

Task sheet

The following activity is designed to cover the challenges Elizabeth inherited on becoming Queen.

Activity one

Read the statements. Explain the problems she faced and how serious they were.

Activity two

Write a list of priorities for Elizabeth in order to bring stability to the country. Which would you do first?

Activity three:

Sort the following factors on the diagram (p.3) depending on whether they were a problem in the short term/long term, and how dangerous you consider them to be:

- money
- religion
- legitimacy
- gender
- France
- Scotland.

Problem statements

Money

Elizabeth inherited financial problems. The debt from Mary's reign was thought to be around £300,000. The religious changes, as well as costly wars abroad by previous monarchs had left England short of money. The Crown's total annual income was around £285,000.

Religion

England had been Catholic for over 800 years before the changes made first by Henry VIII and then Edward VI. Henry's reformation hadn't had time to take full effect when Edward died prematurely. The Counter-Reformation under Mary followed, including the harsh treatment of Protestants. Elizabeth inherited a divided country, with Catholicism still strong in the north and west in particular. Furthermore, extreme Protestants who had fled the country under Mary now returned to England expecting a golden age to Protestant reform to be established.

Legitimacy

Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII had executed Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn in 1536. Once Anne was executed for treason, Henry VIII himself declared Elizabeth illegitimate and excluded her from the succession. Whilst he later reversed this decision, some still saw her as illegitimate.

Gender

As a woman, Elizabeth faced those who thought that a woman wasn't fit to rule England. Her immediate predecessor, Mary I had married Phillip of Spain and given up a lot of power. There was immediate pressure on Elizabeth to marry as the sixteenth century view of women meant that they were viewed as being incapable of ruling alone.

France

During the reign of Mary, England had sided with Spain in a war against the French. The war had not gone well and England lost the last territory it held in France of Calais. Calais had huge psychological importance to the English but it was also valuable for trade and as a military base.

Scotland

Scotland was England's traditional enemy. The border between England and Scotland had seen constant fighting and regular raids between the two sides. When Mary I died, Elizabeth's second cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, declared herself the legitimate Catholic claimant to the English throne. She therefore presented herself as a figurehead for disgruntled Catholics. In an added complication, Mary's mother, Mary of Guise, was ruling Scotland for her daughter and had French troops stationed there meaning a close link between two enemies of England.

