KS4:
The European Commission

Part 1

What it does

Its main job is to draft new laws.

It gets its ideas from

- people who work at the Commission,
- governments of countries that are members of the European Union,
- pressure groups that want to help, for example, business, the consumer, or environmental groups like Friends of the Earth.

When laws get made it is the job of the Commission to make sure the member countries put the laws into practice.

If a country fails to obey the laws, the Commission may take the country to the European Court of Justice.

The Commission does two other things.

It looks after the fishing industry across Europe and sets rules for how much fish countries are allowed to catch and what kind and size of fish.

It keeps an eye on competition in business and makes sure companies have an equal chance to compete with each other.

Part 2

Who runs the Commission

The people who run the Commission are called Commissioners.

There are 27 of them, one from each member state.

Each Commissioner has a special job, such as agriculture, transport, the environment, trade, foreign affairs.

The Commissioner from the UK is Baroness Catherine Ashton (photograph). She looks after foreign affairs, that is, relations with countries outside the European Union.

The top Commissioner is the President of the Commission. The current President is José Manuel Barroso. He is a former Prime Minister of Portugal.

The Commissioners, including the President, are appointed by the Parliament on the recommendation of member states. They do the job for five years.

They are accountable to the Parliament that can fire them in the case of incompetence or misbehaviour.

Besides the Commissioners there are about 25,000 people, called officials, who work at the Commission. They come from the member states.

25,000 may sound like a lot of people but it's about a quarter of the number of people who work in a single large government department in the UK.

The Commission in its day to day work uses three languages, English, French and German.