



The Queen's Speech: Legislative Programme

BRIEFING

The Government placed the principles of "freedom, fairness and responsibility" at the heart of its legislative programme. The slogan was apposite for a coalition. Both parties claim the pursuit of "freedom" to be a key component of their philosophy. The Liberal Democrats lay claim to "fairness" and the Conservatives to "responsibility".

Labour's acting leader Harriet Harman took issue with the suggestion that the terms could be appropriated by any one party – "The whole country would agree with those principles, and we will make sure that [the coalition] lives up to them."

Bills to be brought forward this year will include:

Academies Bill

The Academies Bill will pave the way for primary and special schools to be able to apply for Academy status. The requirement for consultation with the local authority is to be removed. Maintained schools will be able to apply to become Academies, with any applications from schools judged as 'outstanding' by OFSTED (and there are just over 2,000 of them) pre-approved. New Academies will not be able to select students by ability; however, existing selective schools would be able to retain their current admissions policies if they were to become an Academy.

Airports Economic Regulation Bill

This Bill will overhaul the current system of price-capping at airports, with the aim of keeping British airports competitive in the international market following the Government's decision to block new runway proposals and Heathrow and Stansted.

Armed Forces Bill

In addition to the required annual renewal of armed forces legislation, the Government will conduct a Strategic Defence and Security review this year. Reform of Court Martial powers and personnel policy is also proposed.

Decentralisation and Localism Bill

This Bill will contain a wide raft of measures designed to devolve greater powers to local councils and communities.

Both Regional Spatial Strategies and the Infrastructure and Planning Commission ('IPC') are to be abolished. The IPC will be merged with the Planning Inspectorate and the decision-maker for fast-tracked infrastructure projects will be the Secretary of State.

Regional Development Agencies will be replaced by Local Enterprise Partnerships, which will be joint council-business bodies.



Home Information Packs ('HIPs') are to be abolished, although the requirement to obtain an Energy Performance Certificate remains. The requirement to obtain a HIP has already been suspended.

Residents will be able to force a local referendum on a range of local issues, and veto an 'excessive' increase in Council Tax.

The Standards Board regime, which polices the behaviour of local councillors, is to be scrapped. In a speech delivered in September last year, David Cameron suggested that the voter is better placed to judge councillors' performance.

Communities will be given the right to bid to take over local services and facilities threatened with closure.

Education and Children's Bill

The aim of this Bill will be to give greater autonomy to schools by slimming down the requirements of the national curriculum. Accountability frameworks will be reformed to ensure head teachers are held accountable for the delivery of core educational goals. It will introduce a 'pupil premium' to ensure that extra funding is allocated to the poorest pupils.

European Communities (Amendment) Referendum Lock Bill

This Bill will amend the European Communities Act 1972 to ensure that any future transfer of powers from Westminster to Brussels must be put

to referendum. In their manifesto the Conservatives had proposed legislation to "ensure" that the UK Parliament retains its sovereignty, but the coalition only proposes to consult on such legislation.

Energy Security and Green Economy Bill

The proposed legislation will introduce new incentives for both suppliers and households to save energy. It is likely that the bill will also regulate emissions from coal-fired power stations, establish a 'smart grid' and force suppliers to put more information on energy bills. Fulfilling a pledge made by the former Labour Government, the Bill will create a Green Investment Bank to fund low-carbon transport and energy schemes.

Equitable Life Payments Scheme Bill

This Bill will give statutory authority for payments from the Treasury to Equitable Life policyholders who have suffered losses, following the Ombudsman's finding of maladministration in her report of July 2008.

Financial Services Regulation Bill

This Bill will restore responsibility for macro-regulation of the banking system to the Bank of England, taking it away from the Financial Services Authority.

Freedom (Great Repeal) Bill

This Bill will restrict the scope of the DNA database, reduce storage of email and internet



records, tighten regulation of CCTV use and introduce greater safeguards against the misuse of anti-terrorism powers.

Health Bill

Details on the proposed Health Bill are currently vague, but the overall aim of the bill will be to reduce bureaucracy and refocus the NHS as more 'patient-led'. An independent NHS Board will be established.

Identity Documents Bill

As was widely expected given both coalition parties' manifestos, early legislation will abolish the national ID card scheme, the Office of the Identity Commissioner and the National Identity Database.

Local Government Bill

This Bill will repeal the recent Statutory Instruments creating unitary authorities in Exeter and Norwich. It also stops the implementation of a similar scheme in Suffolk.

National Insurance Contributions Bill

This Bill will increase employees' national insurance contributions from 6 April 2011. There are likely to be other, as yet unspecified, measures to "promote enterprise and fairness", which are likely to include a crackdown on tax avoidance and proposals making it easier for people to set up new businesses.

Office for Budget Responsibility Bill

As Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne announced last week, an Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) will be set up to provide independent financial forecasts (such as borrowing forecasts and economic growth forecasts) for the Treasury. A three-person budget responsibility committee will head the OBR and will be operational on an interim basis prior to the emergency budget.

Parliamentary Reform Bill

This Bill, the price the Conservatives had to pay for Liberal Democrat participation in the coalition, will pave the way for a referendum on the Alternative Vote system at Westminster elections, reduce the number of MPs, introduce fixed term parliaments (including the power for parliament to dissolve itself acting by a 55% majority in the Commons) and help ensure constituency sizes are more equal.

Pensions and Savings Bill

This Bill will implement the findings of the current review on the timetable for increasing the state pension age. The Bill will also restore the link between pensions and earnings.

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

This Bill will provide for directly elected police commissioners, amended health and safety laws, a new Border Police force and an increase in the power of local authorities to remove or refuse



alcohol licences.

Postal Services Bill

Dusting off Lord Mandelson's proposals, the Postal Services Bill will provide for an injection of private capital into Royal Mail, whilst keeping the Post Office in public hands. The Bill will also seek to address the Royal Mail's pension deficit.

Public Bodies (Reform) Bill

Under this Bill, ministers will be given the power to merge, abolish or transfer powers from 'quangos'. The number and cost of quangos will be reduced and the functions of public bodies will be reviewed every 3 years.

Scotland Bill

This Bill will aim to implement the recommendations of the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution in order to strengthen the devolution settlement. The Commission recommended that part of the Budget of the Scottish Parliament should come from devolved taxation, with a corresponding reduction in the current 'block grant'.

Terrorist Asset-freezing Bill

The current primary legislation on terrorist asset freezing expires on 31 December 2010 and this Bill will introduce a permanent replacement regime.

Welfare Reform Bill

This Bill seeks to simplify benefits and reduce administration costs by creating a single welfare-to-work programme. Benefits will be more conditional on willingness to re-enter the workplace.

Other measures:

In addition to the Bills being brought forward this year, the Government's commitment to the 'HS2' London-Birmingham rail link was confirmed. Enabling provisions will be brought forward by way of hybrid Bill in due course.

A draft Bill on parliamentary privilege will be brought forward for scrutiny this year. The draft Bill will attempt formally to define the extent of parliamentary privilege, whilst ensuring the continued freedom of speech within Parliament.

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