



Queen's Speech 2007



Overview by Insight Public Affairs

Introduction

In the week that Gordon Brown was told to shake the Labour Party out of its "despondency" by former Minister Frank Field, the government brought forward a series of new proposals in today's Queen's Speech that the prime minister hopes will reinvigorate his premiership.

When Brown moved into 10 Downing Street this July he took the unprecedented step of announcing his intention to introduce 23 bills and draft bills which partially make up this, his first Queen's Speech. They include measures to tackle climate change, boost affordable housing, and raise the school or training leaving age to 18 and changes to the pensions system. The Queen began by stating the Government's overarching ambition:

"My Government's programme will meet people's aspirations for better education, housing, healthcare and children's services, and for a cleaner environment."

The speech announced the government's commitment to community cohesion and supporting local authorities to prevent and manage community tensions. These are Brown's priorities and will form the backbone of the Government's legislative agenda in 2007/08.

The New Bills

Climate Change Bill

Heavily discussed in the media and parliament – and having undergone the rigours of the joint scrutiny committee of both Houses – the government today formally introduced the world's first Bill to create legally binding targets to reduce the UK's carbon emissions up to 2050 and beyond. It proposes statutory targets to reduce UK carbon dioxide emissions by at least 60% by 2050 compared with 1990 levels and establishes a Committee on Climate Change to advise the government. Opposition parties are calling for more ambitious targets.

Education and Skills Bill

Billed as one of the most radical education changes for 50 years, the legislation will be phased-in so all young people will be required to stay in education or training until 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015. It will bring into force the key findings of the Leitch Review, which recommended that training or education should be compulsory for all under-18s, and that 95% of adults should have basic numeracy and literacy skills. Ed Balls, the Schools Secretary, has set a target of 90,000 more apprenticeship places by 2013.

Children and Young Persons Bill

Aims to give children in the care system more stability and improve their performance at school. Proposals include giving pilot local authorities the power to test a different model of organising social care by commissioning services from 'Social Work Practices' and enabling regulation of these practices; increasing schools' capacity to address the needs of children in care, including placing the role of the designated teacher on a statutory footing and ensuring that children in care do not move schools in Year 10 and 11 except in exceptional circumstances and ensuring that young people are not forced out of care before they are ready, by giving them a greater say over moves to independent living.

Counter Terrorism Bill

The government is still considering whether to increase the period of pre-charge detention without trial from the current level of 28 days. Moves to extend this in 2005 led to the first parliamentary defeat of Tony Blair's government. It will prove divisive with opposition parties if Brown does suggest an increase in pre-charge detention and could spark the most dangerous backbench revolt since Gordon Brown became Prime Minister in June. The main elements of the Bill as it currently stands are: measures to ensure that full use



David Davis and Nick Clegg will spearhead opposition to the extension of 28 days detention without trial

can be made of DNA in terrorism investigations; following consultation, changes to enable post-charge questioning of terrorist suspects and the drawing of adverse inferences from a refusal to say something later relied on in court; a requirement for convicted terrorists to provide the police with personal information on their release from prison and to notify any changes to this information; and introduction of a foreign travel order that will enable convicted terrorists to be banned from travelling overseas.

Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill

The main elements of the Bill are the introduction of Violent Offender Orders, which will allow courts to impose post-sentence restrictions on those convicted of violent offences, e.g. residence or movement restrictions. The government is attempting to combat hate crime by introducing a new offence of inciting hatred against gay, transgender and disabled people. The legislation will end automatic sentence discounts for offenders re-sentenced to an indeterminate sentence after initial sentencing decision ruled unduly lenient, and introduce powers for courts to make dangerous offenders given a discretionary life sentence, serve a higher proportion of their tariff before being eligible for parole consideration.



Citizenship and Immigration (Draft Bill)

Tory leader David Cameron has put Labour on to the back foot over immigration in the past week as ministers were forced to admit that official immigration figures were much higher than previously announced. As part of Brown's fight back, immigration has been separated from criminal justice and given its own Bill. No exact details have been outlined as to what the bill will contain but Whitehall officials have revealed that a new system will effectively cut the number of foreign migrant workers by 35,000 a year and could include powers to make more non-EU immigrants learn English.

Cameron: Looking to capitalise on growing concern over immigration

Political Party Funding and Expenditure Proposals

No specific details about the party funding bill have been announced. Future proposals will almost certainly feature a cap on spending for political parties who focus funding on particular constituencies – a move that would be directed at the Conservatives and Lord Ashcroft's tactic of bankrolling individual Conservative candidates. Its introduction comes a week after cross party talks, under the guidance of Sir Hayden Phillips', broke down with Labour and the Conservatives accusing one another of sabotaging negotiations by making unreasonable demands. Without Conservative support the Bill will need the backing of Lib Dems in order to pass through of Lords and who hold the balance of power in the Upper House. Minister Ed Miliband this lunchtime said: "We need to find a way of not just capping spending a year before an election but throughout the year"



Brown will need opposition backing for reforms of party funding after Hayden Phillips' cross-party negotiations broke down last week. The review was introduced in response to the 2006 'cash for peerages' investigation.

Constitutional Renewal (Draft Bill)

This is subject to further consultation but the core ambition is to rebalance power between Parliament and Government and give Parliament more ability to hold Government to account and to reinvigorate democracy. Consultation is underway on proposals already outlined to MPs by Brown on 3rd July, giving MPs the final say on going to war and on international treaties, Commons committees for each English region, moving election day to weekends and a new national security council. It changes the powers of the attorney general and will put the civil service on a statutory footing.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill

The UK-wide draft bill was published on 17 May for pre-legislative scrutiny by a joint committee. The main elements of the Bill are to ensure that the creation and use of all human embryos outside the body – whatever the process used in their creation – are subject to regulation. It will introduce a ban on selecting the sex of offspring for non-medical reasons and ensure the retention of a duty to take account of "the welfare of the child" when providing fertility treatment.

EU Reform Treaty

The Bill to bring in the EU Reform Treaty without a referendum. The legislation will spark a marathon parliamentary battle, likely to start in the New Year, which could rival the struggle over the Maastricht Treaty under John Major's Conservative government in the early 1990s.

Planning Reform Bill

This bill will implement the main proposals from the planning White Paper (May 2007), in particular, establishing a new separate planning system for major infrastructure projects and simplifying the planning system for minor home improvements. The bill will introduce a single consents regime for major infrastructure projects, establishing an Independent Infrastructure Planning Commission, and further measures to improve the Town and Country Planning System. In many cases formal planning permission will no longer be required.

Energy Bill

This Bill aims to provide greater incentives for renewable energy generation, but will also make it easier for private firms to invest in offshore gas supply infrastructure and in "carbon capture" research and provisions on nuclear waste and decommissioning financing. By encouraging a diverse, secure supply of electricity while at the same time reducing carbon dioxide emissions the

government hopes to help the UK progress towards reducing carbon dioxide emissions by at least 60% by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.

Child Maintenance and Other Payments Bill

Will establish the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission to replace the troubled Child Support Agency (CSA). The government says it will have tougher powers to force absent parents to pay for their children. It will also set up a scheme to pay a lump sum to people suffering from the asbestos-related disease mesothelioma, who are not yet eligible for compensation.

Apprenticeships (Draft Bill)

The government proposes bringing forward legislation to reform apprenticeships so that even more young people and adults can benefit from them. In particular, introducing an entitlement to an apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds. A review of the apprenticeship programme is currently underway, due for completion in January 2008 and any new legislation would be expected to cover the leadership of the apprenticeship programme and the rights and responsibilities of those involved – apprentices, employers, training providers and statutory bodies. Specifically it is likely to cover a number of areas including: a statutory definition of apprenticeships; a duty on the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide apprenticeship places; a duty to facilitate entry to apprenticeship programmes through for example a national matching service and a right to public funding for apprenticeship programmes.

Housing and Regeneration Bill

The recent Housing Green Paper set out plans to deliver three million new homes by 2020. The Bill will support the delivery of housing supply through the creation of the Homes and Communities Agency, and reforms social housing and social housing regulation to promote better services for tenants. The main benefits of the Bill would be to bring together land and housing. The Homes and Communities Agency would support the regeneration and delivery of new social and affordable housing, both social and private. It would attempt to make better use of surplus public sector land and maximise the potential for Brownfield development.

Health and Social Care Bill

The bill aims to create a stronger health and social care regulator with a remit to ensure clean and safe services and high quality care. This is a key part of the Government's drive to ensure safe and high quality health and social care services and the Bill will give tougher powers to a new integrated regulator, the Care Quality Commission, for health and adult social care, with focus on providing assurance about the safety and quality of care for patients and service users. The main benefits of the Bill would be; to assure the safety and quality of care and apply a consistent approach to regulation by requiring providers of health services and adult social care to register with a new regulator, the Care Quality Commission; to equip the new regulator with tougher powers, backed by fines, to inspect, investigate and intervene where hospitals are failing to meet hygiene standards; and to extend financial support to mothers-to-be from the 29th week of pregnancy.

Work-life Balance - Proposals

The Government introduced the right to request flexible working in 2003 for parents of children under the age of 6 (or 18 in the case of a disabled child). The scope was extended to include carers of adults from April 2007. The Government is now considering moves to help parents of older children by granting them more flexible working rights.

Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill

This Bill enables unclaimed money in dormant bank accounts to be used for youth facilities, financial inclusion and social investment for distribution in the community. In addition, this Bill will see consumers protected in being able to

reclaim their money at any time in the future. Funds reinvested in the community and money not needed to manage customer reclaim would be reinvested in communities via the BIG lottery fund. In England initial spending would be on youth services, financial capability and inclusion and, resources permitting, a social investment 'wholesaler'. Devolved Administrations would determine their own priorities.

Pensions Bill

The Pensions Bill will place a duty on every employer to contribute to good quality workplace pensions for their employees, enacting the remainder of the pensions reform package set out in the Government's May 2006 White Paper, *Security in retirement: towards a new pension system*.

Eligible workers will be automatically enrolled into a pension to tackle the current behavioural barriers to pension saving, and the difficulty of making the right choice. Individuals will have the right to opt-out. The Bill will introduce a minimum employer contribution to improve incentives to save and increase pension participation

A new scheme of low-cost personal accounts will be introduced to give those without access to a good quality pension scheme – in particular, low to moderate earners – the opportunity to save, with an independent Delivery Authority, utilising the skills and experience of the private sector, determining how the new scheme is built and run.

Local Transport Bill

The Local Transport Bill will tackle congestion and improve public transport, in particular bus services by ensuring local authorities have the right powers to take local action to meet local transport needs. Local Authorities will be given the right mix of powers to improve the quality of local bus services to boost bus use, reduce congestion and help tackle climate change and give them the power to review and propose their own arrangements for local transport governance, to support more coherent planning and delivery of local transport, especially in major urban areas. Existing legal powers will be updated so that, where local areas wish to develop proposals for local road pricing schemes, they have the freedom and flexibility to do so in a way that best meets local needs.

Banking System - Legislation

In the light of the Northern Rock Crisis, this previously unexpected Bill will be introduced to protect depositors and ensure confidence in the banking system by improving the current framework for dealing with banks in distress, including the arrangements for depositor protection.

The Government is committed to extensive discussion and consultation before bringing forward legislation in the forthcoming session of Parliament. As a first step in that process the Treasury, Financial Services Authority and Bank of England published a discussion paper, *Banking reform – protecting depositors* on 11 October, and responses to the issues raised in that paper are requested by 5 December 2007.

Informed by the responses to this paper, the Government intends to follow up with a consultation document in early 2008. Before enacting any concrete measure, the Government wants to be reasonably assured that the benefits of the proposed changes exceed the costs.

Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Bill

A Bill will be introduced to reduce regulatory burden on business by establishing the Local Better Regulation Office, to bring consistency to local authority enforcement by putting in place a range of administrative sanctions for regulatory non-compliance, to complement existing criminal sanctions, and require that regulators would not maintain or impose unnecessary burdens.

At the heart of this would be the promotion of consistent, proportionate, effective and risk-based enforcement by trading standards and environmental health services

Bills carried over from the previous parliamentary session

- Child Maintenance and Other Payments - Bill (carried over/not mentioned in speech)
- Employment - Bill (not mentioned in speech)
- Marine - Draft Bill (not mentioned in speech)
- Crossrail - Bill (hybrid Bill/carried over/not mentioned in speech)
- EC Finance - Bill (not mentioned in speech)
- National Insurance Contributions - Bill (not mentioned in speech)
- Cultural Property (Armed Conflict) - Draft Bill (not mentioned in the speech)
- Heritage Protection - Draft Bill (not mentioned in the speech)
- Sale of Student Loans - Bill (not mentioned in speech)
- Marine Navigation and Port Safety - Draft Bill (not mentioned in speech)
- Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Supplementary Provisions) - Bill (Not mentioned in the speech)

Opposition reaction to the Queen's Speech

Lib Dems: Acting Leader of the Liberal Democrats Vince Cable MP accused Gordon Brown of producing a legislative programme with no new ideas despite delaying a General Election so that he could outline his vision for Government. He said that the "legislative programme is firmly rooted in the Blair era. There is very little new. No ideas, no vision. The one time editor of the Red Paper has penned a Queen's speech in the bluest ink. Across wide swathes of policy his approach is indistinguishable from the Tories. We will seek to amend the Bill to provide for a referendum on our membership of the EU. We can have as much legislative scrutiny as we like, but unless the public are persuaded that EU membership is in their interests British politics will continue to be poisoned by this issue. We want the Prime Minister to join us in making the case for Europe."

Conservatives: Response expected at 15:00 in the House of Commons.

Online media

Go to http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/the_daily_politics/ to watch the very latest views and analysis on the BBC's Daily Politics.

See the latest Queen's Speech debates live on the floor of the House of Commons by going to: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/bbc_parliament/

Blogosphere

Conservative Political Blogger Iain Dale, <http://www.iaindale.blogspot.com/>
BBC Political Editor, Nick Robinson, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/nickrobinson/>
Sky News's Adam Boulton, <http://adamboulton.typepad.com/>
Mike Smithson's Political betting blog, <http://politicalbetting.com/>