

## UK Legislative Process – The Passage of a Bill

### PRELEGISLATIVE SCRUTINEE – DRAFT BILL

*N.B. The regular consideration of draft bills is still a relatively new phenomenon at Westminster, but has become an established feature of the Legislative process since 1997. This stage is relatively flexible and not fixed like the later parliamentary stages.*

#### Draft Bill published

- Alongside Explanatory Notes, Impact Assessment, ECHR Memorandum and (usually) a **consultation**.

#### Select Committee Stage

- Draft Bill referred to relevant Select Committee.
- Select Committee examines Bill as well as taking written and/or oral evidence from appropriate persons and organisations.

#### Select Committee Report

- Committee publishes report on Draft Bill, laying out its recommendations.

#### Government Response

- Government responds to Committee report.

#### Bill Published

- If Government decides to pursue the measures set out in the draft bill, a bill is published.

*Timetable for Draft Bill: Parliamentary pre-legislative scrutiny should be completed in time for any resulting amendments to the Bill to be made in time for introduction to Parliament in the following session. A date for the Committee to report will probably be set in the motions appointing the Committee. Generally a Committee will need at least three to four months to take evidence and report (not including long recesses).*

## PARLIAMENTARY STAGES

N.B. A Bill can enter Parliament either through the Commons or the Lords.

### HOUSE OF COMMONS

#### First Reading

- Short, formal presentation of Bill with no debate. Forms order for Bill to be printed.

#### Second Reading

- House debates Bill principles and votes on it to be read a second time, i.e. proceed.
- Usually done in a day, happening no sooner than two weekends after 1st Reading.

#### Committee Stage

- A committee is appointed to examine each part of the Bill, line-by-line.
- Begins within two weeks of 2nd Reading. Involves several days over several weeks but timing is strictly controlled by Whips.
- All MPs can propose amendments but Chair chooses those for discussion.
- Committee members vote on amendments. Every part of Bill is agreed to, changed or removed, though this can happen without debate.
- Committee can take evidence from external experts and interest groups (in public).

#### Report Stage

- Committee reports back to the House, which can then propose and vote on further amendments, though looking at the Bill in the round, rather than line-by-line.
- Usually done in a day. No set interval between this and Committee stage.

#### Third Reading

- House takes an overview, debating Bill content, and votes on Bill getting a third reading. No amendments can be made.
- Usually very short and happens immediately after Report Stage.

**HOUSE OF LORDS****First Reading**

- Formal presentation, as in Commons

**Second Reading**

- Like Commons, House debates Bill principles and votes on a second reading.

**Committee stage**

- Like Commons, Committee looks at the Bill line-by-line. Usually a “Committee of the whole House” – any interested member can take part.
- Amendments not usually put to vote, but can be. No time limit (can last several days).

**Report Stage**

- Like Commons, House debates Bill, post-Committee, with further chance to amend.
- Can spread over several days, though usually fewer than Committee stage.

**Third reading**

- Final chance for House to debate and (unlike the Commons) amend the Bill.
- Unlike the Commons, usually happens at least three sitting days after Report.

**Consideration of amendments**

- Both Houses must agree Bill's exact wording before it can become an Act.
- So, Bill is sent back to the Commons to consider the Lords amendments.
- A Bill may “ping-pong” between the Houses until they reach agreement.
- No set interval between 3rd Reading and consideration. Ping-pong typically takes 1-2 weeks.

**Royal Assent**

- A formality where the Queen agrees to make the **Bill an Act**, once the Houses agree to the final version.
- Typically takes a few days.

An interactive version of a Bill's passage through Parliament can be found here:  
[http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/flash\\_passage\\_bill/index.html](http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/flash_passage_bill/index.html)

All current Bills and draft Bills before Parliament can be found here:  
<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/>