

The Queen's Speech and the Assembly

Quick Guide

May 2013

Introduction

The Queen's Speech marks the beginning of a UK parliamentary session and sets out the proposed policies and legislation which the UK Government plans to introduce during the course of the year. The **speech takes place annually in the spring**, usually at the beginning of May.

This Quick Guide provides background information about the Queen's Speech, including details of how the Assembly considers and scrutinises its content.

State Opening of Parliament

Each **annual parliamentary session** begins with the State Opening of Parliament where the Monarch formally opens the UK Parliament and delivers an outline of the UK Government's legislative programme for the forthcoming year.

Parliamentary sessions at Westminster usually last one year. The result of this is that any Bill which has not completed its passage through both houses of the UK Parliament by the end of a particular parliamentary session falls and would have to start its legislative passage afresh, unless they have been subject to a 'carry-over motion'¹ in the previous session.

Current sessions take place from spring to spring, which is a relatively new approach introduced in light of the **Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011**. That Act fixes parliamentary terms to five years, each containing five annual parliamentary sessions leading up to a UK General Election in May at the end of the fifth session. Prior to this, the State Opening of Parliament and the accompanying speech took place in the autumn following the party conference season.

The **Assembly, by contrast, has adopted continuous five year sessions** since the beginning of the fourth Assembly in May 2011. This means that Assembly Bills automatically carry over from one year to the next without the need for carry over motions. In explaining the reasons behind this approach, the First Minister stated that 'A five-year legislative programme should permit greater planning and flexibility in bringing items forward so that they are fully developed and consulted upon prior to introduction'.²

¹ UK Parliament, *Glossary: Carry-over motions/bills*

² National Assembly for Wales, RoP, *Plenary: Legislative Priorities*, 14 June 2011

The Queen's Speech

The Queen's Speech is delivered by the Monarch from the Throne in the House of Lords, in the presence of Members of both Houses. Although the Monarch reads the speech, the content is drafted entirely by the UK Government of the day.³

Copies of the speech are usually provided by the UK Government's Cabinet Office shortly following the Monarch's address on the **GOV.UK** and **Number 10** websites. Following the 2012 Queen's Speech, the UK Government also provided **detailed briefing notes to complement the information included in the speech** which set out the aims, objectives and territorial extent of each Bill contained in the speech.⁴

UK Bills that make provisions in devolved areas

The Bills outlined in the Queen's Speech tend to vary in terms of their **territorial impact and extent**. For example, certain Bills will apply to the UK as a whole, while some will be specific to England, England and Wales, or any other combination of the constituent parts of the UK. Those Bills that apply to Wales and make provisions within the Assembly's legislative powers are of particular interest to the Assembly. This is because convention requires the Assembly to give its consent for the UK Parliament to legislate on its behalf in such circumstances through a vote in plenary on what's called a **Legislative Consent Motion (LCM)**.⁵

Following the 2012 Queen's Speech, the Welsh Government issued **a letter to the Presiding Officer and all Assembly Members** which identified the Bills contained in the Speech which made provisions in devolved areas and would be likely to trigger the need for a LCM. The First Minister has confirmed that the Welsh Government will continue with this practice following each Queen's Speech from now on.⁶

Secretary of State's appearance in the Assembly

Section 32 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006* ('the 2006 Act')⁷ and Standing Order 13.3⁸ entitles the **Secretary of State for Wales to participate, but not to vote, in proceedings of the Assembly**, and to have access to documents relevant to those proceedings. Section 33 of the 2006 Act also includes a requirement for the **Secretary of State for Wales to consult the Assembly about the contents of the UK Government's legislative programme in a plenary session** of the Assembly at least once during each parliamentary session. The Assembly's Standing Order 11.21(i) also requires that time is made available in each Assembly year for a debate on the Queen's Speech.

Where, after the beginning of the parliamentary session, it is decided that a Bill should be introduced into Parliament and that Bill has not been included in the Secretary of State's initial consultation with the Assembly, then the 2006 Act requires the Secretary of State to consult the Assembly about it (unless it appears to the Secretary of State to be inappropriate to do so).

The **Research Service produces a paper shortly after the speech takes place** and ahead of the Secretary of State's appearance before the Assembly, summarising the aims and objectives of the Bills contained, with particular emphasis on those Bills that affect devolved areas in Wales.

³ UK Parliament, *State Opening of Parliament*

⁴ Cabinet Office, *The Queen's Speech – briefing notes*, 9 May 2012

⁵ Further information about Legislative Consent Motions is available in the *Quick Guide: Legislative Consent Motions*

⁶ National Assembly for Wales, RoP, *Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee*, 22 April 2013

⁷ *Government of Wales Act 2006* (Chapter 32)

⁸ National Assembly for Wales, *Standing Orders of the National Assembly for Wales*, January 2013, Standing Order 13.3

Further information

For further information on **the Queen's Speech and Wales**, please contact **Owain Roberts** (owain.roberts@Wales.gov.uk), Research Service.

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- List of other **related Quick Guides, Research Papers** or **Research Notes**
- List of other sources or websites which relate to this subject

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