

# Queen's Speech

*Wednesday 4, June 2014*

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## Background

The Queen delivered her 63<sup>rd</sup> speech and the last of this term, outlining the coalition government's legislative programme for the coming year in the lead up to the 2015 general election.

The introduction of the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, which sets a fixed date for the general election, means the government can pursue a full legislative programme in its final year.

The realities of a coalition government and the politics of electioneering arguably impact on the content of this programme. The coalition is struggling to find legislation they can both agree on and this is reflected in the fairly light programme outlined for the coming year. For example a sole Conservative government would likely have included a referendum on whether the UK should remain in the European Union along with further changes to immigration. The Liberal Democrats would likely have wanted to see significant constitutional reform. The challenge on agreeing on legislation is exacerbated by the upcoming general E election. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are trying hard to differentiate themselves for each other in the eyes of voters. Added to this, there is a reluctance to legislate on contentious issues such as health for fear of creating too much controversy which would hinder campaigning.

Both Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg have hit back at claims the coalition has run out of steam in a joint statement saying the coalition is, "still taking bold steps" to "take Britain forward to a brighter future".

## Content of the Queen's Speech

The coalition government has made a commitment to building an economy that rewards those who work hard, ensuring mortgage and interest rates remain low and making the UK an attractive place to start, finance and grow business. It remains to be seen if they deliver on these promises. It is disappointing the government failed to place a more substantial focus on supporting and promoting families as well as addressing the serious poverty that many families are facing.

It is encouraging to see the government has included the Draft Modern Slavery bill in its programme. Along with consolidating existing criminal offences relating to slavery into one piece of legislation, the bill will also impose tougher penalties on those convicted of trafficking and strengthen powers on asset confiscation. It will provide compensation to victims and greater protections by ensuring they do not face prosecution for crimes committed while in slavery. An anti-slavery commissioner will be introduced to see the new law is followed.

The Evangelical Alliance welcomes the work parliament is doing to address human trafficking and slavery and better support victims however there are ways this bill can be improved. This is an important piece of legislation and once the bill is passed into law it is unlikely there will be the chance to improve measures for a long time. So it is important we get it right while we have the chance.

As the bill progresses through parliament we will be pushing for greater protections and support for victims, an obligation on businesses to be transparent about their supply chains so customers can be confident slavery has not been used and greater independence for the anti-slavery commissioner. More information about our involvement in this bill can be found [here](#).

The government is hoping to better protect children from emotional neglect and psychological harm by extending the definition of child cruelty. Any neglect or harm inflicted upon children is abhorrent. Every child deserves to grow up in a loving, safe and supportive environment. We will be looking closely at how this bill protects children while also ensuring parents are not subject to undue state interference. The bill will also see the possession of written paedophilia become a criminal offence. While this is a positive step in the right direction to address paedophilia in the UK there is still more that should be done.

We welcome confirmation that marriage will be recognised in the tax system with the introduction of a married couple's allowance. This follows an earlier announcement in the spring budget.

Subject to the outcome of a consultation, the Charity Commission will be given stronger and more effective powers to tackle those abusing the rules and presenting a “known risk”. There will be pre-legislative scrutiny and if it goes ahead this will likely be in the autumn.

Another positive announcement is there will be greater legal protection for people, such as volunteers, being sued for negligence or breach of duty. The Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Bill is expected to guide judges to take into account whether people were acting in good faith and in order to help communities.

**Other measures to be introduced include:**

- A Bill to help pub landlords by introducing a statutory code and a body to resolve disputes.
- Higher penalties for employers who fail to pay their staff minimum wage along with a clampdown on the abuse of zero hour contracts.
- A 5p charge on all plastic bags.
- Giving voters the control to initiate by-elections where MPs have done serious wrong-doing.
- Reducing excessive redundancy pay-outs to public service employees.
- Increasing the housing supply and home ownership by reforming the planning system. The government will also continue to promote help-to-buy and right-to-buy schemes and create an allowable solution scheme to enable all new homes to be built to zero carbon standards.
- A commitment to seeing all infants receiving a free school meal each day.
- Helping working families with child care costs with a new state-funded childcare subsidy worth up to £2,000 a year. This will replace the existing employer-funded scheme.
- Giving those who have saved greater control over their retirement funds with a bill that allows more innovation in the private pensions market as well as abolishing the 10p tax rate.
- Tougher sentences for cyber criminals and new sentences for those helping with organised crime.
- Tougher penalties for those trying to avoid national insurance contributions.
- Improving the complaints system in the armed forces with the creation of an Ombudsman.
- Continuing to implement reforms to the electricity market.
- Further reforms to GCSE and A Levels to raise standards and prepare pupils for employment.
- Working to promote reform in the European Union including a strong role for member states and national parliaments.
- New financial powers for the Scottish Parliament. The government will also continue to make the case for Scotland to remain in the union.

Further information can be found in the [Cabinet Office's background briefing notes](#).

## Review of the 2013/14 session

The government's previously stated intentions to introduce plain packaging of cigarettes, minimum unit prices for alcohol and the pledge to spend 0.7 per cent of GNI on foreign aid did not eventuate.

Divisions within the Conservative Party were especially apparent during the passage of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill when a majority of Tory MPs voted against the Bill at second reading, reflecting overwhelming public opinion.

In the summer the prime minister faced a further lack of support when the House of Commons rejected Cameron's position of intervention in Syria.

Revelations that MP Patrick Mercer had broken parliamentary lobbying rules led the government to introduce the much criticised Lobbying Act. The Bill was widely condemned introducing a register for lobbyists. Many in the third sector took to referring to it as the "gagging bill" because of new restrictions to third party campaign expenditure.

In October the proposed Royal Charter on press regulation passed into law but only after a news-paper editor alternative had been presented and rejected by the Privy Council.

The UK economy improved and was accompanied by changes to national insurance contributions and bringing forward law to separate investment and high street banking operations.

There was criticism that the government sold off Royal Mail too cheaply.

The controversial HS2 legislation failed to get Royal Assent and could possibly end up dominating the upcoming parliamentary session.

### **Carry-over Bills from the 2013/14 session**

- [Consumer Rights Bill](#)
- [Criminal Justice and Courts Bill](#)
- [Deregulation Bill](#)
- [Finance \(No. 2\) Bill](#)
- [High Speed Rail \(London to West Midlands\) Bill](#)
- [Wales Bill](#)

### **Bills which received Royal Assent during the 2013/14 session**

#### ***Government Bills***

- [Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing](#)
- [Care](#)
- [Children and Families](#)
- [Defence Reform](#)
- [Energy](#)
- [European Union \(Approvals\)](#)
- [Finance](#)
- [Financial Services \(Banking Reform\)](#)
- [Gambling \(Licensing and Advertising\)](#)
- [High Speed Rail \(Preparation\)](#)
- [Immigration](#)
- [Intellectual Property](#)
- [Local Audit and Accountability](#)
- [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\)](#)
- [Mesothelioma](#)
- [National Insurance Contributions](#)
- [Northern Ireland \(Miscellaneous Provisions\)](#)
- [Offender Rehabilitation](#)
- [Pensions](#)
- [Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration](#)
- [Water](#)

***Consolidation and Law Commission Bills***

- [Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies](#)
- [Inheritance and Trustees' Powers](#)

***Private Members' Bills***

- [Citizenship \(Armed Forces\) Deep Sea Mining](#)
- [House of Lords Reform \(No. 2\)](#)
- [International Development \(Gender Equality\) Leasehold Reform \(Amendment\)](#)