

Sections in this briefing

a) **Legislative Overview**

(Introduces how laws are proposed and the passage of legislation from Policy Development, to a Bill to an Act of Parliament (and law))

b) **Inputting into Policy Development**

(Looks at policy development at a departmental level, including Green and White Papers)

c) **Engaging With Parliament and Parliamentarians**

(Keep track of what is happening in Parliament and learn how best to engage with MPs and Lords)

d) **Top Tips on Successful Engagement with Legislation**

(Top 10 Tips for practical engagement with legislation)

e) **Case Study:** the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

f) **Add to Favourites**

(a list of legislation-related websites to help track and influence legislation)

a) Legislative Overview

How are new laws proposed?

The Government introduces most plans for new laws, normally included in the Queen's Speech at the opening of each session of Parliament, and introduces most changes to existing laws. Occasionally, new laws can originate from an MP or a Lord through Private Members Bills.

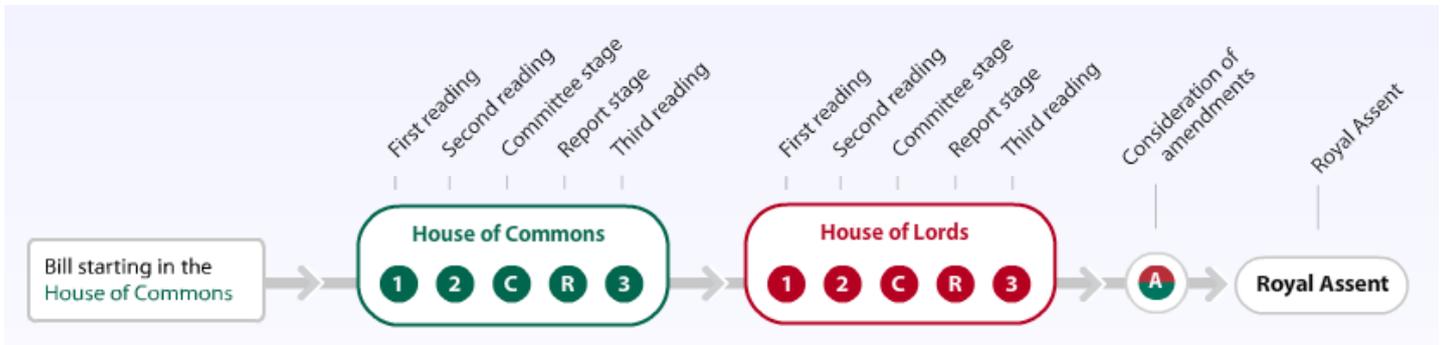
What is the passage of legislation and how long does it take?

Before a Bill is introduced to Parliament, the Government's policy on the matter is often outlined by a Government Department through Green or White Papers; these are drafted by Civil Servants and are often consulted upon. However, there is no requirement for a Green or White Paper to precede a Bill.

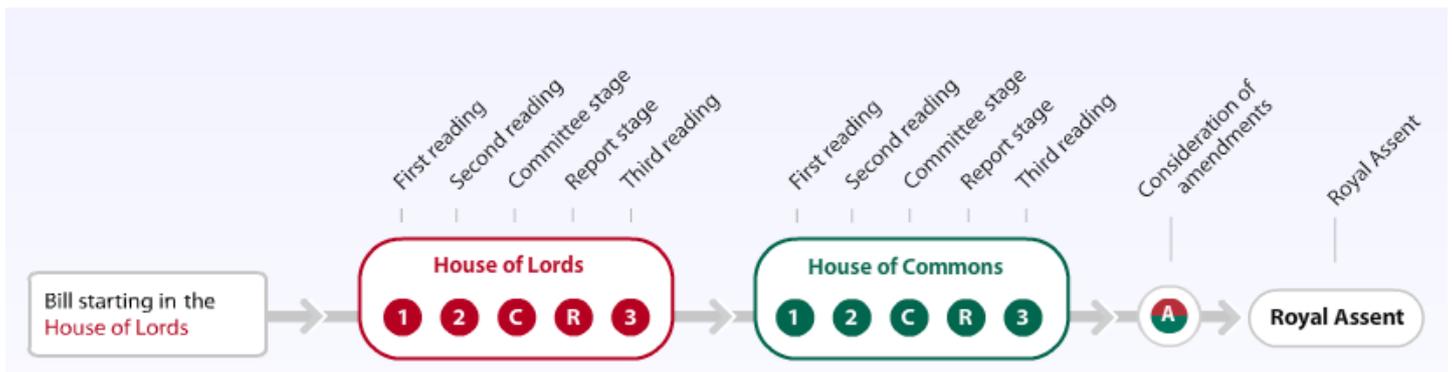
Pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills occasionally takes place in Parliament before a Bill is formally introduced. This might occur where a department has asked a Select Committee to carry out an initial inquiry on the Bill and its impacts.

In Parliament, Bills start in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Generally, more political Bills will begin in the Commons with more technical ones starting in the Lords.

Bills Starting in Commons:



Bills Starting in the Lords:



First Reading (1R)

This is where Bills are formally introduced in either House. 1R is a formality, consisting of the title of the Bill being read out to Parliament.



Second Reading (2R)

This is the first opportunity MPs or Lords have to debate the main principles of a Bill. This looks at whether the proposal is a good idea or not - but not its technicalities. At the end of 2R there is a vote to decide whether the Bill proceeds to Committee Stage.



Committee Stage (CS)

CS in the Commons takes place outside the main Chamber, with MPs looking at amendments or changes required in a Public Bill Committee. CS in the Lords usually takes place in a Committee of the Whole House, which is open to all Lords and happens in the Lords Chamber. CS is usually formally timetabled after the 2R and normally takes place within a couple of weeks. In the Commons, there is a strict timeline at CS, whereas in the Lords there are no time limits. If a Bill starts in the Commons, the committee is able to take evidence from experts and interest groups from outside Parliament.



Report Stage (RS)

At RS the Bill returns to the full chamber and any MP/Lord can take part in the debate about the content of the Bill, including amendments. In the Commons, the Speaker of the House chooses which amendments will be discussed. 3R immediately follows RS.



Third Reading (3R)

By 3R in the Commons, no final changes can be made to the content of the Bill; however the Lords can still make changes to the Bill at 3R. 3R is the opportunity for MPs/Lords to vote on whether the Bill proceeds to the other House where the whole process begins again (1R - 3R) in either Lords or Commons.

Consideration of Amendments / 'Ping Pong'

When a Bill has passed through third reading in both Houses it is returned to the first House (where it started) for the second House's amendments (proposals for change) to be considered. Both Houses must agree on the exact wording of the Bill. There is no set time period between the third reading of a Bill and consideration of any Commons or Lords amendments.

'Ping Pong' if the Commons makes amendments to the Bill, the Lords must consider them and either agree or disagree to the amendments or make alternative proposals. If the Lords disagrees with any Commons amendments, or makes alternative proposals, then the Bill is sent back to the Commons. A Bill may go back and forth between each House ('Ping Pong') until both Houses reach agreement. In exceptional cases, when the two Houses do not reach agreement, the Bill falls. If certain conditions are met, the Commons can use the Parliament Acts to pass the Bill, without the consent of the Lords, in the following session.



Royal Assent (RA)

When a Bill has completed all its parliamentary stages in both Houses, it must have RA before it can become an Act of Parliament (law). There is no set time period between the consideration of amendments to the Bill and RA - it can even be a matter of minutes after Ping Pong is complete. It is highly unlikely that a Monarch would refuse to grant a Bill Royal Assent - the last time this happened was in 1707!

How Long?

There is no rule on how long it takes for legislation to become law. In certain cases, for example with recent anti-terrorist legislation, the passage of legislation can be very quick indeed. In others, the process can take a number of months. Normally the government has a strong idea about by when it would like to see legislation implemented. This is generally set out in the Queen's Speech, which details the Government's policies and the Bills it will introduce in the next session (one year). The Queen's Speech is not binding, and the Government can introduce additional Bills throughout the year to reflect any changing priorities. When policy development at a political party level / departmental level is considered, from policy formation to implementation can also take many years.

Do all Bills apply to the whole of the UK?

Some Bills apply to the whole of the UK. However, Bills may apply to one or more constituent parts - for example, only to England and Wales. Law-making powers in some subjects rest with the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, rather than the UK Parliament. Bills might also apply to specific areas within the UK.

International and EU legislation

Sometimes new laws are also needed to ensure that the UK complies with international or EU legislation.

b) Inputting into Policy Development

How do I know what is coming up within government departments?

Departmental Business Plans (updated annually by each department and accessible via their websites) will enable you to keep abreast of legislation that is likely to be proposed over the next 12 months. The Queen's Speech will also give you an idea of the range of measures the government intends to pursue over the course of the current Parliament.

Tip – Access the Departmental Plan for the Department(s) most relevant to your work. Highlight upcoming legislation.

Who is consulted about changes to the law?

Before Bills are introduced into Parliament, there is often consultation or discussion with established interested parties such as professional bodies, voluntary organisations and pressure groups. Representative Bodies (eg LGA, Campaign for Better Transport or RNIB) are often the place where civil servants will start when drafting Bills to go to Parliament.

Tip – Engage with relevant membership organisations to amplify your voice, read their briefs and take an active role in the input they provide.

Green and White Papers

Proposals for legislative changes may be contained in government **White Papers**. These may be preceded by consultation papers, sometimes called **Green Papers**, which set out government proposals that are still taking shape and seek comments from the public. However, there is no also requirement for White or Green Papers to be issued before a Bill is introduced into Parliament. Both Green and White papers are usually drafted by Civil Servants in relevant departments. Very often the Civil Servant will have limited or no specific experience in the field and so expert input is often welcome.

Tip – By calling the department switchboard, find a contact in the Civil Service developing consultations/policy in relation to your area of work. Establish an early relationship.

Consultation

Before both Green and White papers, Civil Servants will engage with stakeholders on plans. By finding the relevant person within the department, it may be possible to get involved at the very early stage. A formal consultation period of 12 weeks almost always follows Green Papers. There is also possible consultation on White Papers. A formal response is normally followed by legislation.

Tip - Never miss a consultation deadline and only reply on those issues that are 'mission critical'. Sometimes the best replies are the shortest, most targeted ones to a specific part in a consultation. Get consultation responses in to a standard format and reply to relevant section(s) as laid out in the Consultation paper.

c) Engaging With Parliament and Parliamentarians

Tracking new Legislation entering the Houses of Parliament

Legislation can be tracked as it enters and progresses through Parliament using the Parliamentary website. The 'What's New' Calendar details business for the Commons and Lords, as well as in General and Select Committees. Find out more at <http://services.parliament.uk/calendar>

As legislation enters Parliament, keep a close eye on its progression and check which Members who will sit on its Committee. The Parliament website is updated on a daily basis with new legislation and amendments added. You can also access live video of debates both the Commons and Lords to keep a closer eye on minute-by-minute developments.

Do you know your local MP?

The importance of effective personal relationships with Parliamentarians - MPs or Lords - cannot be underestimated. Do you know your MP and their interests? Do you subscribe to their news to find out more about their activities? Before attempting to engage/influence legislation, it is worth making contact with your MP with information about your organisation, your role and your expertise. This way, when issues arise, it's more likely that your local Parliamentarian will turn to you for advice.

Tip - Use the Parliament website to search for your MP (by postcode) <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk> You can also create alerts for each time they speak in the House on 'They Work for You' www.theyworkforyou.com

Remember that local MPs can request Ministerial meetings, ask Parliamentary Questions and raise Parliamentary Debates. Whether or not your local MP is the exact person in Parliament working on your area of interest, it is always worth having them on board. Also get to know their team, in particular caseworkers/researchers.

Establishing a Relationship with the Right Parliamentarians

In addition to local MPs, spend time researching which MPs and, in particular, which Peers should be contacted about a particular issue. These might be those interested generally in the issue at stake (for which use 'They Work for You' / Parliamentary Website / Dod's Parliamentary Companion to find Members' interests). More importantly however, identify which Members will sit on the relevant committees for your area of interest / expertise. Spend time looking at www.parliament.uk/business/committees identifying the Committees relevant to your work and click through to find out about its members.

In the House of Commons, one of the most important committee areas is departmental Select Committees, which are controlled by Parliament (not government) to shadow each government department. Find out what they are investigating and ask to meet members outside Committee.

Often MPs sitting on Committees have no specific expertise and will want a 'crash course' and case studies about a range of issues. Write to committee members, ask to meet them and you may be asked to provide oral evidence or your written evidence may be published by the Committee. Establish contact through letters, not email and avoid proforma campaigning letters, emails and postcards. You could also contact the Clerk of the Committee to introduce yourself and express interest in submitting evidence to any future inquiries.

Tip – Do not use an MP's constituency address unless they happen to be your local MP. If you do, you risk your letter being filtered as your address does not fall within their 'patch'. Instead address correspondence to House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. For Lords, always use the Parliament address.

Top Tip – If sending in specific guidance to a Committee read www.parliament.uk/committee-witness-guide (PDF which advises how this should be done) and structure your input accordingly. Never regurgitate old material and focus on the specific issue not on your organisation.

In the Lords, the select committees do not shadow government departments. However, they can be used in much the same way. Briefings provided by you about **any** given issue must be short and concise with a clear argument. Never exceed 2 A4 pages when briefing Parliamentarians.

A Parliamentarian's Toolkit

Private Members Bills

can be proposed by any Member on any issue. However, there is a limited ballot and limited time to discuss Private Members' Bills. Generally, only those Bills which are adopted by the Government succeed although there are notable exceptions (the Gurkha campaign started with a Private Members Bill in the Lords).

Early Day Motions (EDMs)

In terms of the effect of EDMs in Parliament they go nowhere. However, each EDM is passed to the relevant Minister and in terms of the number of members that sign an EDM they have a huge impact. Each EDM will make a Minister consider: 'do we need to do something about this issue'? EDMs are almost never debated but are useful. Ordinarily, they will be drafted by an MP; an EDM is just one sentence with no full stops.

10 Minute Rule Bill

Twice a week MPs are given the opportunity to speak for up to 10 minutes about any issue. There is no ballot for this and when finished the Bill will be presented to the speaker. These will not change the law overnight and often will not change law at all, but they sometimes do and can be effective.

Amendments

Some organisations follow legislation so carefully that they are able to suggest workable amendments to Parliamentarians working on legislation at exactly the right stage in the legislative process. MPs can feed in suggested amendments at Committee stage and often during 3R but suggested amendments need to be very clear and targeted (suggesting the page, clause and point number). The Committee Chair will decide whether, how and in what order amendments will be debated. Often similar amendments get grouped together for discussion.

d) Top Tips on Successful Engagement with Legislation

1 - Departmental Business Plans Read relevant business plan/s (updated annually) which, along with the Queen's Speech to Parliament, will give you a clear idea on what legislation will be proposed during the course of the current Parliament by the Department which most reflects your expertise/interests.

2 - Personal Engagement at the early stages Phone the switchboard for government departments and ask to be put through to the person/team working on a given issue. Offer your expertise and assistance to the civil servant.

3 - Targeted Responses to Consultation Where you spot opportunities to respond to official consultations, eg through either Green or White Papers, make sure your response hits home by focusing on the issues that really matter. Do not reply to all consultations unless 'mission critical' and tailor responses to focus on specific issues. Often the best responses are the most concise.

4 - Establish a good working relationship with your local MP Find out who your MP is, what their interests are and what committees they sit on. Engage them in your work through visits and provide short, concise briefing notes. Don't forget the importance of MP's researchers in raising issues with Members. Keep in regular touch, ask for meetings with other MPs, Lords or Ministers through your MP and believe that MPs want to help.

5 - Use the Parliament Website Bookmark as a favourite the Parliament.uk website and set up alerts about your areas of interest. Use the Parliament website to research relevant Committees and find out the members who might have an impact on your area.

6 - Contact Committee Members Establish contact with individuals working on Committees in both the Commons and the Lords. If not a local MP, write to Members at their Westminster offices. This is particularly important for MPs, whose constituency team might otherwise filter your letter to your local MP. Be clear on why you are contacting them and what you want.

7 - Focus on the Benefits Try not to be too negative about legislation progressing through the House. Offer solutions, not problems and in the case of amendments explain why a specific amendment would make the Bill better.

8 - Provide Case Studies At all levels of engagement think about real-world case studies that you can provide for Civil Servants, MPs or Peers. By offering real life examples, you can help contextualise legislation for those working on it, highlighting potential pitfalls or benefits not otherwise noted.

9 - Join forces to get your voice heard Use Membership bodies if applicable to raise issues/concerns. If a membership body doesn't exist for the issue/area you are interested in, then create one! And don't be precious about taking the credit for influencing legislation - raise issues for the right reasons.

10 - Follow legislation all the way through Once enacted, monitor whether it does what it was proposed to do and highlight to your contacts what you see is its impact on the ground (balanced: positive and negative).

e) Case Study

Engaging with the Parliamentary Process

Influencing Legislation: the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Subsidy

The HRA Subsidy was an arrangement put in place to redistribute rent income from richer housing authorities to poorer ones. This was not a popular policy with the richer authorities and representative bodies, and a campaign began.

Milestone	Activities and Outcomes
2003 Local Government Act institutes HRA subsidy regime	Parliamentary scrutiny receives written and oral evidence from local authorities. Transport, Local Government and Regions Select Committee recommends changes to the HRA subsidy clauses. Not accepted so arrangements remain in the Act
2003 onwards: campaigning begins	Publicity campaign. Local authorities and representative bodies join. Issue discussed inside and outside of Parliament
2006: 'modelling exercise' for alternatives to HRA Subsidy	6 local authorities asked to participate. Lessons are fed into government thinking
2007: Housing Minister announces full review of HRA subsidy system. Begins in 2008	Campaigners continue to monitor Parliamentary activity: Hansard, Early Day Motions, opportunities to respond to consultations, calls for evidence. Campaign participates fully in the review
2008 Housing and Regeneration Act	Extends the 2007 modelling exercise but much more debate in Parliament and a consciousness that the existing system is unfair
2009: Government announces it will "dismantle" the current system. 4 month consultation begins	Campaigning groups and interested parties respond to formal consultation. Consensus that the current system is unfair; most debate is over what will replace it
March 2010: Detailed proposals published pre-election. A further consultation	Despite the General Election in May, the new Coalition Government states it will not change direction
December 2010: Localism Bill presented to Parliament	Contains clauses to abolish and replace the HRA Subsidy regime

f) Add to Favourites

(a list of legislation-related websites and phone numbers to help track and influence legislation)

www.direct.gov.uk/en/DI1/Directories/A-ZOfCentralGovernment/index.htm

Lists central government departments, executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies

www.info4local.gov.uk

Get quick and easy access to the information you need from central government departments, agencies and public bodies

www.theyworkforyou.com

Find out your local MP using the postcode search. Find out about their interests and voting record, including EDMs signed

www.parliament.uk

Find out what legislation is progressing through Parliament, find Members sitting on relevant Committees read the latest draft Bills as legislation passes through the Houses

www.parliament.uk/outreach

Find out more about Parliamentary Outreach events and contact your local Outreach representative

www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Live.aspx

Watch Parliament live

www.parliament.uk/business/publications

Read the Commons / Lords Hansard for a written record of what was discussed in Parliament

www.legislation.gov

Contains all legislation enacted and amended. Use this to find the current version of the law on whatever topic

Commons Information Office – 020 7219 4272

Lords Information Office – 020 7219 3107