

What debaters need to know about the world

In this chapter, we're going to be learning some basic facts all debaters need to know about how the UK is run and about how the economy works.

One of the (many, many) good things about debating is that it not only teaches you how to argue; it also teaches you about the world. You cannot succeed in debating without being well informed about how the world works, and what is happening in it.

We will talk more in Chapter 14 about ways in which you can keep your current affairs information up to date. In this chapter, though, we'll learn about two key areas of knowledge you need to master as a debater, both of which apply to a great many debates:

- **How the UK is run**
- **How the economy works**

How the UK is run

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If you were watching a football match with someone, and they kept asking you why the players didn't pick up the ball and run with it, you probably wouldn't much respect their opinion on how the teams should play. Knowing the rules of a game helps you to follow it. Similarly, knowing the rules of how Britain is run helps you to have an informed opinion on how it could be run better.

The rules for running a country are known as its **constitution**.

What is the the UK constitution?

The first thing to know about the British constitution is that it doesn't exist.

Other countries, such as the United States, have a written constitution. There are often disagreements about what that written constitution really means, but at least there is one document to which everyone can refer. This has never happened in the UK (and one possible debate is 'This house would introduce a written constitution for the UK'). Instead, the constitution has been determined partly by custom and practice - what everyone has always done and what they're expected to carry on doing - and partly through various documents and by occasional laws, passed as and when they are needed, in no very systematic fashion. The advantage of the unwritten constitution is that it can be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of a changing world; the disadvantage is that difficult situations can arise where no one knows what to do.

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