



Queen's Speech 2010

Briefing from Children England
May 2010

Introduction

Written by the government and delivered by the reigning monarch, the Queen's Speech sets out the legislative agenda for the year ahead and is the centrepiece of the state opening of Parliament. The Queen's speech took place on 25 May 2010, where it outlined the new coalition Government's legislative agenda for the next 18 months. In the speech, the Queen covered 23 Bills and one draft bill proposed by the new administration.

The speech covered a large span of policy areas, although three themes clearly come through. The first theme is the financial and economic crisis, which will overshadow and shape the 2010 parliament, and which is reflected in proposed changes in the banks, the benefits system, retirement age and national insurance, as well as in the creation of the new Office for Budgetary Responsibility. The second is the liberal political reform agenda, dominated by the parliamentary reform bill on the voting system and fixed-term parliaments but also including the abolition of ID cards, the Freedom (great repeal) Bill, and the plan to reform parliamentary privilege.

Meanwhile, the final theme is the devolution of power in government and the public services, marked by the Decentralisation Bill itself, the important Bills on reform of the schools system and the health service. In the five-page speech, the Queen said that public services would be reformed to encourage individual and social responsibility. In doing so, the speech made clear that, despite the weak state of Britain's public finances, the coalition government would still press ahead with reform of public services to introduce what the Tories call the "big society".

Below is a brief explanation of the key Bills in the Queen's Speech of interest to the children, young people and families voluntary and community sector.

Academies Bill

The Academies Bill will allow more schools to become academies, giving them more freedom from both Whitehall and local government. The government states simply that the bill will "remove the requirement to consult the local authority before opening an academy, thus simplifying and accelerating the process". Academy status takes schools out of local authority control and gives them greater freedom over admissions policy, curriculum and teachers' salaries.

The Bill provides a fast-track route for the best-performing schools, those deemed 'outstanding' by Ofsted. In a sense the policy is a flip of the Labour plan, which saw academies set up in schools which had previously been deemed to be failing. This Bill will mean the number of academies will increase from the current 203 to as many as 2,300, giving primary schools the chance to take academy status for the first time.

The Academies Bill will be the first to be introduced by the new Government – being presented to the House of Commons on Wednesday 26 May 2010.

Education and Children's Bill

The Education and Children's Bill will make it easier for parents, teachers and community groups to set up new schools, with state funding for every pupil they attract. The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove believes that such schools, modelled on the charter school movement in the United States and "free schools" in Sweden, can largely be created using existing powers once local authorities can no longer stand in their way. The Bill will also introduce a "pupil premium", directing money towards disadvantaged children.

The Bill proposes to introduce a slimmer curriculum, new tests at the age of 11, a reform of Ofsted and more powers for headteachers to improve pupil behaviour. On discipline, the Bill will pledge to give teachers and head teachers the powers to improve behaviour and tackle bullying – including removing the right of appeal for pupils excluded from school. This Bill is expected to be presented to the House of Commons in the autumn.

Welfare Reform Bill

The Queen's speech outlined a Welfare Reform Bill. The speech made clear that Iain Duncan Smith, the new Work and Pensions Secretary, will oversee radical reform of Britain's benefits system. What is expected is that Labour's various workfare programmes will be rolled into a single new system, with private firms encouraged to do more of the work. The Welfare Reform Bill is promised to simplify the "confusing complexity" of the benefits system by reducing the unnecessary administration of welfare. The Bill will also seek to better incentivise people to return to work. It looks likely that Iain Duncan Smith will accelerate reforms first proposed in a report by the City financier David Freud on behalf of Tony Blair, which gives voluntary and private companies a greater role in placing the long-term unemployed into work. The Work and Pensions Secretary will also be seeking to tie in his welfare reforms to his wider brief in tackling 'Broken Britain', a concept first put forward by his think-tank the Centre for Social Justice in 2006.

Decentralisation and Localism Bill

The purpose of the bill is to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions. The bill will give residents the power to instigate referendums and veto 'excessive' council tax increases. In line with the Tories vision of 'big society' the bill will create new powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, by giving communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services.

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

This Bill aims to make the police more accountable through "directly elected individuals". These new individuals will oversee police force budgets and strategy. The Bill will also create a dedicated border police force, ensure health and safety laws do not stand in the way of "common sense policing" and overhaul the Licensing Act. The Police Reform Bill is to be introduced in the autumn.

Freedom (great repeal) Bill

The core aim of the Bill is to, 'Roll back the State, reducing the weight of government imposition on citizens that has increased in recent years through legislation and centralised programmes.' Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister, will take charge of the Freedom (great repeal) Bill, which will restrict the scope of the DNA database, restrict the use of CCTV cameras and ensure that anti-terrorism legislation "strikes the right balance between protecting the public, strengthening social cohesion and protecting

civil liberties". The Freedom Bill will scrap the ContactPoint children's database, protect trial by jury, review libel laws, introduce new safeguards in anti-terrorism legislation and end storage of internet and email records "without good reason".

Health Bill

Plans for the Health Bill are still being developed, but the Queen's speech outlined a commitment to supporting a patient led NHS focused on outcomes; and to reduce bureaucracy within the NHS. The Bill promises a greater focus on patients, ensuring they genuinely share in making decisions about their care and have more choice and control. Alongside a patient led NHS, the Bill will also establish an independent NHS Board to allocate resources and provide commissioning guidance, and will allow GPs to commission services on behalf of their patients. A new "public health service" will have ring fenced budgets, with disadvantaged areas receiving extra funds and local authorities, voluntary groups and local businesses paid according to any improvements they achieve. Andrew Lansley, the health secretary, will set out more details of his vision in the next few weeks.

The government has promised an independent commission on social care which will report within a year on establishing "responsible and sustainable funding" for long-term care. The coalition government retains a powerful commitment to personal budgets and direct payments in social care.

Key messages for the Voluntary Sector

Much of the Queen's speech focused on the devolution of power and decision-making to communities, including widening the provider market in areas as broad as education and welfare to work. Although not mentioned in the text of the speech, in supplementary information, Number 10 said that radical reform of public services was needed and third sector organisations were one means by which to improve outcomes and reduce the national debt. Based on the coalition's priorities the most likely opportunities for voluntary sector involvement will be in education, welfare to work, health and reducing re-offending.

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Further information:

www.number10.gov.uk

www.guardian.co.uk

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