



## Parliamentary Sessions: Years Without a Queen's Speech

### Summary

Each parliament is divided into sessions. The Government has the power to set the duration of each session.<sup>1</sup> While their length may vary, sessions usually last for 12 months, with the Queen's Speech taking place at the beginning of each new session. Prior to 2010, the Queen's Speech normally took place in the autumn, but subsequently has taken place in the spring.<sup>2</sup>

Following the 2017 general election, the Government announced that the first session of the new parliament would be extended to two years.<sup>3</sup> As a result, there is expected to be no Queen's Speech in 2018. The Government has argued that this extended session was a necessary exception to the norm, to enable Parliament to face a substantial legislative programme, much of which is a result of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The last year in which there was no Queen's Speech was 2011.

### Sessions Lasting More than 12 Months

While most sessions last for twelve months, some have been lengthened or shortened as a result of the timing of general elections. For example, before 2010, the first session of a new parliament after a spring general election would normally have been extended until the autumn of the subsequent year. Between 1945 and 2010, the median length of the session at the start of each parliament was 208 sitting days in the House of Commons, compared to the median for a session mid-way through a parliament which was 163 sitting days.<sup>4</sup> After the 1966 general election, the 1966–67 session lasted from 18 April 1966 to 27 October 1967, with the House of Commons sitting for a total of 246 days.<sup>5</sup> This was the second largest number of sitting days during a session since 1900.

### Years without a Queen's Speech

There have been four years since 1900 when there has been no King's/Queen's Speech: 1915, 1925, 1949 and 2011. The sessions in 1915 and 1925 were not substantially longer than the average for the period. Between 1900 and 1951, the median number of House of Commons sitting days each session was 143:

- The 1914–16 session (during World War One) ran from 11 November 1914 to 27 January 1916, during which the House of Commons sat for 155 days.
- The 1924–25 session ran from 2 December 1924 to 22 December 1925, during which the House of Commons sat for 148 days.<sup>6</sup>

The 1948–49 session was longer than the average for the period. It ran from 26 October 1948 to 16 December 1949, during which the House of Commons sat for 208 days.<sup>7</sup> Press coverage from the time suggests that the Attlee Government's decision to end of the 1948–49 session in December had been dictated in part by the progress it had made in securing the nationalisation of the iron and steel industry and the desire to call a general election the following year.<sup>8</sup> Parliament was dissolved in February 1950 and the Labour Party won the subsequent general election.

## 2010–12 Session

The 2010–12 session was the longest since 1900 in terms of the number of sitting days. During this session, the House of Commons sat for a total of 295 days.<sup>9</sup> This was 49 days more than the Commons had sat during the 1966–67 session. The House of Lords sat for 293 days.<sup>10</sup>

The Government announced part way through the session, in September 2010, that the next Queen's Speech would be in 2012.<sup>11</sup> The then Leader of the House of Commons, Sir George Young stated that, in the context of the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill, the Government intended to establish five twelve-month sessions for each parliament. Sir George argued that extension of the session until spring 2012 was necessary to avoid a truncated session taking place at the end of that parliament.<sup>12</sup>

The decision to extend the first session of the 2010–15 parliament was criticised in the House of Lords during the passage of the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill. Lord Grocott (Labour) argued that the lengthening of the time between Queen's speeches advantaged the Government in securing its legislative agenda at the expense of scrutiny from the Opposition.<sup>13</sup> Lord Grocott tabled an amendment to the Bill requiring there to be a minimum of five parliamentary sessions in each five year parliament. Responding to this amendment, the then Advocate General for Scotland, Lord Wallace of Tankerness, stated that it was the Coalition Government's intention that subsequent sessions would last for only 12 months.<sup>14</sup> The amendment was withdrawn.

## Further information

- House of Lords Library, [The Sovereign's Ceremonial and Formal Role in Parliament Today](#), 4 March 2016
- House of Lords Library, [State Openings of Parliament: Reduced Ceremonial](#), 20 June 2017

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<sup>1</sup> House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2017, pp 27, para 3.02.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister's Office, '[Government to Confirm Two-year Parliament to Deliver Brexit and Beyond](#)', 17 June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons Library, [Number of Commons Sitting Days by Session since 1945](#), 23 May 2016. This figure excludes sessions at the end of a parliament.

<sup>5</sup> David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts*, 2011, pp 212–5.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> This was the second highest number of Commons sitting days during the period from 1900 to 1951. The longest session, in terms of sitting days, during this period was the 1945–46 session when the House of Commons sat for 212 days. David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts*, 2011, pp 212–5.

<sup>8</sup> *Times*, 'Government Compromise on the Steel Bill', 16 November 1949.

<sup>9</sup> House of Commons Library, [Number of Commons Sitting Days by Session since 1945](#), 23 May 2016.

<sup>10</sup> House of Lords, [Statistics on Business and Membership: Session 2010–12](#), 2012, p 2.

<sup>11</sup> [HC Hansard, 13 September 2010, cols 33–4WS](#).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> [HL Hansard, 10 May 2011, cols 868–71](#).

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, cols 873–5.

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