



the Queen's speech 2015

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The 2015 Queen's Speech and State Opening of Parliament will take place on Wednesday 27 May 2015. It is David Cameron's fifth Queen's Speech as Prime Minister but the first wholly Conservative Queen's Speech since John Major's final Parliament as Prime Minister in October 1996. This document sets out some of the Bills that could be included as well as any potential barriers to their becoming law.

EMPLOYMENT BILL

Building on the Coalition Government's job creation record is a central pillar of the Conservative manifesto. It includes a commitment to create two million more jobs and three million more apprenticeships over the next five years.

While an aspiration to deliver new jobs and apprenticeships is uncontroversial, a number of the measures expected to be included in the Conservatives' Employment Bill will be contentious.

Firstly, the Bill is expected to lower the household Benefit Cap to £23,000 a year to release additional funding for apprenticeships. Another welfare reform that may make it into the Bill is the 'Youth Allowance', a time-limited replacement for Jobseekers Allowance for 18 to 21 year olds.

Secondly, the Bill may also include the Conservatives' promised reforms to trade union ballots. Business Secretary Sajid Javid has already indicated his desire to act quickly to implement new rules on strike ballot thresholds. Under the proposed reforms any strike affecting 'essential public services' will need the backing of 40% of eligible union members and a minimum turnout of 50% in strike ballots. The Government also plan to lift so-called 'scab' rules that restrict the use of agency staff to replace striking workers.

In practice the Government may choose to include their trade union reforms in a separate Bill in order to speed the passage of the welfare reforms through Parliament. Either way, the Employment Bill will likely be guided through Parliament by the new Employment Minister, Priti Patel with Skills Minister, Nick Boles expected to lead on the Bill for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

CHILDCARE BILL

In addition to the reforms included in the Employment Bill, the Government have also made clear their intention to introduce their manifesto commitments on childcare as quickly as possible as part of their drive to boost employment.

The Childcare Bill, which is likely to be guided through Parliament by Childcare and Education Minister, Sam Gyimah, will increase provision of free childcare for all three and four-year olds from 15 hours a week to 30 hours a week for households in which both parents are working.

ENTERPRISE BILL

In his first speech as Business Secretary, Sajid Javid announced that one of the key elements of the Queen's Speech will be an Enterprise Bill.

The main focus of the Bill will be on reducing 'red tape'. It will set out plans to cut it by at least £10 billion over the Parliament and, for the first time, it will focus on 'red tape' generated by independent regulators as well as Whitehall. We will have to wait to see the detail but this focus on regulators could have big implications for businesses operating in regulated sectors such as water, energy and telecoms.

Another measure that will feature in the Bill is the creation of a Small Business Conciliation Service which will have a remit to help settle disputes between small and large businesses. It will focus on resolving disputes over late payments by large businesses to smaller firms in their supply chain – an issue that has been increasingly raised by MPs from all parties.

The final element of the Bill will be an extension and simplification of the Primary Authority system, whereby businesses are able to seek advice on regulation from a single local authority whose advice must then be respected by all other local authorities.

The Bill is expected to be led through Parliament by the newly appointed Minister for Small Business and Enterprise, Anna Soubry.

CITIES DEVOLUTION BILL

Devolving greater powers to city regions has been a priority for a number of senior Conservatives for several years, notably the new Communities and Local Government Secretary, Greg Clark and the Chancellor, George Osborne.

After an early set back during the last Parliament when a number of cities voted 'no' in referendums on the introduction of directly elected Mayors, the issue has returned to the top of the Conservative agenda, culminating in the devolution deal agreed with the leaders of Greater Manchester's 10 councils in November 2014.

The Cities Devolution Bill will aim to deliver the Chancellor's vision of a 'northern powerhouse' by giving other cities the opportunity to adopt the model of devolution being implemented in Manchester – gaining powers over housing, transport, skills, health and social care, planning and policing – under the leadership of directly-elected Mayors.

While both Osborne and Greg Clark will both have considerable input, the Bill is expected to be led through Parliament by Minister of State for Communities and Resilience, Mark Francois.

HOUSING BILL

One of the most controversial elements of the Conservative manifesto was the commitment to extend Right-to-Buy to housing association properties. Delivering on this pledge will be the centrepiece of an expected Housing Bill.

The Bill will set out how the Government plans to navigate the legal difficulties in forcing private organisations to sell their assets. It is also expected to set out more detail on the Conservative plan to fund replacement affordable housing by compelling local authorities to sell off their most valuable properties. Given the concerns about the policy's impact on affordable housing levels from many in the sector, the Government may choose to get started on the Bill as soon as possible.

Also expected to be included are measures to set up a Brownfield Fund to help unlock development on brownfield sites. There may also be additional measures in the Bill to increase local involvement in the planning process, in particular in relation to wind farms, though what this might look like is unclear.

The Bill will be guided through Parliament by the Housing and Planning Minister, Brandon Lewis

COUNTER-EXTREMISM BILL

Speaking to the National Security Council shortly after the election, the Prime Minister, David Cameron confirmed the Conservatives' plans to introduce a Counter-Extremism Bill in the forthcoming Queen's Speech.

The Bill will implement a series of reforms first set out by Home Secretary, Theresa May before the election. The centrepiece of the Bill will be the creation of 'extremism disruption orders' which will give the Government greater power to silence extremist groups who use hate speech in public places. In addition the Bill is expected to strengthen police powers to shut down premises used by extremist groups.

The measures in the Bill were blocked by the Liberal Democrats during the last Parliament but even without the constraints of Coalition the Bill's passage is unlikely to be smooth as a number of Conservative backbenchers have already raised concerns about the implications for free speech.

COMMUNICATIONS DATA BILL

Another set of measures that were blocked by the Liberal Democrats during the last Parliament were those set out in the Communications Data Bill. The Bill, which the Home Secretary may try to reintroduce now that the Conservatives have a majority, would require internet and mobile providers to retain records of their users' activity which would then be accessible to law enforcement agencies.

Like the Counter-Extremism Bill, the fact that the Conservatives have a majority does not guarantee the Bill a smooth passage given the concerns of several Tory MPs, including David Davis, about the civil liberties implications.

EDUCATION BILL

Education reform was a key part of the Coalition's first Queen's Speech five years ago and is again expected to feature prominently in the new Government's first wave of legislation.

Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan has confirmed that the Government plans to introduce new powers to intervene in failing and 'coasting' schools as well as pressing ahead with funding for new free schools. The Bill is expected to include new powers for Regional Schools Commissioners to intervene straight away when a school is found to be failing, including powers to bring in new leadership from other schools and speeding up the process for turning failing schools into academies. The Bill will also introduce new powers to intervene in 'coasting' schools i.e. those that are found to be just above the level of failing.

In addition to the provisions in the Bill, the Government has also said they plan to make an immediate start in delivering their manifesto pledge to open 500 new free schools.

IMMIGRATION BILL

Immigration regularly features at the top of lists of voters' concerns so it was little surprise the Prime Minister chose to focus one of his first speeches after the election on the subject. In his speech he set out plans to include an Immigration Bill in the Queen's Speech aimed at cracking down on illegal immigration and exploitation of illegal labour.

The Bill will include new powers for councils to force landlords to evict illegal migrant workers more quickly, new responsibilities on banks to check bank accounts against databases of people in the UK illegally and extending the current 'deport first, appeal later' measures relating immigration cases. The Bill will also create a new offence of illegal working to allow law enforcement agencies to seize wages earned illegally in the same way they can seize other proceeds of crime.

The Conservatives will also use the Bill to take ownership of one of the Labour Party's election pledges: making it an offence for business and recruitment agencies to recruit abroad without advertising in the UK.

Finally, the Bill is expected to include provisions to create a new Labour Market Enforcement Agency to help tackle labour market exploitation.

The Bill is likely to be guided through Parliament by Immigration Minister, James Brokenshire.

EU REFERENDUM BILL

The proposed EU referendum will be one of the defining events of the next five years and will be at the top of many Conservative MPs' agendas. While we do not yet know exactly when the referendum will take place, the Prime Minister has confirmed that he plans to include the EU Referendum Bill in his first Queen's Speech and will publish the text of the Bill the day after the Speech.

In the Commons the Bill will be steered through the House by the Europe Minister, David Lidington; it will be interesting to see who takes responsibility for the Bill in the Lords where it will face a far harder passage.

SCOTLAND BILL

The Queen's Speech will include a Scotland Bill aimed at delivering on the promises of further devolution made during the independence referendum campaign. While the Prime Minister has indicated that he may devolve further powers over and above those set out by the cross-party Smith Commission, the Bill that will be included in the Queen's Speech is likely to stick to the draft Bill published earlier this year, based on the Smith Commission's proposals.

The Bill has cross-party support and should have a relatively smooth passage through Parliament but the debates around it will be of great interest, not least with 56 SNP MPs now in the Commons.

BRITISH BILL OF RIGHTS

One of the Conservatives' most prominent manifesto commitments was the pledge to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a British Bill of Rights. However, despite its prominence, there is only a slim chance it will make the cut for the Government's first Queen's Speech.

There are a number of complexities surrounding any repeal of the Human Rights Act, ranging from how it fits with the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to the impact it may have on Britain's relationship with the European Court of Human Rights. Add to this strong opposition in the Lords and a number of Conservative rebels in the Commons, as well as the practicalities of implementing this particular manifesto pledge, it looks challenging even before considering exactly how a replacement Bill of Rights could be put together (it is rumoured already to be on its seventh draft).

The Prime Minister and his new Justice Secretary Michael Gove will probably leave it out of this year's Speech, opting to delay it entirely or to launch a consultation on the Bill's provisions to help them iron out its manifest complexities.

If you would like to know more about any of the Bills included in the Queen's Speech, or to learn more about Connect's services, please get in touch on 0207 592 9592 or on intelligence@connectpa.co.uk.