), and the [Isle of Man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isle_of_Man) are not part of the United Kingdom, being [Crown dependencies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_dependencies) with the British Government responsible for defence and international representation.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-21)

The relationships among the countries of the United Kingdom have [changed over time](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_formation_of_the_United_Kingdom). [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales) was annexed by the [Kingdom of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England) under the [Acts of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_in_Wales_Acts_1535%E2%80%931542) of 1536 and 1543. [A treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Union) between England and [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Scotland) resulted in 1707 in a unified [Kingdom of Great Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Great_Britain), which merged in 1801 with the [Kingdom of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Ireland) to form the [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_of_Great_Britain_and_Ireland). In 1922, five-sixths of Ireland seceded from the country, leaving the present formulation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.[[nb 6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-22) The UK has [fourteen Overseas Territories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Overseas_Territories).[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-23) These are the remnants of the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) which, at its height in the 1920s, encompassed almost a quarter of the world's land mass and was the [largest empire in history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_empires#All_empires_at_their_greatest_extent). British influence can be observed in the [language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language), [culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_United_Kingdom), and [legal systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_law) of many of [its former colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_that_have_gained_independence_from_the_United_Kingdom).

The United Kingdom is a [developed country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developed_country) and has the world's [sixth-largest economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)) by nominal [GDP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product) and [tenth-largest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)) by [purchasing power parity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purchasing_power_parity). The country is considered to have a [high-income economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Bank_high-income_economy) and is categorised as very high in the [Human Development Index](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index), currently ranking [14th in the world](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index). It was the world's first [industrialised](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrialisation" \o "Industrialisation) country and the world's foremost [power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_(international_relations)) during the 19th and early 20th centuries.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-24)[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ferguson-25) The UK remains a [great power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power) with considerable economic, cultural, military, scientific, and political[influence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphere_of_influence) internationally.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-26)[[21]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-David_M._McCourt-27) It is a [recognised](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Non-Proliferation_Treaty" \o "Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) [nuclear weapons state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_states_with_nuclear_weapons) and its [military expenditure ranks fifth or sixth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures) in the world.[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-SIPRI-28)[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-iiss.org-29) The UK has been a [permanent member](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permanent_members_of_the_United_Nations_Security_Council) of the[United Nations Security Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council) since its first session in 1946. It has been a [member state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_state_of_the_European_Union) of the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union) (EU) and its predecessor, the [European Economic Community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Economic_Community)(EEC), since 1973; it is also a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the [Council of Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Europe), the [G7](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G7), the [G8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G8), the [G20](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G-20_major_economies), [NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO), the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development" \o "Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (OECD), and the [World Trade Organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Organization) (WTO).

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  + [2.1 Before 1707](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Before_1707)
  + [2.2 Since the Acts of Union of 1707](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Since_the_Acts_of_Union_of_1707)
* [3 Geography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Geography)
  + [3.1 Climate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Climate)
  + [3.2 Administrative divisions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Administrative_divisions)
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  + [5.1 Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Government)
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  + [6.3 Energy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Energy)
* [7 Demographics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Demographics)
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  + [7.2 Languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Languages)
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  + [7.6 Healthcare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Healthcare)
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  + [8.1 Literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Literature)
  + [8.2 Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Music)
  + [8.3 Visual art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Visual_art)
  + [8.4 Cinema](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Cinema)
  + [8.5 Media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Media)
  + [8.6 Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Philosophy)
  + [8.7 Sport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Sport)
  + [8.8 Symbols](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Symbols)
* [9 See also](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#See_also)
* [10 Notes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Notes)
* [11 References](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#References)
* [12 Further reading](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Further_reading)
* [13 External links](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#External_links)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Etymology_and_terminology)Etymology and terminology

*See also:*[*Britain (placename)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britain_(placename))*and*[*Terminology of the British Isles*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terminology_of_the_British_Isles)

The [1707 Acts of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1707) declared that the kingdoms of [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England) and [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Scotland) were "United into One Kingdom by the Name of [Great Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Great_Britain)", though the new state is also referred to in the Acts as the "Kingdom of Great Britain", "United Kingdom of Great Britain" and "United Kingdom".[[24]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-30)[[25]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-31)[[nb 7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-32) However, the term "united kingdom" is only found in informal use during the 18th century and the country was only occasionally referred to as the "United Kingdom of Great Britain" — its full official name, from 1707 to 1800, being merely *Great Britain*, without a "long form".[[26]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-33)[[27]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-name-34)[[28]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-name2-35)[[29]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-name3-36)[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-37) The [Acts of Union 1800](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1800) united the Kingdom of Great Britain and the [Kingdom of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Ireland) in 1801, forming the [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_of_Great_Britain_and_Ireland). The name "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" was adopted following the independence of the [Irish Free State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Free_State), and the [partition of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_Ireland), in 1922, which left Northern Ireland as the only part of the island of Ireland within the UK.[[31]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-38)

Although the United Kingdom, as a sovereign state, is a country, England, Scotland, Wales, and to a lesser degree, Northern Ireland, are also regarded as *countries*, though they are not sovereign states.[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-alphabeticalNI-39)[[33]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-40) Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have devolved self-government.[[34]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-41)[[35]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-citizenship-42) The British Prime Minister's website has used the phrase "countries within a country" to describe the United Kingdom.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-page823-17) Some statistical summaries, such as those for the twelve [NUTS 1 regions of the UK](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NUTS_of_the_United_Kingdom), also refer to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as "regions".[[36]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-43)[[37]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-44) Northern Ireland is also referred to as a "province".[[32]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-alphabeticalNI-39)[[38]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-placeApart-45) With regard to Northern Ireland, the descriptive name used "can be controversial, with the choice often revealing one's political preferences."[[39]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-46)

The term *Britain* is often used as synonym for the United Kingdom. The term *Great Britain*, by contrast, refers conventionally to the island of Great Britain, or politically to England, Scotland and Wales in combination.[[40]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-47)[[41]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-48)[[42]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-49)However, it is sometimes used as a loose synonym for the United Kingdom as a whole.[[43]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-50)[[44]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-51) *GB* and *GBR* are the [standard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Organization_for_Standardization) country codes for the United Kingdom (see [ISO 3166-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_3166-2:GB) and [ISO 3166-1 alpha-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_3166-1_alpha-3)) and are consequently used by international organisations to refer to the United Kingdom. Additionally, the United Kingdom's Olympic team competes under the name "Great Britain" or "Team GB".[[45]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-52)[[46]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Team_GB-53)

The adjective *British* is commonly used to refer to matters relating to the United Kingdom. The term has no definite legal connotation, but is used in law to refer to UK citizenship and [matters to do with nationality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_nationality_law).[[47]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Bradley-54) People of the United Kingdom use a number of different terms to describe their national identity and may identify themselves as being [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_people); or as being [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_people), [Scottish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_people), [Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_people), [Northern Irish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People_of_Northern_Ireland), or [Irish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_people);[[48]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-55) or as being both.[[49]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-56)

In 2006, a new design of [British passport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_passport) was introduced. Its first page shows the long form name of the state in English, [Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_language) and [Scottish Gaelic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Gaelic).[[50]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-57) In Welsh, the long form name of the state is "Teyrnas Unedig Prydain Fawr a Gogledd Iwerddon" with "Teyrnas Unedig" being used as a short form name on government websites.[[51]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-58) (However it is usually abbreviated to "DU" for the mutated form "Y Deyrnas Unedig".) In Scottish Gaelic, the long form is "Rìoghachd Aonaichte Bhreatainn is Èireann a Tuath" and the short form "Rìoghachd Aonaichte".

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#History)History

*See also:*[*History of the British Isles*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_British_Isles)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Before_1707)**Before 1707**

*Main articles:*[*History of England*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_England)*,*[*History of Wales*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wales)*,*[*History of Scotland*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Scotland)*,*[*History of Ireland*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Ireland)*and*[*History of the formation of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_formation_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stonehenge2007_07_30.jpg)

[Stonehenge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonehenge), in [Wiltshire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiltshire), was erected around 2500 BC.

Settlement by [anatomically modern humans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cro-Magnons) of what was to become the United Kingdom occurred [in waves beginning by about 30,000 years ago](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistoric_settlement_of_the_British_Isles).[[52]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-59) By the end of the [region's prehistoric period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistoric_Britain), the population is thought to have belonged, in the main, to a culture termed [Insular Celtic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insular_Celts), comprising [Brythonic Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britons_(historical)) and [Gaelic Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaelic_Ireland).[[53]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-60) The [Roman conquest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_conquest_of_Britain), beginning in 43 AD, and the 400-year [rule of southern Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Britain), was followed by an invasion by [Germanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_peoples) [Anglo-Saxon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Saxon) settlers, reducing the Brythonic area [mainly to what was to become Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales#Medieval_Wales) and the historic [Kingdom of Strathclyde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Strathclyde).[[54]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-61) Most of the [region settled by the Anglo-Saxons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Saxon_England) became unified as the [Kingdom of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England) in the 10th century.[[55]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Short_Athelstan_biography_on_the_BBC_History_website-62) Meanwhile, [Gaelic-speakers in north west Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A1l_Riata) (with connections to the north-east of Ireland and traditionally supposed to have migrated from there in the 5th century)[[56]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-63)[[57]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-64) united with the [Picts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picts" \o "Picts) to create the [Kingdom of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Scotland) in the 9th century.[[58]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-65)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bayeux_Tapestry_WillelmDux.jpg)

The [Bayeux Tapestry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayeux_Tapestry) depicts the[Battle of Hastings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Hastings), 1066, and the events leading to it.

In 1066, the [Normans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normans) invaded England from France and after [its conquest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_conquest_of_England), seized [large parts of Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_invasion_of_Wales), [conquered much of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_invasion_of_Ireland) and were invited to [settle in Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Davidian_Revolution), bringing to each country [feudalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) on the Northern French model and [Norman-French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman-French) culture.[[59]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-66) The [Norman elites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Norman) greatly influenced, but eventually assimilated with, each of the local cultures.[[60]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-67) Subsequent [medieval English kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Plantagenet) completed the [conquest of Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquest_of_Wales) and made an unsuccessful [attempt to annex Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_Scottish_Independence). Following the [Declaration of Arbroath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_Arbroath), Scotland maintained its independence, albeit in [near-constant conflict with England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Scottish_Wars). The English monarchs, through inheritance of [substantial territories in France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angevin_Empire) and claims to the French crown, were also heavily involved in conflicts in France, most notably the [Hundred Years War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Years_War), while the [Kings of Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Scottish_monarchs) were in [an alliance with the French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auld_Alliance) during this period.[[61]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-68)

The [early modern period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Modern_Britain) saw religious conflict resulting from the [Reformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformation) and the introduction of [Protestant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism_in_the_United_Kingdom) state churches in each country.[[62]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-69) Wales was [fully incorporated into the Kingdom of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_in_Wales_Acts_1535%E2%80%931542),[[63]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-BBC_Tudors-70) and Ireland was constituted as a kingdom in personal union with the English crown.[[64]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-71) In what was to become Northern Ireland, the lands of the independent Catholic Gaelic nobility were confiscated and [given to Protestant settlers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plantation_of_Ulster) from England and Scotland.[[65]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-72)

In 1603, the kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland were united in a [personal union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_union) when [James VI, King of Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_I_of_England), inherited the crowns of England and Ireland and moved his court from Edinburgh to London; each country nevertheless remained a separate political entity and retained its separate political, legal, and religious institutions.[[66]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-D._Ross.2C_2002_p._56-73)[[67]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-J._Hearn.2C_2002_p._104-74)

In the mid-17th century, all three kingdoms [were involved in a series of connected wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_the_Three_Kingdoms) (including the [English Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Civil_War)) which led to the temporary overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the short-lived [unitary republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_republic) of the [Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_England).[[68]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-75)[[69]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-76)

Although the monarchy was restored, it ensured (with the [Glorious Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glorious_Revolution) of 1688 and subsequent [Bill of Rights 1689](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_of_Rights_1689)) that, unlike much of the rest of Europe, [royal absolutism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_absolutism) would not prevail, and a professed Catholic could never accede to the throne. The [British constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_constitution) would develop on the basis of [constitutional monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) and the [parliamentary system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system).[[70]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-77) With the constitutional rights of Parliament legally established, no monarch has since entered the [House of Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons_of_the_United_Kingdom) when it is sitting [meeting], which is annually commemorated at the [State Opening of Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Opening_of_Parliament) by the British monarch when the doors of the House of Commons are slammed in the face of the monarch's messenger, symbolising the rights of Parliament and its independence from the monarch.[[71]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-78)[[72]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-79) With the founding of the [Royal Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society) in 1660, science was greatly encouraged. During this period, particularly in England, the development of [naval power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_navy) (and the interest in [voyages of discovery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Discovery)) led to the acquisition and settlement of [overseas colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_British_Empire), particularly in North America.[[73]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-80)[[74]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-81)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Since_the_Acts_of_Union_of_1707)**Since the Acts of Union of 1707**

*Main article:*[*History of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Treaty_of_Union.jpg)

The [Treaty of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Union) led to a single united kingdom encompassing all Great Britain.

On 1 May 1707, the united [Kingdom of Great Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Great_Britain) came into being, the result of [Acts of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1707) being passed by the parliaments of England and Scotland to ratify the 1706 [Treaty of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Union)and so unite the two kingdoms.[[75]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-82)[[76]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-83)[[77]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-84)

In the 18th century, cabinet government developed under [Robert Walpole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Walpole), in practice the first prime minister (1721–1742). A series of [Jacobite Uprisings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobite_Uprisings" \o "Jacobite Uprisings) sought to remove the Protestant[House of Hanover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Hanover) from the British throne and restore the Catholic [House of Stuart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Stuart). The Jacobites were finally defeated at the [Battle of Culloden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Culloden) in 1746, after which the [Scottish Highlanders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Highlanders) were brutally suppressed. The British colonies in North America that broke away from Britain in the [American War of Independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_War_of_Independence) became the United States of America in 1782. British imperial ambition turned elsewhere, particularly to [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India).[[78]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-85)

During the 18th century, Britain was involved in the [Atlantic slave trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade). British [ships](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_ship) transported an estimated 2 million slaves from Africa to the West Indies before banning the trade in 1807 and taking a leading role in the movement to abolish slavery worldwide by pressing other nations to end their trade with a series of treaties, and then formed the world's oldest international human rights organisation, [Anti-Slavery International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Slavery_International), in London in 1839.[[79]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-86)[[80]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-87)[[81]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-88) The term 'United Kingdom' became official in 1801 when the parliaments of Britain and Ireland each passed an [Act of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_(1800)), uniting the two kingdoms and creating the [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_of_Great_Britain_and_Ireland).[[82]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-89)

In the early 19th century, the British-led [Industrial Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution) began to transform the country. It slowly led to a shift in political power away from the old [Tory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tory) and [Whig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiggism) landowning classes towards the new industrialists. An alliance of merchants and industrialists with the [Whigs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whig_(British_political_party)) would lead to a new party, the [Liberals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_(UK)), with an ideology of [free trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_trade) and [*laissez-faire*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laissez-faire). In 1832 Parliament passed the [Great Reform Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Reform_Act), which began the transfer of political power from the aristocracy to the middle classes. In the countryside, [enclosure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclosure) of the land was driving small farmers out. Towns and cities began to swell with a new urban working class. Few ordinary workers had the vote, and they created their own organisations in the form of [trade unions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_unions).

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_Waterloo_1815.PNG)

The [Battle of Waterloo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Waterloo) marked the end of the [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars) and the start of [Pax Britannica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Britannica" \o "Pax Britannica).

After the defeat of France in the [Revolutionary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_revolutionary_wars) and [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars) (1792–1815), the UK emerged as the principal naval and imperial power of the 19th century (with London the largest city in the world from about 1830).[[83]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-90) [Unchallenged at sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy#1815.E2.80.931914), British dominance was later described as *[Pax Britannica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Britannica" \o "Pax Britannica)*.[[84]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-91)[[85]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-92) By the time of [the Great Exhibition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Exhibition) of 1851, Britain was described as the "workshop of the world".[[86]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-93) The British Empire was expanded to include [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Raj), large [parts of Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire#Cape_to_Cairo) and many other territories throughout the world. Alongside the formal control it exerted over its own colonies, British dominance of much of world trade meant that it effectively controlled the economies of many countries, such as China, Argentina and [Siam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand).[[87]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-94)[[88]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-95)Domestically, political attitudes favoured free trade and laissez-faire policies and a gradual widening of the voting franchise. During the century, the population increased at a dramatic rate, accompanied by rapid urbanisation, causing significant social and economic stresses.[[89]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-96) After 1875, the UK's industrial monopoly was challenged by Germany and the USA. To seek new markets and sources of raw materials, the [Conservative Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_(UK)) under [Disraeli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disraeli) launched a period of imperialist expansion in Egypt, South Africa and elsewhere. [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada), [Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia) and [New Zealand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand) became self-governing dominions.[[90]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-97)

Social reform and home rule for Ireland were important domestic issues after 1900. The [Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_(UK)" \o "Labour Party (UK)) emerged from an alliance of trade unions and small Socialist groups in 1900, and[suffragettes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffragettes) campaigned for women's right to vote before 1914.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Irish_Rifles_ration_party_Somme_July_1916.jpg)

Infantry of the [Royal Irish Rifles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Ulster_Rifles)during the [Battle of the Somme](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Somme). More than 885,000 British soldiers died on the battlefields of World War I.

The UK fought with France, Russia and (after 1917) the US, against Germany and its allies in [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) (1914–18).[[91]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-98) The UK armed forces were engaged across much of the British Empire and in several regions of Europe, particularly on the [Western front](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Front_(World_War_I)).[[92]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Westwell.26Cove-99) The high fatalities of trench warfare caused the loss of much of a generation of men, with lasting social effects in the nation and a great disruption in the social order.

After the war, the UK received the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations) mandate over a number of former German and [Ottoman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire) colonies. The British Empire reached its greatest extent, covering a fifth of the world's land surface and a quarter of its population.[[93]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-100) However, the UK had suffered 2.5 million casualties and finished the war with a huge national debt.[[92]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Westwell.26Cove-99) The rise of [Irish Nationalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Nationalism) and disputes within Ireland over the terms of [Irish Home Rule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Home_Rule) led eventually to the [partition of the island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_Ireland) in 1921,[[94]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-101) and the [Irish Free State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Free_State) became independent with[Dominion status](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion) in 1922. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom.[[95]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-CAIN-102) A wave of strikes in the mid-1920s culminated in the [UK General Strike of 1926](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_General_Strike_of_1926). The UK had still not recovered from the effects of the war when the [Great Depression](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression_in_the_United_Kingdom) (1929–32) occurred. This led to considerable unemployment and hardship in the old industrial areas, as well as political and social unrest in the 1930s. A coalition government was formed in 1931.[[96]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-103)

The UK entered [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) by declaring war on [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany) in 1939, after it had invaded [Poland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) and [Czechoslovakia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia). In 1940, [Winston Churchill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill) became prime minister and head of a coalition government. Despite the defeat of its European allies in the first year of the war, the UK continued the fight alone against Germany. In 1940, the [RAF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF) defeated the German[Luftwaffe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luftwaffe) in a struggle for control of the skies in the [Battle of Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Britain). The UK suffered heavy bombing during [the Blitz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blitz). There were also eventual hard-fought victories in the [Battle of the Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Atlantic_(1939%E2%80%931945)), the [North Africa campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Africa_campaign) and [Burma campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma_campaign). UK forces played an important role in the [Normandy landings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy_landings) of 1944, achieved with its ally the US. After Germany's defeat, the UK was one of the [Big Three](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allies_of_World_War_II) powers who met to plan the post-war world; it was an original signatory to the [Declaration of the United Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_the_United_Nations). The UK became one of the five permanent members of the [United Nations Security Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council). However, the war left the UK severely weakened and depending financially on [Marshall Aid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marshall_Plan) and loans from the United States.[[97]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-104)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_British_Empire.png)

Territories that were at one time part of the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire). Names of current [British Overseas Territories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Overseas_Territories) are underlined in red.

In the immediate post-war years, the [Labour government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Government_1945%E2%80%931951" \o "Labour Government 1945–1951) initiated a radical programme of reforms, which had a significant effect on British society in the following decades.[[98]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-105) Major industries and public utilities were [nationalised](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalised" \o "Nationalised), a [Welfare State](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welfare_State) was established, and a comprehensive, publicly funded healthcare system, the [National Health Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Health_Service), was created.[[99]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-106)The rise of nationalism in the colonies coincided with Britain's now much-diminished economic position, so that a policy of [decolonisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decolonisation" \o "Decolonisation) was unavoidable. Independence was granted to [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) and [Pakistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan) in 1947.[[100]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-107) Over the next three decades, most colonies of the British Empire gained their independence. Many became members of the [Commonwealth of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations).[[101]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-108)

Although the UK was the third country to develop [a nuclear weapons arsenal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_weapons_and_the_United_Kingdom) (with its [first atomic bomb test](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Hurricane) in 1952), the new post-war limits of Britain's international role were illustrated by the [Suez Crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suez_Crisis) of 1956. The international spread of the English language ensured the continuing international influence of its [literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_literature) and [culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_United_Kingdom). From the 1960s onward, its [popular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_culture) culture was also influential abroad. As a result of a shortage of workers in the 1950s, the UK government encouraged [immigration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration) from [Commonwealth countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_countries). In the following decades, the UK became a multi-ethnic society.[[102]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-109) Despite rising living standards in the late 1950s and 1960s, the UK's economic performance was not as successful as many of its competitors, such as West Germany and Japan. In 1973, the UK joined the [European Economic Community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Economic_Community) (EEC), and when the EEC became the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union)(EU) in 1992, it was one of the 12 founding members.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tratado_de_Lisboa_13_12_2007_(081).jpg)

After the two vetos of France in 1961 and 1967, the UK entered in the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union)in 1973. In 1975, 67% of Britons voted yes to the permanence in the European Union.

From the late 1960s, Northern Ireland suffered communal and paramilitary violence (sometimes affecting other parts of the UK) conventionally known as [the Troubles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Troubles). It is usually considered to have ended with the [Belfast "Good Friday" Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast_Agreement) of 1998.[[103]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-110)[[104]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Hope-111)[[105]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-112)

Following a period of widespread economic slowdown and industrial strife in the 1970s, the [Conservative Government of the 1980s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Government_1979%E2%80%931990) initiated a radical policy of [monetarism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monetarism), deregulation, particularly of the financial sector (for example, [Big Bang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bang_(financial_markets)) in 1986) and labour markets, the sale of state-owned companies ([privatisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privatisation" \o "Privatisation)), and the withdrawal of subsidies to others.[[106]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-113) This resulted in high unemployment and social unrest, but ultimately also economic growth, particularly in the services sector. From 1984, the economy was helped by the inflow of substantial [North Sea oil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea_oil) revenues.[[107]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-114)

Around the end of the 20th century there were major changes to the governance of the UK with the establishment of [devolved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution) administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-devoladmins-18)[[108]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-115) The [statutory incorporation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Rights_Act_1998) followed acceptance of the [European Convention on Human Rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Convention_on_Human_Rights). The UK is still a key global player diplomatically and militarily. It plays leading roles in the EU, UN and NATO. However, controversy surrounds some of Britain's overseas [military deployments](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_deployment), particularly in [Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%93present)) and [Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq).[[109]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-116)

The [2008 global financial crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_global_financial_crisis) severely affected the UK economy. The [coalition government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameron_ministry) of 2010 introduced austerity measures intended to tackle the substantial public deficits which resulted.[[110]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-117) In 2014 the [Scottish Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Government) held a [referendum on Scottish independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_independence_referendum,_2014), with 55% of voters rejecting the independence proposal and opting to remain within the United Kingdom.[[111]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BBC-118)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Geography)Geography

*Main article:*[*Geography of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Uk_topo_en.jpg)

The topography of the UK

The total area of the United Kingdom is approximately 243,610 square kilometres (94,060 sq mi). The country occupies the major part of the [British Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles)[[112]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-119) [archipelago](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archipelago) and includes the island of Great Britain, the northeastern one-sixth of the island of Ireland and some smaller surrounding islands. It lies between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea with the south-east coast coming within 22 miles (35 km) of the coast of northern France, from which it is separated by the [English Channel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Channel).[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-factbook-120) In 1993 10% of the UK was forested, 46% used for pastures and 25% cultivated for agriculture.[[114]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Atlapedia-121) The [Royal Greenwich Observatory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Observatory,_Greenwich) in London is the defining point of the [Prime Meridian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Meridian).[[115]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-122)

The United Kingdom lies between latitudes [49°](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/49th_parallel_north) to [61° N](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/61st_parallel_north), and longitudes [9° W](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/9th_meridian_west) to [2° E](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2nd_meridian_east). Northern Ireland shares a 224-mile (360 km) land boundary with the Republic of Ireland.[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-factbook-120) The coastline of Great Britain is 11,073 miles (17,820 km) long.[[116]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-UK_coastline-123) It is connected to [continental Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Europe) by the [Channel Tunnel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel_Tunnel), which at 31 miles (50 km) (24 miles (38 km) underwater) is the longest underwater tunnel in the world.[[117]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-124)

[England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_England) accounts for just over half of the total area of the UK, covering 130,395 square kilometres (50,350 sq mi).[[118]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-125) Most of the country consists of lowland terrain,[[114]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Atlapedia-121) with mountainous terrain north-west of the [Tees-Exe line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tees-Exe_line); including the [Cumbrian Mountains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_District) of the Lake District, the [Pennines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennines" \o "Pennines) and [limestone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limestone) hills of the [Peak District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peak_District), [Exmoor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exmoor" \o "Exmoor) and [Dartmoor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dartmoor" \o "Dartmoor). The main rivers and estuaries are the [Thames](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Thames), [Severn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Severn) and the [Humber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humber). England's highest mountain is [Scafell Pike](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scafell_Pike) (978 metres (3,209 ft)) in the [Lake District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_District). Its principal [rivers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivers_of_England) are the Severn, Thames, Humber, Tees, Tyne, Tweed, Avon, Exe and Mersey.[[114]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Atlapedia-121)

[Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Scotland) accounts for just under a third of the total area of the UK, covering 78,772 square kilometres (30,410 sq mi)[[119]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-126) and including nearly eight hundred [islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_Scotland),[[120]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-127) predominantly west and north of the mainland; notably the [Hebrides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrides), [Orkney Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orkney) and [Shetland Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shetland). The topography of Scotland is distinguished by the [Highland Boundary Fault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland_Boundary_Fault) – a [geological rock fracture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fault_(geology)) – which traverses Scotland from [Arran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isle_of_Arran" \o "Isle of Arran) in the west to [Stonehaven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonehaven" \o "Stonehaven) in the east.[[121]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-128) The faultline separates two distinctively different regions; namely the [Highlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Highlands) to the north and west and the [lowlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Lowlands) to the south and east. The more rugged Highland region contains the majority of Scotland's mountainous land, including [Ben Nevis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Nevis) which at 1,343 metres (4,406 ft) is the highest point in the British Isles.[[122]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-129) Lowland areas – especially the narrow waist of land between the [Firth of Clyde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firth_of_Clyde) and the [Firth of Forth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firth_of_Forth) known as the [Central Belt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Lowlands) – are flatter and home to most of the population including [Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow), Scotland's largest city, and [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh), its capital and political centre.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:BenNevis2005.jpg)

[Ben Nevis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Nevis), in Scotland, is the highest point in the [British Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles)

[Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Wales) accounts for less than a tenth of the total area of the UK, covering 20,779 square kilometres (8,020 sq mi).[[123]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-130) Wales is mostly mountainous, though [South Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Wales) is less mountainous than [North](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Wales) and [mid Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mid_Wales). The main population and industrial areas are in South Wales, consisting of the coastal cities of [Cardiff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff), [Swansea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swansea) and [Newport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport,_Wales), and the [South Wales Valleys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Wales_Valleys) to their north. The highest mountains in Wales are in [Snowdonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowdonia" \o "Snowdonia) and include [Snowdon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowdon" \o "Snowdon) ([Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_language): *Yr Wyddfa*) which, at 1,085 metres (3,560 ft), is the highest peak in Wales.[[114]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Atlapedia-121)The 14, or possibly 15, Welsh mountains over 3,000 feet (914 m) high are known collectively as the [Welsh 3000s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_3000s). Wales has over 2,704 kilometres (1,680 miles) of coastline.[[116]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-UK_coastline-123) Several islands lie off the Welsh mainland, the largest of which is [Anglesey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglesey) (*Ynys Môn*) in the northwest.

[Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Ireland), separated from Great Britain by the [Irish Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Sea) and [North Channel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Channel_(Great_Britain_and_Ireland)), has an area of 14,160 square kilometres (5,470 sq mi) and is mostly hilly. It includes [Lough Neagh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lough_Neagh)which, at 388 square kilometres (150 sq mi), is the largest lake in the British Isles by area.[[124]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-131) The highest peak in Northern Ireland is [Slieve Donard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slieve_Donard" \o "Slieve Donard) in the [Mourne Mountains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mourne_Mountains" \o "Mourne Mountains) at 852 metres (2,795 ft).[[114]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Atlapedia-121)

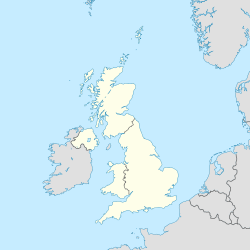
[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Climate)**Climate**

*Main article:*[*Climate of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_of_the_United_Kingdom)

The United Kingdom has a temperate climate, with plentiful rainfall all year round.[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-factbook-120) The temperature varies with the seasons seldom dropping below −11 [°C](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celsius) (12 [°F](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fahrenheit)) or rising above 35 °C (95 °F).[[125]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-132) The prevailing wind is from the south-west and bears frequent spells of mild and wet weather from the Atlantic Ocean,[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-factbook-120) although the eastern parts are mostly sheltered from this wind since the majority of the rain falls over the western regions the eastern parts are therefore the driest. Atlantic currents, warmed by the [Gulf Stream](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_Stream), bring mild winters; especially in the west where winters are wet and even more so over high ground. Summers are warmest in the south-east of England, being closest to the European mainland, and coolest in the north. Heavy snowfall can occur in winter and early spring on high ground, and occasionally settles to great depth away from the hills.

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Administrative_divisions)**Administrative divisions**

*Main article:*[*Administrative geography of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_geography_of_the_United_Kingdom)



[*Atlantic Ocean*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean)

[*Channel*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Channel)

[*North Sea*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea)

[*Celtic Sea*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtic_Sea)

[*Netherlands*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands)

[*France*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France)

[*Belgium*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium)

[*Norway*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway)

[*Ireland*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland)

[Aberdeen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aberdeen)

Red pog.svg

[Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow)

Red pog.svg

[Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh)

Red pog.svg

[Newcastle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newcastle_upon_Tyne)

Red pog.svg

[Leeds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leeds)

Red pog.svg

[Manchester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester)

Red pog.svg

[Birmingham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham)

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[London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London)

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[Belfast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast)

Red pog.svg

[Cardiff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff)

Red pog.svg

[England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England)

[Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland)

[Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales)

[Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland)

The four [countries of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Countries_of_the_United_Kingdom).

Each country of the United Kingdom has its own system of administrative and geographic demarcation, whose origins often pre-date the formation of the United Kingdom. Thus there is "no common stratum of administrative unit encompassing the United Kingdom".[[126]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-UN-133) Until the 19th century there was little change to those arrangements, but there has since been a constant evolution of role and function.[[127]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-barlow-134) Change did not occur in a uniform manner and the devolution of power over local government to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland means that future changes are also unlikely to be uniform.

The organisation of [local government in England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_in_England) is complex, with the distribution of functions varying according to local arrangements. Legislation concerning local government in England is the responsibility of the UK parliament and the [Government of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_the_United_Kingdom), as England has no devolved parliament. The upper-tier [subdivisions of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subdivisions_of_England) are the nine [Government office regions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_England) or European Union government office regions.[[128]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-135) One region, [Greater London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_London_Authority), has had a directly elected assembly and mayor since 2000 following popular support for the proposal in a [referendum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_London_Authority_referendum,_1998).[[129]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-136) It was intended that other regions would also be given their own elected [regional assemblies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_assembly_(England)), but a proposed assembly in the[North East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_East_England) region was rejected by a [referendum in 2004](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_England_devolution_referendums,_2004).[[130]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-137) Below the regional tier, some parts of England have [county councils](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_and_non-metropolitan_counties_of_England) and district councils and others have [unitary authorities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_authorities); while London consists of 32 [London boroughs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_borough) and the [City of London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_London). Councillors are elected by the [first-past-the-post](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plurality_voting_system) system in single-member wards or by the [multi-member plurality system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plurality-at-large_voting) in multi-member wards.[[131]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-138)

For [local government purposes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_in_Scotland), Scotland is divided into [32 council areas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subdivisions_of_Scotland), with wide variation in both size and population. The cities of [Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow), Edinburgh, [Aberdeen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aberdeen) and [Dundee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dundee) are separate council areas, as is the [Highland Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_Highland_council_area) which includes a third of Scotland's area but only just over 200,000 people. Local councils are made up of elected councillors, of whom there are currently 1,223;[[132]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-139) they are paid a part-time salary. Elections are conducted by [single transferable vote](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_transferable_vote) in multi-member wards that elect either three or four councillors. Each council elects a [Provost](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provost_(civil)), or [Convenor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairman" \o "Chairman), to chair meetings of the council and to act as a figurehead for the area. [Councillors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Councillor" \o "Councillor) are subject to a [code of conduct](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethical_code) enforced by the [Standards Commission for Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standards_Commission_for_Scotland).[[133]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-140) The representative association of Scotland's local authorities is the [Convention of Scottish Local Authorities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_of_Scottish_Local_Authorities) (COSLA).[[134]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-141)

[Local government in Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_in_Wales) consists of 22 unitary authorities. These include the cities of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport which are unitary authorities in their own right.[[135]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-142) Elections are held every four years under the first-past-the-post system.[[136]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-143) The most recent elections were held in May 2012, except for the [Isle of Anglesey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isle_of_Anglesey). The [Welsh Local Government Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Local_Government_Association) represents the interests of local authorities in Wales.[[137]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-144)

[Local government in Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_in_Northern_Ireland) has since 1973 been organised into 26 district councils, each elected by single transferable vote. Their powers are limited to services such as collecting waste, controlling dogs and maintaining parks and cemeteries.[[138]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-145) On 13 March 2008 the executive agreed on proposals to create 11 new councils and replace the present system.[[139]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-146) The next local elections were postponed until 2016 to facilitate this.[[140]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-147)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Dependencies)Dependencies

*Main articles:*[*British Overseas Territories*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Overseas_Territories)*,*[*Crown dependencies*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_dependencies)*and*[*British Islands*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Islands)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Inside_the_Reef_Cayman.jpg)

A view of the [Caribbean Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean_Sea) from the [Cayman Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands), one of the world's foremost international financial centres[[141]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-148) and tourist destinations.[[142]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-149)

The United Kingdom has sovereignty over seventeen territories which do not form part of the United Kingdom itself: fourteen British Overseas Territories[[143]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-fco14Terr-150) and three Crown dependencies.[[144]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-151)

The fourteen British Overseas Territories are: [Anguilla](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anguilla); [Bermuda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bermuda); the [British Antarctic Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Antarctic_Territory); the [British Indian Ocean Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Indian_Ocean_Territory); the [British Virgin Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Virgin_Islands); the [Cayman Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands); the[Falkland Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falkland_Islands); [Gibraltar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gibraltar); [Montserrat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montserrat); [Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Helena,_Ascension_and_Tristan_da_Cunha); the [Turks and Caicos Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turks_and_Caicos_Islands); the [Pitcairn Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitcairn_Islands); [South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Georgia_and_the_South_Sandwich_Islands); and [Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akrotiri_and_Dhekelia).[[145]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-152) British claims in Antarctica are not universally recognised.[[146]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-153) Collectively Britain's overseas territories encompass an approximate land area of 1,727,570 square kilometres (667,018 sq mi) and a population of approximately 260,000 people.[[147]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-154) They are the remnants of the British Empire and several have specifically voted to remain British territories (Bermuda in [1995](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bermudan_independence_referendum,_1995), Gibraltar in [2002](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gibraltar_sovereignty_referendum,_2002) and the Falkland Islands in [2013](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falkland_Islands_sovereignty_referendum,_2013)).[[148]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Independent_results-155)

The Crown dependencies are possessions of [the Crown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Crown), as opposed to overseas territories of the UK.[[149]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-156) They comprise three independently administered jurisdictions: the [Channel Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel_Island) of [Jersey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jersey) and [Guernsey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guernsey) in the English Channel, and the [Isle of Man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isle_of_Man) in the Irish Sea. By mutual agreement, the British Government manages the islands' foreign affairs and defence and the UK Parliament has the authority to legislate on their behalf. However, internationally, they are regarded as "territories for which the United Kingdom is responsible".[[150]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-International_recognition-157) The power to pass legislation affecting the islands ultimately rests with their own respective legislative assemblies, with the assent of the Crown ([Privy Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_Majesty%27s_Most_Honourable_Privy_Council) or, in the case of the Isle of Man, in certain circumstances the Lieutenant-Governor).[[151]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-158) Since 2005 each Crown dependency has had a [Chief Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Minister) as its [head of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government).[[152]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-159)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Politics)Politics

*Main articles:*[*Politics of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_United_Kingdom)*,*[*Monarchy of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom)*and*[*Elections in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth_II_greets_NASA_GSFC_employees,_May_8,_2007_edit.jpg)

[Elizabeth II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II), [Queen of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_of_the_United_Kingdom) but also of each of the other[Commonwealth realms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_realms)

The United Kingdom is a [unitary state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_state) under a [constitutional monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy). [Queen Elizabeth II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II) is the head of state of the UK as well as monarch of fifteen other independent [Commonwealth countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_realm). The monarch has "the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, and the right to warn".[[153]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-160) The United Kingdom is one of only four countries in the world to have an [uncodified constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncodified_constitution" \o "Uncodified constitution).[[154]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-161)[[nb 8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-162) The [Constitution of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_United_Kingdom) thus consists mostly of a collection of disparate written sources, including [statutes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statute), judge-made [case law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_law) and international treaties, together with [constitutional conventions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Constitution#Conventions). As there is no technical difference between ordinary statutes and "constitutional law", the [UK Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_the_United_Kingdom) can perform "constitutional reform" simply by passing [Acts of Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_Parliament), and thus has the political 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.[[155]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-163)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Government)**Government**

*Main article:*[*Government of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_the_United_Kingdom)

The UK has a [parliamentary government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system) based on the [Westminster system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_system) that has been emulated around the world: a legacy of the British Empire. The parliament of the United Kingdom meets in the [Palace of Westminster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palace_of_Westminster) and has two houses: an elected [House of Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons_of_the_United_Kingdom) and an appointed [House of Lords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lords). All bills passed are given [Royal Assent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Assent) before becoming law.

The position of [prime minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_the_United_Kingdom),[[nb 9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-164) the UK's [head of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government),[[156]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-165) belongs to the person most likely to command the [confidence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confidence_and_supply) of the House of Commons; this individual is typically the leader of the political party or coalition of parties that holds the largest number of seats in that chamber. The prime minister chooses a cabinet and its members are formally appointed by the monarch to form [Her Majesty's Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_the_United_Kingdom). By convention, the Queen respects the prime minister's decisions of government.[[157]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-npm-166)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Palace_of_Westminster,_London_-_Feb_2007.jpg)

The [Palace of Westminster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palace_of_Westminster), seat of both houses of the Parliament of the United Kingdom

The [cabinet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_of_the_United_Kingdom) is traditionally drawn from members of the prime minister's party or coalition and mostly from the House of Commons but always from both legislative houses, the cabinet being [responsible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsible_government) to both. Executive power is exercised by the prime minister and cabinet, all of whom are sworn into the [Privy Council of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privy_Council_of_the_United_Kingdom), and become [Ministers of the Crown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_the_Crown). The current Prime Minister is [David Cameron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Cameron), who has been in office since 11 May 2010.[[158]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-167) Cameron is the leader of the [Conservative Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Party_(UK)) and heads a coalition with the [Liberal Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Democrats). For elections to the House of Commons, the UK is currently divided into [650 constituencies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_constituencies),[[159]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Elections_and_voting.C2.A0.E2.80.94_UK_Parliament-168) each electing a single [member of parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_parliament) (MP) by [simple plurality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plurality_voting_system). General elections are called by the monarch when the prime minister so advises. The [Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_Acts_1911_and_1949) require that a new election must be called no later than five years after the previous general election.[[160]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-The_Parliament_Acts.C2.A0.E2.80.94_UK_Parliament-169)

The UK's three [major political parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_the_United_Kingdom#Major_parties_in_the_House_of_Commons) are currently the Conservative Party ([Tories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tories)), the [Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_(UK)" \o "Labour Party (UK)) and the Liberal Democrats, representing the British traditions of [conservatism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism_in_the_United_Kingdom" \o "Conservatism in the United Kingdom),[socialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism_in_the_United_Kingdom) and [social liberalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism_in_the_United_Kingdom), respectively. At the [2010 general election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_general_election,_2010) these three parties together won 622 out of 650 seats in the House of Commons.[[161]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-170)[[162]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-171) Most of the remaining seats were won by parties that contest elections only in one part of the UK: the [Scottish National Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_National_Party) (Scotland only); [Plaid Cymru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plaid_Cymru) (Wales only); and the [Alliance Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_Party_of_Northern_Ireland), [Democratic Unionist Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Unionist_Party), [Social Democratic and Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_and_Labour_Party) and [Sinn Féin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinn_F%C3%A9in) (Northern Ireland only[[nb 10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-172)). In accordance with party policy, no elected Sinn Féin members of parliament have ever attended the House of Commons to speak on behalf of their constituents because of the requirement to take an oath of allegiance to the monarch.

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Devolved_administrations)**Devolved administrations**

*Main articles:*[*Devolution in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution_in_the_United_Kingdom)*,*[*Northern Ireland Executive*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Executive)*,*[*Scottish Government*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Government)*and*[*Welsh Government*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Government)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scotland_Parliament_Holyrood.jpg)

The [Scottish Parliament Building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Parliament_Building) in[Holyrood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holyrood,_Edinburgh) is the seat of the [Scottish Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Parliament).

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own [government or executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)), led by a [First Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Minister) (or, in the case of Northern Ireland, a [diarchal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diarchy) [First Minister and deputy First Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Minister_and_deputy_First_Minister)), and a [devolved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution) [unicameral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unicameralism) legislature. England, the largest country of the United Kingdom, has no such devolved executive or legislature and is administered and legislated for directly by the UK government and parliament on all issues. This situation has given rise to the so-called [West Lothian question](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Lothian_question) which concerns the fact that members of parliament from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can vote, sometimes decisively,[[163]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-173) on matters that only affect England.[[164]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-174) The [McKay Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commission_on_the_consequences_of_devolution_for_the_House_of_Commons) reported on this matter in March 2013 recommending that laws affecting only England should need support from a majority of English members of parliament.[[165]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-bbcnews250313-175)

The [Scottish Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Government) and [Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Parliament) have wide-ranging powers over any matter that has not been specifically [reserved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserved_matters) to the UK parliament, including [education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Scotland), [healthcare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NHS_Scotland), [Scots law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scots_law) and [local government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_in_Scotland).[[166]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-176) At the [2011 elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Parliament_general_election,_2011) the Scottish National Party won re-election and achieved an overall majority in the Scottish parliament, with its leader, [Alex Salmond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_Salmond), as[First Minister of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Minister_of_Scotland).[[167]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-177)[[168]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-178) In 2012, the UK and Scottish governments signed the [Edinburgh Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh_Agreement_(2012)) setting out the terms for a [referendum on Scottish independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_independence_referendum,_2014) in 2014, which was defeated 55% to 45%.

The [Welsh Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Government) and the [National Assembly for Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_for_Wales) have more limited powers than those devolved to Scotland.[[169]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-179) The Assembly is able to legislate on devolved matters through[Acts of the Assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_the_National_Assembly_for_Wales), which require no prior consent from Westminster. The [2011 elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_for_Wales_election,_2011) resulted in a minority Labour administration led by [Carwyn Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carwyn_Jones" \o "Carwyn Jones).[[170]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-IcWales-180)

The [Northern Ireland Executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Executive) and [Assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Assembly) have powers similar to those devolved to Scotland. The Executive is led by a [diarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diarchy) representing [unionist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Designated_Unionist) and [nationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Designated_Nationalist) members of the Assembly. Currently, [Peter Robinson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Robinson_(politician)) (Democratic Unionist Party) and [Martin McGuinness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_McGuinness) (Sinn Féin) are [First Minister and deputy First Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Minister_and_deputy_First_Minister) respectively.[[171]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-northernireland1-181) Devolution to Northern Ireland is contingent on participation by the Northern Ireland administration in the [North-South Ministerial Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North-South_Ministerial_Council), where the Northern Ireland Executive cooperates and develops joint and shared policies with the [Government of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_Ireland). The British and Irish governments co-operate on non-devolved matters affecting Northern Ireland through the [British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British%E2%80%93Irish_Intergovernmental_Conference), which assumes the responsibilities of the Northern Ireland administration in the event of its non-operation.

The UK does not have a [codified constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codified_constitution) and constitutional matters are not among the powers devolved to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Under the doctrine of [parliamentary sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_sovereignty_in_the_United_Kingdom), the UK Parliament could, in theory, therefore, abolish the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly or Northern Ireland Assembly.[[172]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-182)[[173]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-183) Indeed, in 1972, the UK Parliament [unilaterally prorogued](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_(Temporary_Provisions)_Act_1972) the [Parliament of Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_Northern_Ireland), setting a precedent relevant to contemporary devolved institutions.[[174]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-184) In practice, it would be politically difficult for the UK Parliament to abolish devolution to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, given the political entrenchment created by referendum decisions.[[175]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-185) The political constraints placed upon the UK Parliament's power to interfere with devolution in Northern Ireland are even greater than in relation to Scotland and Wales, given that devolution in Northern Ireland rests upon an international agreement with the [Government of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_Ireland).[[176]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-186)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Law_and_criminal_justice)**Law and criminal justice**

*Main article:*[*Law of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_courts_of_justice.jpg)

The [Royal Courts of Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Courts_of_Justice) of[England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_and_Wales)

The United Kingdom does not have a single legal system, as Article 19 of the [1706 Treaty of Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Union) provided for the continuation of Scotland's separate legal system.[[177]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-187) Today the UK has three distinct [systems of law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_systems_of_the_world): [English law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_law), [Northern Ireland law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courts_of_Northern_Ireland) and [Scots law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scots_law). A new [Supreme Court of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_the_United_Kingdom) came into being in October 2009 to replace the [Appellate Committee of the House of Lords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial_functions_of_the_House_of_Lords).[[178]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-188)[[179]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-189) The [Judicial Committee of the Privy Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judicial_Committee_of_the_Privy_Council), including the same members as the Supreme Court, is the highest court of appeal for several independent Commonwealth countries, the [British Overseas Territories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Overseas_Territories) and the [Crown Dependencies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Dependencies).[[180]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-190)

Both English law, which applies in [England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_and_Wales), and [Northern Ireland law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_law) are based on [common-law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_law) principles.[[181]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-191) The essence of common law is that, subject to statute, the law is developed by judges in courts, applying statute, [precedent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precedent) and common sense to the facts before them to give explanatory judgements of the relevant legal principles, which are reported and binding in future similar cases ([*stare decisis*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stare_decisis)).[[182]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-192) The [courts of England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courts_of_England_and_Wales) are headed by the [Senior Courts of England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senior_Courts_of_England_and_Wales), consisting of the [Court of Appeal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_of_Appeal_of_England_and_Wales), the [High Court of Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Court_of_Justice) (for civil cases) and the [Crown Court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Court) (for criminal cases). The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land for both criminal and civil appeal cases in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and any decision it makes is binding on every other court in the same jurisdiction, often having a persuasive effect in other jurisdictions.[[183]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-193)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:High_Court_of_Justiciary.jpg)

The [High Court of Justiciary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Court_of_Justiciary) – the [supreme](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_of_Justice" \o "College of Justice)[criminal court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criminal_justice) of [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland).

Scots law is a hybrid system based on both common-law and [civil-law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_law_(legal_system)) principles. The chief courts are the [Court of Session](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_of_Session), for civil cases,[[184]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-194) and the [High Court of Justiciary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Court_of_Justiciary), for criminal cases.[[185]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-195) The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom serves as the highest court of appeal for civil cases under Scots law.[[186]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-196) [Sheriff courts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheriff_Court) deal with most civil and criminal cases including conducting criminal trials with a jury, known as sheriff solemn court, or with a sheriff and no jury, known as sheriff summary Court.[[187]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-197) The Scots legal system is unique in having three possible [verdicts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verdict) for a criminal trial: "[guilty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilt_(law))", "[not guilty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acquittal)" and "[not proven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Not_proven)". Both "not guilty" and "not proven" result in an acquittal.[[188]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-198)

Crime in England and Wales increased in the period between 1981 and 1995, though since that peak there has been an overall fall of 48% in recorded crime from 1995 to 2007/08,[[189]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-199) according to [crime statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_statistics_in_the_United_Kingdom). The [prison population of England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_population_of_England_and_Wales) has almost doubled over the same period, to over 80,000, giving England and Wales the highest rate of incarceration in Western Europe at 147 per 100,000.[[190]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-200) [Her Majesty's Prison Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Her_Majesty%27s_Prison_Service), which reports to the [Ministry of Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Justice_(United_Kingdom)), manages most of the prisons within England and Wales. Crime in Scotland fell to its lowest recorded level for 32 years in 2009/10, falling by ten per cent.[[191]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-201) At the same time Scotland's prison population, at over 8,000,[[192]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-202) is at record levels and well above design capacity.[[193]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-203) The[Scottish Prison Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Prison_Service), which reports to the [Cabinet Secretary for Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_Secretary_for_Justice), manages Scotland's prisons.

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Foreign_relations)**Foreign relations**

*Main article:*[*Foreign relations of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_the_United_Kingdom)

The UK is a [permanent member](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Five_(United_Nations)) of the [United Nations Security Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council), a member of [NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO), the [Commonwealth of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations), [G7](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G7), [G8](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G8), [G20](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G-20_major_economies), the [OECD](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development), the [WTO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Organization), the [Council of Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Europe), the [OSCE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organization_for_Security_and_Co-operation_in_Europe), and is a [member state of the European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_state_of_the_European_Union). The UK is said to have a "[Special Relationship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Relationship)" with the United States and a close partnership with France—the "[Entente cordiale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entente_cordiale)"—and shares nuclear weapons technology with both countries.[[194]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-204)[[195]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-205) The UK is also closely linked with the Republic of Ireland; the two countries share a [Common Travel Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Travel_Area) and co-operate through the[British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British-Irish_Intergovernmental_Conference) and the [British-Irish Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British-Irish_Council). Britain's global presence and influence is further amplified through its trading relations, foreign investments, [official development assistance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_development_assistance) and military engagements.[[196]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-206)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Military)**Military**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cavalry_Trooping_the_Colour,_16th_June_2007.jpg)

Troopers of the [Blues and Royals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues_and_Royals)during the 2007 [Trooping the Colour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trooping_the_Colour)ceremony

*Main article:*[*British Armed Forces*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Armed_Forces)

The [armed forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armed_forces) of the United Kingdom—officially, [*Her Majesty's Armed Forces*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Armed_Forces)—consist of three professional service branches: the [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy) and [Royal Marines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Marines) (forming the [Naval Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_Service_(United_Kingdom))), the [British Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Army) and the [Royal Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Air_Force).[[197]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-207) The forces are managed by the [Ministry of Defence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Defence_(United_Kingdom)) and controlled by the [Defence Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defence_Council_of_the_United_Kingdom" \o "Defence Council of the United Kingdom), chaired by the [Secretary of State for Defence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_of_State_for_Defence). The [Commander-in-Chief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commander-in-Chief) is the [British monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom), [Elizabeth II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_II), to whom members of the forces swear an oath of allegiance.[[198]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Speaker-208) The Armed Forces are charged with protecting the UK and its overseas territories, promoting the UK's global security interests and supporting international peacekeeping efforts. They are active and regular participants in [NATO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO), including the [Allied Rapid Reaction Corps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_Rapid_Reaction_Corps), as well as the [Five Power Defence Arrangements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Power_Defence_Arrangements), [RIMPAC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RIMPAC) and other worldwide coalition operations. Overseas garrisons and facilities are maintained in[Ascension Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascension_Island), [Belize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_Belize), [Brunei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Forces_based_in_Brunei), [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Army_Training_Unit_Suffield), [Cyprus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_Base_Areas), [Diego Garcia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diego_Garcia), the [Falkland Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_the_Falkland_Islands), [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Forces_Germany), [Gibraltar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Forces_Gibraltar), [Kenya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya), [Qatar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar) and [Singapore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore).[[199]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Facilities-209)[[200]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-210)

The British armed forces played a key role in establishing the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) as the [dominant world power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superpower) in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. Throughout its unique history the British forces have seen action in a number of major wars, such as the [Seven Years' War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Years%27_War), the [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars), the [Crimean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_War), [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) and [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II)—as well as many colonial conflicts. By emerging victorious from such conflicts, Britain has often been able to decisively [influence world events](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Vienna). Since the end of the British Empire, the UK has nonetheless remained a major military power. Following the end of the [Cold War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War), defence policy has a stated assumption that "the most demanding operations" will be undertaken as part of a coalition.[[201]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-211)Setting aside the [intervention in Sierra Leone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Palliser), recent UK military operations in [Bosnia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosnian_War), [Kosovo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosovo_War), [Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role_of_the_United_Kingdom_in_the_War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%93present)), [Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Telic) and, most recently, [Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_military_intervention_in_Libya), have followed this approach. The last time the British military fought alone was the [Falklands War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falklands_War) of 1982.

According to various sources, including the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_International_Peace_Research_Institute) and the [International Institute for Strategic Studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Institute_for_Strategic_Studies), the United Kingdom has the fifth- or sixth-highest [military expenditure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures) in the world. Total defence spending currently accounts for around 2.4% of total national GDP.[[22]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-SIPRI-28)[[23]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-iiss.org-29)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Economy)Economy

*Main article:*[*Economy of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:London.bankofengland.arp.jpg)

The [Bank of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_of_England) – the [central bank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_bank) of the United Kingdom

The UK has a partially regulated [market economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_economy).[[202]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-212) Based on market [exchange rates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exchange_rate) the UK is today the sixth-largest economy in the world and the third-largest in Europe after Germany and France, having fallen behind France for the first time in over a decade in 2008.[[203]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-GDP-213) [HM Treasury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HM_Treasury), led by the [Chancellor of the Exchequer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chancellor_of_the_Exchequer), is responsible for developing and executing the British government's [public finance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_finance) policy and [economic policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_policy). The [Bank of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank_of_England) is the UK's [central bank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_bank) and is responsible for issuing notes and coins in the nation's currency, the [pound sterling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pound_sterling). 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 their issue. Pound sterling is the world's third-largest [reserve currency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve_currency) (after the US Dollar and the Euro).[[204]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-214) Since 1997 the Bank of England's [Monetary Policy Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monetary_Policy_Committee), headed by the[Governor of the Bank of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor_of_the_Bank_of_England), has been responsible for setting [interest rates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_bank_rate) at the level necessary to achieve the overall inflation target for the economy that is set by the Chancellor each year.[[205]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-215)

The UK [service sector](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertiary_sector_of_the_economy) makes up around 73% of GDP.[[206]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-216) London is one of the three "command centres" of [the global economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_trade) (alongside New York City and Tokyo),[[207]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-217) it is the world's largest financial centre alongside New York,[[208]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Global_Financial_Centres_7-218)[[209]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Mastercard-219)[[210]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-forbes.com-220) and it has the [largest city GDP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_by_GDP) in Europe.[[211]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Global_city_GDP_rankings_2008-2025-221) Edinburgh is also one of the largest financial centres in Europe.[[212]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-222) [Tourism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_the_United_Kingdom) is very important to the British economy and, with over 27 million tourists arriving in 2004, the United Kingdom is ranked as the sixth major tourist destination in the world and London has the most international visitors of any city in the world.[[213]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-223)[[214]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-224) The [creative industries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_industries) accounted for 7% GVA in 2005 and grew at an average of 6% per annum between 1997 and 2005.[[215]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-225)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:A350_First_Flight_-_Low_pass_02.jpg)

The [Airbus A350](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airbus_A350) has its wings and engines manufactured in the UK.

The [Industrial Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution) started in the UK with an initial concentration on the textile industry,[[216]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Europa-226) followed by other heavy industries such as [shipbuilding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shipbuilding), coal mining and[steelmaking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steelmaking).[[217]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-227)[[218]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-228) British merchants, shippers and bankers developed overwhelming advantage over those of other nations allowing the UK to dominate international trade in the 19th century.[[219]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-229)[[220]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-230) As other nations industrialised, coupled with economic decline after two world wars, the United Kingdom began to lose its competitive advantage and heavy industry declined, by degrees, throughout the 20th century. Manufacturing remains a significant part of the economy but accounted for only 16.7% of national output in 2003.[[221]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-231)

The [automotive industry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automotive_industry_in_the_United_Kingdom) is a significant part of the UK manufacturing sector and employs over 800,000 people, with a turnover of some £52 billion, generating £26.6 billion of exports.[[222]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-232)

The [aerospace industry of the UK](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aerospace_industry_in_the_United_Kingdom) is the second- or third-largest national aerospace industry in the world depending upon the method of measurement and has an annual turnover of around £20 billion. The wings for the [Airbus A380](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airbus_A380) and the [A350 XWB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A350_XWB) are designed and manufactured at [Airbus UK](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airbus_UK)'s world-leading Broughton facility, whilst over a quarter of the value of the [Boeing 787](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing_787) comes from UK manufacturers including Eaton (fuel subsystem pumps), [Messier-Bugatti-Dowty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messier-Bugatti-Dowty) (the landing gear) and [Rolls-Royce](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolls-Royce_Holdings) (the engines). Other key names include[GKN Aerospace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GKN_Aerospace) – an expert in metallic and composite aerostructures that's involved in almost every civil and military fixed and rotary wing aircraft in production and development today.[[223]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-233)[[224]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-asd-234)[[225]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ads-235)[[226]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-theengineer.co.uk-236)

[BAE Systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAE_Systems) plays a critical role in some of the world's biggest defence aerospace projects. The company makes large sections of the [Typhoon Eurofighter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Typhoon_Eurofighter) at its sub-assembly plant in Salmesbury and assembles the aircraft for the [RAF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RAF) at its Warton Plant, near Preston. It is also a principal subcontractor on the [F35](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Martin_F-35_Lightning_II) Joint Strike Fighter—the world's largest single defence project—for which it designs and manufactures a range of components including the aft fuselage, vertical and horizontal tail and wing tips and fuel system. As well as this it manufactures the [Hawk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BAE_Hawk), the world's most successful jet training aircraft.[[226]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-theengineer.co.uk-236) [Airbus UK](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airbus_UK) also manufactures the wings for the [A400m](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airbus_A400M_Atlas)military transporter. [Rolls-Royce](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolls-Royce_Holdings), is the world's second-largest aero-engine manufacturer. Its engines power more than 30 types of [commercial aircraft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commercial_aircraft) and it has more than 30,000 engines currently in service across both the civil and defence sectors. Rolls-Royce is forecast to have more than 50% of the widebody market share by 2016, ahead of [General Electric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GE_Aviation).[[227]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-237) [Agusta Westland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agusta_Westland" \o "Agusta Westland) designs and manufactures complete helicopters in the UK.[[226]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-theengineer.co.uk-236)

The UK space industry is growing very fast. Worth £9.1bn in 2011 and employing 29,000 people, it is growing at a rate of some 7.5 per cent annually, according to its umbrella organisation, the [UK Space Agency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Space_Agency). Government strategy is for the space industry to be a £40bn business for the UK by 2030, capturing a 10 per cent share of the $250bn world market for commercial space technology.[[226]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-theengineer.co.uk-236) On 16 July 2013, the British government pledged £60m to the [Skylon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skylon_(spacecraft)" \o "Skylon (spacecraft)) project: this investment will provide support at a "crucial stage" to allow a full-scale prototype of the [SABRE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SABRE_(rocket_engine)) engine to be built.

The [pharmaceutical industry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharmaceutical_industry_in_the_United_Kingdom) plays an important role in the UK economy and the country has the third-highest share of global pharmaceutical R&D expenditures (after the United States and Japan).[[228]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-pharmsectorbis-238)[[229]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-239)

Agriculture is intensive, highly mechanised and efficient by European standards, producing about 60% of food needs with less than 1.6% of the labour force (535,000 workers).[[230]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-240) Around two-thirds of production is devoted to livestock, one-third to arable crops. Farmers are subsidised by the EU's [Common Agricultural Policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Agricultural_Policy). The UK retains a significant, though much reduced fishing industry. It is also rich in a number of natural resources including coal, petroleum, natural gas, tin, limestone, iron ore, salt, clay, chalk, gypsum, lead, silica and an abundance of arable land.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:City_of_London_skyline_at_dusk.jpg)

The [City of London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_London) is one of the world's largest[financial centres](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_financial_centre)[[208]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Global_Financial_Centres_7-218)[[209]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Mastercard-219)[[210]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-forbes.com-220)

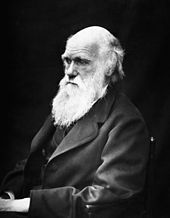
In the final quarter of 2008 the UK economy officially entered [recession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late-2000s_recession) for the first time since 1991.[[231]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-241) [Unemployment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unemployment_in_the_United_Kingdom) increased from 5.2% in May 2008 to 7.6% in May 2009 and by January 2012 the unemployment rate among 18 to 24-year-olds had risen from 11.9% to 22.5%, the highest since current records began in 1992.[[232]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-242)[[233]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-243) Total UK[government debt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_debt) rose from 44.4% of GDP in 2007 to 82.9% of GDP in 2011.[[234]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-244) In February 2013, the UK lost its top AAA credit rating for the first time since 1978.[[235]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-245)

[Inflation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inflation)-adjusted wages in the UK fell by 3.2% between the third quarter of 2010 and the third quarter of 2012.[[236]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-PAwages-246) Since the 1980s, [economic inequality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_inequality) has grown faster in the UK than in any other developed country.[[237]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Beckford-247)

The [poverty line in the UK](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_the_United_Kingdom) is commonly defined as being 60% of the median household income.[[nb 11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-248) In 2007–2008 13.5 million people, or 22% of the population, lived below this line. This is a higher level of [relative poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relative_poverty) than all but four other EU members.[[238]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-249) In the same year 4.0 million children, 31% of the total, lived in households below the poverty line after housing costs were taken into account. This is a decrease of 400,000 children since 1998–1999.[[239]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-250) The UK imports 40% of its food supplies.[[240]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-251) The [Office for National Statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_for_National_Statistics) has estimated that in 2011, 14 million people were at risk of [poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_in_the_United_Kingdom) or social exclusion, and that one person in 20 (5.1%) was now experiencing "severe material depression,"[[241]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Andrews-252) up from 3 million people in 1977.[[242]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Glynn-253)[[243]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Physorg-254)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Science_and_technology)**Science and technology**

*Main article:*[*Science and technology in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_and_technology_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Charles_Darwin_01.jpg)

[Charles Darwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Darwin) (1809–82), whose theory of [evolution by natural selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution) is the foundation of modern biological sciences.

England and Scotland were leading centres of the [Scientific Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_Revolution) from the 17th century[[244]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-255) and the United Kingdom led the Industrial Revolution from the 18th century,[[216]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Europa-226) and has continued to produce scientists and engineers credited with important advances.[[245]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-256) Major theorists from the 17th and 18th centuries include [Isaac Newton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton), whose [laws of motion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton%27s_laws_of_motion) and illumination of [gravity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravitation" \o "Gravitation)have been seen as a keystone of modern science;[[246]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-257) from the 19th century [Charles Darwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Darwin), whose theory of [evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution) by [natural selection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection) was fundamental to the development of modern biology, and [James Clerk Maxwell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Clerk_Maxwell), who formulated classical [electromagnetic theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electromagnetic_theory); and more recently [Stephen Hawking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Hawking), who has advanced major theories in the fields of [cosmology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmology), [quantum gravity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_gravity) and the investigation of [black holes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_holes).[[247]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-258) Major scientific discoveries from the 18th century include [hydrogen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrogen) by [Henry Cavendish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Cavendish);[[248]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-259) from the 20th century [penicillin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penicillin) by [Alexander Fleming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Fleming),[[249]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-260) and the structure of [DNA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA), by [Francis Crick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Crick) and others.[[250]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-261) Major engineering projects and applications by people from the UK in the 18th century include the [steam locomotive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steam_locomotive), developed by [Richard Trevithick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Trevithick) and [Andrew Vivian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Vivian);[[251]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-262) from the 19th century the [electric motor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electric_motor) by [Michael Faraday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Faraday), the [incandescent light bulb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incandescent_light_bulb) by [Joseph Swan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Swan),[[252]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-263) and the first practical telephone, patented by [Alexander Graham Bell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Graham_Bell);[[253]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-264) and in the 20th century the world's first working television system by [John Logie Baird](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Logie_Baird) and others,[[254]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-265) the [jet engine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jet_engine) by [Frank Whittle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Whittle), the basis of the modern computer by [Alan Turing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Turing), and the [World Wide Web](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Wide_Web) by [Tim Berners-Lee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Berners-Lee).[[255]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-266)

Scientific research and development remains important in British universities, with many establishing [science parks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_park) to facilitate production and co-operation with industry.[[256]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-267) Between 2004 and 2008 the UK produced 7% of the world's scientific research papers and had an 8% share of scientific citations, the third and second highest in the world (after the United States and China, and the United States, respectively).[[257]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-268) Scientific journals produced in the UK include [*Nature*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature_(journal)), the [*British Medical Journal*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMJ) and [*The Lancet*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lancet).[[258]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-269)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Transport)**Transport**

*Main article:*[*Transport in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heathrow_T5.jpg)

[Heathrow Terminal 5 building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Heathrow_Terminal_5).[London Heathrow Airport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Heathrow_Airport" \o "London Heathrow Airport) has the [most international passenger traffic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World%27s_busiest_airports_by_international_passenger_traffic) of any airport in the world.[[259]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-bbc1-270)[[260]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-airport-271)

A radial road network totals 29,145 miles (46,904 km) of main roads, 2,173 miles (3,497 km) of motorways and 213,750 miles (344,000 km) of paved roads.[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-factbook-120) In 2009 there were a total of 34 million licensed vehicles in Great Britain.[[261]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-272)

The UK has a railway network of 10,072 miles (16,209 km) in [Great Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rail_transport_in_Great_Britain) and 189 miles (304 km) in [Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Railways). Railways in Northern Ireland are operated by [NI Railways](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NI_Railways), a subsidiary of state-owned [Translink](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Translink_(Northern_Ireland)" \o "Translink (Northern Ireland)). In Great Britain, the [British Rail](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Rail) network was privatised between 1994 and 1997. [Network Rail](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Network_Rail) owns and manages most of the fixed assets (tracks, signals etc.). About 20 privately owned (and foreign state-owned railways including: [Deutsche Bahn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Bahn); [SNCF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SNCF) and [Nederlandse Spoorwegen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nederlandse_Spoorwegen" \o "Nederlandse Spoorwegen)) [Train Operating Companies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Train_Operating_Companies) (including state-owned [East Coast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Coast_(train_operating_company))), operate passenger trains and carry over 18,000 passenger trains daily. There are also some 1,000 freight trains in daily operation.[[113]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-factbook-120) The UK government is to spend £30 billion on a new high-speed railway line, [HS2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HS2), to be operational by 2025.[[262]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-273) [Crossrail](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossrail" \o "Crossrail), under construction in London, Is Europe's largest construction project with a £15 billion projected cost.[[263]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-274)[[264]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-275)

In the year from October 2009 to September 2010 UK airports handled a total of 211.4 million passengers.[[265]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-caastats-276) In that period the three largest airports were [London Heathrow Airport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Heathrow_Airport)(65.6 million passengers), [Gatwick Airport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gatwick_Airport) (31.5 million passengers) and [London Stansted Airport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Stansted_Airport) (18.9 million passengers).[[265]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-caastats-276) London Heathrow Airport, located 15 miles (24 km) west of the capital, has the most international passenger traffic of any airport in the world[[259]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-bbc1-270)[[260]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-airport-271) and is the hub for the UK flag carrier [British Airways](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Airways), as well as for [BMI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BMI_(airline)) and [Virgin Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_Atlantic).[[266]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-277)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Energy)**Energy**

*Main article:*[*Energy in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Oil_platform_in_the_North_SeaPros.jpg)

An oil platform in the [North Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea)

In 2006, the UK was the world's ninth-largest consumer of energy and the 15th-largest producer.[[267]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-278) The UK is home to a number of large energy companies, including two of the six oil and gas "[supermajors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supermajor" \o "Supermajor)" – [BP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BP) and [Royal Dutch Shell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Dutch_Shell) – and [BG Group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BG_Group).[[268]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-279)[[269]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-280) In 2011, 40% of the UK's electricity was produced by gas, 30% by coal, 19% by nuclear power and 4.2% by wind, hydro, biofuels and wastes.[[270]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-world-nuclear.org-281)

In 2009, the UK produced 1.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d) of oil and consumed 1.7 million bbl/d.[[271]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiaoil-282) Production is now in decline and the UK has been a net importer of oil since 2005.[[271]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiaoil-282)In 2010 the UK had around 3.1 billion barrels of proven [crude oil reserves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea_oil), the largest of any EU member state.[[271]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiaoil-282) In 2009, 66.5% of the UK's oil supply was imported.[[272]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-283)

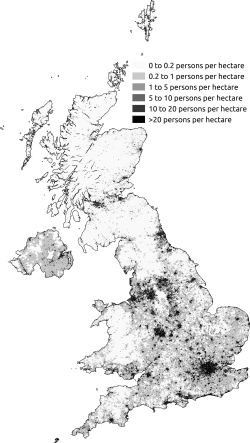
In 2009, the UK was the 13th-largest producer of natural gas in the world and the largest producer in the EU.[[273]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiagas-284) Production is now in decline and the UK has been a net importer of natural gas since 2004.[[273]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiagas-284) In 2009, half of British gas was supplied from imports and this is expected to increase to at least 75% by 2015, as domestic reserves are depleted.[[270]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-world-nuclear.org-281)

Coal production played a key role in the UK economy in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the mid-1970s, 130 million tonnes of coal was being produced annually, not falling below 100 million tonnes until the early 1980s. During the 1980s and 1990s the industry was scaled back considerably. In 2011, the UK produced 18.3 million tonnes of coal.[[274]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiaoverview-285) In 2005 it had proven recoverable coal reserves of 171 million tons.[[274]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-eiaoverview-285) The UK [Coal Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coal_Authority) has stated there is a potential to produce between 7 billion tonnes and 16 billion tonnes of coal through [underground coal gasification (UCG)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underground_coal_gasification) or '[fracking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydraulic_fracturing" \o "Hydraulic fracturing)',[[275]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Coal_2-286) and that, based on current UK coal consumption, such reserves could last between 200 and 400 years.[[276]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Coal_3-287) However, environmental and social concerns have been raised over chemicals getting into the water table and minor earthquakes damaging homes.[[277]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-288)[[278]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-289)

In the late 1990s, nuclear power plants contributed around 25% of total annual electricity generation in the UK, but this has gradually declined as old plants have been shut down and ageing-related problems affect plant availability. In 2012, the UK had 16 reactors normally generating about 19% of its electricity. All but one of the reactors will be retired by 2023. Unlike Germany and Japan, the UK intends to build a new generation of nuclear plants from about 2018.[[270]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-world-nuclear.org-281)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Demographics)Demographics

*Main article:*[*Demographics of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Population_density_UK_2011_census.png)

Map of population density in the UK as at the 2011 census.

A [census](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Census_in_the_United_Kingdom) is taken simultaneously in all parts of the UK every ten years.[[279]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-290) The [Office for National Statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_for_National_Statistics) is responsible for collecting data for England and Wales, the [General Register Office for Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Register_Office_for_Scotland) and the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Statistics_and_Research_Agency) each being responsible for censuses in their respective countries.[[280]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-291) In the [2011 census](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_Census_2011) the total population of the United Kingdom was 63,181,775.[[281]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-2011census-292) It is the third-largest in the European Union, the fifth-largest in the Commonwealth and the 21st-largest in the world. 2010 was the third successive year in which natural change contributed more to population growth than net long-term international migration.[[282][282]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-pop2010-293) Between 2001 and 2011 the population increased by an average annual rate of approximately 0.7 per cent.[[281]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-2011census-292) This compares to 0.3 per cent per year in the period 1991 to 2001 and 0.2 per cent in the decade 1981 to 1991.[[282]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-pop2010-293) The 2011 census also confirmed that the proportion of the population aged 0–14 has nearly halved (31 per cent in 1911 compared to 18 in 2011) and the proportion of older people aged 65 and over has more than tripled (from 5 to 16 per cent).[[281]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-2011census-292) It has been estimated that the number of people aged 100 or over will rise steeply to reach over 626,000 by 2080.[[283]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-294)

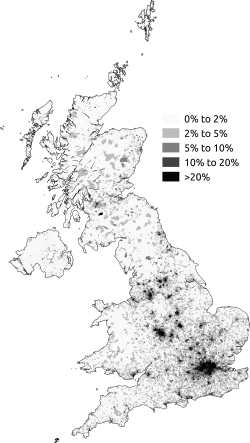
England's population in 2011 was found to be 53 million.[[284]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-2011_UK_censuses-295) It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with 383 people resident per square kilometre in mid-2003,[[285]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-2003density-296) with a particular concentration in London and the south-east.[[286]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-297) The 2011 census put Scotland's population at 5.3 million,[[287]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-298) Wales at 3.06 million and Northern Ireland at 1.81 million.[[284]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-2011_UK_censuses-295) In percentage terms England has had the fastest growing population of any country of the UK in the period from 2001 to 2011, with an increase of 7.9%.

In 2012 the average [total fertility rate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_fertility_rate) (TFR) across the UK was 1.92 children per woman.[[288]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-TFR-299) While a rising birth rate is contributing to current population growth, it remains considerably below the 'baby boom' peak of 2.95 children per woman in 1964,[[289]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Boseley-300) below the replacement rate of 2.1, but higher than the 2001 record low of 1.63.[[288]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-TFR-299) In 2012, Scotland had the lowest TFR at only 1.67, followed by Wales at 1.88, England at 1.94, and Northern Ireland at 2.03.[[288]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-TFR-299) In 2011, 47.3% of births in the UK were to unmarried women.[[290]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-301) A government figure estimated that there are 3.6 million homosexual people in Britain comprising 6 per cent of the population.[[291]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-302)

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| * [view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Largest_Urban_Areas_of_the_United_Kingdom) * [talk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_talk:Largest_Urban_Areas_of_the_United_Kingdom) * [edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Largest_Urban_Areas_of_the_United_Kingdom&action=edit) * [view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Largest_Urban_Areas_of_the_United_Kingdom) * [talk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_talk:Largest_Urban_Areas_of_the_United_Kingdom) * [edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Largest_Urban_Areas_of_the_United_Kingdom&action=edit)   **Largest urban areas of**[**the United Kingdom**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_United_Kingdom)United Kingdom 2011 census Built-up areas[[292]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BUA-303)[[293]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-304)[[294]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-305) | | | | | | | | | |
|  | [**Rank**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Urban area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Pop.**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Principal settlement**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Rank**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Urban area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Pop.**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) | [**Principal settlement**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_in_the_United_Kingdom) |  |
| [Greater London Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:London_from_a_hot_air_balloon.jpg) [Greater London Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_London_Urban_Area)  [Greater Manchester Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Manchester_from_the_Sky,_2008.jpg) [Greater Manchester Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Manchester_Urban_Area) | 1 | [**Greater London Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_London_Urban_Area) | 9,787,426 | [London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London) | 11 | [**Bristol Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Urban_Area) | 617,280 | [Bristol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol) | [West Midlands Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Birmingham_Skyline_from_Bartley_Green.jpg) [West Midlands Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Midlands_Urban_Area)  [West Yorkshire Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Leedsnight.jpg) [West Yorkshire Urban Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Yorkshire_Urban_Area) |
| 2 | [**Greater Manchester Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Manchester_Urban_Area) | 2,553,379 | [Manchester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester) | 12 | [**Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast_Metropolitan_Urban_Area) | 579,236 | [Belfast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast) |
| 3 | [**West Midlands Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Midlands_Urban_Area) | 2,440,986 | [Birmingham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham) | 13 | [**Leicester Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leicester_Urban_Area) | 508,916 | [Leicester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leicester) |
| 4 | [**West Yorkshire Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Yorkshire_Urban_Area) | 1,777,934 | [Leeds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leeds) | 14 | [**Edinburgh**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh) | 488,610 | [Edinburgh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh) |
| 5 | [**Greater Glasgow**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Glasgow) | 976,970 | [Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow) | 15 | [**Brighton/Worthing/Littlehampton**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brighton/Worthing/Littlehampton) | 474,485 | [Brighton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brighton) |
| 6 | [**Liverpool Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool_Urban_Area) | 864,122 | [Liverpool](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool) | 16 | [**South East Dorset conurbation**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_East_Dorset_conurbation) | 466,266 | [Bournemouth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bournemouth) |
| 7 | [**South Hampshire**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Hampshire) | 855,569 | [Southampton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southampton) | 17 | [**Cardiff Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff_Urban_Area) | 390,214 | [Cardiff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff) |
| 8 | [**Tyneside**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyneside) | 774,891 | [Newcastle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newcastle_upon_Tyne) | 18 | [**Teesside**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teesside) | 376,633 | [Middlesbrough](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middlesbrough) |
| 9 | [**Nottingham Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham_Urban_Area) | 729,977 | [Nottingham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham) | 19 | [**The Potteries Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Potteries_Urban_Area) | 372,775 | [Stoke-on-Trent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoke-on-Trent) |
| 10 | [**Sheffield Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield_Urban_Area) | 685,368 | [Sheffield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield) | 20 | [**Coventry and Bedworth Urban Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coventry_and_Bedworth_Urban_Area) | 359,262 | [Coventry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coventry) |

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Ethnic_groups)**Ethnic groups**

*Main article:*[*Ethnic groups in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Non-white_in_the_2011_census.png)

Map showing the percentage of the population who are not white according to the 2011 census.

Historically, indigenous British people were thought to be [descended from the various ethnic groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetic_history_of_the_British_Isles) that settled there before the 11th century: the [Celts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celts), Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Norse and the [Normans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normans). [Welsh people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_people) could be the oldest ethnic group in the UK.[[295]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-306) A 2006 genetic study shows that more than 50 per cent of England's gene pool contains[Germanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germanic_peoples) Y chromosomes.[[296]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-307) Another 2005 genetic analysis indicates that "about 75 per cent of the traceable ancestors of the modern British population had arrived in the British isles by about 6,200 years ago, at the start of the British Neolithic or Stone Age", and that the British broadly share a common ancestry with the [Basque people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_people).[[297]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-308)[[298]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-309)[[299]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Henderson-310)

The UK has a history of small-scale non-white immigration, with [Liverpool](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool) having the oldest Black population in the country dating back to at least the 1730s during the period of the African slave trade,[[300]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Costello-311) and the oldest [Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Chinese) community in Europe, dating to the arrival of Chinese seamen in the 19th century.[[301]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Chinese-312) In 1950 there were probably fewer than 20,000 non-white residents in Britain, almost all born overseas.[[302]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-313)

Since 1948 substantial immigration from Africa, the [Caribbean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean) and [South Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asia) has been a legacy of ties forged by the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire). Migration from new EU member states in [Central](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Europe" \o "Central Europe)and Eastern Europe since 2004 has resulted in growth in these population groups but, as of 2008, the trend is reversing. Many of these migrants are returning to their home countries, leaving the size of these groups unknown.[[303]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-314)

Academics have argued that the [ethnicity categories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classification_of_ethnicity_in_the_United_Kingdom) employed in British national statistics, which were first introduced in the [1991 census](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_UK_census), involve confusion between the concepts of[ethnicity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnicity) and [race](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(human_classification)).[[304]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-315)[[305]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Kertzer-316) In [2011](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_Census_2011), 87.1 per cent of the UK population identified themselves as white, meaning 12.9 per cent of the UK population identify themselves as of one of number of [ethnic minority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_group) groups.[[306]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ethnicity2011-317) In the 2001 census, this figure was 7.9 per cent of the UK population.[[307]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ethnicity2001-318)

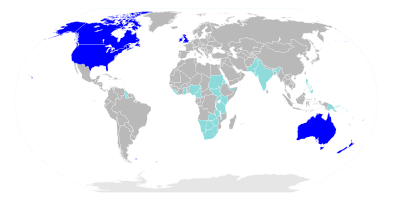
The fastest-growing ethnicity category over the period from 2001 to 2011 was the other Asian category, which increased from 0.4 to 1.4 per cent of the population.[[307]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ethnicity2001-318)[[306]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ethnicity2011-317) There was also considerable growth in the [mixed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed_(United_Kingdom_ethnicity_category)) category. In 2001, people in this category accounted for 1.2 per cent of the population;[[307]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-ethnicity2001-318) by 2011, the proportion was 2 per cent.[[306]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ethnicity2011-317)

Ethnic diversity varies significantly across the UK. 30.4 per cent of London's population and 37.4 per cent of [Leicester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leicester)'s was estimated to be non-white in 2005,[[308]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-319)[[309]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-320) whereas less than 5 per cent of the populations of [North East England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_East_England), Wales and the [South West](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_West_England) were from ethnic minorities, according to the 2001 census.[[310]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-321) In 2011, 26.5 per cent of primary and 22.2 per cent of secondary pupils at [state schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_school) in England were members of an ethnic minority.[[311]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-322)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Ethnic group** | **Population, 2011** | **Percentage of total population, 2011**[[306]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ethnicity2011-317) |
| White | 55,010,359 | 87.1 |
| Gypsy/Traveller/Irish Traveller | 63,193 | 0.1 |
| Asian/Asian British: Indian | 1,451,862 | 2.3 |
| Asian/Asian British: Pakistani | 1,173,892 | 1.9 |
| Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi | 451,529 | 0.7 |
| Asian/Asian British: Chinese | 433,150 | 0.7 |
| Asian/Asian British: Other Asian | 861,815 | 1.4 |
| Black/African/Caribbean/Black British | 1,904,684 | 3.0 |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic groups | 1,250,229 | 2.0 |
| Other ethnic group | 580,374 | 0.9 |
| Total | 63,182,178 | 100 |

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Languages)**Languages**

*Main article:*[*Languages of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Anglospeak.svg)

The [English-speaking world](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English-speaking_world). Countries in dark blue have a majority of native speakers; countries where English is an official but not a majority language are shaded in light blue. English is one of the official languages [of the European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_European_Union)[[312]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-EUlang-323) and [the United Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_languages_of_the_United_Nations)[[313]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-324)

The UK's [*de facto*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_facto) [official language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_language) is [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language).[[314]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-direct.gov.uk-325)[[315]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-thecommonwealth.org-326) It is estimated that 95% of the UK's population are [monolingual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monolingual) English speakers.[[316]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BBC_languages-327) 5.5% of the population are estimated to speak languages brought to the UK as a result of relatively recent immigration.[[316]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BBC_languages-327) South Asian languages, including [Bengali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_language" \o "Bengali language),[Tamil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language), [Punjabi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjabi_language), [Hindi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindi) and [Gujarati](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gujarati_language), are the largest grouping and are spoken by 2.7% of the UK population.[[316]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BBC_languages-327) According to the 2011 census, [Polish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_language) has become the second-largest language spoken in England and has 546,000 speakers.[[317]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-328)

Four [Celtic languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtic_languages) are spoken in the UK: [Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_language); [Irish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_language); [Scottish Gaelic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Gaelic); and [Cornish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornish_language). All are recognised as regional or minority languages, subject to specific measures of protection and promotion under the [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Charter_for_Regional_or_Minority_Languages)[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-reglang-4)[[318]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-329) and the [Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Framework_Convention_for_the_Protection_of_National_Minorities).[[319]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-330) In the 2001 Census over a fifth (21%) of the population of Wales said they could speak Welsh,[[320]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-331) an increase from the 1991 Census (18%).[[321]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-332) In addition it is estimated that about 200,000 Welsh speakers live in England.[[322]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-333) In the same census in Northern Ireland 167,487 people (10.4%) stated that they had "some knowledge of Irish" (see [Irish language in Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_language_in_Northern_Ireland)), almost exclusively in the [nationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_nationalism) (mainly Catholic) population. Over 92,000 people in Scotland (just under 2% of the population) had some Gaelic language ability, including 72% of those living in the [Outer Hebrides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outer_Hebrides).[[323]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-334) The number of schoolchildren being taught through Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Irish is increasing.[[324]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-335) Among emigrant-descended populations some Scottish Gaelic is still [spoken in Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Gaelic) (principally [Nova Scotia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia) and [Cape Breton Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Breton_Island)),[[325]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Edwards2010-336) and Welsh in [Patagonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patagonia), Argentina.[[326]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Koch2006-337)

[Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scots_language), a language descended from early northern [Middle English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_English), has limited [recognition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Charter_for_Regional_or_Minority_Languages) alongside its regional variant, [Ulster Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Scots_dialects) in Northern Ireland, without specific commitments to protection and promotion.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-reglang-4)[[327]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-338)

It is compulsory for pupils to study a second language up to the age of 14 in England,[[328]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-339) and up to age 16 in Scotland. French and German are the two most commonly taught second languages in England and Scotland. All pupils in Wales are taught Welsh as a second language up to age 16, or are [taught in Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_medium_education).[[329]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-340)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Religion)**Religion**

*Main article:*[*Religion in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:West_Side_of_Westminster_Abbey,_London_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1406999.jpg)

[Westminster Abbey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westminster_Abbey) is used for the [coronation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronation) of [British monarchs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom)

Forms of [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) have dominated religious life in what is now the United Kingdom for over 1,400 years.[[330]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-341) Although a majority of citizens still identify with Christianity in many surveys, regular church attendance has fallen dramatically since the middle of the 20th century,[[331]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-342) while immigration and demographic change have contributed to the growth of other faiths, most notably Islam.[[332]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-343) This has led some commentators to variously describe the UK as a multi-faith,[[333]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-344) [secularised](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularism),[[334]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-345) or [post-Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-Christian) society.[[335]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-346)

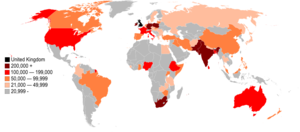
In the 2001 census 71.6% of all respondents indicated that they were Christians, with the next largest faiths (by number of adherents) being Islam (2.8%), [Hinduism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism) (1.0%), [Sikhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism) (0.6%), Judaism (0.5%), [Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism) (0.3%) and all other religions (0.3%).[[336]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-347) 15% of respondents stated that they had [no religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irreligion), with a further 7% not stating a religious preference.[[337]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-348) A [Tearfund](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tearfund" \o "Tearfund) survey in 2007 showed only one in ten Britons actually attend church weekly.[[338]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-349) Between the 2001 and 2011 census there was a decrease in the amount of people who identified as Christian by 12%, whilst the percentage of those reporting no religious affiliation doubled. This contrasted with growth in the other main religious group categories, with the number of Muslims increasing by the most substantial margin to a total of about 5%.[[339]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-350)

The [Church of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_England) is the [established church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_religion) in England.[[340]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-351) It retains a [representation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lords_Spiritual) in the [UK Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_the_United_Kingdom) and the [British monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom) is its [Supreme Governor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Governor_of_the_Church_of_England).[[341]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-352) In [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Scotland) the [Presbyterian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterianism" \o "Presbyterianism)[Church of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Scotland) is recognised as the [national church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_church). It is not [subject to state control](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_religion), and the British monarch is an ordinary member, required to swear an oath to "maintain and preserve the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government" upon his or her accession.[[342]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-353)[[343]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-354) The (Anglican) [Church in Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_in_Wales) was disestablished in 1920 and, as the (Anglican) [Church of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Ireland)was disestablished in 1870 before the [partition of Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_Ireland), there is no established church in Northern Ireland.[[344]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-355) Although there are no UK-wide data in the 2001 census on adherence to individual Christian denominations, it has been estimated that 62% of Christians are Anglican, 13.5% [Catholic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church), 6% [Presbyterian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian), 3.4% [Methodist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodist) with small numbers of other [Protestant denominations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism) such as [Open Brethren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Brethren), and [Orthodox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church) churches.[[345]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-356)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Migration)**Migration**

*Main article:*[*Immigration to the United Kingdom since 1922*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_the_United_Kingdom_since_1922)

*See also:*[*Foreign-born population of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign-born_population_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:United_Kingdom_foreign_born_population_by_country_of_birth.png)

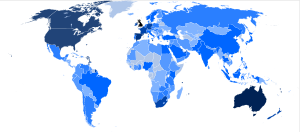
Estimated foreign-born population by country of birth, April 2007 – March 2008

The United Kingdom has experienced successive waves of migration. The [Great Famine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Famine_(Ireland)) in Ireland, then part of the United Kingdom, resulted in perhaps a million people migrating to Great Brtain.[[346]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-357) Unable to return to Poland at the end of World War II, over 120,000 [Polish veterans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_Armed_Forces_in_the_West) remained in the UK permanently.[[347]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-358) After World War II, there was significant immigration from the colonies and newly independent former colonies, partly as a legacy of empire and partly driven by labour shortages. Many of these migrants came from the [Caribbean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean) and the [Indian subcontinent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent).[[348]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-359) The [British Asian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Asian) population has increased from 2.2 million in 2001 to over 4.2 million in 2011.[[349]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-360)

One of the more recent trends in migration has been the arrival of workers from the new EU member states in Eastern Europe. In 2010, there were 7.0 million foreign-born residents in the UK, corresponding to 11.3% of the total population. Of these, 4.76 million (7.7%) were born outside the EU and 2.24 million (3.6%) were born in another EU Member State.[[350]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-361) The proportion of foreign-born people in the UK remains slightly below that of many other European countries.[[351]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-362) However, immigration is now contributing to a rising population[[352]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-363) with arrivals and UK-born children of migrants accounting for about half of the population increase between 1991 and 2001. Analysis of [Office for National Statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_for_National_Statistics) (ONS) data shows that a net total of 2.3 million migrants moved to the UK in the 15 years from 1991 to 2006.[[353]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-364)[[354]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-365) In 2008 it was predicted that migration would add 7 million to the UK population by 2031,[[355]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-366) though these figures are disputed.[[356]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-367) The ONS reported that net migration rose from 2009 to 2010 by 21 per cent to 239,000.[[357]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-368) In 2011 the net increase was 251,000: immigration was 589,000, while the number of people emigrating (for more than 12 months) was 338,000.[[358]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Migration_Statistics-369)[[359]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-370)

195,046 foreign nationals became British citizens in 2010,[[360]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-home_office-371) compared to 54,902 in 1999.[[360]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-home_office-371)[[361]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-372) A record 241,192 people were granted permanent settlement rights in 2010, of whom 51 per cent were from Asia and 27 per cent from Africa.[[362]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-373) 25.5 per cent of babies born in England and Wales in 2011 were born to mothers born outside the UK, according to official statistics released in 2012.[[363]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-374)

Citizens of the European Union, including those of the UK, have the right to live and work in any EU member state.[[364]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-375) The UK applied temporary restrictions to citizens of Romania and Bulgaria, which joined the EU in January 2007.[[365]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-376) Research conducted by the [Migration Policy Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Migration_Policy_Institute) for the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equality_and_Human_Rights_Commission) suggests that, between May 2004 and September 2009, 1.5 million workers migrated from the new EU member states to the UK, two-thirds of them Polish, but that many subsequently returned home, resulting in a net increase in the number of nationals of the new member states in the UK of some 700,000 over that period.[[366]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-MPI-377)[[367]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-378) The[late-2000s recession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late-2000s_recession) in the UK reduced the economic incentive for Poles to migrate to the UK,[[368]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-379) the migration becoming temporary and circular.[[369]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-380) In 2009, for the first time since enlargement, more nationals of the eight central and eastern European states that had joined the EU in 2004 left the UK than arrived.[[370]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-A8_leaving-381) In 2011, citizens of the new EU member states made up 13% of the immigrants entering the country.[[358]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Migration_Statistics-369)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:British_expats_countrymap.svg)

Estimated number of British citizens living overseas by country, 2006

The UK government has introduced a [points-based immigration system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Points-based_immigration_system_(United_Kingdom)) for immigration from outside the [European Economic Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Economic_Area) to replace former schemes, including the Scottish Government's [Fresh Talent Initiative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fresh_Talent_Initiative).[[371]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-382) In June 2010 the UK government introduced a temporary limit of 24,000 on immigration from outside the EU, aiming to discourage applications before a permanent cap was imposed in April 2011.[[372]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-383) The cap has caused tension within the coalition: business secretary [Vince Cable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vince_Cable) has argued that it is harming British businesses.[[373]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-384)

Emigration was an important feature of British society in the 19th century. Between 1815 and 1930 around 11.4 million people emigrated from Britain and 7.3 million from Ireland. Estimates show that by the end of the 20th century some 300 million people of British and Irish descent were permanently settled around the globe.[[374]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-385) Today, at least 5.5 million UK-born people live abroad,[[375]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom" \l "cite_note-BritsAbroad-386)[[376]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-387)[[377]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-388) mainly in Australia, Spain, the United States and Canada.[[375]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BritsAbroad-386)[[378]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-389)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Education)**Education**

*Main article:*[*Education in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_the_United_Kingdom)

*See also:*[*Education in England*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_England)*,*[*Education in Northern Ireland*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Northern_Ireland)*,*[*Education in Scotland*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Scotland)*and*[*Education in Wales*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Wales)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:KingsCollegeChapelWest.jpg)

[King's College](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King%27s_College,_Cambridge), part of the [University of Cambridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge), which was founded in 1209

Education in the United Kingdom is a [devolved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution) matter, with each country having a separate education system.

Whilst [education in England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_England) is the responsibility of the [Secretary of State for Education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_of_State_for_Education), the day-to-day administration and funding of state schools is the responsibility of [local authorities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_education_authority).[[379]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-390) Universally free of charge state education was introduced piecemeal between 1870 and 1944.[[380]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-391)[[381]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-392) Education is now mandatory from ages five to sixteen (15 if born in late July or August). In 2011, the [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trends_in_International_Mathematics_and_Science_Study) (TIMSS) rated 13–14-year-old pupils in England and Wales 10th in the world for maths and 9th for science.[[382]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-393) The majority of children are educated in state-sector schools, a small proportion of which select on the grounds of academic ability. Two of the top ten performing schools in terms of [GCSE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GCSE) results in 2006 were state-run [grammar schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar_school). Over half of students at the leading universities of Cambridge and Oxford had attended state schools.[[383]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-394) Despite a fall in actual numbers the proportion of children in England attending private schools has risen to over 7%.[[384]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-395) In 2010, more than 45% of places at the [University of Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Oxford) and 40% at the[University of Cambridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge) were taken by students from private schools, even though they educate just 7% of the population.[[385]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-396) England has the two oldest universities in English-speaking world, Universities of [Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Oxford) and [Cambridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge) (jointly known as "[Oxbridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxbridge)") with history of over eight centuries. The United Kingdom has 9 universities featured in the Times Higher Education top 100 rankings, making it second to the United States in terms of representation.[[386]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-397)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:QueensBelfast.jpg)

[Queen's University Belfast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen%27s_University_Belfast), built in 1849[[387]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-398)

[Education in Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Scotland) is the responsibility of the [Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_Secretary_for_Education_and_Lifelong_Learning), with day-to-day administration and funding of state schools the responsibility of Local Authorities. Two [non-departmental public bodies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_public_bodies) have key roles in Scottish education. The [Scottish Qualifications Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Qualifications_Authority) is responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees which are delivered at secondary schools, [post-secondary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertiary_education) colleges of [further education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Further_education) and other centres.[[388]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-399) The [Learning and Teaching Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_and_Teaching_Scotland) provides advice, resources and staff development to education professionals.[[389]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-400)Scotland first legislated for compulsory education in 1496.[[390]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-401) The proportion of children in Scotland attending private schools is just over 4%, and it has been rising slowly in recent years.[[391]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-402) Scottish students who attend [Scottish universities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_universities) pay neither [tuition fees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuition_fees) nor graduate endowment charges, as fees were abolished in 2001 and the graduate endowment scheme was abolished in 2008.[[392]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-403)

The [Welsh Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Government) has responsibility for [education in Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Wales). A significant number of Welsh students are taught either wholly or largely in the [Welsh language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_language); lessons in Welsh are compulsory for all until the age of 16.[[393]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-404) There are plans to increase the provision of Welsh-medium schools as part of the policy of creating a fully bilingual Wales.

[Education in Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Northern_Ireland) is the responsibility of the [Minister of Education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_of_Education_(Northern_Ireland)) and the [Minister for Employment and Learning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_for_Employment_and_Learning), although responsibility at a local level is administered by five education and library boards covering different geographical areas. The [Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_for_the_Curriculum,_Examinations_%26_Assessment) (CCEA) is the body responsible for advising the[government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Executive) on what should be taught in Northern Ireland's schools, monitoring standards and awarding qualifications.[[394]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-405)

A [government commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Mobility_and_Child_Poverty_Commission)'s report in 2014 found that privately educated people comprise 7% of the general population of the UK but much larger percentages of the top professions, the most extreme case quoted being 71% of senior judges.[[395]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-SMCPC20140828-406)[[396]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Guardian20140828-407)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Healthcare)**Healthcare**

*Main article:*[*Healthcare in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Aberdeen_Children%27s_Hospital.jpg)

The [Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Aberdeen_Children%27s_Hospital), an [NHS Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NHS_Scotland) specialist[children's hospital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_hospital)

Healthcare in the United Kingdom is a [devolved matter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution) and each country has its own system of private and [publicly funded health care](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publicly_funded_health_care), together with [alternative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine), holistic and complementary treatments. Public healthcare is provided to all [UK permanent residents](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_nationality_law) and is mostly free at the point of need, being paid for from general taxation. The [World Health Organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Health_Organization), in 2000, ranked the provision of healthcare in the United Kingdom as fifteenth best in Europe and eighteenth in the world.[[397]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Who2000-408)[[398]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-409)

Regulatory bodies are organised on a UK-wide basis such as the [General Medical Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Medical_Council), the [Nursing and Midwifery Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nursing_and_Midwifery_Council) and non-governmental-based, such as the [Royal Colleges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_College). However, political and operational responsibility for healthcare lies with four national [executives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)); [healthcare in England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare_in_England) is the responsibility of the UK Government; [healthcare in Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare_in_Northern_Ireland) is the responsibility of the [Northern Ireland Executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Executive); [healthcare in Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare_in_Scotland) is the responsibility of the [Scottish Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Government); and [healthcare in Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare_in_Wales) is the responsibility of the[Welsh Assembly Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Assembly_Government). Each [National Health Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Health_Service) has different policies and priorities, resulting in contrasts.[[399]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-410)[[400]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-411)

Since 1979 expenditure on healthcare has been increased significantly to bring it closer to the European Union average.[[401]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-412) The UK spends around 8.4 per cent of its gross domestic product on healthcare, which is 0.5 percentage points below the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_for_Economic_Co-operation_and_Development" \o "Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average and about one percentage point below the average of the European Union.[[402]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-413)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Culture)Culture

*Main article:*[*Culture of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_United_Kingdom)

The culture of the United Kingdom has been influenced by many factors including: the nation's island status; its [history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_Kingdom) as a western liberal democracy and a major power; as well as being a [political union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_union) of four countries with each preserving elements of distinctive traditions, customs and symbolism. As a result of the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire), British influence can be observed in the [language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language), [culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_United_Kingdom) and [legal systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_law) of many of its former colonies including Australia, Canada, [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India), Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States. The substantial cultural influence of the United Kingdom has led it to be described as a "cultural superpower."[[403]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-414)[[404]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-415)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Literature)**Literature**

*Main article:*[*British literature*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_literature)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:William_Shakespeare_Chandos_Portrait.jpg)

The [Chandos portrait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandos_portrait" \o "Chandos portrait), believed to depict [William Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare)

'British literature' refers to literature associated with the United Kingdom, the [Isle of Man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isle_of_Man) and the Channel Islands. Most British literature is in the English language. In 2005, some 206,000 books were published in the United Kingdom and in 2006 it was the [largest publisher of books](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_published_per_country_per_year) in the world.[[405]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Reuters-416)

The English playwright and poet [William Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare) is widely regarded as the greatest dramatist of all time,[[406]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-417)[[407]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-418)[[408]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-419) and his contemporaries [Christopher Marlowe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Marlowe) and [Ben Jonson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Jonson) have also been held in continuous high esteem. More recently the playwrights [Alan Ayckbourn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Ayckbourn), [Harold Pinter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Pinter), [Michael Frayn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Frayn), [Tom Stoppard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Stoppard) and [David Edgar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Edgar_(playwright)) have combined elements of surrealism, realism and radicalism.

Notable pre-modern and early-modern English writers include [Geoffrey Chaucer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_Chaucer) (14th century), [Thomas Malory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Malory) (15th century), [Sir Thomas More](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_More) (16th century), [John Bunyan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bunyan) (17th century) and[John Milton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Milton) (17th century). In the 18th century [Daniel Defoe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Defoe) (author of [*Robinson Crusoe*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robinson_Crusoe)) and [Samuel Richardson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Richardson) were pioneers of the [modern novel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_novel). In the 19th century there followed further innovation by [Jane Austen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Austen), the gothic novelist [Mary Shelley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley), the children's writer [Lewis Carroll](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Carroll), the [Brontë sisters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bront%C3%AB_family" \o "Brontë family), the social campaigner [Charles Dickens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens), the [naturalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalism_(literature)) [Thomas Hardy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hardy), the [realist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism_(arts)" \o "Realism (arts))[George Eliot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Eliot), the visionary poet [William Blake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake) and romantic poet [William Wordsworth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wordsworth). 20th-century English writers include the science-fiction novelist [H. G. Wells](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._G._Wells); the writers of children's classics[Rudyard Kipling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard_Kipling), [A. A. Milne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._A._Milne) (the creator of [Winnie-the-Pooh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnie-the-Pooh)), [Roald Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roald_Dahl) and [Enid Blyton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enid_Blyton); the controversial [D. H. Lawrence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D._H._Lawrence); the [modernist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism) [Virginia Woolf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Woolf); the satirist [Evelyn Waugh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Waugh); the prophetic novelist [George Orwell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Orwell); the popular novelists [W. Somerset Maugham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Somerset_Maugham) and [Graham Greene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graham_Greene); the crime writer [Agatha Christie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agatha_Christie) (the [best-selling novelist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_fiction_authors) of all time);[[409]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-420) [Ian Fleming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Fleming) (the creator of[James Bond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bond)); the poets [T.S. Eliot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T.S._Eliot), [Philip Larkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Larkin) and [Ted Hughes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Hughes); the [fantasy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy_literature) writers [J. R. R. Tolkien](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._R._R._Tolkien), [C. S. Lewis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._S._Lewis) and [J. K. Rowling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._K._Rowling); the graphic novelist [Alan Moore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Moore).

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dickens_by_Watkins_detail.jpg)

A photograph of [Victorian era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era) novelist [Charles Dickens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens)

[Scotland's contributions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_literature) include the detective writer [Arthur Conan Doyle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle) (the creator of [Sherlock Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes)), romantic literature by [Sir Walter Scott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Scott), the children's writer[J. M. Barrie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._M._Barrie), the epic adventures of [Robert Louis Stevenson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Louis_Stevenson) and the celebrated poet [Robert Burns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Burns). More recently the modernist and nationalist [Hugh MacDiarmid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_MacDiarmid)and [Neil M. Gunn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_M._Gunn) contributed to the [Scottish Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Renaissance). A more grim outlook is found in [Ian Rankin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Rankin)'s stories and the psychological horror-comedy of [Iain Banks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iain_Banks). Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, was UNESCO's first worldwide [City of Literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Literature).[[410]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-421)

Britain's oldest known poem, [*Y Gododdin*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y_Gododdin), was composed in *[Yr Hen Ogledd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hen_Ogledd" \o "Hen Ogledd)* (*The Old North*), most likely in the late 6th century. It was written in [Cumbric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cumbric_language" \o "Cumbric language) or [Old Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Welsh) and contains the earliest known reference to [King Arthur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Arthur).[[411]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-422) From around the seventh century, the connection between Wales and the Old North was lost, and the focus of Welsh-language culture shifted to Wales, where Arthurian legend was further developed by [Geoffrey of Monmouth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_of_Monmouth).[[412]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-423) Wales's most celebrated medieval poet, [Dafydd ap Gwilym](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dafydd_ap_Gwilym" \o "Dafydd ap Gwilym) (*fl.*1320–1370), composed poetry on themes including nature, religion and especially love. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest European poets of his age.[[413]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-424) Until the late 19th century the majority of [Welsh literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_literature) was in Welsh and much of the prose was religious in character. [Daniel Owen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Owen) is credited as the first Welsh-language novelist, publishing [*Rhys Lewis*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhys_Lewis_(novel)) in 1885. The best-known of the [Anglo-Welsh poets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Welsh_poetry) are both Thomases. [Dylan Thomas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dylan_Thomas) became famous on both sides of the Atlantic in the mid-20th century. He is remembered for his poetry – his "[Do not go gentle into that good night](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Do_not_go_gentle_into_that_good_night); Rage, rage against the dying of the light." is one of the most quoted couplets of English language verse – and for his 'play for voices', [*Under Milk Wood*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Under_Milk_Wood). The influential [Church in Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_in_Wales) 'poet-priest' and [Welsh nationalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_nationalism) [R. S. Thomas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._S._Thomas) was nominated for the [Nobel Prize in Literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_Prize_in_Literature) in 1996. Leading Welsh novelists of the twentieth century include [Richard Llewellyn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Llewellyn) and [Kate Roberts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_Roberts_(author)).[[414]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-425)[[415]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-426)

Authors of other nationalities, particularly from [Commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations) countries, the Republic of Ireland and the United States, have lived and worked in the UK. Significant examples through the centuries include [Jonathan Swift](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Swift), [Oscar Wilde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde), [Bram Stoker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bram_Stoker), [George Bernard Shaw](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw), [Joseph Conrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Conrad), [T.S. Eliot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T.S._Eliot), [Ezra Pound](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ezra_Pound) and more recently British authors born abroad such as [Kazuo Ishiguro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazuo_Ishiguro) and [Sir Salman Rushdie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salman_Rushdie).[[416]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-427)[[417]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-428)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Music)**Music**

*Main article:*[*Music of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_the_United_Kingdom)

*See also:*[*British rock*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_rock)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Fabs.JPG)

[The Beatles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beatles) are the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed band in the [history of music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_classical_music_traditions), selling over a billion records internationally.[[418]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Beatles_sales-429)[[419]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-McCartney-430)[[420]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Guinness-431)

Various styles of music are popular in the UK from the indigenous [folk music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music) of [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music_of_England), [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Wales#Folk_music), [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music_of_Scotland) and [Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music_of_Northern_Ireland) to [heavy metal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavy_metal_music). Notable composers of classical music from the United Kingdom and the countries that preceded it include [William Byrd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Byrd), [Henry Purcell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Purcell), [Sir Edward Elgar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Elgar), [Gustav Holst](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Holst), [Sir Arthur Sullivan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Sullivan) (most famous for working with the librettist [Sir W. S. Gilbert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._S._Gilbert)), [Ralph Vaughan Williams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Vaughan_Williams) and [Benjamin Britten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Britten), pioneer of modern British opera. [Sir Peter Maxwell Davies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Maxwell_Davies) is one of the foremost living composers and current [Master of the Queen's Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master_of_the_Queen%27s_Music). The UK is also home to world-renowned symphonic orchestras and choruses such as the [BBC Symphony Orchestra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_Symphony_Orchestra) and the [London Symphony Chorus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Symphony_Chorus). Notable conductors include [Sir Simon Rattle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Rattle), [John Barbirolli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Barbirolli) and [Sir Malcolm Sargent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcolm_Sargent). Some of the notable [film score](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film_score) composers include [John Barry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Barry_(composer)), [Clint Mansell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clint_Mansell), [Mike Oldfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Oldfield), [John Powell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Powell_(composer)), [Craig Armstrong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_Armstrong_(composer)), [David Arnold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Arnold), [John Murphy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Murphy_(composer)), [Monty Norman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty_Norman) and [Harry Gregson-Williams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Gregson-Williams). [George Frideric Handel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Frideric_Handel), although born German, was a [naturalised](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naturalization" \o "Naturalization) [British citizen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_nationality_law)[[421]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Handel-432) and some of his best works, such as [*Messiah*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_(Handel)), were written in the English language.[[422]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-433) [Andrew Lloyd Webber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Lloyd_Webber) has achieved enormous worldwide commercial success and is a prolific composer of musical theatre, works which have dominated London's [West End](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_End_Theatre) for a number of years and have travelled to Broadway in New York.[[423]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-434)

[The Beatles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beatles) have international sales of over one billion units and are the [biggest-selling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_music_artists) and most influential band in the history of popular music.[[418]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Beatles_sales-429)[[419]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-McCartney-430)[[420]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Guinness-431)[[424]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-435) Other prominent British contributors to have influenced popular music over the last 50 years include; [The Rolling Stones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rolling_Stones), [Led Zeppelin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Led_Zeppelin), [Pink Floyd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_Floyd), [Queen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_(band)), the [Bee Gees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bee_Gees), and [Elton John](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elton_John), all of whom have world wide record sales of 200 million or more.[[425]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-436)[[426]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-437)[[427]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-438)[[428]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-439)[[429]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-440)[[430]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-441) The [Brit Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brit_Awards) are the [BPI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Phonographic_Industry)'s annual music awards, and some of the British recipients of the Outstanding Contribution to Music award include; [The Who](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Who), [David Bowie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bowie), [Eric Clapton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Clapton), [Rod Stewart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Stewart) and [The Police](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Police).[[431]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-442) More recent UK music acts that have had international success include [Coldplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coldplay), [Radiohead](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radiohead), [Oasis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oasis_(band)), [Spice Girls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spice_Girls),[Robbie Williams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robbie_Williams), [Amy Winehouse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amy_Winehouse) and [Adele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adele).[[432]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-443)

A number of UK cities are known for their music. Acts from [Liverpool](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool) have had more UK chart number one hit singles per capita (54) than any other city worldwide.[[433]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Liverpool_vs_Stavanger-444) [Glasgow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow)'s contribution to music was recognised in 2008 when it was named a [UNESCO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO) [City of Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_Cities_Network), one of only three cities in the world to have this honour.[[434]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-445)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Visual_art)**Visual art**

*Main article:*[*Art of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Turner_selfportrait.jpg)

[J. M. W. Turner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._M._W._Turner) self-portrait, oil on canvas, c. 1799

The history of British visual art forms part of [western art history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_art_history). Major British artists include: the [Romantics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism) [William Blake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake), [John Constable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Constable), [Samuel Palmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Palmer) and [J.M.W. Turner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.M.W._Turner); the [portrait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait) painters[Sir Joshua Reynolds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Reynolds) and [Lucian Freud](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucian_Freud); the landscape artists [Thomas Gainsborough](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Gainsborough) and [L. S. Lowry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L._S._Lowry); the pioneer of the [Arts and Crafts Movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arts_and_Crafts_Movement) [William Morris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Morris); the figurative painter [Francis Bacon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon); the [Pop artists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop_artist) [Peter Blake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Blake_(artist)), [Richard Hamilton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Hamilton_(artist)) and [David Hockney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hockney); the collaborative duo [Gilbert and George](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_and_George); the [abstract](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_art) artist [Howard Hodgkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_Hodgkin); and the [sculptors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sculpture) [Antony Gormley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antony_Gormley), [Anish Kapoor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anish_Kapoor" \o "Anish Kapoor) and [Henry Moore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Moore). During the late 1980s and 1990s the [Saatchi Gallery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saatchi_Gallery) in London helped to bring to public attention a group of multi-genre artists who would become known as the "[Young British Artists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_British_Artists)": [Damien Hirst](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damien_Hirst), [Chris Ofili](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Ofili), [Rachel Whiteread](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel_Whiteread), [Tracey Emin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracey_Emin), [Mark Wallinger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Wallinger), [Steve McQueen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_McQueen_(artist)), [Sam Taylor-Wood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Taylor-Wood) and the [Chapman Brothers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jake_and_Dinos_Chapman) are among the better-known members of this loosely affiliated movement.

The [Royal Academy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Academy) in London is a key organisation for the promotion of the visual arts in the United Kingdom. Major schools of art in the UK include: the six-school [University of the Arts London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_the_Arts_London), which includes the [Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Saint_Martins_College_of_Art_and_Design) and [Chelsea College of Art and Design](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chelsea_College_of_Art_and_Design); [Goldsmiths, University of London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goldsmiths,_University_of_London); the [Slade School of Fine Art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slade_School_of_Fine_Art) (part of [University College London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_College_London)); the [Glasgow School of Art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasgow_School_of_Art); the [Royal College of Art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_College_of_Art); and [The Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ruskin_School_of_Drawing_and_Fine_Art) (part of the University of Oxford). The [Courtauld Institute of Art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Courtauld_Institute_of_Art" \o "Courtauld Institute of Art) is a leading centre for the teaching of the [history of art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_art). Important art galleries in the United Kingdom include the [National Gallery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Gallery), [National Portrait Gallery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Portrait_Gallery_(London)), [Tate Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tate_Britain) and [Tate Modern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tate_Modern) (the most-visited modern art gallery in the world, with around 4.7 million visitors per year).[[435]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-446)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Cinema)**Cinema**

*Main article:*[*Cinema of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alfred_Hitchcock_NYWTSm.jpg)

Film director [Alfred Hitchcock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock)

The United Kingdom has had a considerable influence on the history of the cinema. The British directors [Alfred Hitchcock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock), whose film [*Vertigo*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertigo_(film)) is considered by some critics as the [best film of all time](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_films_considered_the_best),[[436]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-bbc-447) and [David Lean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Lean) are among the most critically acclaimed of all-time.[[437]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-448) Other important directors including [Charlie Chaplin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Chaplin),[[438]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-449) [Michael Powell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Powell),[[439]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-450) [Carol Reed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carol_Reed)[[440]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-451) and [Ridley Scott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ridley_Scott).[[441]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-452)Many British actors have achieved international fame and critical success, including: [Julie Andrews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Andrews),[[442]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-453) [Richard Burton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Burton),[[443]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-454) [Michael Caine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Caine),[[444]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-455) Charlie Chaplin,[[445]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-456) [Sean Connery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean_Connery),[[446]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-457) [Vivien Leigh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivien_Leigh),[[447]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-458) [David Niven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Niven),[[448]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-459) [Laurence Olivier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence_Olivier),[[449]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-460) [Peter Sellers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Sellers),[[450]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-461) [Kate Winslet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_Winslet),[[451]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-462) [Anthony Hopkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Hopkins),[[452]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-463) and [Daniel Day-Lewis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Day-Lewis).[[453]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-464) Some of the most commercially successful films of all time have been produced in the United Kingdom, including the two [highest-grossing film franchises](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_highest-grossing_film_series) ([*Harry Potter*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter_(film_series)) and [*James Bond*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bond_(film_series))).[[454]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-465) [Ealing Studios](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ealing_Studios" \o "Ealing Studios) has a claim to being the oldest continuously working film studio in the world.[[455]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-466)

Despite a history of important and successful productions, the industry has often been characterised by a debate about its identity and the level of American and European influence. British producers are active in [international co-productions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_co-productions) and British actors, directors and crew feature regularly in American films. Many successful Hollywood films have been based on British people,[stories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_literature) or events, including [*Titanic*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titanic_(1997_film)), [*The Lord of the Rings*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lord_of_the_Rings_film_trilogy), [*Pirates of the Caribbean*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirates_of_the_Caribbean_films).

In 2009, British films grossed around $2 billion worldwide and achieved a market share of around 7% globally and 17% in the United Kingdom.[[456]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-statistics-467) UK box-office takings totalled £944 million in 2009, with around 173 million admissions.[[456]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-statistics-467) The [British Film Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Film_Institute) has produced a poll ranking of what it considers to be the 100 greatest British films of all time, the [BFI Top 100 British films](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BFI_Top_100_British_films).[[457]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-468) The annual [British Academy Film Awards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Academy_Film_Awards) are hosted by the [British Academy of Film and Television Arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Academy_of_Film_and_Television_Arts).[[458]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-469)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Media)**Media**

*Main article:*[*Media of the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_of_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bbc_broadcasting_house_front.jpg)

[Broadcasting House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadcasting_House) in London, headquarters of the[BBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC), the oldest and largest broadcaster in the world.[[459]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-MediaNewsline-470)[[460]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ProspectMag-471)[[461]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-AboutBBC-472)

The [BBC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Broadcasting_Corporation), founded in 1922, is the UK's publicly funded radio, television and Internet broadcasting corporation, and is the oldest and largest broadcaster in the world.[[459]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-MediaNewsline-470)[[460]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-ProspectMag-471)[[461]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-AboutBBC-472) It operates numerous television and radio stations in the UK and abroad and its domestic services are funded by the [television licence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television_licensing_in_the_United_Kingdom).[[462]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-autogenerated1-473)[[463]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-474) Other major players in the UK media include [ITV plc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ITV_plc), which operates 11 of the 15 regional television broadcasters that make up the [ITV Network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ITV_(TV_network)),[[464]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-475) and [News Corporation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_Corporation), which owns a number of national newspapers through [News International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_International) such as the most popular [tabloid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabloid_(newspaper_format)) [*The Sun*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sun_(United_Kingdom)) and the longest-established daily "[broadsheet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadsheet)" [*The Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times),[[465]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-476) as well as holding a large stake in satellite broadcaster [British Sky Broadcasting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Sky_Broadcasting).[[466]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-477) London dominates the media sector in the UK: national newspapers and television and radio are largely based there, although Manchester is also a significant national media centre. Edinburgh and Glasgow, and Cardiff, are important centres of newspaper and broadcasting production in Scotland and Wales respectively.[[467]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-478) The UK publishing sector, including books, directories and databases, journals, magazines and business media, newspapers and news agencies, has a combined turnover of around £20 billion and employs around 167,000 people.[[468]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-479)

In 2009, it was estimated that individuals viewed a mean of 3.75 hours of television per day and 2.81 hours of radio. In that year the main BBC [public service broadcasting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_service_broadcasting_in_the_United_Kingdom) channels accounted for an estimated 28.4% of all television viewing; the three main independent channels accounted for 29.5% and the increasingly important other satellite and digital channels for the remaining 42.1%.[[469]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-480) Sales of newspapers have fallen since the 1970s and in 2009 42% of people reported reading a daily national newspaper.[[470]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-481) In 2010 82.5% of the UK population were Internet users, the highest proportion amongst the 20 countries with the largest total number of users in that year.[[471]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-482)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Philosophy)**Philosophy**

*Main article:*[*British philosophy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_philosophy)

The United Kingdom is famous for the tradition of 'British Empiricism', a branch of the philosophy of knowledge that states that only knowledge verified by experience is valid, and 'Scottish Philosophy', sometimes referred to as the '[Scottish School of Common Sense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_School_of_Common_Sense)'.[[472]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-483) The most famous philosophers of British Empiricism are [John Locke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Locke), [George Berkeley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Berkeley) and [David Hume](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume); while[Dugald Stewart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dugald_Stewart), [Thomas Reid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Reid) and [William Hamilton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_William_Hamilton,_9th_Baronet) were major exponents of the Scottish "common sense" school. Two Britons are also notable for a theory of moral philosophy [utilitarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism), first used by [Jeremy Bentham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Bentham) and later by [John Stuart Mill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stuart_Mill) in his short work [*Utilitarianism*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism_(book)).[[473]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-484)[[474]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-485) Other eminent philosophers from the UK and the unions and countries that preceded it include [Duns Scotus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duns_Scotus), [John Lilburne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lilburne), [Mary Wollstonecraft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Wollstonecraft), [Sir Francis Bacon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Francis_Bacon), [Adam Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Smith), [Thomas Hobbes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes), [William of Ockham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Ockham), [Bertrand Russell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_Russell) and [A.J. "Freddie" Ayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Jules_Ayer). Foreign-born philosophers who settled in the UK include [Isaiah Berlin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_Berlin), [Karl Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx), [Karl Popper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Popper) and[Ludwig Wittgenstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Wittgenstein).

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Sport)**Sport**

*Main article:*[*Sport in the United Kingdom*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport_in_the_United_Kingdom)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wembley_Stadium,_illuminated.jpg)

[Wembley Stadium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wembley_Stadium), London, home of the [England national football team](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_national_football_team), is one of the most expensive stadia ever built.[[475]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-Daily_Mail_-_stadium_ready-486)

Major sports, including [association football](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_football), [tennis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis), [rugby union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union), [rugby league](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_league), [golf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golf), [boxing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boxing), [rowing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rowing_(sport)) and [cricket](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket), originated or were substantially developed in the UK and the states that preceded it. With the rules and codes of many modern sports invented and codified in late 19th-century [Victorian Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_Britain), in 2012, the President of the IOC, [Jacques Rogge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Rogge), stated; "This great, sports-loving country is widely recognized as the birthplace of modern sport. It was here that the concepts of sportsmanship and fair play were first codified into clear rules and regulations. It was here that sport was included as an educational tool in the school curriculum".[[476]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-487)[[477]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-488)

In most international competitions, separate teams represent England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland usually field a single team representing all of Ireland, with notable exceptions being association football and the [Commonwealth Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth_Games). In sporting contexts, the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish / Northern Irish teams are often referred to collectively as the [Home Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_Nations). There are some sports in which a single team represents the whole of United Kingdom, including the Olympics, where the UK is represented by the [Great Britain team](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain_at_the_Olympics). The [1908](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1908_Summer_Olympics), [1948](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Summer_Olympics) and [2012](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Summer_Olympics) Summer Olympics were held in London, making it the first city to host the games three times. Britain has participated in every modern Olympic Games to date and is third in the [medal count](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-time_Olympic_Games_medal_table).

A 2003 poll found that football is the most popular [sport in the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport_in_the_United_Kingdom).[[478]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-sports_poll-489) England is recognised by [FIFA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIFA) as the birthplace of club football, and [The Football Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Football_Association) is the oldest of its kind, with the [rules](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_the_Game_(association_football)) of football first drafted in 1863 by [Ebenezer Cobb Morley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebenezer_Cobb_Morley).[[479]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-490)[[480]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-491) Each of the Home Nations has its own football association, national team and [league system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_system). The English top division, the [Premier League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premier_League), is the most watched football league in the world.[[481]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-492) The first-ever international football match was contested by [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_national_football_team) and[Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland_national_football_team) on 30 November 1872.[[482]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-BBC_article-493) England, Scotland, [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales_national_football_team) and [Northern Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_national_football_team) compete as separate countries in international competitions.[[483]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-494) A [Great Britain Olympic football team](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain_Olympic_football_team) was assembled for the first time to compete in the [London 2012 Olympic Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_2012_Olympic_Games). However, the [Scottish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Football_Association), [Welsh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Football_Association_of_Wales) and [Northern Irish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Football_Association) football associations declined to participate, fearing that it would undermine their independent status – a fear confirmed by FIFA president Sepp Blatter.[[484]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-495)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Inside_the_Millennium_Stadium,_Cardiff.jpg)

The [Millennium Stadium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Stadium), [Cardiff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cardiff), opened for the [1999 Rugby World Cup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Rugby_World_Cup).

In 2003, [rugby union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union) was ranked the second most popular sport in the UK.[[478]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-sports_poll-489) The sport was created in [Rugby School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_School), Warwickshire, and the [first rugby international](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1871_England_versus_Scotland_rugby_union_match) took place on 27 March 1871 between [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_national_rugby_union_team) and [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland_national_rugby_union_team).[[485]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-496)[[486]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-497) England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France and Italy compete in the [Six Nations Championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Nations_Championship); the premier international tournament in the northern hemisphere. [Sport governing bodies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport_governing_body) in [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union_in_England), [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union_in_Scotland), [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union_in_Wales) and [Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union_in_Ireland) organise and regulate the game separately.[[487]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-498) If any of the British teams or the Irish team beat the other three in a tournament, then it is awarded the [Triple Crown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triple_Crown_(rugby_union)).[[488]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-499)

[Cricket](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket) was invented in England, and its [laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_cricket) were established by [Marylebone Cricket Club](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marylebone_Cricket_Club) in 1788.[[489]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-500) The [England cricket team](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_cricket_team), controlled by the [England and Wales Cricket Board](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_and_Wales_Cricket_Board),[[490]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-501)is the only national team in the UK with [Test status](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Test_cricket). Team members are drawn from the main county sides, and include both English and Welsh players. Cricket is distinct from football and rugby where Wales and England field separate national teams, although Wales had fielded its own team in the past. [Irish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport_in_Ireland) and [Scottish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket_in_Scotland) players have played for England because neither[Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland_national_cricket_team) nor [Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_cricket_team) have Test status and have only recently started to play in [One Day Internationals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Day_International).[[491]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-502)[[492]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-503) Scotland, England (and Wales), and Ireland (including Northern Ireland) have competed at the [Cricket World Cup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket_World_Cup), with England reaching the finals on three occasions. There is a professional [league championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Championship) in which clubs representing 17 English counties and 1 Welsh county compete.[[493]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-504)

[Rugby league](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_league) originated in Huddersfield and is generally played in [Northern England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_England).[[494]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-505) A single 'Great Britain Lions' team had competed in the [Rugby League World Cup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_League_World_Cup) and Test match games, but this changed in 2008 when [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_national_rugby_league_team), [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland_national_rugby_league_team) and [Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_national_rugby_league_team) competed as separate nations.[[495]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-506) Great Britain is still being retained as the full national team for Ashes tours against Australia, New Zealand and France.[Super League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_League) is the highest level of professional rugby league in the UK and Europe. It consists of 11 teams from Northern England, 1 from London, 1 from Wales and 1 from France.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Court_1.jpg)

The [Wimbledon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Championships,_Wimbledon) Championships, the oldest [Grand Slam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Slam_(tennis)) tennis tournament, is held in [Wimbledon, London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wimbledon,_London) every June and July.

The modern game of [tennis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis) originated in Birmingham, England in the 1860s, before spreading around the world.[[496]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-507) The world's oldest tennis tournament, the [Wimbledon championships](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wimbledon_championships), first occurred in 1877, and today the event takes place over two weeks in late June and early July.[[497]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-508)

[Thoroughbred racing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thoroughbred_horse_race), which originated under [Charles II of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_II_of_England) as the "sport of kings", is popular throughout the UK with world-famous races including the [Grand National](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_National), the [Epsom Derby](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epsom_Derby), [Royal Ascot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Ascot) and the [Cheltenham National Hunt Festival](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheltenham_National_Hunt_Festival) (including the [Cheltenham Gold Cup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheltenham_Gold_Cup)). The UK has proved successful in the international sporting arena in [rowing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rowing_(sport)).

The UK is closely associated with [motorsport](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motorsport). Many teams and drivers in [Formula One](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formula_One) (F1) are based in the UK, and the country has won more [drivers'](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Formula_One_World_Drivers%27_Champions) and [constructors'](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Formula_One_World_Constructors%27_Champions) [titles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formula_One_World_Championship) than any other. The UK hosted the very first F1 Grand Prix in 1950 at [Silverstone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silverstone_Circuit), the current location of the [British Grand Prix](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Grand_Prix) held each year in July. The country also hosts legs of the [Grand Prix motorcycle racing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Prix_motorcycle_racing), [World Rally Championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Rally_Championship) and [FIA World Endurance Championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIA_World_Endurance_Championship). The premier national auto racing event is the [British Touring Car Championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Touring_Car_Championship) (BTCC). Motorcycle road racing has a long tradition with races such as the [Isle of Man TT](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isle_of_Man_TT) and the [North West 200](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_West_200).

Golf is the sixth-most popular sport, by participation, in the UK. Although [The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Royal_and_Ancient_Golf_Club_of_St_Andrews) in Scotland is the sport's home course,[[498]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-509) the world's oldest golf course is actually Musselburgh Links' Old Golf Course.[[499]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-510) In 1764, the standard 18 hole golf course was created at St Andrews when members modified the course from 22 to 18 holes.[[500]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-511) The oldest golf tournament in the world, and the first major championship in golf, [The Open Championship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Open_Championship), is played annually on the weekend of the third Friday in July.[[501]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-512)

[Snooker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snooker) is one of the UK's popular sporting exports, with the world championships held annually in [Sheffield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheffield).[[502]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-513) The modern game of [lawn tennis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis) first originated in the city of [Birmingham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham) between 1859 and 1865.[[503]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-514) [The Championships, Wimbledon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Championships,_Wimbledon) are international tennis events held in [Wimbledon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wimbledon,_London) in south London every summer and are regarded as the most prestigious event of the global tennis calendar. In Northern Ireland [Gaelic football](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaelic_football) and[hurling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurling) are popular team sports, both in terms of participation and spectating, and Irish expatriates in the UK and the US also play them.[[504]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-CJSHurl-515) [Shinty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinty" \o "Shinty) (or *camanachd*) is popular in the [Scottish Highlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Highlands).[[505]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-516)

[§](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#Symbols)**Symbols**

*Main article:*[*Symbols of the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbols_of_the_United_Kingdom,_the_Channel_Islands_and_the_Isle_of_Man)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Britannia-Statue.jpg)

The Statue of [Britannia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia) in[Plymouth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth). Britannia is a[national personification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_personification) of the UK.

The [flag of the United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom) is the [Union Flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Flag) (also referred to as the Union Jack). It was created in 1606 by the superimposition of the [Flag of England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_England) on the [Flag of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Scotland) and updated in 1801 with the addition of [Saint Patrick's Flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Patrick%27s_Flag). Wales is not represented in the Union Flag, as Wales had been conquered and annexed to England prior to the formation of the United Kingdom. The possibility of redesigning the Union Flag to include representation of Wales has not been completely ruled out.[[506]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-517) The [national anthem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_anthem) of the United Kingdom is "[God Save the King](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_Save_the_Queen)", with "King" replaced with "Queen" in the lyrics whenever the monarch is a woman.

[Britannia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia) is a [national personification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_personification) of the United Kingdom, originating from [Roman Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Britain).[[507]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-518) Britannia is symbolised as a young woman with brown or golden hair, wearing a [Corinthian helmet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinthian_helmet)and white robes. She holds [Poseidon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poseidon)'s three-pronged trident and a shield, bearing the Union Flag. Sometimes she is depicted as riding on the back of a lion. Since the height of the British Empire in the late 19th century, Britannia has often been associated with British maritime dominance, as in the patriotic song "[Rule, Britannia!](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule,_Britannia!)". Up until 2008, the lion symbol was depicted behind Britannia on the [British fifty pence coin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifty_pence_(British_decimal_coin)) and on the back of the [British ten pence coin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_pence_(British_decimal_coin)). It is also used as a symbol on the non-ceremonial flag of the British Army. The [bulldog](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulldog) is sometimes used as a symbol of the United Kingdom and has been associated with Winston Churchill's defiance of Nazi Germany.[[508]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom#cite_note-519)