



Back to Business

A guide to the start of the new Parliament

July 2024



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Acronyms

AV	Alternative Vote
BBCOM	Backbench Business Committee
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
CWH	Committee of the Whole House
ESC	European Scrutiny Committee
HOLAC	House of Lords Appointments Commission
ISC	Intelligence and Security Committee
LOTO	Leader of the Opposition
MP	Member of Parliament
NAO	National Audit Office
OBR	Office for Budget Responsibility
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PACAC	Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PBC	Public Bill Committee
REUL	Retained EU Law
SI	Statutory Instrument
SNP	Scottish National Party
SO	Standing Order
STV	Single Transferable Vote
UQ	Urgent Question

Executive summary

When will the Government present its first bills after the King's Speech? When will the Government schedule a Budget? Why do departmental spending plans (the 'Main Estimates') need to be approved urgently before the Summer recess? When will House of Commons Select Committees be up and running? If two opposition parties win a similar number of seats at the General Election, how might this affect the functioning of the opposition in the House of Commons?

The new Parliament will assemble on Tuesday 9 July, just five days after the General Election. The first item of business will be to choose the Speaker of the House of Commons, with Sir Lindsay Hoyle seeking to return to the Chair. After the Speaker has been chosen the swearing-in of MPs will be the primary item of business for the following few days. Substantive parliamentary business will not begin until after the King's Speech at the State Opening of Parliament on Wednesday 17 July.

This briefing explains the ceremonial, legislative, organisational and procedural processes engaged at the start of the new Parliament. It also explores the challenges a General Election in July poses to the parliamentary calendar over the Summer, detailing the implications for sitting times, recess periods and the possible length of the Session.

It also explores some key questions about what the new Government may do with respect to legislation and public finances in the early months of the Parliament and how its plans may compare with the actions of the new Governments that followed the 1979, 1997 and 2010 General Elections.

When will the Government present its first bills?

Following the King's Speech, several bills may be introduced to Parliament just a day after the event and a mere fortnight after the General Election.

Ministers may also aim to schedule the Second Reading of some of these bills before the Summer recess. It is common practice for a new Government to move swiftly with its legislative programme following a General Election.

In 2010 the Queen's Speech took place on 25 May. The following day three bills – the Identity Documents Bill, the Local Government Bill and the Academies Bill – were laid before Parliament, two in the House of Commons and one in the House of Lords. The Academies Bill was the first to receive its Second Reading on 7 June 2010, a fortnight after it had been presented. By the Summer recess in late July a further seven bills had been presented, five in the Commons and two in the Lords.

In 1997 the Queen's Speech took place on 14 May. The following day two bills – the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill and the National Health Service (Private Finance) Bill – were laid before Parliament, the former in the House of Commons and the latter in the House of Lords. Less than a week later a further five Bills were presented to Parliament. The Referendums Bill was the first to receive its Second Reading on 21 May 1997, just a week after it was presented to the House of Commons. By the 15 July, just two months after the Queen's Speech, 19 bills had been introduced and 18 of these had received a Second Reading in the House in which they were presented.

When will the Government schedule a Budget?

Rachel Reeves has said that she will not hold a Budget without an independent forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) if Labour win the General Election. The OBR requires 10 weeks' notice to prepare an independent forecast for a Budget.

Assuming the earliest date she can give notice to the OBR to prepare a forecast is Friday 5 July, the

earliest possible date that a Budget could be held is Friday 13 September.

Unless the Government decides that Parliament should sit during one or more of the three party conferences between 16 September and 4 October then it seems likely that the Budget will take place soon after Parliament returns from the conference recess the week commencing 7 October.

The earliest feasible date for the Budget would thus be 95 days after the General Election. This would be considerably later than Budgets that followed the last three changes of Government:

- in 1979 the Budget was held 39 days after the General Election;
- in 1997 the Budget was held 61 days after the General Election;
- in 2010 the Budget was held 46 days after the General Election.

Why do departmental spending plans (the ‘Main Estimates’) need to be approved urgently before the Summer recess?

The ‘Main Estimates’ setting out departmental spending plans for the current financial year are normally published in April for parliamentary approval in July. However, the Government did not publish this year’s ‘Main Estimates’ prior to calling the General Election.

House of Commons Standing Orders enable all departmental Estimates to be approved in a single ‘roll-up’ motion, but only if the motion is approved before 5 August each year. If approval is not secured before 5 August, then the abbreviated ‘roll-up’ procedure cannot be used, and each departmental Estimate would need to be approved separately which would be time-consuming.

The Government must publish and seek parliamentary approval of the Main Estimates before the Summer recess or departments will

begin to run out of money by early Autumn.

The Estimates are scrutinised by departmental Select Committees. However, these are unlikely to be established before the Summer recess. The Estimates will therefore receive even less scrutiny than usual.

When will House of Commons Select Committees be up and running?

There is a 4-stage process to set up the majority of Select Committees:

Stage 1: a determination by the Speaker of the number of Committee chairmanships due to each party, to reflect the composition of the House. The Speaker must inform the parties of this the day after his re-election.

Stage 2: tabling of the motion allocating chairmanships to each party. This has to be done by the parties within two weeks of the King’s Speech. It is usually agreed by the House several days later. In recent Parliaments the motion has been approved on the 11th sitting day.

Stage 3: election of chairs 14 calendar days after the House approves the motion allocating chairmanships to each party.

Stage 4: nomination of Select Committee members by the parties following an internal ‘election’ process. This generally occurs about 30 sitting days after the first meeting of Parliament but Summer and party conference recesses means this can take up to three calendar months.

It is therefore probable that Select Committees will not be fully established until early October. Their early work could also be stymied if there are frontbench changes arising from opposition party leadership elections in the Autumn, which would then have a knock-on effect on Committee membership.

If two opposition parties win a similar number of seats at the General Election, how might this affect the functioning of the opposition in the House of Commons?

The Official Opposition is “the largest minority party which is prepared, in the event of the resignation of the Government, to assume office”, according to Erskine May.

The Leader of the Opposition is defined in the Ministerial and other Salaries Act 1975 as he or she who is “for the time being the Leader in that House of the party in opposition to Her [sic] Majesty’s Government having the greatest numerical strength in the House of Commons.”

If it is unclear which is the largest minority party or who the leader of that party is, the Act states that “the question shall be decided for the purposes of this Act by the Speaker of the House of Commons, and his decision, certified in writing under his hand, shall be final and conclusive.”

If two parties were to secure the same number of seats in the House of Commons it would therefore be for the Speaker of the House to decide which of them should be accorded the status of the Official Opposition. After the number of seats won, the criterion relied on by the Speaker in reaching a determination would most likely be each party’s share of the vote.

In a period of considerable political and electoral volatility it cannot be ruled out that the party accorded the status of the Official Opposition might change during the course of the Parliament owing to deaths in office, defections, mergers, resignations or suspensions. In the event of a material change in the number of seats held by the opposition parties mid-Parliament, it would be for the Speaker to decide whether the rights and responsibilities of the Official Opposition should be transferred to another party.

The identity of the second-largest minority party in the Commons might also change during the course of the Parliament. However, the definition in the House of Commons Standing Orders of the second-largest opposition party for the purpose of allocating Opposition Days explicitly states that it is the non-government party which “has the second largest number of members *elected to the House as members of that party*” (our italics for emphasis).

A party which had more seats than any other opposition party – apart from the Official Opposition – as a result of defections or a merger, would therefore not secure the rights of the second party of opposition because its new MPs would not have been elected to the House as members of that party.

There is precedent for such a scenario: when the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party merged in 1988 to form a new party, the Social and Liberal Democrats, they were the second largest opposition party in the House in terms of size, but the new party lost the entitlement to three Opposition Days previously held by the Liberal Party to the smaller Ulster Unionist Party.



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Parliamentary calendar: Sessions, sittings & recesses

Before the General Election was announced, Parliament had been scheduled to rise for the Summer recess on Tuesday 23 July. However, that date was nullified with the dissolution of the last Parliament. It will be for the new Government to propose fresh recess dates.

When will the Summer recess start?

If Parliament were to break for Summer recess as previously planned (on or around 23 July), there would be little or no time for any further business following the debate on the King's Speech.

A spokesperson for Keir Starmer has indicated that it is "not sustainable" to begin parliamentary business on 17 July (with the King's Speech) only to head off for the Summer a week later.¹ Similarly, Rachel Reeves has reportedly indicated that were Labour to win the General Election a shortened recess would help to demonstrate momentum in the Government's first 100 days.²

This suggests Parliament may be required to sit later than usual - into July or early August - as well as returning earlier than usual at the end of August. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* suggested that Parliament will continue to sit until 31 July and return on 2 September, shortening the usual recess period by about a week.³ If the Government wanted to shorten the recess period a little further then MPs might return after the Bank Holiday weekend (so returning on Tuesday 27 August) thereby reducing the usual six week recess period by about a fortnight.

When will Parliament sit in September and October?

Parliament normally sits during the first two weeks of September before adjourning for the party conference recess. The table to the right shows the known party conference dates for the main political parties in Great Britain.

Table 1: Party conference dates

Party	Conference Dates
Scottish National Party (SNP)	Friday 30 August - Sunday 1 September
Green Party	Friday 6 September - Sunday 8 September
Liberal Democrats	Saturday 14 September - Tuesday 17 September
Labour Party	Sunday 22 September - Wednesday 25 September (Labour Women's Conference: Saturday 21 September)
Conservative Party	Sunday 29 September - Wednesday 2 October
Plaid Cymru	Not yet published
Reform UK	Not yet published

If Parliament were to return from the Summer recess on 2 September as *The Sunday Times* has suggested, then it would be expected to rise for the conference recess a fortnight later on or around 12 September.

However, if the Government wished to press ahead with the Budget the earliest it could do so would be the following week, if it is to observe the Office for Budget Responsibility's 10-week preparation rule to draw up an independent forecast to accompany the Budget (see page 33). This would mean Parliament sitting during the Liberal Democrat party conference.

Unless the Government decides exceptionally that Parliament should sit during one or more of the three party conference weeks beginning 16 September to consider the Budget and priority legislation, then it seems likely that Parliament will return the week commencing 7 October and the Budget will be considered soon thereafter.

Parliamentary calendar: Sessions, sittings and recesses

A one- or two-year parliamentary Session?

Two of the last four opening Sessions following a General Election have been of two rather than the usual one-year duration (2010-12 and 2017-19) and the opening Session of the last Parliament (2019-21) was extended to 16 months. Whether to follow suit in this Parliament will be an early decision for the Government's business managers.

If it is to be a one-year Session, will it end early next Summer (in May or June) or will it extend into Autumn (ending in October or early November)?

The advantage of a two-year Session is that it eases the pressure on the legislative programme created by the sessional cut-off. It also avoids early disruption to parliamentary scrutiny, particularly for Select Committees which may not be operational until Autumn (see pages 22-29) and would face less than nine months of active work before the end of a one-year Session. A two-year Session would also save money by eliminating the need for a State Opening of Parliament.

The disadvantage of a two-year Session is that it removes the benefit of the sessional deadline to force legislation through. There is a risk with a two-year Session that legislation may get bogged down in the House of Lords where the Government does not have a majority if Peers think they have a lot of time at their disposal for scrutiny. A two-year Session would also rob the Government of the opportunity for a King's Speech which is a significant parliamentary and media moment to focus minds on a new legislative programme.

Key dates in the parliamentary calendar

Below are some of the known and anticipated dates for key legislative, organisational and procedural matters that will occur in the early weeks of the new Parliament, and which are addressed in later sections of this paper.

Where the entries are italicised this means the information is indicative only, based on a best estimate of when the event may happen given the uncertainty about parliamentary sitting days.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	2	3	4 General election	5	6	7
8	9 Speaker's election (Commons)	10 Swearing-in of MPs and Peers Speaker announces distribution of Select Committee chairs	11 Swearing-in of MPs and Peers	12	13	14
15	16	17 King's Speech Speaker appoints up to three temporary Deputy Speakers	18 King's Speech debate (day 2) First Business Questions	19 <i>PMB Ballot in the House of Lords</i>	20	21
22 King's Speech debate (day 3)	23 King's Speech debate (day 4)	24 First PMQs <i>Deputy Speakers' election</i> King's Speech debate (day 5)	25 Private Members' Bill Ballot <i>King's Speech debate (day 6)</i>	26	27	28
29	30 <i>Allocation of Select Committee chairs</i> <i>House rises for summer recess?</i>	31 <i>House rises for summer recess?</i>	1 <i>House rises for summer recess?</i>	2	3	4

Election of the Speaker

Between the summoning of the new Parliament on Tuesday 9 July and the State Opening of Parliament on Wednesday 17 July a series of important procedures that mark the start of any new Parliament will be implemented: the receipt of the Return Book confirming the election of all MPs; the election of the Speaker of the House of Commons; the approval of the Speaker's election and his laying claim to the "ancient and undoubted rights and privileges" of the House on behalf of MPs; and the swearing-in of Members of both Houses.

How is the Speaker elected?

The procedures initiating the election of the Speaker and his approval in office by the Monarch are set out in Standing Orders 1, 1A and 1B.⁴

On Tuesday 9 July, Black Rod will be sent to summon the House of Commons to attend the House of Lords. There, the Lords Commissioners – five senior peers, usually including the Speaker of the House, the Leader of the House (in the event that Labour wins the General Election this is likely to be Baroness Smith of Basildon), the Shadow Leader of the House and the Convenor of the Crossbench Peers – will direct MPs to choose a Speaker.

Who is Black Rod?

A senior official in the House of Lords with responsibility for access to and order in the Lords chamber and surrounding precincts; for Royal matters at Westminster, principally organising and participating in major ceremonial events including the State Opening and Royal and State visits; and as the King's representative for looking after the residual Royal estate in the Palace.

On their return to the House of Commons, MPs will begin the process of electing a Speaker

immediately. The process is overseen by the Father or Mother of the House, namely the Member with the longest continuous service who is not a Minister (see 'Who will be Father / Mother of the House?' on the following page).

The Father or Mother of the House will ask Sir Lindsay Hoyle, who was Speaker at the dissolution of the previous Parliament, if he is again willing to serve as Speaker. As Sir Lindsay is seeking re-election to the House of Commons – and so by convention has faced no opposition in his constituency from the major parties – it is expected he will seek to be re-elected.

Who are the Lords Commissioners?

A group of Privy Counsellors (usually five) who are appointed by the King to carry out specific tasks in Parliament on his behalf when he is not present in person. Lords Commissioners usually are, but do not have to be, Members of the House of Lords.

If the Speaker in the previous Parliament seeks re-election to the Chair, a motion is put before the House by a Member for consideration forthwith, "that (name of former Speaker) do take the Chair of this House as Speaker".⁵ The vote on the motion is usually taken 'by acclamation' (that is by MPs shouting in support of or opposition to the motion). It is customary that the motion is uncontested and the former Speaker is re-elected. Exceptionally, if MPs audibly shout in opposition to the motion then a division (a formal vote requiring MPs to go through the voting lobbies to record their decision) will be needed (see 'A contested election?' on page 15).

Once the question is agreed to, the Father or Mother of the House will leave the Chair and return to the backbenches. The Speaker-elect will be 'dragged' from his place on the backbenches to the

Election of the Speaker

Chair by other Members. This custom is rooted in the history of the office of the Speaker. In previous centuries one of the Speaker's roles was to communicate the opinions and decisions of the House of Commons to the Monarch. On several occasions, the Speaker was executed for conveying messages that were not to the liking of the Monarch. Understandably, some MPs were therefore reluctant to accept the position.

Having been conveyed to the Chair the Speaker-elect will say a few words to acknowledge and thank the House for the honour it has bestowed and then take the Chair. At this point the Mace will be placed upon the table in front of the Speaker-elect (this is the symbol of Royal authority within Parliament). Brief speeches of congratulation by each of the party leaders will then follow. However, the Speaker is not confirmed in office until the House of Commons' choice is approved by the Monarch.

Who will be Father/Mother of the House?

Of those standing for re-election the most senior in order of continuous length of service are: Sir Peter Bottomley, Sir Edward Leigh, Jeremy Corbyn, Sir Roger Gale, Sir David Davis, and Diane Abbott. If he is re-elected, Sir Peter Bottomley will remain as Father of the House, having been an MP continuously since a by-election in 1975. Likewise, Diane Abbott is the most senior female MP standing for re-election and would therefore become Mother of the House. If Diane Abbott is the most senior MP in the next Parliament, it will be the first time that a female MP has occupied that position.



How is the choice of Speaker confirmed by the Monarch?

Assuming that Sir Lindsay Hoyle's re-election on 9 July passes without controversy, the following day Black Rod will again be sent to summon the House of Commons to attend the House of Lords to confirm the choice of Speaker. In 2019, when the Government wished to proceed rapidly with Brexit-related legislation, exceptionally Black Rod was sent to the House of Lords on the same day as the re-election of the Speaker. In 2010, 2015 and 2017, however, Black Rod summoned the House of Commons the day after the election of the Speaker.

The King will not be present, but will again be represented by the Lords Commissioners, who will

A contested election

In the unlikely event that the motion to re-elect the Speaker is challenged, then the House will have to formally divide to vote on the motion, with each Member's decision being recorded for publication in Hansard.

Should MPs vote against the motion to re-elect the previous Speaker, a contested election by secret ballot would follow the next day under Standing Order No.1B.⁹ Written nominations are submitted between 9.30am and 10.30am. At 2.30pm, with the Father or Mother of the House in the Chair, each candidate would address the House in turn, before the first round of voting via secret ballot in the division lobbies. If no candidate receives a majority of votes, there are further rounds of voting. Candidates with less than 5% of vote or with the fewest votes are excluded from the next round.

Successive ballots are held until one candidate obtains over half the votes cast or only one candidate remains. Each round of voting can take around two hours.

be robed and seated between the Throne and the Woolsack. "It not being convenient for His Majesty to be personally present here this day", the Lords Commissioners will be empowered, by Letters Patent under the Great Seal of the Realm, to "do all things in His Majesty's name, which are to be done on His Majesty's part in this Parliament."⁶

On arrival in the House of Lords, the Speaker-elect will inform the Lords Commissioners:

*"That in obedience to the Royal Command, His Majesty's most faithful Commons have, in the exercise of their undoubted rights and privileges, preceded to the election of a Speaker, and that their choice has fallen upon myself. I therefore present myself to your Lordships' Bar and submit myself with all humility for His Majesty's gracious Approbation."*⁷

The presiding Commissioners will, on behalf of the Monarch, then approve and confirm his election.

What are the "ancient and undoubted rights and privileges" claimed by the Speaker on behalf of MPs?

The Speaker lays claim, by 'humble petition', to the "ancient and undoubted rights and privileges" of the House of Commons from the Crown. This is an assertion of the parliamentary privilege granted to Members of the House of Commons dating back to the Bill of Rights of 1689.⁸

The "rights and privileges" include freedom of speech, freedom from arrest, and freedom of access to His Majesty whenever required via the Speaker. These will be duly granted by the Lords Commissioners on the Monarch's behalf.

Having received the Approbation, the Speaker will then return to the House of Commons.

Election of the Deputy Speakers

One of the Speaker's first decisions will be to decide a date for the election of the Deputy Speakers. The House of Commons has three Deputy Speakers who assist the Speaker by chairing debates in his absence. Unlike the Speaker, the Deputy Speakers do not resign from their party when they take up their post.

On the day of the King's Speech, pending the election of the Deputy Speakers, the Speaker nominates up to three MPs to serve temporarily in the role. In 2019 the temporary Deputy Speakers were Sir Roger Gale, Sir George Howarth, and Sir Gary Streeter (only Sir Roger Gale is seeking re-election to Parliament at the General Election).

When are the Deputy Speakers elected?

The Standing Orders do not specify a date for the Deputy Speakers' election, only that the Speaker sets out the arrangements: "At the commencement of every Parliament, or from time to time, as necessity may arise, the Speaker shall notify the House of the arrangements to be made to elect a Chairman of Ways and Means and two Deputy Chairmen of Ways and Means..."¹⁰

However, the Standing Orders do require the ballot to be held between 11am and noon on the day appointed for the election.

In recent years, the election of Deputy Speakers has been held between four and six sitting days after the King's Speech. The precise date will depend on whether the House sits on Friday 19 July and when the House rises for Summer recess. The Speaker normally announces the date for the election around the time of the King's Speech.

How are the Deputy Speaker roles allocated to the parties?

The first Deputy Speaker is the Chairman of Ways and Means, who historically presided over debates on financial matters.

The Chairman of Ways and Means continues to have duties beyond those of the two other Deputy Speakers, such as normally presiding over the Budget debate, any Committee of the Whole House, and in connection with legislative committees, private bills and Westminster Hall sittings.



Election of the Deputy Speakers

Under Standing Order No.2A, the Chairman of Ways and Means and the Second Deputy Chairman should come from the opposite side of the House to the Speaker, while the First Deputy Chairman should be from the same side of the House as the Speaker.¹¹ The Standing Order also prescribes that among the Speaker and three Deputy Speakers there should be at least one man and one woman.

As Sir Lindsay Hoyle was previously a Labour MP, then assuming Labour wins the General Election, one of the three Deputy Speakers must be chosen from the Government benches and the other two Deputy Speakers from the opposition ranks. The Chairman of Ways and Means must come from the opposition benches. Of the three Deputy Speakers in the last Parliament (Dame Eleanor Laing (Cons), Dame Rosie Winterton (Lab) and Nigel Evans (Cons)) only the latter is seeking re-election at the General Election. It is likely that if returned to Parliament he will seek re-election as one of the Deputy Speakers.

How are the Deputy Speakers elected?

The three Deputy Speakers are elected by secret ballot, using the Single Transferable Vote system.

Nominations for the Deputy Speakerships must be submitted between 10am and 5pm on the day before the election. Candidates require the support of between six and 10 Members. The elections are held between 11am and 12 noon, with the winners taking-up their posts the following day.

Once elected, Deputy Speakers remain in office until the dissolution of the Parliament, unless they resign or otherwise cease to be an MP.

Single Transferable Vote

Each MP will rank the candidates for Deputy Speaker in his or her order of preference by marking 1, 2, 3, etc. next to their name. If a candidate has enough votes to be supported – so they have more votes than the required quota (for three Deputy Speakers the quota is 25%) then the fraction of their votes above the quota are transferred to the next preference of the voters. If after this transfer, no other candidate has reached the quota, the lowest -placed candidate is eliminated and their preferences redistributed. The process stops once three candidates have reached the quota and have therefore been elected Deputy Speakers.

Swearing-in

The newly-elected Speaker takes the Oath of Allegiance in the House of Commons first, before all other Members. The swearing-in of MPs and Peers usually begins the day after the Speaker's election and can take several days; no other business is conducted before the King's Speech.

On his return from the House of Lords, the Speaker will swear the Oath of Allegiance. He will then be followed by other MPs in order of seniority beginning with the Father and Mother of the House, the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet. All other MPs are then called to take the Oath/Affirmation, usually starting with the shadow Cabinet and Privy Counsellors, followed by non-Cabinet ministers, and then other MPs in order of the Parliament in which they most recently entered the House.

How does the House of Commons confirm who has been elected as an MP?

A list of all those MPs returned at the General Election is formally submitted to the Clerk of the House of Commons by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. This is a ceremonial position for the conveying of the Crown's commands to Parliament, held by the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice (currently Dame Antonia Romeo).

The list of newly elected MPs is contained in a vellum-bound Return Book known colloquially as the 'White Book', reflecting the colour of the binding. (In practice, the list may be conveyed by the Deputy Clerk of the Crown in a copy of the Return Book.)

How do MPs swear-in?

At the table of the House of Commons, in the presence of the Speaker a senior Clerk will invite each MP in turn to swear the Oath or indicate whether they wish to Affirm their allegiance. If they take the Oath, the words are:

"I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles, his heirs and successors, according to law. So help me God."

If they choose to make a 'solemn Affirmation' the words are:

"I (name of MP) do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm, that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles, his heirs and successors, according to law."

The Oath / Affirmation must be taken / made in English first, but Members can follow this by taking it in the Welsh, Scots Gaelic or Cornish languages.

Once the Oath or the Affirmation has been administered, each MP signs the 'Test Roll' at the table in the House and is then introduced to the Speaker. The parchment book is known as the 'Test Roll' because historically the act of signing it was used to test MP's loyalty to the Crown.

How long does swearing-in take?

Three to four hours each day for two to four days may be set aside to enable all MPs to be sworn-in; the length of time set aside for the process is a matter for the Speaker. In 2019, when the Government wished to move quickly to begin consideration of Brexit-related legislation, swearing-in started on the day of the Speaker's election. Once swearing-in is complete, the House will adjourn until the day of the King's Speech.

Why must MPs swear-in?

It is vital that all MPs take the Oath or Affirmation. By law, no MP can participate in the proceedings of the House (with the exception of the election of the Speaker) unless and until they have been sworn-in.

Swearing-in

Under the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866, any MP who votes, or sits during any debate after the Speaker has been chosen, before they are sworn-in, will be subject to a £500 penalty; but more importantly their seat is vacated “in the same manner as if he were dead.”¹² A writ for a by-election would then be moved.

Once sworn-in, it had been customary for MPs not to participate in proceedings until they had made their Maiden Speech. However, this custom was relaxed in the 2010 Parliament because of the number of new MPs. As there will be many first-time MPs in the new Parliament, this relaxation of the custom may be repeated.

Sinn Fein MPs do not swear-in: what difference does this make?

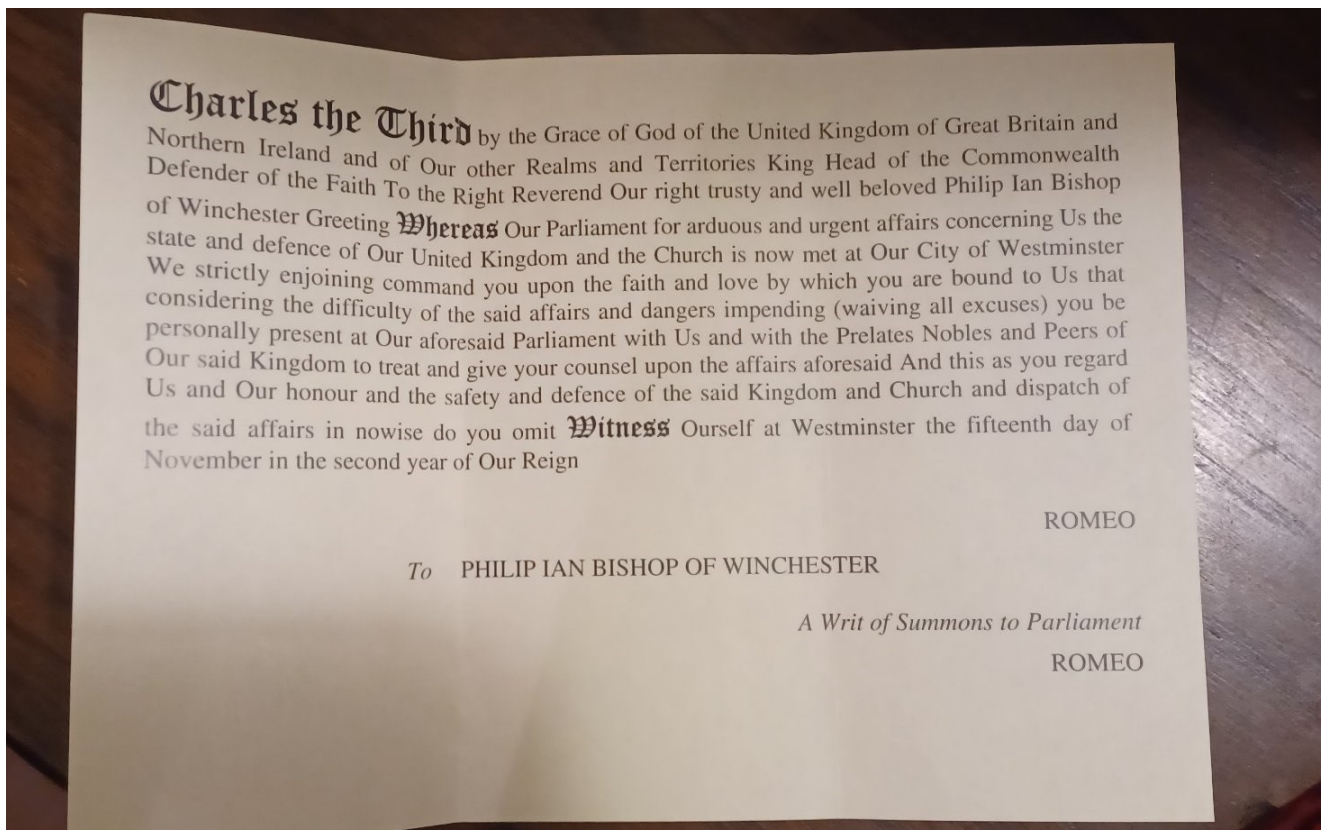
Sinn Fein have a policy of abstentionism from Westminster and their MPs decline to take the Oath or make the Affirmation because it would require them to swear allegiance to the British Monarch. As

a result, they cannot take their seats, participate in parliamentary proceedings or draw a salary. However, they can claim parliamentary expenses for office and staffing costs as well as some accommodation and travel expenses.

How do Members of the House of Lords swear-in?

The swearing-in of Peers in the House of Lords is similar to that of MPs in the House of Commons. Members of the Upper House present their ‘writ of summons’ to attend the Parliament and swear the Oath / Affirmation. Additionally, they must sign a commitment to abide by the House of Lords Code of Conduct.

Below is an example of a writ of summons presented to the Bishop of Winchester in 2023 by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery (Dame Antonia Romeo) prior to the Bishop’s introduction to the House of Lords.



State Opening of Parliament and King's Speech

The State Opening of Parliament and the King's Speech will take place on Wednesday 17 July. State Opening is the ceremonial opening of the first Session of the new Parliament while the King's Speech marks the start of the Session's legislative business. The Speech and debate and votes which follow it are constitutionally important because it is a public test of the Government's ability to command the confidence of the House of Commons (although, in practice, it is only really a test for Governments with a slim majority or no majority at all).

What are the ceremonial preparations for State Opening?

On the morning of 17 July, the Yeoman of the Guard will search the basement of the Houses of Parliament. This is a ceremonial tradition that dates back to Guy Fawkes' 'gunpowder plot', the conspiracy to assassinate King James I of England and Members of Parliament on 5 November 1605 and restore a Catholic Monarch to the throne.

While the King travels to Parliament for the State

Opening, a member of the Government – usually the Whip accorded the title of Vice Chamberlain of the Household – travels in the opposite direction to Buckingham Palace to be 'held hostage' for the duration of the King's time in Parliament, as a guarantor of his safe return.

Summoning of MPs to the House of Lords to attend the King

Having arrived in the Palace of Westminster via Sovereign's Entrance, the King is conveyed to the Royal Robing Room to put on the Imperial State Crown and the Robe of State. From there he processes to the Lords Chamber via the Royal Gallery. Once he has taken his place on the throne in the House of Lords chamber, a sign is given to Black Rod that she should summon the House of Commons to come to the House of Lords to attend the King.

When Black Rod arrives at the House of Commons, the door is shut in front of her, at which point she strikes the door three times and it is re-opened. This custom is a symbolic demonstration of the House of Commons' independence from the



State Opening of Parliament and King's Speech

Sovereign and dates back to the occasion in 1641 when Black Rod entered the Commons without the permission of the House to do so.

The instruction is given for MPs to attend the King and they then proceed to the bar of the House of Lords, led by the Speaker, Prime Minister, and Leader of the Opposition.

From the throne in the House of Lords, the King will outline the Government's policies and proposed legislative programme for the new parliamentary Session, to the assembly of MPs and Peers. The content of the King's Speech (which is sometimes also referred to as the 'Speech from the Throne') is a matter for the Prime Minister and Government. At the conclusion of the Speech MPs will return to the House of Commons.

What is the Outlawries Bill and the Select Vestries Bill?

Prior to the start of the King's Speech debate in each House, Members will symbolically assert their right to deliberate regardless of the Monarch's summons to the Address, by reading a *pro forma* bill into the record. In the House of Commons the Clerk of the House will announce the Outlawries Bill, and it will be ordered that it be read a second time. However, no date for a Second Reading will be agreed, the Bill will not be printed and there will be no further debate. A similar symbolic proceeding is adopted in the House of Lords, but there the Select Vestries Bill will be read.

The Outlawries Bill was first presented to Parliament in 1727. Historically the Bill provided for the more 'effectual preventing' of 'clandestine outlawries' – that is, the declaration of someone as an outlaw without due process. The Select Vestries Bill is a remnant of the regular debates that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries about the reform of select vestries (a form of local government based on church parish boundaries

which had the church vestry as their meeting place). Property restrictions limited those entitled to vote in these vestries to only a few 'select' people. Reform of select vestries was thus an important aspect of the debate about extending the franchise and reducing the power of the Crown and executive. As the House of Lords historically comprised powerful landowners and Bishops, the Bill came to symbolise the need for Members to act in the national interest rather than self-interest.

How much time is spent debating the King's Speech?

The number of days spent debating the Address is a matter for the Government, which will advise the Speaker of the number of days it wishes to allocate.

The first day's debate is general in character and includes speeches proposing and seconding the Address, and contributions from the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Remaining days are allocated to thematic discussions determined between the parties through what are known as the 'Usual Channels'.¹³

What are the 'Usual Channels'?

"The efficient and smooth running of the parliamentary machine depends largely upon the Whips... The [Government] Chief Whip and the Chief Whip of the largest opposition party constitute the 'usual channels', through which consultations are held with other parties and Members about business arrangements and other matters of concern to the House."

Erskine May, Paragraph 4.9

After the 2015, 2017, and 2019 elections, there were six days' debate following the Queen's Speech; in 2010 there were four days' debate and

State Opening of Parliament and King's Speech

in 1997 five days were set aside. At the start of the last Parliament the debate was split into the following broad thematic areas: 'Britain in the world'; education and local government; a 'green industrial revolution'; health and social care; and the economy and jobs.

Peers also debate the King's Speech for several days on thematic issues although, unlike the Commons, there is no final vote.

How do MPs vote on the King's Speech?

The House of Commons debates the Address on the following Government motion:

"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, as follows: Most Gracious Sovereign, We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament."

In both Houses, the motion is moved and seconded by Government backbenchers rather than a Minister. By convention the mover and seconder comprise one long-serving member and one relative newcomer, and their speeches typically avoid controversial political points and may instead include personal or constituency-related matters, usually alongside some humorous remarks.

Under Standing Order 33, the Speaker may select up to four amendments to the motion for debate and decision.¹⁴ Of these, one may be moved on the penultimate day of debate, and up to three on the final day.

Usually, the amendment moved on the penultimate day and one of those moved on the final day are

tabled by the Leader of the Opposition. A further amendment tabled by the leader of the third largest party will usually also be moved.

Another amendment could come from Government backbenchers, as happened in the final-day debate on the Queen's Speech in 2013, when the Speaker selected an amendment regretting the lack of planned legislation for an EU membership referendum, tabled by the Conservative MP John Baron. Although the amendment was defeated the number of Conservative MPs supporting it led the Government to change its position in favour of legislating for a referendum. This was therefore an important early step on the road to Brexit.

What other parliamentary business takes place on days when the King's Speech is debated?

While proceedings on the King's Speech take place, other business – such as Prime Minister's Questions – is carried on. However, Urgent Questions are not accepted on the first day of the King's Speech debate, nor may there be any applications that day for an emergency debate. Westminster Hall will not sit for debates until after the conclusion of the King's Speech debates in the Chamber.

The first Business Questions answered by the Leader of the House are likely to take place the day after the King's Speech, on Thursday 18 July. This may be the occasion on which key information about the Summer recess dates and related matters is formally provided to the House.

Departmental oral questions generally commence on the third sitting day after the King's Speech which will likely fall on Tuesday 23 July.

In recent years the House of Commons Table Office has published daily 'Chamber Information' papers for the days between the Summoning of

State Opening of Parliament and King's Speech

Parliament and State Opening in lieu of Order Papers. The first Order of Business and Summary Agenda (the Order Paper) will be published the day after the King's Speech, on Thursday 18 July.

When will the Government present its first bills?

It is not clear which bills the new Government will prioritise for presentation to Parliament after the King's Speech. However, it will almost certainly present some bills in the days immediately following the Speech.

Comparisons with 1997 and 2010 when there was a change of Government after the General Election are instructive. In 2010 the Queen's Speech took place on 25 May. The following day three bills – the Identity Documents Bill, the Local Government Bill and the Academies Bill – were laid before Parliament, two in the House of Commons and one in the House of Lords. The Academies Bill was the first to receive its Second Reading on 7 June 2010, a fortnight after presentation. By the Summer recess in late July a further seven bills had been presented, five in the Commons and two in the Lords.

In 1997, the Queen's Speech took place on 14 May. The following day two bills – the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill and the National Health Service (Private Finance) Bill – were laid before

Parliament, the former in the House of Commons and the latter in the House of Lords. Less than a week later a further five bills were presented to Parliament. The Referendums Bill was the first to receive its Second Reading on 21 May 1997, just a week after it was presented to the House of Commons. By the 15 July, just two months after the Queen's Speech, 19 bills had been introduced and 18 of these had received a Second Reading in the House in which they were presented.

When will the Panel of Chairs be appointed?

Members of the Panel of Chairs are appointed to chair Public Bill Committees, other general committees (for example Delegated Legislation Committees) and Westminster Hall debates. They may also act as temporary chairs of Committees of the Whole House. It is therefore important that the Panel is in place to deal with the first Bills that appear.

At the beginning of each parliamentary Session, not fewer than 10 Members of the House of Commons are nominated by the Speaker to serve on the Panel of Chairs. The Chairman of Ways and Means (the principal Deputy Speaker) chairs the Panel and the other two Deputy Speakers are also members. The dates for appointment of the Panel members in recent Parliaments has varied considerably, from five to 23 sitting days after Parliament first meets.





**Black Rod knocks on the House of
Commons door**

7 November 2023

© House of Commons

Setting up Select Committees

By convention, the membership of each Select Committee must reflect as closely as possible the party balance of the House. Parties agree amongst themselves how the committee places are divided. Since 2010, the chairs of most House of Commons Select Committees have been elected by the whole House. This election process is now one of the most high-profile features of the start of a new Parliament. Committee members are nominated by their parties following their own internal election method. There is no deadline for the nomination of members so there can be long delays in fully constituting some Committees.

If the new Government introduces early changes to the Whitehall machinery, for example the creation, merging or abolition of departments, this will have an impact on the number of Select Committees that must be established as each Government department must have a departmental Select Committee to shadow it. The Labour Party has also indicated in its manifesto that it plans to establish a Modernisation Committee to consider future reform of the procedures and practices of the House of Commons; but it is unclear whether it intends to do so immediately at the start of the new Parliament.

While there may be some changes made to the Select Committee landscape at the start of the Parliament, the process for constituting the Committees is largely set out in Standing Orders and is unlikely to change in the near future. However, it is possible that there may be some churn in membership of the Committees in the first Session due to any reshuffle of the Opposition front bench following the completion of a possible opposition party leadership contest later in the year.

Which Select Committee chairs are subject to election?

The process for the election of chairs currently applies to all departmental Select Committees (as

listed in Standing Order No.152,¹⁵ of which there were 20 at the end of the 2019 Parliament), and seven other non-departmental committees: the chairs of the Environmental Audit; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs (PACAC); Public Accounts (PAC); Petitions; Procedure; Standards; and Backbench Business committees, each of which has its own Standing Order.

How is the distribution of Select Committee chairmanships to the parties determined?

The first step in the establishment of Select Committees in a new House of Commons is the allocation of chairmanships between parties.

Standing Order No.122B specifies that the overall distribution of elected chairs among parties must reflect the composition of the House.¹⁶ On the day after his election the Speaker must inform the party leaders of the number of elected committee chairmanships due to each party.

Standing Orders specify that the chairs of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and Standards Committee must be held by the Official Opposition, and the Backbench Business Committee cannot be chaired by a member of a Government party.

By convention, the chairs of the Treasury and Foreign Affairs Committees are usually held by a member of the Government party. Beyond this, there is no published formula by which the allocation of chairmanships takes place.

The remaining chairmanships are divided up among the parties by negotiations among the business managers, via the 'Usual Channels'.

In 2019, 28 Committees were elected by the House as a whole. 27 chairmanships were elected under the process set out in Standing Order No.122B: Conservatives: 16; Labour: nine (including PAC and Standards); SNP: two. Additionally, a Labour

Setting up Select Committees

MP, Ian Mearns, held the chairmanship of the Backbench Business Committee throughout the 2019 Parliament.

Under Standing Order No.122B, the leaders of all the parties entitled to at least one chairmanship then have two calendar weeks from the King's Speech (so by 31 July) to table the motion allocating chairmanships to each party. In 2019, the House temporarily extended this deadline to four weeks to avoid it falling during the Christmas recess. If Parliament rises for Summer recess shortly after conclusion of the King's Speech debate a similar extension may again be needed. If party leaders have not tabled such a motion within two weeks of the King's Speech, any MP can lay a motion to allocate chairs and the Speaker will give precedence to its consideration.

Once the motion is tabled, there may be a few more days before the motion is agreed by the House. In 2017 and 2019 the allocation of chairs motion took place on the 11th sitting day. Assuming two full sitting days of swearing-in and that the House does not sit on any Fridays before the Summer recess, the 11th sitting day would fall on Tuesday 30 July.

What is the process for electing chairs of Select Committees?

Under the Standing Orders, the election of Chairs takes place 14 calendar days after the House approves the motion allocating chairmanships to parties.¹⁷ In 2017 and 2019, the election of Chairs took place on the 16th and 18th sitting days of the Parliament respectively.

The timing of both the allocation of Chairs motion and the election of Committee Chairs will therefore depend heavily on the decision about the timing of the Summer recess. It is possible – indeed likely – that the election of Committee Chairs may not take place until after Summer recess if this timetable is adhered to.

However, if necessary, using his power under Standing Order No.122B(12) the Speaker can vary the timings of the election deadlines.¹⁸ (At the start of the 2019 Parliament, for example, the Speaker used this power to shorten the deadline from 14 to 13 days.)

Nominations for chairs must be accompanied by the signatures of 15 Members elected to the House from the candidate's own party, or 10% of the Members of that party, whichever is lower.¹⁹ Nominations may also be accompanied by the signatures of up to five Members elected to the House as Members of another party.

One exception to this is the Backbench Business Committee: candidates seeking to chair this Committee require the support of between 20 and 25 Members, including at least 10 from the Government side and 10 from among non-Government Members. Unlike other Select Committee chairs, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee is elected for only one parliamentary Session at a time.

The Alternative Vote

Each MP will rank candidates in order of preference, marking '1' on the ballot paper for their first preference, '2' for their second preference, and so on. MPs can vote for one candidate or support as many candidates as they wish. If a candidate receives more than half of first preference votes, they are elected. If no candidate receives more than half, then the candidate with the lowest number of first preference votes is eliminated and their votes are reallocated according to the next preferences indicated on the ballot papers. This process is repeated until a candidate secures more than half the votes cast.

Setting up Select Committees

Nominations for all Select Committee chairs close at 5pm on the day before the ballot. The election of chairs takes place by secret ballot, under the Alternative Vote system.

When will the results of the elections to chair Select Committees be announced?

At the start of the 2019 Parliament, the ballot for Select Committee Chairs was held on 29 January 2020, with the results declared the same day (in 2015 and 2017, the declaration took place the day after). Of the 28 chairs elected at the start of the 2019 Parliament, 13 were elected unopposed, which were therefore announced two days earlier upon the close of nominations.²⁰

How are chairs of Select Committees that are not elected by the whole House chosen?

The chairs of Select Committees not elected by the whole House are elected by the relevant committees at their first meetings. These include the Administration; European Scrutiny; European Statutory Instruments; Finance; Liaison; Privileges; Selection; and Statutory Instruments Committees. If a vote in Committee is required to elect a chair, candidates need the support of a majority of members.

The election of the Chair of the Liaison Committee has varied over the last few decades. More recently, between 2010 and 2019, following the introduction of elected chairs, the Committee adopted the practice of choosing a Chair from among its members. However, in 2020, the Government tabled a motion to directly appoint Sir Bernard Jenkin MP as both a member and the Chair of the Liaison Committee.²¹ It remains to be seen whether the next Government will repeat this precedent.

Are any potential chairs of Select Committees affected by term limits?

Standing Order No.122A specifies that “unless the House otherwise orders” no Select Committee may have as its chair any Member who has served as chair of that Committee for the two previous Parliaments or a continuous period of eight years, whichever is the longer.²²

The truncated nature of the 2017-19 Parliament means that, at present, the eight-year period is the longer. This means that chairs elected in 2017 and re-elected in 2019 will be eligible to stand again in 2024, but, if re-elected, would - unless the House otherwise orders - be unable to continue as chairs beyond June 2025.

However, at the start of the last Parliament, the House agreed to disapply Standing Order No.122A for the duration of the Parliament, and similarly in 2018 the House agreed to extend the limit from eight to 10 years for the remainder of the 2017 Parliament to enable affected chairs to remain in post.

As things stand, at least five chairs in the previous Parliament who are seeking re-election to this Parliament would be affected by the term-limit rule if they secure re-election and seek to continue as chair of their Select Committee (see Table 4 on page 32) Clive Betts (Levelling Up, Housing and Communities); Dame Meg Hillier (PAC); Pete Wishart (Scottish Affairs); Sir Bill Wiggin (Selection); and Jessica Morden (Statutory Instruments).

Betts, Hillier, and Wishart have served more than eight years as chairs of their respective Committees, having benefited from the relaxations of the term limit rules over the last two Parliaments. As a result, each became ineligible to stand again the moment that Parliament dissolved and will not

Setting up Select Committees

be able to continue in post unless a further motion to set aside the Standing Order is approved in the new Parliament. If Labour wins the General Election then Hillier will be unable to resume her role as Chair of the PAC, even if unaffected by term limits, as the Chair of this Committee must be allocated to a member of the Official Opposition. Wiggin and Morden were elected to their committee roles in 2017 and would be unable to remain in post beyond June 2025 unless the House otherwise orders.

How are Select Committee members chosen?

Members of most Select Committees, including the departmental Select Committees, are nominated by a motion put before the House, normally by the Committee of Selection. Under Standing Order No.121, two sitting days' notice must normally be given of Select Committee membership nominations.²³

Standing Orders do not specify how parties should choose the MPs they put forward for their allocated Select Committee seats.

In 2010, the House agreed a motion that parties entitled to nominate members would put names forward which result from a "secret ballot by whichever transparent and democratic method" of internal election they choose, rather than selection by the Whips as previously.²⁴ The nature of the internal election method is a matter for each party individually.

Standing Orders do not set parties any deadline by which they must nominate their Select Committee members. This means that the timetable for establishing Select Committees can become hostage to parties' internal processes. In previous recent Parliaments, the nomination of Select Committee members has generally occurred

around 30 sitting days after the first meeting of the Parliament (see Table 3 on page 31).

However, the timing of recesses means it can take several months. In 2017, the process took 25 sitting days to complete, but because the nominations took place after Summer recess, this translated into around three months (see Table 2 on page 31). A similar schedule is likely in this new Parliament.

Size of Select Committees and minor party representation

Since 2010, most Select Committees have 11 members. The allocation of committee chairmanships and seats to reflect the party balance in the House tends to leave smaller parties unrepresented. To ensure some minor party representation, the size of some Select Committees has been expanded beyond the norm. For example, the Treasury Committee in the 2010-15 Parliament was expanded to 13 members to allow the Liberal Democrats and SNP to have seats. When the new Exiting the EU Committee was appointed in 2016, it was created with 21 members, to allow representation of Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish parties. Alternatively, a larger party may give up a Select Committee seat so that a smaller party has some representation. However, such flexibility is voluntary and a goodwill gesture by the main parties; its repetition in the new Parliament is not automatic.

The geographical distribution of a party's MPs may also mean that it does not have enough members from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to take up the seats allocated to that party on the relevant national Select Committees. For instance, in the 2019 Parliament, three Conservative MPs from English constituencies served on the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Setting up Select Committees

The growth in the number of smaller parties winning seats in the House of Commons has given rise to pressure for Select Committees to expand still further to accommodate them, or for a relaxation of the requirement that each Committee should reflect the overall party balance of the House.

Were the General Election to result in a very large Labour majority it is possible eight or nine of the 11 places on each Select Committee would be proportionately allocated to Labour members. This dominance by the governing party may weaken the scrutiny function of Select Committees.

In 2015 the Liaison Committee said that, as Select Committees operate by consensus and unanimity, “arithmetical proportions do not have the same degree of relevance that they do with Public Bill Committees”²⁵. The Committee recommended that the balance on each committee need not be identical “if the overall representation across all committees was fair and proportionate.”²⁶ No formal change has been made to date to the overall party balance requirement but this may have to be looked at again in this Parliament if the arithmetic leads to one-party dominance of the Committees and little or no representation for the minor parties.

Time-limited, temporary Select Committees

Most Select Committees are appointed under permanent Standing Orders, but sometimes a Select Committee is created for a specified period only. For example, the Exiting the European Union Committee was appointed in October 2016 under a temporary Standing Order until the end of that Parliament.

At the dissolution of the last Parliament, only one Select Committee was dependent on a temporary Standing Order: the European Statutory Instruments Committee (ESIC). This Committee is responsible for sifting some proposed reforms to assimilated law (formerly known as retained EU

law) - in the form of proposed negative Statutory Instruments - to ensure they are given adequate parliamentary scrutiny. The temporary Standing Order expired at the end of the 2019-24 Parliament. The parliamentary sifting process for these Statutory Instruments is enshrined in statute, so the Committee is likely to be restored at the start of the new Parliament or its responsibilities will have to be transferred to another Committee.

Unusually the Backbench Business Committee (BBCom) is constituted at the start of every Session rather than every Parliament.²⁷ Consequently, the election of the Chair of BBCom also has to take place at the start of every Session. The date of the election is chosen by the Speaker. The BBCom Chair is not included in the allocation of chairs motion at the start of a Parliament, and it is stipulated only that the Chair must be a member of a party not represented in the Government.

The nomination requirements for the Committee are more demanding than for other Select Committees, with candidates needing signatures from 20 to 25 MPs, of which at least 10 must be from parties represented in the Government and at least 10 must be from opposition parties or no party.²⁸

Any changes to the line-up of departments which are made by the new Government would also normally be reflected in changes to the line-up of departmental Select Committees. At the start of a Parliament, such changes to the Select Committee line-up are normally made through a motion or motions to amend Standing Order No.152 and normally considered at the same time as the motion allocating Select Committee chairmanships.²⁹

House of Lords select committees

Rather than organising its Select Committees along departmental lines, the House of Lords operates a set of thematic Select Committees to conduct policy scrutiny. At the start of a new Parliament a motion

Setting up Select Committees

is normally passed for their re-appointment. Committee members are normally proposed to the House by the House of Lords' Committee of Selection, with chairs either similarly proposed or left for Committees to elect.

The size of Select Committees in the House of Lords is more flexible than in the Commons, as are practices regarding the balance of membership and chairmanships between parties.

As there is no need to allocate chairmanships between parties, nor for parties to hold internal elections for committee members, House of Lords Select Committees can be re-established at the start of a Parliament more quickly than their counterparts in the Commons: at the start of the 2019 Parliament, the House of Lords appointed its main committees on its 6th sitting day.

The House of Lords operates a rotation rule, whereby members of most Select Committees can serve for only three successive years before being rotated off for at least two years.³⁰

The House of Lords is also able to appoint a small number of *ad hoc* Committees each session which investigate a particular topic but cease to exist when they have reported or otherwise completed their task. None of the four special inquiry Committees appointed in the last Session had reported before Parliament dissolved, so the House of Lords may be expected to approve a motion early in the new Session to reappoint the Committees.

Setting up the Intelligence and Security Committee

The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) is a committee of Parliament but is not a parliamentary Select Committee. It is established by an Act of Parliament rather than by resolutions of the House. Its members are appointed by Parliament but unlike those of Select Committees, the members must

first be nominated by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. The Committee is staffed by Cabinet Office officials rather than officials from Parliament.

The ISC often takes significantly longer to be set up than parliamentary Select Committees. One reason for this is that security screening is required for members, given the nature of the Committee's work.

Following the last four General Elections it has taken between 131 and 216 days to establish the Committee and the first meeting of the ISC has consequently taken place between five and seven months after the General Election.

The process of setting up the Committee generated particular controversy following the 2019 General Election. The Justice and Security Act 2013 removed the Prime Minister's previously held right to directly appoint the Committee's Chair and instead allowed the ISC to choose a Chair from among its members. Following the appointment of ISC members on 13 July 2020, the ISC chose Julian Lewis MP as its new Chair. The Government's preferred candidate for the Chair had been Chris Grayling MP, but Julian Lewis sought support from opposition members of the Committee and won the election. Lewis had the Conservative whip removed as a result, though it was restored a few months later.

Setting up Select Committees

Table 2: Calendar dates of each stage in setting up Select Committees since 2010

Stage	2010	2015	2017	2019
Election of Speaker	18 May	18 May	13 June	17 December
Queen's/King's Speech	25 May	27 May	21 June	19 December
Allocation of chairs motion agreed by the House	26 May	3 June	4 July	16 January 2020
Nominations for chairs close	8 June	10 June	7 July	27 January
Election of chairs	9 June	17 June	12 July	29 January
Results of election announced	10 June	18 June	12 July	29 January
Nomination of Committee members	12-16 July	6-20 July	11 September	2 March

Source: Kelly, R. (12 March 2020), House of Commons Library, [Select committees: election of chairs and members](#)

Table 3: Sitting day of each stage in setting up Select Committees since 2010

Stage	2010	2015	2017	2019
Election of Speaker	1	1	1	1
Queen's/King's Speech	5	6	4	3
Allocation of chairs motion agreed by the House	6	10	11	11
Nominations for chairs close	11	14	Day after 13th sitting day	16
Election of chairs	12	18	16	18
Results of election announced	13	19	16	18
Nomination of Committee members	30-38	28-36	25	32

Source: Kelly, R. (12 March 2020), House of Commons Library, [Select committees: election of chairs and members](#)

Setting up Select Committees

Table 4: House of Commons Select Committees at the end of the 2019-24 Parliament

Chairs elected by House	Members	Party of chair	Chair
Departmental select committees			
Business and Trade	11	Labour	Liam Byrne
Culture, Media and Sport	11	Conservative	Caroline Dinenage
Defence	11	Conservative	Jeremy Quin
Education	11	Conservative	Robin Walker
Energy Security and Net Zero	11	SNP	Angus Brendan MacNeil
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	11	Conservative	Robert Goodwill
Foreign Affairs	11	Conservative	Alicia Kearns
Health and Social Care	11	Conservative	Steve Brine
Home Affairs	11	Labour	Diana Johnson
International Development	11	Labour	Sarah Champion
Justice	11	Conservative	Robert Neill
Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	11	Labour	Clive Betts
Northern Ireland	11	Conservative	Robert Buckland
Science and Technology	11	Conservative	Greg Clark
Scottish Affairs	11	SNP	Pete Wishart
Transport	11	Conservative	Iain Stewart
Treasury	11	Conservative	Harriet Baldwin
Welsh Affairs	11	Conservative	Stephen Crabb
Women and Equalities	11	Conservative	Caroline Nokes
Work and Pensions	11	Labour	Stephen Timms
Others			
Environmental Audit	17	Conservative	Philip Dunne
Petitions	11	Labour	Cat Smith
Procedure	17	Conservative	Karen Bradley
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs	11	Conservative	Jackie Doyle-Price
Committees with non-government status of chair			
Backbench Business (non-Government)	8	Labour	Ian Mearns
Public Accounts (Official Opposition)	16	Labour	Meg Hillier
Standards (Official Opposition)	14*	Labour	Harriet Harman
Chairs elected by the committee itself			
Administration	11	Conservative	Charles Walker
European Scrutiny	17	Conservative	William Cash
European Statutory Instruments	16	Conservative	Andrew Jones
Finance	11	Labour	Sharon Hodgson
Liaison	34	Conservative	Bernard Jenkin
Privileges	7	Labour	Harriet Harman
Selection	9	Conservative	Bill Wiggin
Statutory Instruments	5	Labour	Jessica Morden

* This Committee's membership is comprised of seven MPs and seven lay members

Retired from the House of Commons in 2024

Elected in 2017 and will therefore be ineligible to continue as chair beyond 2025, unless the House sets aside or amends the time-limit provisions in Standing Orders.

Has been chair for more than eight years and would be ineligible to stand again unless the House sets aside or amends the time-limit provisions in Standing Orders

The Budget and Estimates

The new Government will face a series of financial decisions and procedures that need to be implemented on a tight timetable in its first six months. A decision will have to be made about when to hold a Budget. The ‘Main Estimates’ to provide parliamentary approval for departmental spending have not yet been approved for this current financial year (2024-25). And a Spending Review must be concluded by December to inform government bodies of their budget allocations for the start of the next financial year.

When will there be a Budget?

The last Budget was in March 2024. However, in General Election years it is not unusual for the new Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce a Budget shortly after the start of the new Parliament, even if a Budget has already been delivered in the same calendar or financial year and even if the election did not result in a change of administration.

As the table below shows, when there has been a change of Government (following the 1979, 1997 and 2010 General Elections), a Budget has been held between 39 and 61 days after polling day.

The Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves has said that she will not hold a Budget without it being accompanied by an independent forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).³¹ The OBR requires 10 weeks’ notice to prepare an economic and fiscal forecast for a Budget. Accordingly, the earliest possible date that a Budget could be held

would be Friday 13 September, assuming she gave the OBR notice on her first day in office on Friday 5 July. This timetable would see the Budget held later than the Budgets that followed the last three changes of Government following the General Election.

Parliament normally sits during the first two weeks of September before adjourning for three weeks for the party conference recess.

Unless the Government decides that Parliament should sit during one or more of the party conference weeks beginning 16 September (see page 11) and should consider the Budget during that period, then it seems likely that the Budget will be soon after Parliament returns in early October (most likely the House will return the week commencing 7 October).

The Budget cycle: an Autumn Budget or an Autumn Statement?

Traditionally, the Budget used to be delivered in March each year, before the start of the new financial year in April, but this was usually accompanied by an Autumn Statement (prior to 2010 this was known as the pre-Budget Report). In November 2016, Chancellor Philip Hammond MP announced that the 2017 Spring Budget would be the last, with the Government moving to a single annual ‘fiscal event’ each Autumn. In practice, however, both the timing of subsequent General Elections and the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the proposed Autumn Budget cycle was disrupted.

Table 5: Dates of Budget Days following a change of Government

General election	State Opening	Budget Day	Days between election and budget
3 May 1979	15 May 1979	12 June 1979	39 days
1 May 1997	14 May 1997	2 July 1997	61 days
6 May 2010	25 May 2010	22 June 2010	46 days
4 July 2024	17 July 2024	?	?

The December 2019 General Election meant that the planned November Budget was postponed until March 2020. The onset of the pandemic meant multiple economic statements had to be made that year and the next Budget was also pushed into Spring 2021. More recently we have had two successive Autumn Statements rather than Budgets in 2022 and 2023, although in content and importance they had all the appearance of being a 'mini-budget'.

In her 'Mais Lecture', the Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves made clear that a Labour Government would be committed to a single Autumn Budget every year.³² This commitment was repeated in Labour's manifesto.³³

An advantage of the move to an Autumn Budget cycle is that it would allow for some policies announced in the Budget to be consulted on during the subsequent Winter and Spring, followed by consultation on draft legislative clauses providing for technical implementation of the measures, before their inclusion in the Finance Bill the following Autumn. It remains to be seen whether this timetable will be adhered to, at least for the first Budget of the Parliament, when a new Government will be keen to convey political vigor and actively deliver changes as quickly as possible.

The Budget Statement and debate

The Budget Statement outlines the state of the economy and the Government's taxation proposals. The Chancellor's Statement may also cover public spending but parliamentary scrutiny and approval of Government expenditure is engaged through the Estimates rather than the Budget process, the details of which are set out in a separate section below.

The delivery of any Budget will follow a set formula. On Budget Day at around 12.30pm, the Chancellor will make a statement to the Chamber, with the Chairman of Ways and Means (the most senior Deputy Speaker) in the Chair rather than the

Speaker. Budgets are typically – although not necessarily – delivered on a Wednesday, with the Budget Statement coming immediately after Prime Minister's Questions.

After the conclusion of the Budget speech, MPs are asked to agree a motion without debate to give immediate provisional effect, for a specified limited period, to changes to existing or continuing taxes such as duty increases on alcohol, cigarettes or petrol, under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.³⁴ Parliament has 10 sitting days to agree the motion(s) putting these changes onto a permanent footing, subject to passage of the Finance Bill.

After the Budget Statement has been delivered, there are usually four days of debate at the end of which the House is asked to approve a set of 'Ways and Means' motions putting all the Budget's tax measures into effect (including those already given temporary force by the initial general motion under the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968). Dozens of Ways and Means motions may be needed to implement a Budget (sometimes as many as 80 or more) and the Chair may therefore take a number of consecutive motions together to save time. The House will generally divide (formally vote) only a few times and only on the most controversial proposals. Once the Ways and Means motions are agreed – and thus become resolutions of the House – the Government can present the Finance Bill to the House, founded on these resolutions.

The Budget resolutions take permanent legal effect when the Finance Bill achieves Royal Assent. Given that the initial resolution provides for some tax measures only for a specified limited period, it is important that the Finance Bill achieves Royal Assent before this period expires.

The Finance Bill

As is the case for other bills, the First Reading of the Finance Bill is a formality. The Bill's long title is

read out and a day for its Second Reading is named. This day is often given as ‘tomorrow’. However, this does not mean that the Second Reading will actually take place the following day – ‘tomorrow’ is a procedural device to list the Bill on the Future Business of the House. In practice, the Second Reading of the Finance Bill may not be held until some weeks after the conclusion of the Budget debate.

At Committee stage the Finance Bill is usually split into two parts: the most controversial aspects are considered by a Committee of the Whole House, and the rest by a Public Bill Committee (PBC) comprising up to 40 Members.

The Treasury Committee normally conducts a speedy inquiry into the Budget proposals (including scrutiny of the report which is issued by the Office for Budget Responsibility), with a view to publishing its findings in time for scrutiny by other Members at Public Bill Committee stage. It is possible, however, that the Treasury Committee may not be fully operational in time for a Budget in the early Autumn.

Once through the House of Commons, the Finance Bill is sent to the House of Lords for consideration, but this is a formality. The House of Lords conducts no real scrutiny of the Finance Bill because the financial powers of the Upper House are limited by the ancient ‘rights and privileges’ of the House of Commons and the terms of the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949.³⁵ Control of taxation can be exercised only by the House of Commons. The role of the House of Lords in respect of finance is “to agree, and not to initiate or amend”.³⁶

When will there be a Spending Review?

Spending Reviews set out headline spending plans for each Government department, usually over a three- or four-year period. Drawing on the plans outlined in the Spending Review, the Government

then makes formal requests to Parliament for funds for departments, agencies and arms-length bodies for the financial year ahead. These requests are made in at least two – and sometimes as many as four – stages throughout the year. This process is known as the ‘Estimates Cycle’.³⁷

The last Spending Review in Autumn 2021 set departmental budgets up to the end of March 2025. Some form of Spending Review must therefore be concluded by December 2024 in order that budget allocations can be made in time for the start of the next financial year (April 2025-March 2026). Given the tight timescale it is likely that an initial one-year spending review may be held first to make decisions about next year’s spending, with a further, multi-year Comprehensive Spending Review to follow with publication perhaps timed to coincide with a Budget in Autumn 2025.

Why do departmental ‘Main Estimates’ need to be approved urgently?

The ‘Main Estimates’ whereby Government departments and their agencies and arms-length bodies seek parliamentary approval for their spending plans for the financial year are normally published in April for parliamentary approval in early July. Some agencies and bodies have published their Main Estimate for the current financial year 2024-25. However, prior to the General Election the collective set of Main Estimates, including those of individual Government departments, had not been presented to Parliament.

This has already had consequences for the devolved administrations. The Welsh Government, for example, has been unable to present its usual Supplementary Budget to the Senedd as it would normally do in June or July because it does not have confirmation of the Main Estimates which would have consequential spending implications for Wales. It will now be unable to present its

Supplementary Budget until mid-September at the earliest, some three months later than normal.³⁸

The laying of the Estimates before Parliament and the formal approval of them by MPs will therefore be an early item of business in mid-July following State Opening. House of Commons Standing Orders enable all departmental Estimates to be approved in a single 'roll-up' motion, but only if the motion is approved before 5 August each year.³⁹ If approval is not secured before 5 August, then the abbreviated 'roll-up' procedure cannot be used, and each departmental Estimate would need to be approved separately. This is not an insurmountable problem, but it would be time consuming.

We know of no case in the modern era where the Main Estimate was not approved by the August deadline. In practice, however, the 5 August deadline could be altered if MPs wished. A motion could be moved, for example, to amend the Standing Order and substitute a date other than 5 August for consideration of the Estimates.

However, such an approach has never been tested. Ministers and MPs would have to weigh the political advantages of doing so against the risks involved in potentially withholding funding for critical economic and social programmes of benefit to their constituents. Government departments secure parliamentary approval for a 45% advance in their funding to cover departmental spending plans for the first four months of the following financial year through the first stage of the Estimates cycle known as the Vote on Account.⁴⁰ If MPs fail to approve the Main Estimates by August, then by early Autumn the government would begin to run out of money as the 45% advance depletes and as all other options to redeploy funds from other sources are exhausted.

How are the Estimates debated?

Only three days' debate each Session are set aside for consideration of the Estimates (departmental spending plans). This limits the scope for significant

intervention by individual MPs. They may propose a reduction in an Estimate selected for debate, but they may not propose an increase in the Estimate. Controversial spending measures need not be included as a specific line item in the Estimates so it is difficult for opposition MPs to vote against them.

It largely falls to departmental Select Committees to scrutinise the relevant departmental Estimates and accompanying Estimates memoranda, supported by the House of Commons Scrutiny Unit. However, departmental Select Committees are unlikely to be established in time to scrutinise this year's Main Estimates prior to the August deadline.

The topics for Estimates Day debates are selected by the Backbench Business Committee following bids for a debate on one of the departmental Estimates from backbench MPs, including Select Committee chairs. The Liaison Committee then formally recommends the proposals selected by the Backbench Business Committee to the House, which must agree them (this is usually a formality).

If the Estimates are debated for approval in July then the Backbench Business Committee and the Liaison Committee (the Select Committee comprising the chairs of all other Select Committees) may not have been formed in time to recommend the choice of subjects for debate. If so, the topics may have to be determined through negotiations between the party business managers (the 'Usual Channels').

Once the Main Estimates motions have been approved, they become resolutions of the House (or Supply Resolutions). These have political force but are not law. Legislation is also required in the form of a Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Bill.⁴¹ The Bill is usually introduced immediately after the Supply motions are agreed, with Second Reading set for the next sitting day.

As the House has already agreed the Supply resolutions, a Supply and Appropriation Bill is not subject to debate or amendment at any stage. There is no Committee stage, and thus no Report stage, and questions on Second and Third Reading are put 'forthwith'. The Bill is certified as a Money Bill by the Speaker⁴² and goes to the House of Lords, where it is passed unamended (in accordance with the Parliament Act 1911). Once the Bill receives Royal Assent, the Government has the legislative approval necessary for the monies sought by each department to be released.

Will Supplementary Estimates be needed?

Supplementary Estimates are the means by which Government departments seek parliamentary approval for additional resources or for reallocation of existing resources to new activities which are not covered in the Main Estimate.⁴³

They are usually presented to Parliament in February for approval by the House of Commons by 18 March so that the funds can be spent before the end of the financial year. However, in exceptional cases out-of-turn Supplementary Estimates are sometimes presented earlier in the financial year. For example, in October 2022 out-of-turn Supplementary Estimates for the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy needed approval by Parliament to cover expenditure for cost-of-living support.

It is possible that having had little input into the Main Estimates, a new Government may need to make additional requests to Parliament to authorise new funding levels or amend existing ones or to authorise changes in the purpose for which money is sought by departments. This may be particularly necessary if machinery of government changes are implemented, giving rise to costs arising from the transfer of functions between Whitehall departments.

As with the Main Estimates, if Supplementary Estimates are needed then the Supplementary Supply Resolutions will need to be given legislative effect in a Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) Bill.⁴⁴ The process for this is the same as for the Main Estimates Bill.

Presentation and scrutiny of Departmental Annual Reports and Accounts

Departmental Annual Reports and Accounts are also usually presented to Parliament in June or July in advance of Summer recess. This is therefore likely to happen soon after Parliament first meets. However, there is no formal deadline stipulating when the reports and accounts must be laid, so some departments may delay publication until the Autumn subject to the wishes of their new Secretary of State.

One of the 'core tasks' of departmental Select Committees is to examine the expenditure plans, outturn and performance of the department and its arms-length bodies and the relationship between spending and the delivery of outcomes.⁴⁵ However, it is for individual Committees to determine the extent and means of this scrutiny – for example, whether to conduct a full inquiry and call Ministers and officials to give evidence. When planning their future work, the newly constituted departmental Select Committees will thus have to make an early decision about whether, how and when to scrutinise the Departmental Annual Reports and Accounts and what prioritisation should attach to them compared to other, competing areas of potential scrutiny.

Private Members' Bill ballot

Thirteen Friday sittings (approximately 65 hours) are set aside in the House of Commons each Session for the consideration of Private Members' Bills (PMBs). These are bills introduced by MPs and Peers who are not Government Ministers. Due to the timing of the Summer recess there is likely to be a longer than usual period between the drawing of the ballot for PMBs and the presentation of the bills to the House. This will provide an extended window of opportunity for lobby groups to encourage MPs who have been successful in the ballot to adopt their legislative proposal.

Priority for the use of the first seven sitting Fridays is given to PMBs introduced by the PMB ballot. Ballot Bills therefore have the best chance of becoming law, or at least being debated on the Floor of the House.

When does the PMB ballot take place?

The PMB ballot is usually drawn on the second Thursday of each Session, although there have been exceptions.⁴⁶ In the 2010-12 Session, for example, the ballot was moved to the third Thursday of the Session. The PMB Ballot is therefore likely to fall either on 25 July or 1 August.

MPs do not need to have drafted a Bill or even chosen the title before entering the ballot.

The names of the 20 Members whose names are drawn in the ballot are announced immediately.

When do PMBs have to be presented?

On a subsequent Wednesday (Standing Orders specify the fifth Wednesday of a Session, but this was moved to the sixth Wednesday in 2010), all 20 MPs successful in the ballot present their bills.

At this First Reading stage they require only the bill's short and long title, which sets out, in a short summary, what provisions a bill will contain.

Between being selected in the ballot and the presentation of their bill, the MPs who are selected are often subject to intense lobbying efforts by organisations with proposals for legislation. The timing of the election means that the PMB ballot and the presentation of the bills are likely to fall either side of the Summer recess, leaving an even longer period for this lobbying to take place.

When will PMBs receive a Second Reading?

After presenting their bill, each MP will choose one of the allotted PMB Fridays for its Second Reading. MPs can postpone their allocated Second Reading day but may not bring it forward to an earlier day. MPs choose their Second Reading days in the order in which they were selected in the ballot. The procedures that apply to PMBs (which differ to those of Government bills) mean a PMB is much more likely to succeed if it is debated first. MPs higher up the list will therefore pick days chosen by the fewest MPs so that their bill can be considered as early as possible in the day.

Introduction of PMBs in the House of Lords

For PMBs introduced by Peers, a ballot is conducted two working days after the King's Speech to determine the order in which PMBs handed in on that day receive their First Reading.⁴⁷

Peers must submit a long and short title to the Legislation Office by 4pm on the day after the State Opening, but not a full text. Twenty-five bills are drawn from the ballot, two of which are then introduced each sitting day in the order in which they were drawn. If a Member turns down their First Reading 'slot', all Peers below them on the ballot list move up one place in the queue for First Readings.

Peers are still able to introduce a bill at any stage of the Session, but such bills will receive their First Readings after those entered in the ballot.

Opposition parties

The opinion polls have predicted for some time that the General Election will result in a Labour Government with a substantial majority. However, they have suggested several possible scenarios regarding the performance of the other parties. If realised, these scenarios may have important implications for the functioning of the opposition in the House of Commons over the course of the new Parliament.

Some polls suggest that the Conservative Party could be reduced to around 150 seats, others suggest it could be reduced to 80 seats or fewer. Some of the scenarios in which the Conservative Party performance is at the lower end of expectations also suggest that the Liberal Democrats could overtake the Conservatives to become the second largest party, but with a lower share of the national vote. Under some scenarios, the election result could be so distorted that Reform UK could conceivably be the second or third largest party by vote share, but at best secure only a handful of seats, while the Liberal Democrats could become the second largest party in terms of seats and therefore become the Official Opposition but rank only fourth in share of the national vote.

These scenarios will all give rise to criticism of the First-Past-the-Post electoral system and debate about the merits of electoral reform. But some of the scenarios may also give rise to questions about fairness in the sharing of the rights and privileges accorded to the opposition parties in the House of Commons.

How is the Official Opposition determined?

Erskine May states that the party that has the right to be called the Official Opposition is “the largest minority party which is prepared, in the event of the resignation of the Government, to assume office.”⁴⁸

The Ministerial and other Salaries Act 1975 sets out the definition of the Leader of the Opposition: he or

she is “in relation to either House of Parliament, that Member of that House who is for the time being the Leader in that House of the party in opposition to Her [sic] Majesty’s Government having the greatest numerical strength in the House of Commons.”⁴⁹

In the event that it is unclear which is the largest minority party or who the leader of that party is, the Act states: “If any doubt arises as to which is or was at any material time the party in opposition to Her [sic] Majesty’s Government having the greatest numerical strength in the House of Commons, or as to who is or was at any material time the leader in that House of such a party, the question shall be decided for the purposes of this Act by the Speaker of the House of Commons, and his decision, certified in writing under his hand, shall be final and conclusive.”⁵⁰

Exceptionally, if two parties were to secure the same number of seats in the House of Commons it would therefore be for the Speaker of the House to decide which of them should be accorded the status of the Official Opposition. After the number of seats won, the criterion relied on by the Speaker in reaching a determination, would most likely be each party’s share of the vote.

In a period of considerable political and electoral volatility it cannot be ruled out that the party accorded the status of Official Opposition might change during the course of the Parliament owing to deaths in office, defections, mergers, resignations or suspensions. In the event of a material change in the number of seats held by the opposition parties mid-Parliament, it would be for the Speaker to decide whether the rights and responsibilities of the Official Opposition should be transferred to another party. His decision would be guided by the statutory and parliamentary definitions of the term Official Opposition.

Opposition parties

Nor can it be ruled out that the identity of the second-largest party in the Commons might also change during the course of the Parliament.

However, the parliamentary definition in Standing Orders of the second-largest opposition party for the purpose of allocating Opposition Days explicitly states that it is the non-government party which “has the second largest number of members elected to the House *as members of that party*” (our italics for emphasis). As such a party which had more seats than any other opposition party other than the Official Opposition as a result of defections or a merger, would not secure the rights of the second party of opposition because its new MPs would not have been elected to the House as members of that party. There is precedent for such a scenario: when the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party merged in 1988 to form a new party, the Social and Liberal Democrats, they were the second largest opposition party in the House in terms of size, but the new party lost the entitlement to three Opposition Days previously held by the Liberal Party to the smaller Ulster Unionist Party.⁵¹

If the election result is particularly distorted, and especially if the opposition parties can muster little more than 150 seats between them, then it may be to their mutual advantage, liaising with the Speaker, to re-think the concept of how opposition is organised and resourced in a more collaborative direction.

What rights do the Official Opposition have in Parliament?

The status of the Official Opposition and the role of Leader of the Opposition entail significant constitutional rights and responsibilities.

1. Question Time: At Prime Minister’s Question’s, the Leader of the Opposition may ask the Prime Minister up to six questions. In contrast, the leader of the second largest opposition party is usually

only called upon to ask two questions. At departmental questions Opposition party spokespersons are usually permitted to ask a certain number of supplementary questions. Erskine May indicates that “members of the Shadow Cabinet and other Official Opposition spokespersons are also given some precedence in asking questions and in debate.”⁵²

2. Opposition Days: Under Standing Order No.14(2), 20 days are allotted in each Session for debates on motions selected by opposition parties. Seventeen Opposition Days are at the disposal of the Official Opposition, while just three are awarded to the second largest opposition party.⁵³

3. Amendments: Amendments to motions and bills tabled by the Official Opposition, and particularly by the Leader of the Opposition, are given priority in the selection of amendments by the Speaker.

4. Select Committees: While Standing Orders require the allocation of Select Committee chairs to reflect the party balance in the House, the chairs of both the Public Accounts Committee and the Standards Committee are reserved for MPs from the Official Opposition.

5. No-confidence motions: Any MP is entitled to table a motion of no confidence in the Government. However, if the Leader of the Opposition tables such a motion, then by convention the Government will make time available for that motion to be debated promptly. It is under no obligation to make such time available for any other party leader or individual MP.

6. Speech time limits: Under Standing Order No.47, the Speaker can impose a time limit on backbench speeches.⁵⁴ That time limit does not apply to speeches made by Ministers, Shadow Ministers, or by “not more than one Member” representing the leader of the second largest opposition party.

Opposition parties

The Speaker has also indicated that when Ministers make a Statement to the House, he expects their speech to take no longer than 10 minutes, with a similar expectation of five minutes for the Shadow Minister, and just two minutes for the spokesperson from the third party.⁵⁵ A similar convention applies to Urgent Questions (UQs), with a three-minute limit for the Minister's response to the UQ, two minutes for the Shadow Minister, and one minute for the third-party spokesperson.

The per seat and per vote general funding, the travel expenses, and the funding for the Leader of the Opposition's Office have since been updated for 2024-25 in line with the Consumer Price Index in December 2023 (which was 4.0% according to the Office for National Statistics).⁵⁷

7. Short Money: Since 1975 opposition parties have received funding to support their parliamentary activities. The funding is available to all opposition parties that win either two seats, or one seat and more than 150,000 votes in the most recent General Election.

The funding has three components:

- (i) general funding to support parliamentary business;
- (ii) travel expenses; and
- (iii) funding for the Leader of the Opposition's office.

Parties largely use the general funds to provide research and policy support to their frontbench and to fund staff in the Whips' and Leader of the Opposition's offices.

In 2023-24, the parties received £21,438.33 in Short Money for every seat they won in the most recent General Election, plus £42.82 for every 200 votes the party received.

A total of £235,511.46 to cover travel expenses is also divided proportionately among the parties in accordance with the same formula.

In addition to the general funding and travel expenses, a sum of £998,817.35 was made available to cover the costs of running the Leader of the Opposition's Office.⁵⁶

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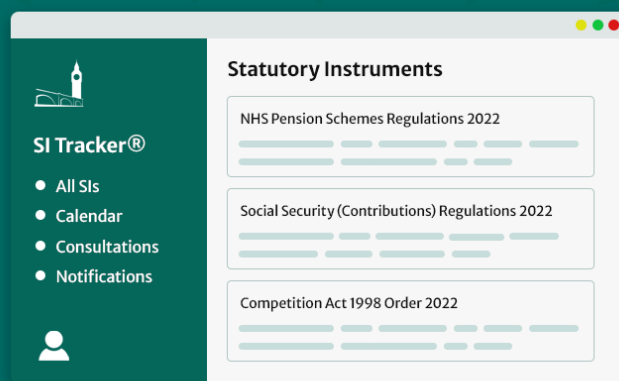
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