

# What is an Act of Parliament?



An Act of Parliament creates a new law or changes an existing law. An Act is a Bill that has been approved by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and has been given Royal Assent by the Monarch (the King).

## What is a Green Paper?

A Green Paper is the first step towards creating a new law. Its purpose is to allow and start a debate (discussion) without committing to any specific action. Stakeholders (any interested parties) and the public will be invited to comment on the Green Paper. Each Green Paper will contain several alternative policies, which will be discussed before a final decision is made.

## What is a White Paper?

A White Paper is the policy document produced by the Government that sets out their proposals for future legislation (e.g. an Act/new law). A White Paper may include a draft version of a Bill (Act) that is being planned. This provides a basis for further consultation and discussion with interested or affected groups and allows final changes to be made before a Bill is formally presented to Parliament. An example is the [Valuing People White Paper](#).



[Watch this video summarising the stages involved in making a law](#)



[Read how the National Autistic Society, along with other charities, autistic people and their families campaigned for the Autism Act](#)



[Read about the development of the British Sign Language Bill](#)

### Putting an Act into force

The Government are responsible for bringing new laws into force once they have been passed by Parliament.

An Act may come into force immediately, on a specific future date, or in stages. Sometimes a specific date is not given, and the timing is decided by the Secretary of State for the relevant government department.

Although Parliament is not responsible for implementing legislation, its committees can investigate how well an Act is being implemented by the Government and the effect that the new law is having. This is known as post-legislative scrutiny.

### Changes to Acts

Changes to the law happen through the passing of another Act or delegated legislation. An Act can also be repealed (cancelled) so that its provisions no longer apply. Parliamentary committees examine UK laws and recommend the removal of out-of-date legislation.

Even when reforms (changes) to a law, particularly complex laws, have been passed by Parliament they can take a long time before they are fully implemented in practice.

Changes to Acts may be welcomed by stakeholders (interested parties) and the public, for example the Mental Health Act reforms.

**Read how the Challenging Behaviour Foundation used this opportunity to further the campaign to change the use of mental health services for people with a learning disability, autism or both:**

[Click here to read more](#)



However, the proposed changes to the Human Rights Act were not welcomed by all stakeholders and the public.

**Read how the British Institute of Human Rights campaigned to ensure that people's human rights were not reduced in any way:**



[Click here to read more](#)

Some Acts (laws) affect everyone in society e.g. The Equality Act but there are others which are in place to specifically protect and support people with a learning disability, autism or both e.g. The Autism Act.

### Key Message

Knowing about the Acts (laws) relevant to your relative will help you advocate on their behalf to ensure their rights are upheld. You do not have to have an in-depth knowledge of the Acts (laws) but knowing they exist and that they apply to your relative provides an opportunity to raise a concern or make a complaint when the law is not being followed.

### How to access Acts

Most current Acts of Parliament are available to read on the [legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk) website.