

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is situated on the British Isles. The British Isles, lying to the north-west of Europe, consist of two large islands – Great Britain and Ireland and about 5 thousand small islands. Their total area is over 244,000 square kilometres. The United Kingdom is one of the world's smaller countries. Its population is over 57 million people. About 80 percent of the population is urban.

The United Kingdom is made up of four countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Their capitals are: London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast. Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales and does not include Northern Ireland. But in everyday speech Great Britain is used in the meaning of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The capital of the UK is London. The British Isles are separated from the Continent by the North Sea and the British Channel. The western coast of Great Britain is washed by the Atlantic Ocean and the Irish Sea.

The surface of the British Isles varies very much. The north of Scotland is mountainous and is called the Highlands. The South, which has beautiful valleys and plains, is called the Lowlands. The north and west of England are mountainous, but the eastern, central and south-eastern parts of England are vast plain. Mountains are not very high. Ben Nevis in Scotland is the highest mountain (1343m.). There are a lots of rivers in Great Britain, but they are not very long. The Severn is the longest river, while the Thames is the deepest and the most important one. The mountains, the Atlantic Ocean and warm waters of the Gulf Stream influence the climate of the British Isles. It is mild the whole year round.

The UK is a highly developed industrial country. It produces and exports machinery, iron and steel products, electronics, chemicals and textile, aircraft and navigation equipment. One of the chief industries of the country is shipbuilding.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a constitutional monarchy. It means that Great Britain is governed by the Parliament and the Queen is the Head of the state. The legislative power in the country is exercised by the Houses of Parliament. The British Parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The House of Lords has more than 1000 members (hereditary and life peers and peeresses), although only 250 of them take an active part in the work of the House. The House of Commons is made up of 650 elected members, known as Members of Parliament (MP). It is the real governing body of the UK. The Executive power is exercised by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. The government is usually formed by the political party which is supported by the majority in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister is the majority party leader and is appointed by the Queen. The Prime Minister chooses a team of ministers: twenty of them are in the Cabinet. The second largest party becomes the official opposition with its own leader and the Shadow Cabinet. Two leading parties in Great Britain are the Conservative Party (the Tories, it was formed in 1867) and the Labour Party (formed in 1900). There

is no written constitution in Britain, only precedents and traditions.

There are 44 universities in Britain. They are divided into three types:

- 1) The old established universities, such as Oxford (founded in 1249), Cambridge and Edinburgh. Oxford and Cambridge together are often called Oxbridge.

- 2) The 19th – century universities such as London and Manchester.

New universities established after World War 2, such as Essex, Lancaster and Viter.