

Making Laws in Britain

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A proposal for a new law is called a bill. Bills may be introduced in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords by any member. In practice most bills are proposed by the Government. After being discussed and perhaps changed, the bill is sent to the other House to go through the same process. When both Houses agree on a text, the bill is sent to the Queen for her signature (or "Royal Assent") at which point it becomes an Act of Parliament. A bill which has been passed by the House of Commons is almost certain to become law. About fifty bills become Acts each year. The House of Lords can revise bills but it can not stop them from becoming Acts; it can only delay the process. The Royal Assent is a formality: no sovereign has refused a bill since 1707.

The Legal System

British law comes from two main sources: laws made in Parliament and Common Law, which is based on previous judgments and customs. Just as there is no written constitution, so Britain has no criminal code or civil code and the interpretation of the law is based on what has happened in the past. The laws which are made in Parliament are interpreted by the courts, but changes in the law itself are made in Parliament.

The most common type of law court in Britain is the magistrates' court. There are 700 magistrates' courts and about 30 000 magistrates.

More serious criminal cases then go to the crown Court, which has 90 branches in different towns and cities. Civil cases (for example, divorce or bankruptcy cases) are dealt with in County courts. Appeals are heard by higher courts. For example, appeals from magistrates' courts are heard in the Crown Court, unless they are appeals on points of law. The highest court of appeal in England and Wales is the House of Lords. (Scotland has its own High Court in Edinburgh, which hears all appeals from Scottish courts). Certain cases may be referred to the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg.

People in Law Cases

Solicitors

There are about 50 000 solicitors in Great Britain, a number of which is rapidly increasing. They are found in every town, where they deal with all the day-to-day work of preparing legal documents for buying and selling houses, making wills, etc. Solicitors also work on court cases for their clients, prepare cases for barristers to present in the higher courts, and may represent their client in a magistrates' court.

Barristers

There about 500 barristers who defend or prosecute in the higher courts. Although solicitors and barristers work together on cases, barristers specialize in representing clients in court and the training for two types of lawyer is quite separate.

In court, barristers wear wigs and gowns in keeping with the extreme formality of the proceedings. The highest level of barristers has the little QC (Queen's Counsel).

Judges and Magistrates

There are few hundred judges, trained as barristers, who preside in more serious cases. There is no separate training for judges.

There are about 30 000 magistrates (Justices of the Peace, or JPs), who judge cases in the lower courts. They are usually unpaid and have no formal legal qualifications but they are respectable and honored people.

Jury

A jury consists of twelve people ("jurors"), who are ordinary people chosen at random from the Electoral Register (the list of people who can vote in elections). The jury listens to the evidence given in court in certain criminal cases and decides whether the defendant is guilty or innocent. If the person is found guilty, the punishment is passed by the presiding judge. Juries are rarely use din civil cases. The article was produced by the member of masterpapers.com. Sharon White is a senior writer and writers consultant at term papers. Get some useful tips for thesis and buy term papers.