



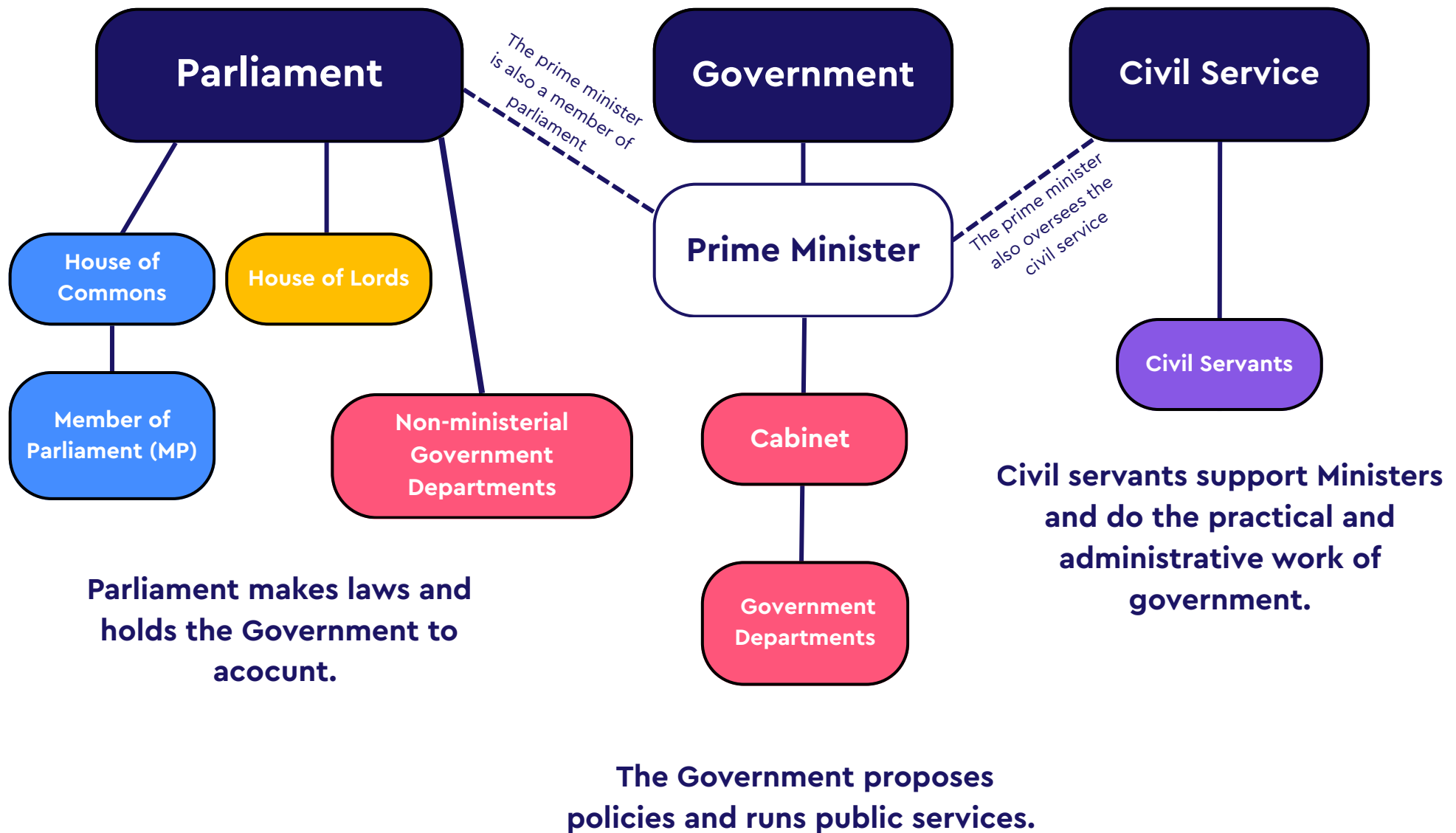
NATIONAL
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Bitesize Guide

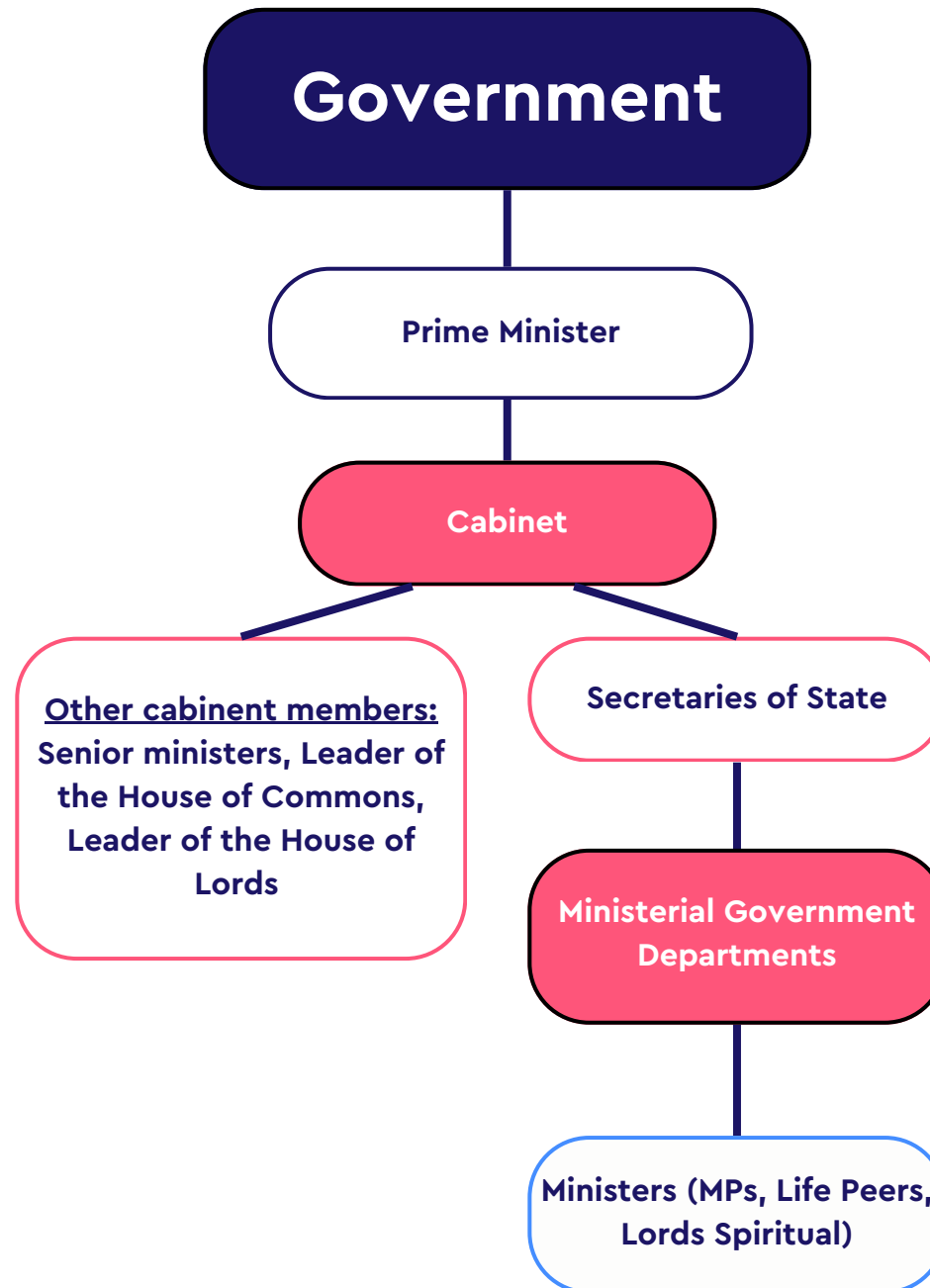
**Roles of government
officials -
who's running the
country?**



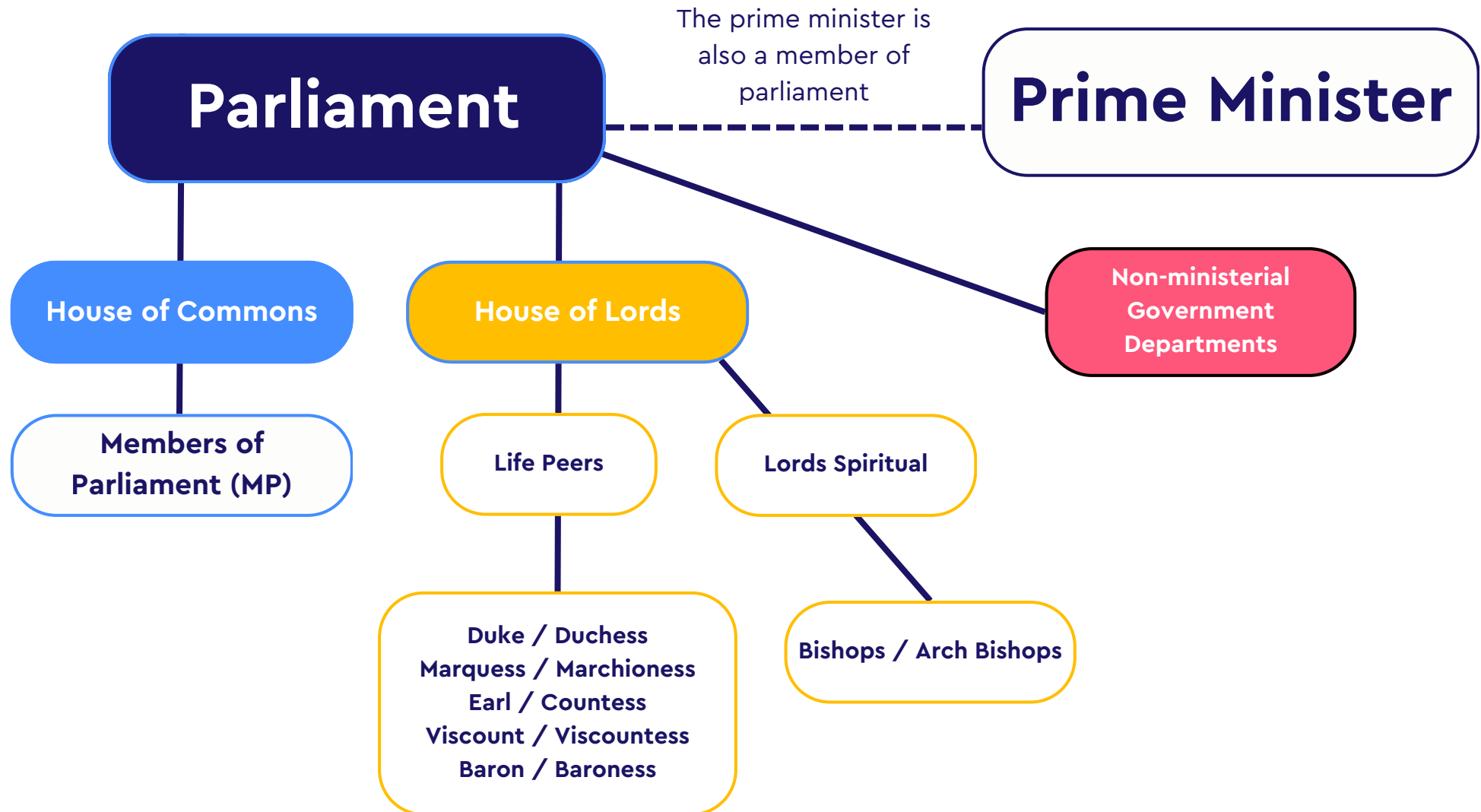
Structure of UK State



Detailed Structure of UK Government



Detailed Structure of UK Parliament



Prime Minister

What does a prime minister do?

The prime minister is the leader of the UK Government.

Their job is to:

- Lead the government.
- Choose Secretaries of State and government ministers.
- Chair meetings with senior ministers (called the Cabinet).
- Make important decisions about the country.
- Oversee the Civil Service, which helps run the government.
- Represent the UK at home and around the world.
- Lead their political party.

The prime minister is responsible for the decisions the government makes. They must answer to their cabinet, their political party, parliament and the people of the UK.

The prime minister helps decide what the government will do. They make important decisions about:

- schools
- hospitals
- transport
- the economy
- the environment
- laws
- defence
- public services



These decisions affect everyone, including children and young people.

How is a prime minister normally chosen?

At least every five years, people vote in a general election. They do not vote directly for the prime minister.

The party with the most members of parliament will become the party leading the UK Government so long as they have more than 326 members of parliament, which are sometimes called 'seats' (because an MP 'sits' in parliament).

The leader of that party usually becomes the prime minister. If no political party gets 326 or more seats in parliament, then the party that has the greatest number of seats gets to ask one or more of the other political parties if they want to join together to create a **Coalition Government**. In a coalition government the political parties that have joined together to create the government will share important government jobs between them, but the biggest party's leader will still get to be the prime minister, and the next biggest party in the coalition will choose a deputy prime minister.

Sometimes, a prime minister will leave their job before a general election. The party that currently holds the most seats in the House of Commons will then need to go through a process of electing a new leader of their party to be prime minister.

There is no public election to choose a new prime minister.

The Cabinet, Government Departments, and people who work in them

The Cabinet

The cabinet is the team of 20 or so most senior members of the government who are chosen by the prime minister to lead on specific policy areas such as health, transport, foreign affairs or defence.

Every week during Parliament, members of the cabinet meet to discuss the most important issues for the government.

Secretary of State

These are members of the prime minister's cabinet that are in charge of government departments, like the Department for Education, the Home Office, and the Department of Health and Social Care.

Government Departments

Departments and their agencies are responsible for writing policy and putting government policy into practice. The UK government is made up of a number of ministerial departments and non-ministerial departments.

Ministerial departments are led by secretaries of state. They will have a team of ministers, who are MPs in the House of Commons, who each take responsibility for parts of the work done in the department.

Very occasionally, a ministerial department is led by a secretary of state from the House of Lords rather than the House of Commons. They will do exactly the same job as the secretary of state. Non-ministerial departments are headed by senior civil servants and not ministers.

Some departments, like the Ministry of Defence, cover the whole of the UK. Others, such as the Department for Education don't. This is because some aspects of government are devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, meaning that their local governments are responsible for managing those areas.

Non-ministerial departments are overseen by Parliament. This is to make sure that they can make rules and decisions based on what the law says and on their knowledge of a particular topic, and not based on what a political party wants.

Minister

Most ministers are MPs in the House of Commons, who also have roles in government departments. Some ministers sit the House of Lords. They are appointed by the prime minister and are responsible for a specific area of government policy. They are responsible for the actions, successes and failures of their part of the department.

Ministers speak on behalf of the government during parliamentary debates and must answer questions put to them by other MPs or members of the House of Lords.

Civil Service

The Civil Service does the practical and administrative work of government. Overall responsibility sits with the Prime Minister and Cabinet, while day-to-day management is carried out by senior civil servants.

Civil Servant

A civil servant is someone who works for the Civil Service. They are not elected by the UK public, but rather apply for their jobs just like everyone else.

Around half of all civil servants provide services direct to the public, including:

- paying benefits and pensions
- running employment services
- staffing prisons
- collect information and data about who lives in the UK
- issuing driving licences



The Opposition

The term 'opposition' can refer to the parliamentary opposition: all the political parties in parliament that are not currently in government. It can also refer to the official opposition, which generally only includes the second largest party in the House of Commons, whose members sit to the left of the Speaker when MPs meet.

The official opposition's main job is to challenge government policy by asking questions, sitting in committees, and also chairing select committees, which check and report on the different things that the government does.

Leader of the Opposition

The Leader of the Opposition is the leader of the political party in Parliament that has formed the Official Opposition.

The Shadow Cabinet is the team of senior spokespeople chosen by the Leader of the Opposition to mirror the Cabinet in Government. Each member of the shadow cabinet is appointed to lead on a specific policy area for their party and to question and challenge their counterpart in the Cabinet.

In this way the Official Opposition seeks to show the public what they would do if they received enough votes at the next general election to become the new government.

Parliament

The parliament of the UK is the part of the government where laws are made. It is made up of two parts.

The House of Commons

The House of Commons consists of 650 Members of Parliament (MPs). The members of the Commons are voted for by the public.

The government and its opposition meet to debate the big political issues of the day and discuss proposals for new laws. The House of Commons is responsible for making decisions about money, like changing taxes.

The House of Lords

There are about 780 members of the House of Lords, and they're not currently voted for by the public.

Most members are appointed because of their experience, expertise or public service. Some members are bishops from the Church of England.

The House of Lords debates new laws proposed by MPs and makes suggestions about changes to those laws.

Member of Parliament (MP).

An MP is the person elected by all those who live in a particular area, or constituency, to represent them in the House of Commons. Every area of the UK elects a local MP so that every area is represented when decisions taken at Parliament affect them.

MPs work both at the UK Parliament and in their local constituencies.

In Parliament, MPs are expected to carry out the work of the House of Commons:

- Legislation and taxation – examining and approving new laws or taxes
- Scrutiny – holding the government to account for its actions
- Debating – where competing viewpoints can be expressed and the concerns of constituents can be raised

Although each MP is sent to represent the views of one local area, at Parliament they must also consider how to support the best interests of the entire nation.



Member of Parliament (MP) cont.

Apart from formal parliamentary events, MPs can attend private meetings during each week at Parliament. These may be meetings with representatives from industry, trade unions, campaigners, and lobbyists. They may also attend party meetings and meetings arranged by All-Party Parliamentary Groups.

In their constituency, MPs can meet with local businesses and community groups, attend local events and visit schools, hospitals or job centres to see for themselves how services are being delivered. They also meet with members of the public living in the area to hear about problems they may need to resolve.

