



SUCCESSION



The Queen with The Prince of Wales, the heir apparent to the Throne, at the State Opening of Parliament in 1996. The title to the Crown is derived partly from statute and partly from common law. Despite interruptions in the direct line of succession which have occurred, the hereditary principle has always been preserved
David Secombe, © Royal Collection



The Prince of Wales shares a joke with his mother, The Queen, during his speech at a reception held in his honour at Buckingham Palace, London, on the eve of his 50th birthday. Five hundred guests attended the event
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Succession

The basis for the succession was determined in the constitutional developments of the 17th century, which culminated in the [Bill of Rights](#) (1689) and the [Act of Settlement](#) (1701). When [James II](#) fled the country in 1688, Parliament held that he had 'abdicated the government' and that the throne was vacant. The throne was then offered, not to James's young son, but to his daughter [Mary](#) and her husband William of Orange, as joint rulers. It therefore came to be established not only that the Sovereign rules through Parliament, but that the succession to the throne can be regulated by Parliament, and that a Sovereign can be deprived of his title through misgovernment.

The succession to the throne is regulated not only through descent, but also by statute; the Act of Settlement confirmed that it was for Parliament to determine the title to the throne. The Act laid down that only Protestant descendants of Princess Sophia - the Electress of Hanover and granddaughter of James I - are eligible to succeed. Subsequent Acts have confirmed this.

Parliament, under the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement, also laid down various conditions which the Sovereign must meet. A Roman Catholic is specifically excluded from succession to the throne; nor may the Sovereign marry a Roman Catholic. The Sovereign must, in addition, be in communion with the Church of England and must swear to preserve the established Church of England and the established Church of Scotland. The Sovereign must also promise to uphold the Protestant succession.

Succession to the throne is based on the principle of male primogeniture, according to which male heirs take precedence over daughters and the right of succession belongs to the eldest son. Daughters take precedence over the Sovereign's brothers. When a daughter succeeds, she becomes Queen Regnant and has the same powers as a king. Where a Sovereign has no children, the succession then lies with the Sovereign's eldest surviving brother and his children (sons, then daughters), as when [William IV](#) was succeeded by his niece [Victoria](#). If a Sovereign has no brothers, or if those brothers have no children, then the line of succession passes to the Sovereign's sister(s) in age order, as when [Edward VI](#) was succeeded by his half-sisters [Mary](#) and [Elizabeth](#).

Current order of succession to the throne:



The Queen (then Princess Elizabeth)
with her son, Prince Charles at
Clarence House, 1950
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[The Prince of Wales](#) (see [Titles/Royal family](#))
Prince William of Wales
Prince Henry of Wales
[The Duke of York](#)
Princess Beatrice of York
Princess Eugenie of York
[The Earl of Wessex](#)
[The Princess Royal](#) (see [Titles/Royal family](#))
Peter Phillips