

STAGES OF PASSING A BILL

1. First reading is the first stage of a Bill's passage through the House of Commons - usually a formality, it takes place without debate at any time in a parliamentary session.

The short title of the Bill read is out and is followed by an order for the Bill to be printed.

The Bill is published as a House of Commons paper for the first time.

2. The next stage is second reading, the first opportunity for MPs to debate the general principles and themes of the Bill. It usually takes place no sooner than two weekends after first reading.

The Government minister, spokesperson or MP responsible for the Bill opens the second reading debate. The official Opposition spokesperson responds with their views on the Bill.

The debate continues with other Opposition parties and backbench MPs giving their opinions.

At the end of the debate, the Commons decides whether the Bill should be given its second reading by voting, meaning it can proceed to the next stage. It is possible for a Bill to have a second reading with no debate - as long as MPs agree to its progress.

3. Once second reading is complete the Bill proceeds to committee stage - where each clause (part) and any amendments (proposals for change) to the Bill may be debated and detailed examination of the Bill takes place. It usually starts within a couple of weeks of a Bill's second reading. Government Bills are usually formally timetabled. Most Bills are dealt with in a Public Bill Committee. If the Bill starts in the Commons the committee is able to take evidence from experts and interest groups from outside Parliament. Amendments (proposals for change) for discussion are selected by the chairman of the committee and only members of the committee can vote on amendments during committee stage. Amendments proposed by MPs to the Bill will be published daily and reprinted. Every clause in the Bill is agreed to, changed or removed from the Bill, although this may happen (particularly under a programme order) without debate.

A minority of Bills are dealt with by a Committee of the Whole House (takes place on the floor of the House of Commons), with every MP able to take part.

4. If the Bill has been amended, the Bill is reprinted before its next stage and it returns to the floor of the House of Commons for its report stage, where the amended Bill can be debated and further amendments proposed. Report stage gives MPs an opportunity, on the floor of the House, to consider further amendments (proposals for change) to a Bill. There is no set time period between the end of committee stage and the start of the report stage. All MPs may speak, suggest amendments and vote - for lengthy or complex Bills the debates may take several days.

5. Report stage is usually followed immediately by debate on the Bill's third reading.

It is the final chance for the Commons to debate the contents of a Bill. It usually takes place on the same day. Debate on the Bill is usually short, and limited to what is actually in the Bill. Amendments (proposals for change) cannot be made to a Bill at third reading in the Commons. At the end of the debate, the House votes on whether to approve the third reading of the Bill.

6. When the exact wording has been agreed by the Commons and the Lords, the bill is ready for royal assent. Once a bill receives Royal Assent it is made an Act of Parliament (the proposals in the bill become law) and an announcement is made in both Houses – by the Lord Speaker in the Lords and the Speaker in the Commons. In exceptional cases, when the two Houses do not reach agreement, the bill falls. After Royal Assent the legislation within the bill may come into effect immediately, after a set period or only after a commencement order by a government minister. If there is no commencement order, the Act will come into force from midnight at the start of the day of the royal assent. The practical implementation of an Act is the responsibility of the appropriate government department, not Parliament.

[online] dostęp 12.03.2016, dostępny w Internecie <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/passage-bill/>; słownik online, [12.03.2016] dostępny w Internecie: www.diki.angielski.pl

I. Match the terms with the definitions:

1. consent of the Monarch	A third reading
2. proposals for modifications	B a committee stage
3. a part of a Bill	C second reading
4. it takes place without a debate in a session	D Royal Assent
5. the first debate over the general subject and principles of the Bill	E first reading
6. it follows immediately the report stage	F report stage
7. each proposal for changes are debated and the Bill is examined	G amendments
8. time when the amended Bill is debated and further changes can be proposed	H a clause

II. Answer the questions:

1. What happens after the title of the Bill is read out?
2. Who opens the 2nd reading in Parliament?
3. What happens at the end of the debate the 2nd reading?
4. What is the committee able to?
5. What opportunity does the report stage give to MPs?
6. How is the debate on the Bill at third reading?
7. Who selects amendments for discussion and who can vote on them?
8. What happens when the Bill receives Royal Assent?
9. When will the Act come into force?
10. What is the appropriate government department responsible for?

III. Put the sentences into Passive Voice:

1. The House of Commons is debating over the Bill.
2. The Opposition responds their views on the Bill.
3. MPs proposed changes at the committee stage yesterday.
4. The Commons sometimes make amendments at third reading.
5. The Commons have agreed the exact wording of the Bill.
6. The Queen has given Royal Assent to the Bill.
7. The Lord Speaker will make an announcement of a new Act of Parliament.
8. The Commons are examining a new Bill today.

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