

NFU Parliament Jargon Buster

Confused by all the different parliamentary terminology? The NFU London office has created the following list to help you untangle the jargon that so often accompanies the reporting of parliamentary affairs.

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A

Act Papers	A paper put before Parliament because an Act of Parliament requires it.
Acts of Parliament	Also known as primary legislation, this is a law enacted by the Parliament. An Act begins as a Bill, which has to pass through all stages of the parliamentary procedure and receive Royal Assent before it can become an Act of Parliament.
Adjournment Debate	A House of Commons debate that does not require the House to vote. They usually take place at the end of the day and in Westminster Hall.
Affirmative Resolution Procedure	Procedure in which a Statutory Instrument (SI) can become law. With this procedure the SI must be approved by both houses if it is to become law. If the SI is potentially contentious, the affirmative route will be used. See Statutory Instrument
All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)	Type of parliamentary body, consisting of MPs and members of the House of Lords, which meet to discuss a particular issue of concern. An example is the APPG on Dairy Farming.
Amendments	Changes members of the House of Commons and House of Lords want to make to a Bill going through Parliament.

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B

Backbencher	MPs that do not hold ministerial office or do not have a shadow cabinet role.
Ballot Bills	A method used by MPs of introducing a Private Members Bill. Twenty names are drawn, but only the first seven (normally) are guaranteed a day's debate on Second Reading.
Bi-Cameral System	A bi-cameral system is a parliamentary system of two legislative chambers. The British system is bi-cameral because both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are involved in the process of making new laws.
Bills	A proposed new law introduced to parliament. Once a Bill has successfully passes through parliament and received Royal Consent it becomes law. A Bill can be introduced by the government (the most common method), individual MPs or Lords, or private individuals or organizations.
Black Rod	Black Rod is an officer in the House of Lords, who is responsible for accommodation, security and services in the Lords. He is best known for his part in the ceremonies surrounding the State Opening of Parliament.
Boundary Commission	A body that draws up and revises contingency

The voice of British farming

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	boundaries.
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C

Cabinet	The supreme committee of government, which decides government policy. Cabinet meetings are chaired by the Prime Minister.
Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms	The Government Chief Whip in the House of Lords.
Captain of the Yeomen of the Guard	The Government deputy Chief Whip in the House of Lords.
Clause	The different sections of a Bill. When a Bill becomes an Act of Parliament these clauses are called sections.
Command Papers	The collective name given to different types of papers (such as Treaties, a Green Paper, and White Paper etc) prepared by the Government and presented to Parliament.
Commencement Orders	Procedure in which a Statutory Instrument may simply become law the date stated in them. Such Instruments are, in general, not contentious, nor often particularly important. See Statutory Instrument
Committees	Much of Parliament work is carried out by committees. They can examine in detail government departments, policy, a proposed new law, and wider topics like the economy. See Committee of the Whole House , General Committees , Joint Committees , Select Committees ,
Committee of the Whole House	In the Commons the consideration of a Bill usually takes place in a standing committee, outside the Chamber, but occasionally a bill will be considered in a committee of the whole House in the main chamber. The procedure is normally reserved for finance bills and other important, controversial legislation. In the House of Lords, committee stage consideration nearly always takes place in a committee of the whole House.
Conservative Party	The Oldest of the three leading political parties. Their political stance is traditionally centre right. Their current leader is David Cameron.
Consolidation Bill	A measure which brings together a number of acts that deal with the same subject in a single act of Parliament. It will not, as a rule, seek to change significantly the policy represented by the original pieces of legislation.

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Debate	A formal discussion on a topic in the House of Commons, House of Lords or Westminster Hall.
Debate on the Address	The debate on the contents of the Queens Speech.
Deferred Divisions	Means that Members can vote on a series of motions (like statutory instrument) using ballot papers at a convenient time instead of holding divisions immediately at the end of a debate. Proceedings on Bills are excluded from this procedure.
Defra	Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

	The department was created in 2001 after the perceived failure of the Ministry of Agriculture to deal adequately with the Foot and Mouth disease. Hilary Benn MP is the department's current Secretary of State and Helen Ghosh is the current Permanent Secretary.
Delegated or Secondary Legislation	An original Act of Parliament makes provisions for future delegated legislation. This allows governments to make changes to a law without needing a new Act of Parliament. A criticism of delegated legislation is that it avoids the normal scrutiny of Parliament made law. See Deregulation Orders , Henry VIII Clause , Order in Council , Remedial Orders , Statutory Instruments
Deregulation Orders	A form of delegated legislation that allows governments to amend or repeal a provision in primary legislation which has become burdensome to anyone carrying on a trade or profession.
Despatch Boxes	Ministers and Shadow Ministers stand at the Despatch Boxes when they speak in the Chamber.
Devolution	The transfer of government authority to the regions. The most recent examples of devolution are the setting up of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
Dissolution of Parliament	When Parliament is dissolved and a general election called. The Prime Minister may ask the monarch to dissolve Parliament at any time, though it must be dissolved five years after the last general election as that is the maximum term a parliament may sit. Also see prorogued
Division Bell	A bell rung in or around a parliament to call members to vote.
Draft Bills	Introduced by government for consultation before being formally introduced to parliament.

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E

Early Day Motions (EDMs)	Formal motions speculatively tabled for debate in the House of Commons. They are used mainly to draw attention to a particular issue. Few are actually debated.
EFRA Committee	Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee. It is an example of a select committee; Its role is to oversee the work of Defra. The committee consists of 14 members and its current chairman is Michael Jack.
Emergency Debate	A debate called at a short notice on an important topic. Only one or two are granted per year.

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F

Father of the House	The MP who has the longest unbroken service in the Commons. Alan Williams of Labour currently holds the title.
Filibustering	An attempt by a politician to oppose a Bill by making very long speeches.
First Lord of the Treasury	The Prime Minister's actual title.

First Past the Post	The voting system used in Britain to elect MPs.
First Reading	The first stage of a Bill's passage through Parliament. The short title of the Bill is read out in the Chamber by the Clerk. It is then given a date for Second Reading and an order made for it to be printed.
Frontbencher	Ministers and the official opposition spokespeople.

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General Committee	Were known as Standing Committees on Bills until November 2006. These are Committees appointed for each Bill that passes through parliament. Depending on its complexity the consideration can take a few minutes or a few months. Along with Government Bills, General Committees exist to debate matters in specific areas, such as the Northern Ireland Committee; committees on Delegated Legislation, and European documents. See Public or Private Bills Committee
Give Way	Term used when an MP wants to interrupt another MP speaking in the house.
Government	Formed by the party that gains most seats in a general election, the government is the institution that runs the country. It is also known as the Executive. The Prime Minister selects the members of government.
Grand Committee	In the House of Commons there are three Grand Committees, one each for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the House of Lords a Grand Committee considers the committee stage of a bill away from the Floor of the House.
Green Card	A card that a member of the public fills in if they want to see their MP at the Palace of Westminster.
Green Papers	Papers published by government that puts forward ideas for future government policy that are open for discussion. See also White Papers .
Guillotine (Allocation of Time Motion)	A Motion to ensure that certain stages of a Bill are completed by a certain date or within a fixed number of sittings. They have largely been replaced by Programme Motions .

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H

Hansard	The official record of parliament proceedings.
Henry VIII Clauses	A provision in a bill which enables primary legislation to be amended or repealed by subordinate legislation with or without further Parliamentary scrutiny. The scope of their power is limited.
House of Commons	The lower chamber of parliament, it is a democratically elected body consisting of 646 members. It is by far the most dominant branch of parliament.
House of Commons Commission	The body responsible for the House of Commons administration. It comprises of 6 members; the Speaker, the Leader of the House, and four other members, none of whom may be a Minister.

House of Lords	The upper chamber of parliament was once the most dominant branch but reforms over the centuries have weakened its power. Today it consists of 753 members. Along with its legislative functions the house is also the highest court of appeal for most cases in the United Kingdom. However the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 will transfer the judicial functions of the Lords to a new Supreme Court.
Hybrid Bill	A mixture of a Public and Private Bill. Its affects the general public but has a significant impact on specific individuals or groups. An example was the Bill passed for the construction of the channel tunnel.

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Joint Committees	Similar to select committees, joint committees consist of MPs and Lords. Some are permanent, like the Joint Committee on Human Rights, others are appointed for specific purposes, such as examining proposals for Bills on subjects like stem cell research.
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L

Labour Party	Formed in 1906, they are the current party of government. Their political stance was traditionally centre left, however under the leadership of Tony Blair the party rebranded itself as New Labour and has moved to the centre. Gordon Brown is the current leader.
Law Lords	Senior judges or other holders of high judicial office, who are given life peerages in order to carry out the judicial work of the House of Lords.
Leader of the House	The member of the government who is chiefly responsible for the arrangement of government business in the House of Commons. Jack Straw is the current Leader of the House.
Liberal Democrats	Party formed in 1988 out of the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. They take a centre left position on many issues. Their current leader is Sir Menzies Campbell.
Life Peers	The Life Peerages Act 1958 allowed for the creation of non-hereditary members of the Lords. They are nominated by the Prime Minister; however the Leader of the Opposition and other party leaders can propose a certain number.

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M

Minister	There are three main types of Minister: Departmental Ministers, Ministers of State and Junior Ministers. Departmental Ministers in the Cabinet are generally called Secretary of State but some have special titles such as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Ministers of State and Junior Ministers assist the ministers in charge of the department.
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MP	Member of Parliament
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N

Naming of a Member	When a MP persistently obstructs the working of the House, then the speaker can call them by their actual name and not their official title or constituency. The 'naming of a member' may result in the member being suspended for a period from the House.
Negative Resolution Procedure	The most common procedure to introduce a Statutory Instrument. Under this procedure a SI is laid before Parliament, with Parliament able to annul it if it desires, within a time limit. Either House can record its disapproval. The address to Her Majesty praying that an instrument be annulled is known as a 'prayer'. See Statutory Instrument

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O

Oath of Allegiance	Also called Affirmation, at the beginning of every new Parliament MPs and Lords have to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown.
Ombudsman	The person who investigates complaints from members of the public about Government Departments.
Opposition	The political parties other than the Government party. Their role is to question the work of government. The largest of the Opposition parties is known as Her Majesty's Opposition.
Opposition Days	20 days of each parliament year in which the subjects to be debated are not decided by government.
Order in Council	A form of delegated legislation; they are made by the Privy Council in exercise of powers conferred upon them alone. Such Orders are, in general, not contentious, nor often particularly important. They are used when an ordinary Statutory Instrument would be inappropriate, such as for transferring responsibilities between Government Departments.
Order Confirmation Bill	A Bill that applies to Scotland only.

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P

Pairing	Pairing is an arrangement where an MP of one party agrees with an MP of an opposing party not to vote in a particular division.
Parliament	Also called the legislature, parliament is comprised of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Its purpose is to be involved in law making and to scrutinize the government.
Parliament Act	Two Acts of Parliament passed in 1911 and 1949 respectively. They asserted the supremacy of the House of Commons by ensuring that legislation can be passed without the approval of the House of Lords. The Parliament Acts have been used to pass legislation against the wishes of the House of Lords on only seven

	occasions, including the legislation that introduced the Hunting Act in 2004.
Parliament Agent	Special lawyers who introduce and promote Private Bills through Parliament.
Parliament Private Secretary (PPS)	A backbench MP who acts as an assistant to a minister.
Parliament Privilege	To enable an MP to debate freely they have certain privileges. For example they cannot be charged with libel for anything that he or she says in Parliament.
Parliamentary Counsel	Legal experts who assist in the drawing up of Bills.
Parliament Under Secretary (PUS)	A junior to a Minister of State, the PUS is the most junior ministerial office.
Permanent Secretary	The most senior official who runs a government department.
Plaid Cymru	The principal nationalist political party in Wales. They advocate the establishment of an independent Welsh state within the European Union. They take a left of centre view on most issues. Support for the Party is historically concentrated in rural Welsh-speaking areas. They currently have 3 seats in the House of Parliament.
Portcullis	The official emblem of the Houses of Parliament.
Portcullis House	A Parliament Building opened in 2001 that is situated opposite the House of Parliament. It provides offices, Select Committee, conference and meeting facilities for all MPs.
Presentation	A method to introduce a Private Members Bill. Members formally introduce the title of the Bill but do not speak in support of it - they rarely become law.
Prime Minister	The head of government the office of the Prime Minister is the most important political office in the UK. The first official PM was Sir Robert Walpole in 1721, William Pitt the Younger was the youngest to hold the office at the age of 24, William Gladstone is the only person to serve 4 terms, Margaret Thatcher was the first female PM, and Tony Blair is the longest serving Labour PM. Gordon Brown became PM on 27 June 2007.
Prime Minister Questions (PMQs)	A parliamentary practice whereby the Prime Minister spends a half hour at 12 noon on a Wednesday answering questions from MPs.
Privy Council	The name given to the group of ministers who acted as chief advisers to the Monarch. As the power of the monarch declined the Cabinet replaced the Privy Council as the senior decision-making body. Today the Privy Council's duties are largely formal and ceremonial. It has about three hundred members, including all Cabinet members past and present, the leaders of all the main parties, and the Speaker.
Programme Motions	Motions which set out a timetable for a bill in the House of Commons at the start of its consideration. They have largely replaced Guillotine Motions .
Prorogued	The formal end to the parliamentary year. When Parliament is prorogued it brings to an end nearly all parliamentary business. A bill which has not obtained royal assent by the end of the parliament year in which it

	was introduced usually 'dies', and has to be reintroduced in the next session. Also see Dissolution of parliament .
Private Bills	Bills that can only change the law as it applies to specific individuals or organizations rather than the general public.
Private Members Bill	Public Bills introduced by MPs and Lords who aren't government ministers. They are 3 ways of introducing a PMB; The Ballot , Ten Minute Rule , and Presentation . Very few actually become law.
Public Bills	See Bills .
Public or Private Bill Committee	A type of General Committee; a Public or Private Bill Committee is appointed for each Bill that goes through Parliament. Each Public Bill Committee is named after the Bill it considers. For example, a committee considering a Bill titled the Climate Bill would be called the Climate Bill Committee. See General Committee

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Q

Queens Speech	Held at the State Opening of Parliament in the House of Lords chamber. The speech outlines the Government's policies and the bills it will introduce in the next session. It usually takes place in mid November
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R

Recess	The periods when parliament does not sit.
Referendum	A poll of the electorate on a specific issue. The only referendum to date in the whole of the UK was in 1975 on whether the UK should remain a member of the Common Market (now the European Union).
Register of Interests	A register that allows MPs to declare any interests that they hold outside Parliament, such as consultancy work, gifts or membership of organizations.
Remedial Orders	A form of delegated legislation which seeks to correct a miscalculation or imbalance between UK law and the European Convention on Human Rights.
Report Stage	A passage of a Bill when it is returned to the House after its Committee Stage.
Royal Assent	Final stage of the legislative process is when the monarch agrees to make a Bill an Act. Queen Anne in 1707 was the last monarch to deny royal assent.
Royal Prerogative.	A series of historic powers officially held by the Queen that have, in reality, been passed to the prime minister of the day. They enable decisions to be taken without the backing of, or consultation with, Parliament. An example is the Prime Ministers decision to go to war.

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S

Salisbury Convention	A convention introduced by Lord Salisbury in the 1940s which stated that the Lords may propose amendments but would not oppose any government legislation promised in its election manifesto. Since 2005 both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats have indicated
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	that as a result of decreasing voter turnout, and the low share of the vote received by the government, they do not feel bound by the convention.
Second Reading	When the main purpose of a Bill is discussed and voted on. If the Bill passes it moves on to the Committee Stage.
Secretary of State	Departmental ministers in the cabinet.
Select Committees	Committees concerned with the work of a governmental department. Some, like the Public Accounts Committee, cross departmental boundaries, and other are involved in a range of ongoing investigations. Lords select committees concentrate on European, scientific, economic and constitutional issues.
Serjeant at Arms	An official of the House of Commons who is responsible for maintaining law and order in and around the Commons. He is the only person in the Commons allowed to carry a sword.
Shadow Cabinet	Senior group of opposition spokespeople who shadow or mark each individual member of the government.
Speaker	The chairman of the House of Commons. The role is politically neutral. The current speaker is Michael Martin.
Standing Committees	Became known as General Committees in November 2006. See General Committee
Standing Orders	The rules under which Parliament conducts its business. They regulate the way MPs behave in the Commons and the way debates are organized.
Starred Questions	With the exception of Friday, business in the House of Lords begins each day with up to four oral "starred" questions to the government. Supplementary questions on the same subject may be asked by any Lord without notice.
Statutory Instrument	Most delegated legislation is made in the form of a statutory instrument. They are frequently used to make detailed provisions that are left out of primary legislation. They are also used to incorporate the provisions of Directives of the EU into UK law. They are much faster and simpler to implement than a full Act of Parliament. When implemented they have the same force as an Act of Parliament. Two to three thousand are passed each year. Most are subject to parliamentary procedure, but in the Commons they are to be debated they are debated in committees rather than on the floor of the house. Some instruments that are not deemed important enough are not laid before the Parliament. There is a Commons Select Committee and a Joint Committee responsible for scrutinizing Statutory Instruments. See affirmative resolution procedure , commencement orders , negative resolution procedure
Sunset Clause	A provision that terminates or repeals all or portions of the law after a specific date.

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I

Tellers	Members who count the votes in the House of Commons
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	and the House of Lords during a division.
Ten Minute Rule	A method to introduce a Private Members Bill. It is not a serious attempt to get a Bill passed but is used to mainly raise the profile of an issue.
Third Reading	This is a final opportunity to vote on the whole of a Bill. After third reading in the Chamber in which the Bill was first introduced, the Bill moves to first reading in the other Chamber.
Three-Line Whip	A written notice, underlined three times, that is used to indicate to MPs that their party requires them to attend a division and vote. It is a very serious matter for MPs to defy a three-line whip, when it does occur it can lead to the member being expelled from the party.
Tory Party	See Conservative Party

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U

Unstarred Questions	In the Lords, a Peer may ask an Unstarred Question at the end of the day's business and allow a short debate ending with a government reply.
Urgent Questions	See Emergency Debate
Usual Challenges	A term used to describe the working relationship of the Whips from the different parties

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W

Westminster Hall	A room that has been used for some parliamentary debates since 1999. Topics are usually non-contentious.
Whip	An MP who ensures that members of the party attend and vote as the party leadership desires.
White Papers	Government Papers that gives a more definite intention of proposed government policy than a Green Papers .
Whitehall	A road near Parliament where many important government departments are located.
Written Questions	The vast majority of questions answered in each session are written questions. There is no limit to the number of written question a member may table. They are usually answered within 7 days.

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Y

Yeoman	The deputy to the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod who assists him with his duties.
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