

The Executive

1. **The executive:** one of the three ‘powers’ or ‘branches’ of the system of government. The executive’s prime responsibility is to use the power of the state to govern the country by executing the laws passed by the legislature, or by taking actions sanctioned in other ways by the representative assembly, and by supporting the judiciary in enforcing the laws. **The executive in Britain is very often referred to as the government.**

The functions or role of the executive :

- A support for the other branches of government
- A democratic, representative function.
- Responsive government : the government needs to respond to the will of the people as expressed in the various groups and institutions which link the people and the executive.
- To govern responsibly : although the executive branch has to be responsive and
- representative in a liberal democracy, it must also run the country and do so in a responsible or sensible way
- An administrative role : Just as a business has to be efficient in its operations, so the government should attempt to run the country, or administer it, as well as possible according to the rules of good government

1.1 The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister seems, on balance, to control more resources than his potential rivals in the core executive. The resources (or powers) of the Prime Minister are not clearly defined because of the unwritten nature of the British constitution, but the main points can be summarized as follows :

- ❖ **The first minister, or head of the government :**
- ❖ **The chairman of the Cabinet :** The Prime Minister is head of a Cabinet of ministers and has to call a meeting of the Cabinet roughly once a week; he or she can decide on the precise timing of the meetings and their length and format.
- ❖ **The first minister, or head of the government :** The Prime Minister is the leading figure in the government.
- ❖ **The leader of the government team**

❖ **The Prime Minister appoints the members of the Cabinet**, and all government

jobs are approved by him or her. The Prime Minister can ‘reshuffle’ the Cabinet from time to time, moving ministers from department to department, getting rid of unsuccessful or elderly ministers and bringing in talented newcomers .

❖ **The minister for the civil service** : The Prime Minister may also reorganize the Civil Service, reform and restructure it and change its overall complexion and attitude.

❖ **The holder of great powers of patronage** : A large number of other appointments to what can broadly be called the Establishment are at the disposal of the Prime Minister: positions in the Church of England, at certain universities and in the armed forces. Again, the Prime Minister will generally follow expert advice on these appointments.

❖ **Coordinator of government policy and ideology** : Working with individual ministers, and through the Cabinet, the Prime Minister coordinates government policy.

❖ **The leader of the major political party in the House of Commons**

❖ **The chief spokesman for the party and the government in Parliament**

1.1.1 The Prime Minister’s Office : To support the Prime Minister in his role, there is a Prime Minister’s Office, centred on 10 Downing Street, which is both the Prime Minister’s home and his office.

1.2 The Cabinet: the chief ministers who work with the Prime Minister (who is also a member of the Cabinet) in running the country. ‘The Cabinet’ also describes the regular meetings of these members of the government. The Cabinet meets roughly once a week while Parliament is in session. Meetings are called by the Prime Minister and it is up to him or her when these meetings take place. Some Prime Ministers have used the Cabinet more frequently than others.

Brown’s first Cabinet consisted of 23 members of the government, with four more junior ministers listed as also attending; the precise number varies from time to time but it is generally about that size, or a little larger. Blair’s last Cabinet had also been 23-strong, with one additional attender. Cabinet ministers are all members of the Commons or Lords, mainly the former. Every Cabinet member since 1945 has been a member of the party which has won the previous general election – that is to say, there have been no coalition governments since then. The Prime Minister will always be a member of the Cabinet, and acts as the chairman of the meeting.

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The great constitutional convention, or rule, which concerns the Cabinet says that all the members of the Cabinet are together (or collectively) responsible for all the actions of the government. In fact this is now extended to collective ministerial responsibility, which involves all the junior ministers outside the Cabinet too.