The Cabinet is an informal meeting of "such of His Majesty's Confidential Servants as are of the Privy Council" (Johnson). Until the Ministers of the Crown Act, 1937 (which, among other things, makes provision for the payment of additional salary to certain Ministers when they are members of the Cabinet) the existence of the Cabinet had not been recognised in any statute: its existence depends on a convention of the constitution. Its origin, as an informal gathering is reflected in its organisation and procedure; and, although in the last thirty or forty years a more formal system has developed, practice and procedure have varied considerably to suit particular circumstances and particular Prime Ministers.

The Cabinet has no statutory powers or functions, but consisting of the leading members of the dominant Party in the House of Commons it is the directing body of national policy. In relation to Parliament it provides a means of reconciling the principles of Ministerial responsibility and collective responsibility, under which every Minister in charge of a Department is responsible to Parliament for a particular sphere of activity and yet shares with his colleagues collective responsibility for the Government's policy as a whole.

On the development of Cabinet Government, the constitutional relationship between the King and the Cabinet and between the Cabinet and Parliament, and the formation of Cabinets, reference should made to the standard authorities, e.g. Jennings; and Anson, Vol. II(1), pp. 108-148.

For a short reference list of books, etc. about the Cabinet and the Cabinet system see Part VII(5) Annex I.

For a brief note on Cabinet Government in the United Kingdom see Part VII(5) Annex III.