

2.2 Subordinate legislation and members of UK parliament

2.2a Subordinate legislation

Subordinate legislation is legislation made by a person or body to whom Parliament has given the power to make laws. There are three main forms of subordinate legislation: statutory instruments, by-laws and orders in council. This type of legislation is issued for a number of reasons, including insufficiency of Parliamentary time for the volume and detail of the new laws now needed; technical subject matter, where it is felt that the laws would be better produced by those with detailed technical expertise; and the need for local knowledge and flexibility. Subordinate legislation is controlled by means of consultation, publication and supervision by the UK Parliament. It is very common but it does come under some criticism because of the lack of democratic involvement, the difficulties in challenging it and the sheer volume of law that is now created in this way.

2.2b Members of the UK Parliament

Before we look at what an MP does, have a go at this activity.

Activity 1: The work of a Member of the UK Parliament

0 hours 10 minutes

Take a few moments to think about what you have read so far in Section 3. UK citizens who are over 18 are able to vote in elections for their MP. MPs sit (i.e. work) in the House of Commons. What do you think an MP does? How might they be involved in the law-making process?

Discussion

From what we have just learnt about law making, you may have identified that MPs would be involved in the law-making process due to their work in the House of Commons. You may also have had contact with your local MP or you may have seen reports on their work in your local newspaper.

End of discussion

People wishing to become an MP must be over 18 years of age and a UK citizen, or a citizen of a Commonwealth country or the Republic of Ireland. Candidates must be nominated by ten Parliamentary electors of the constituency in which they wish to stand. Authorisation is required to stand for a specific party, such as one of the main political parties in the UK, otherwise candidates will be described as independent or have no description.

In order to encourage only serious candidates to stand, a £500 deposit is required when submitting the nomination papers. The deposit is returned if the candidate receives over five per cent of the total votes cast.

Certain people are disqualified from standing as an MP:

- convicted prisoners serving a sentence of over 12 months
- people found guilty of certain electoral offences
- peers who sit and are eligible to vote in the House of Lords
- bishops (known as the Lords Spiritual) who are entitled to sit and vote in the House of Lords.

UK citizens elect MPs to represent their interests and concerns in the House of Commons. MPs are involved in considering and proposing new laws and they are able to use their position to ask government ministers questions about current issues. MPs split their time between working in Parliament itself, working in the constituency that elected them and working for their political party.

When the UK Parliament is sitting, MPs generally spend their time working in the House of Commons. This may include raising issues affecting their constituents, attending debates and voting on new laws. Most MPs are also members of committees, which look at issues in detail, ranging from government policy and new laws, to wider topics like human rights.

In their constituency, MPs often hold a 'surgery' in their office, where local people can come along to discuss any matters that concern them. MPs also attend functions, visit schools and businesses, and generally try to meet as many local people as possible. This helps MPs to be aware of issues that matter to their constituents.