



MILESTONES...

Development of rights in the UK

1215	Magna Carta – Imposed by rebellious barons on King John of England, this was the first systematic attempt to distinguish between monarchy and tyranny, based on the requirement that the king should rule justly and in accordance with a body of defined law and custom. Among the rights it established was the writ of habeas corpus, which allows people to appeal against imprisonment without trial.
1689	Bill of Rights – The Bill comprised a range of rights including the freedom to petition the monarch, freedom from cruel and unusual punishments and freedom from being fined without trial, although it should not be mistaken for a comprehensive rights document, such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) and the US Bill of Rights (ratified in 1791).
1950	European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) – The UK signed the ECHR, which was drafted in 1950 under the auspices of the Council of Europe, and was intended to apply the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) in a European context. In 1966, UK citizens gained the right of direct access to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, which opened in 1959.
1998	Human Rights Act – The HRA, which came into effect in 2000, incorporated the ECHR into UK law. A major constitutional reform, this marked a shift in the UK in favour of an explicit and codified legal definition of individual rights. In doing so, it substantially widened the capacity of the judiciary to protect civil liberties and check the exercise of executive power and, in certain respects, the power of Parliament. Its main provision is that the courts should interpret all legislation (statutory and delegated legislation) in such a way as to be compatible with the ECHR.
2001	Freedom of Information Act – This provides a general right of public access to information held by any public body; it was felt that the people have a right to know about the activities of any public authority funded by the taxpayer. The general right of access to information was a commitment to the public interest in having more openness in government.
2010	Equality Act – This Act brings together nine major pieces of legislation, including the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and the 1976 Race Relations Act, with a view to providing a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. It requires equal treatment in access to employment, as well as public and private services, regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual preference, and gender reassignment.