



# MAKING LAWS

## THE PARLIAMENT ACTS

The Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 are used to limit the powers of the House of Lords to delay the progress of Commons bills.

## FOLLOWING A BILL

Each stage of a bill is recorded in Hansard, Parliament's Official Report.

## Parliament and legislation

One of Parliament's main responsibilities is to scrutinise proposed bills for new laws or changes to existing laws. It is the role of Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of the House of Lords to examine each bill before it is either approved and becomes an Act, or is rejected.

Usually, a bill passes through these stages in one parliamentary session (generally running from November to November). Exceptions can be made to 'carry-over' bills to the next session.

Bills can start in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords and must be approved by both Houses before becoming law.

### Where do these bills come from?

Most bills that become Acts originate from the Government. Before a government bill is presented to Parliament it is drafted by a team of specialist lawyers. This may take place after a consultation period with the public or after a government policy statement. It is also possible for MPs and Members of the House of Lords to present bills for Parliament to consider.

### How bills are considered by Parliament

There is a formal set of stages by which each House scrutinises, challenges and amends (changes) a bill. When both Houses agree on the text, it is sent for Royal Assent and becomes law.

First and Second readings in the Commons and Lords are essentially the same. There is no debate at First reading and at Second reading there is a

debate on the general principles of the bill. Government bills are rarely defeated at this stage, but many Private Members' Bills do not progress beyond this point.

When a bill has passed its Second reading, it is considered clause by clause in committee and amendments can be made to the text. In the Commons this is often delegated to a Public Bill Committee. In the Lords it usually takes place in Committee of the Whole House in the Lords Chamber.

The amended bill is then considered in Report. This stage is similar in both Houses and allows all Members to speak, vote and propose amendments.

Third reading in the Commons usually takes place immediately after Report stage and is normally a short one hour debate where no further changes can be made to the bill. Third reading in the Lords can take longer and further changes can be made.

### **An agreed text**

A bill that begins in the Commons is changed, agreed and reprinted before being sent to the Lords where it is further changed, agreed and reprinted.

Changes made by the Lords are sent back to the Commons for consideration. The Commons can agree, reject or amend

those changes before sending these back to the Lords. This process continues until the text is agreed or until the end of the Session, in which case the process starts from the beginning in the following Session.

### **Royal Assent**

Bills must receive Royal Assent before becoming Acts. When Royal Assent is given, an announcement is made in both Houses. Legislation may come into force immediately, after a set period or after a commencement order by a government minister.

### **Other types of bill**

Private Members' Bills are initiated by backbench MPs. These are public bills and can be on any issue. Few become law because of time constraints in Parliament. They can also be presented by Peers in the House of Lords.

Private bills are promoted by individuals or organisations outside Parliament (e.g. local authorities or companies) to obtain powers over and above existing public acts.

Recent procedural changes allow public bills to be published in draft for pre-legislative scrutiny, meaning MPs can examine proposed bills before they are introduced in the House. Most of these draft bills are government bills.

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