



How powerful is the Queen of England?

At first sight it would seem that Queen Elizabeth II can do anything she likes in her country with a simple wave of her royal hand. She can suspend or recall Parliament, refuse to sign a bill of Parliament to make it law, even declare war on another country! However, these are purely notional powers. She suspends and recalls Parliament only at the beginning and end of the Parliamentary year, and any declaration of war is made by the Prime Minister, in her name. The last monarch to refuse to sign a bill was Queen Anne in 1708. It was a very minor bill, but it made Parliament worried and since then no monarch has refused to sign one. If Elizabeth II ever did refuse, it would provoke a constitutional crisis.

She does have one advantage, however. The monarch is considered to be above the law and therefore cannot be prosecuted, either for a criminal or a civil offence. That said, if the Queen did something terrible, she would be forced to abdicate and then she could be prosecuted. In any case, it is unlikely that the Queen would ever do anything really terrible.

Although the Queen does not have much real power, she has been on the throne since 1952 and appointed 13 Prime Ministers in the United Kingdom alone, not to mention the 31 other countries in which she remains head of state, in that time. Tony Blair and David Cameron were not even born when she became Queen.

It is customary for the Prime Minister to meet the Queen once a week whenever possible to discuss affairs of state. Given her long experience, the Queen can advise and warn, and a wise Prime Minister will listen.

Will the Queen ever abdicate? Probably not. Many think she should make Prince William her heir, but that is not possible. Constitutionally, the next in line is always the eldest child, so one day Charles will succeed her. William will have to wait.