

### Tasks:

1. Read the background information about Edward the Confessor and use it to complete a fact-file on the king.
2. Describe two features of Anglo-Saxon kingship.
3. Give **three** examples of how Edward's powers were limited.
4. On balance explain how powerful you think Anglo-Saxon government was.



### Edward the Confessor (1042-66)

By the reign of Edward the Confessor, England had been mostly under Anglo-Saxon control for 600 years. Throughout these six centuries a strong system of government had developed alongside a prosperous economy. England was a Christian country, but with this was mixed ancient beliefs about how people should behave. For example, one key belief was that people owed service to their lord for the protection they had from him. So, in return for land, a man owed military service to his lord.

The Vikings were also powerful in this period and there were Viking settlements in northern England. The kings before Edward had been Vikings: King Cnut and his two sons. Although Anglo-Saxon kings ruled all of England, half of this was made up of an area known as the Danelaw, which had kept some Danish laws and customs. These people wanted local men to rule them.

Anglo-Saxon kings held their power because they led armies and had clawed back England from Viking control. Although Edward was not a warrior king, his Earls and their Thegns were a powerful military force. Edward relied on his earls, especially Earl Godwin, to protect England.

A king who was a war leader gained legitimacy for his rule by being able to hand out wealth and land of their defeated enemies to their followers. Edward did not really have this, however he had two key things that gave him legitimacy:

- He was a respected law-maker who kept family quarrels between land-owners in check.
- He was very pious (religious) which pleased Anglo-Saxon society as kings were believed to be a representative of Christ on Earth. A good king could bring God's blessing to his country.

Earl Godwin of Wessex was as rich as Edward and militarily more powerful: he could pressure the king into doing things the way he wanted. For example, he could get the king to appoint his men to important church positions and give earldoms to his sons.

In 1050 Edward ordered Godwin to punish the people of Dover for attacking a visitor from Boulogne. Godwin refused and was exiled. However, he returned in 1051 with a large army. Edward had to restore Godwin's earldom to avoid war.

Edward the Confessor fact-file

Years ruled:

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Area ruled:

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Legitimacy (right to be king):

1.

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2.

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Relations with the Vikings:

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Strongest supporter:

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Problems:

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## Teaching notes

This lesson was originally designed to follow on from work on the nature of Anglo Saxon government ([see resource 27097](#)).

A PowerPoint presentation accompanies this resource (for subscribers only).

### Starter suggestion

Ask students to create a spider diagram of ‘what makes a king/leader powerful?’ Students can then refer back to these ideas after studying Edward.

### Main Activity

Use the information provided to create a fact-file on Edward. Students can then consolidate their understanding in a hot seating activity:



#### Hot Seating!

Ask all your students to come up with two or three questions (that they know the answer to) to ask the person on the hot seat. Pick a student at random to go on hot seat. Now ask your students to question the hot-seated person. If they get it right, they stay on the chair, if they get it wrong they leave the chair and the student that asked the question gets to go on - winner is last person on the chair.

This works particularly well if there is a reward for asking/answering the question and winning!

Their understanding could be further developed with questioning about the limitations to Edward’s powers (question 3), linking back to the qualities of a powerful king.

### Plenary activity

Students could decide where Edward should sit on a spectrum of power. They could be asked to justify their positioning and write a sentence to explain their judgement (question 4).

Incredibly/  
extremely

Partly  
powerful

Not  
powerful

Very  
powerful

Limited  
power