



Queen's Speech 2009

Beyond the ancient pomp and ritual that traditionally forms the backdrop for the Queen's Speech, this year's legislative programme had a noticeably more political feel, hinting at what we can expect to see in the Labour Party's General Election manifesto. It marks the beginning of a very short fifth and final session of this Parliament and fires the starting pistol on what is expected to be a long and bruising phony war ahead of an election in the spring of 2010.

This is an important Queen's Speech. It is one of the last chances for the Labour Party to present a programme for government to the public, and in turn, a chance for the Conservatives to set out their alternative vision.

There was a sceptical response to Harriet Harman's assertion that "most" of the bills would be passed by the dissolution of Parliament, with only between 70 and 80 parliamentary days left before an election. The Conservative leader in the Lords, Lord Strathclyde, promised that the Conservative Party would take a combative approach to the Government's programme.

Amongst the list of Bills there are a number that catch the eye as likely priorities for the Parliamentary session. One of these is the Financial Services Bill, as the Government will want to make clear that they will not tolerate a 'business as usual' approach in the City. The financial services industry may be wishing that Nick Clegg's calls to cancel this year's speech had not fallen on deaf ears. Although critics will point to the limited impact of the personal care proposals, this is an emotive subject and a substantial policy commitment.

As Gordon Brown and David Cameron engaged in polite conversation en route from the Commons to the Lords, both men were keenly aware that this legislative agenda would start the fight that will determine who will become the next Prime Minister.

Financial Services Bill

The Financial Services Bill will be a top priority for Government in the run up to the General Election, defining Labour's more-interventionist stance on regulating the City. The Bill has become a catch-all proposal, incorporating recommendations from the Turner Review, legislating for the roll-out of a Money Guidance service, banning unsolicited credit card cheques and cracking down on remuneration policy and financial crime. On tripartite reform, the FSA will be given a new statutory duty to maintain financial stability, and a new Council for Financial Stability bringing together members of the tripartite will be introduced. Lobbying from the financial services industry will be intense and focussed on issues including "living wills", the pre-funding of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and remuneration.

Financial Responsibility Bill

This Bill would commit Government to halving the deficit in public finances within four years and give Parliament power over multi-year fiscal plans. While the Treasury believes that the Bill will bring reassurance to financial markets, it is viewed by Labour as an opportunity to regain ground in credibility in fiscal management as the debate on spending intensifies. Moreover, it is an attempt to throw down the gauntlet to the Conservatives over whether they would honour the commitment if in Government.



Personal Care at Home Bill

As its main item of health policy, the Government announced that it will extend free personal care for the elderly. The Prime Minister previewed this legislation in his party conference speech two months ago. This would be the first step towards the establishment of the National Care Service as laid out in the Adult Social Care Green Paper published in July.

The Bill will guarantee free personal care for the 280,000 people who have the greatest care needs. This will include those who suffer from serious dementia or Parkinson's disease. Further, £130 million of funding will be made available to rehabilitate those who receive care at home, in order to help people lead more independent lives. Where possible, home adaptations or technology that increase people's independence will be offered. The expectation is that in the long run this will save local authorities and the Department of Health money as people will have less need for home care.

Although it was not mentioned in today's Queen's Speech, it has been reported in the media that the Government would bring forward legislation to make the 18-week target a legal guarantee, and that patients not treated within this amount of time would have the right to be treated in a non-NHS facility (a right that already exists at the point of referral or 'choice'). This measure could potentially be included in the above Bill on personal care, although The Guardian today speculated that the measure had been dropped.

Energy Bill

The Energy Bill would implement the key elements of the Government's Low Carbon Transition Plan, published in July. The main focuses are fuel poverty and a financial incentive for carbon capture and storage ('CCS'). The Bill creates a mandatory social support obligation (most likely in the form of a rebate) on energy providers to ease the burden of bills on their low income, elderly and most vulnerable customers.

On CCS, the Bill introduces a financial incentive in the form of a £9.5 billion levy on electricity suppliers to support the construction of up to four commercial-scale demonstration projects.

The Bill bolsters the strength of Ofgem; in addition to the long term aim of protecting competition, the regulator will have a duty to proactively step in to protect consumers, and must specifically consider energy security and reducing emissions when assessing their interests.

Digital Economy Bill

This Bill follows Stephen Carter's Digital Britain White Paper and sets out the Government's ambition to maximise the digital economy and improve the UK's communications infrastructure.

The legislation's focus is on stimulating investment in the UK's digital network and includes a commitment to invest in a new superfast broadband system, to be funded by a levy on phone bills. This has been strongly opposed by the Conservative Party and a consultation on the matter will be published alongside the PBR in December.

The Bill also contains Peter Mandelson's controversial plans to create a legal and regulatory framework to combat illegal file sharing. On broadcasting, the Government has identified regional news as the immediate priority. The Bill will reallocate the contestable element of the license fee to create pilot programmes for regional news consortia; a final decision on this matter will most likely have to be made by a future Conservative government in 2012. However, the Conservatives have strongly opposed this vision of regional news. Jeremy Hunt has said that he would sweep away cross-media ownership rules which prevent local groups owning more than one newspaper or radio station.



Children, Schools and Families Bill

On the heels of a row over spending between Balls and the Chancellor, this Bill will implement the policies set out in the 2009 Schools White Paper. Most importantly the Bill offers pupil and parent guarantees to raise the standards of education.

The Bill also introduces an accountability framework and school improvement strategies for all schools, underpinned by a new School Report Card. It promises “greater flexibility” for primary schools to set their own curriculums. All young people will be guaranteed to receive at least one year of sex and relationships education, a point of controversy that will spark a debate over parents’ control over the curriculum.

Flood and Water Management Bill

The Flood and Water Management Bill implements many of the recommendations outlined in the Pitt Review. The Bill aims to clarify the flood risk management responsibilities of the Environment Agency, local authorities and other involved bodies. It extends the sustainability duty (the duty to take environmental considerations as well as social and economic factors into account in flood risk management) of the Environment Agency to other bodies managing flood risk and for the first time assigns by law the responsibility for surface water flooding to local authorities.

Other direct provisions of the Bill include the requirement for new building developments to install Sustainable Drainage Systems, the protection of the interests of water customers through a special administration scheme, and in line with other utility sectors, the power for water companies to control non-essential domestic uses of water in times of shortage.

Cluster Munitions Prohibition Bill

The Cluster Munitions Prohibition Bill will ban the use, development, production, acquisition, retention, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions. The Bill, which will have cross party support, was announced by Gordon Brown in the Commons on June 29 2009. The Bill will implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions in UK law and pave the way for the ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions which the Government signed on December 3 2008.

Draft International Development Spending Bill

The Draft International Development Spending Bill will make the Government’s commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on official development assistance by 2013 legally binding.

The Bill ensures that Britain contributes to the increased global aid levels necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The Conservatives have supported this commitment since 2005 and have promised to ring-fence the international development budget. In addition they have pledged to establish an Independent Aid Watchdog to monitor the performance of the Department for International Development.



Crime and Security Bill

The Crime and Security Bill will attempt to tackle the causes of anti-social behaviour by introducing mandatory assessments of parenting needs whenever a 10-15 year old is being considered for an ASBO. The Bill also aims to protect victims of domestic violence, by barring suspects, even if they have not been charged, from their home for a fixed period of time.

The most controversial aspect of the Bill are plans to allow the police to store the DNA of those who have been arrested, but not charged, for six years. Both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats have condemned the plans and both parties have called for a database that only holds the information of those convicted of a crime.

The Bill will also enable the DNA of convicted offenders to be stored indefinitely, while the police will be able to take DNA and fingerprints anytime following conviction for a serious crime, including those from abroad. The police will also be required to fill in less information in stop and search forms, in an attempt to increase the amount of time they spend in the community.

Equality Bill

The Equality Bill to 'promote equality, narrow the gap between rich and poor and tackle discrimination' has been carried over from the last session of Parliament. It has passed through Committee stage in the Commons where it is awaiting its third reading before going to the Lords for scrutiny in December.

The Bill will harmonise nine strands of existing equality legislation (and over 100 statutory instruments) into a single act and extend the duty to promote equality from race, disability and gender to incorporate age, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. The Bill will require all public sector bodies with more than 150 employees to start reporting on gender pay, ethnic minority employment and disability employment by 2012. Private sector reporting on gender pay, for businesses with over 250 employees, will remain voluntary until 2013.

The Conservative Party opposed the Bill in the Commons, on the grounds that it created extra bureaucracy and had become Harriet Harman's 'legacy legislation' rather than an effective piece of law.

Child Poverty Bill

The Government's Child Poverty Bill was introduced to the House of Commons in June 2009. It enshrines in law the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The Bill includes the establishment of a national and local accountability framework which will be refreshed every three years; annual reports will also help hold Government to account.

Although no new initiatives were announced today and focus will be on whether the Conservatives chose to also honour the commitment.

Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill

The Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill has already reached report stage in the Commons. The Bill does not include provisions to reform the system of expenses.

The Bill would end by-elections for hereditary peers, and introduce suspension, resignation and expulsion measures for the House of Lords, including disqualification of peers convicted of serious criminal offences subject to bankruptcy restriction orders. To some extent the Bill also addresses the separation of powers by removing the Prime Minister's role in the process of appointing Supreme Court Judges.

Draft House of Lords Reform Bill

The House of Lords Reform Bill would create an elected second chamber, with 80-100% of peers becoming directly elected. If the House moves to 100% elected peers, bishops would no longer retain reserved places. Under an 80% elected House, the Appointments Commission would be placed on a statutory footing. The Bill will not mean an immediate mass- eviction of existing hereditary peers, rather current hereditary peers will not be replaced.

Bribery Bill

Although the UK is recognised to be one of the least corrupt countries globally, this Bill represents the need to replace old and fragmented legislation with a modern and comprehensive scheme. Based on the recommendations of the Law Commission, the Bribery Bill aims to reform and strengthen the law on bribery to equip prosecutors and courts to deal effectively with offences.

Potential General Election Dates

Thursday 25th March 2010

Tuesday 2nd March	Proclamation
Wednesday 3rd March	Receipt of Writ
Friday 5th March	Last possible day for Notice of Election
Thursday 25th March	Polling Day

Thursday 6th May 2010

Thursday 1st April	Last time for publication of Notice of Election (5pm) (Local)
Friday 2nd April	Good Friday – Dies Non
Monday 5th April	Easter Monday – Dies Non
Monday 12th April	Proclamation (Parliamentary)
Tuesday 13th April	Receipt of Writ (Parliamentary)
Thursday 15th April	Last possible day for Notice of Election (Parliamentary)
Monday 3rd May	Bank Holiday - Dies Non
Thursday 6th May	Polling Day (7am – 10pm)

Thursday 3rd June 2010

Monday 10th May	Proclamation
Tuesday 11th May	Receipt of Writ
Thursday 13th May	Last possible day for Notice of Election
Monday 24th May	Bank Holiday - Dies Non
Thursday 3rd June	Polling Day

Next Steps

House of Commons

2.30 pm: Speeches by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Opposition Party leaders. Debate then open to backbenchers until 10.00 pm.

House of Lords

3.30 pm: Debate on Queen's Speech; debate usually then adjourned after speeches by the Leaders of the main parties.

Future Debates on Queen's Speech will be as follows:

Thursday 19 November

Commons	Education and Health
Lords	Foreign and European Affairs, International Development and Defence

Thursday 19 November

Commons	Foreign and Common Office, Ministry of Defence
Lords	Home, Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Thursday 19 November

Commons	Energy and Climate Change, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Lords	Environment, Energy, Agriculture, Local Government and Transport

Thursday 25 November

Commons	Home Office, Work and Pensions
Lords	Business and Economic Affairs, Consumer Affairs, Culture

Thursday 26 November

Commons	Her Majesty's Treasury, Business, Innovation and Skills
Lords	Equality, Social Affairs, Health, Education

