

Parliamentary Law Making

In A-level law, one of the topics to consider how law is made by Parliament and how the judges apply them in cases that come before the courts.

In this activity we will concentrate on how a proposal for a new law (known as a Bill) becomes an Act of Parliament (a law).

Parliament

Parliament is the supreme law-making body in the UK. This means only Parliament has authority to make law. Most of the laws are proposed by the Government but it is Parliament who are responsible for making the Acts of Parliament (also known as statutes).

Parliament is divided into two Houses: The House of Commons and the House of Lords. The House of Commons is made up of the Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by the people at a general election. The House of Lords includes peers (eg Lord Sugar) and senior members of the church (eg the Archbishop of Canterbury). These MPs and Lords are from all the political parties, not just the party in power.

Almost every suggested piece of legislation passes through both Houses of Parliament and must be agreed by them both before it is given Royal Assent by the Monarch.

The formal law-making process

An Act of Parliament starts as a Bill and must go through a set procedure to become an Act of Parliament.

Most Bills start in the House of Commons. There are five stages to this formal process. When the process is completed the Bill passes to the House of Lords and goes through the same five stages. The Bill moves back and forth between the two Houses until both Houses vote in favour of the final version. Not all Bills become law. If both the House of Commons and the House of Lords approve the Bill, it will receive Royal Assent by the Monarch (currently Queen Elizabeth) to become a law.

The five stages which repeat in each House are as follows:

1. First Reading

The Bill is introduced to the House. The title is read out. A vote is taken to decide if it should continue to the next stage. Often, the person proposing the Bill will be a Government Minister. For example, if the Bill relates to schools, the Government Minister for Education will introduce the Bill.

2. Second Reading

The House debates the Bill. Normally the Minister who introduced the Bill will start the debate. There is another vote to decide if the Bill should pass to next stage.

3. Committee Stage

A committee of cross-party MPs with a special interest in the subject matter of the Bill, will scrutinise the Bill. This means they will examine it in detail. In the House of Lords, it is often the whole House which scrutinises the Bill. They will go through the Bill, line-by-line, seeking amendments where necessary.

4. Report Stage

The committee reports back to the House and a vote is taken on any changes that have been made.

5. Third Reading

A final vote is taken to decide whether the bill should proceed to the other House.

Parliamentary Ping-Pong

The Bill will pass back and forth between the House of Commons and the House of Lords until all the amendments are approved. This is known as parliamentary ping-pong.

Royal Assent

Once both Houses have approved the Bill it is sent to the Monarch who gives Royal Assent to the Bill. It then becomes a law.

You can find out more about law making here: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/>

YOUR TASK: create an information sheet

Please present this information in a way that can be shared with someone who does not know how the law is made. This will be on one or two sheets of A4 paper or one A3 sheet of paper.

You should try to combine words and pictures and to use colour. Research tells us that a person is better able to understand new information when words (oral or written) are combined with an appropriate visual image.

A visual representation might include a timeline, colour-coding, illustration or images.

You can use any format you wish. For example, you can create a poster or a leaflet/pamphlet or even an infographic.

If you are feeling adventurous you might try making a podcast recording or a video.

I hope you enjoy this activity. If you have any questions about this or the A-level law course, please email me.

I look forward to seeing your work and meeting you next year.

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