

State Opening of Parliament 2021

The formal start to a year in parliament is marked with the State Opening and the Queen's Speech.

This year it takes place today, Tuesday 11 May, when the government will set out its agenda for the new session.

The occasion, which is the biggest ceremony which takes place in the House of Commons, is usually quite glittering with all MPs in the Chamber as well as in the Lords. This is the occasion that Black Rod knocks on the door to the Commons chamber to summon MPs to the House of Lords where they stand and listen to the Queen's Speech. The speech is written by government and read out by HM The Queen from the Throne in the House of Lords chamber. It is an outline of government policies and the laws which will be passed in this new session. The content of the speech is then debated upon for several days and MPs then vote to pass it.

The government has already announced that the new legislative programme will focus on supporting recovery, backing the NHS, levelling up and spreading opportunity. There is a commitment to make streets and neighbourhoods safer and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. The tagline is "build back better".

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, said: "The impact of the pandemic on people's lives has been unique in our history.

"My Government is still focussed on beating this disease, saving lives and livelihoods and rolling out vaccines, but I

am also determined that we look forward and get on with fulfilling the promises we have made to the British people.

“Not only will we address the legacies of the pandemic, we will go further to unite and level up the country, fight crime and create opportunities up and down the country for businesses and families to build brighter futures.”

The ceremony will be a little different this year. We asked some of the local MPs what it would mean for them.

Ian Murray MP for Edinburgh South, and Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, explained that he is not allowed in the chamber or indeed to take part in the parade to the House of Lords, so he will be watching it on TV.

Deidre Brock MP will not be there either due to the restriction on numbers owing to Covid. She said: “I will certainly be following it online to see what legislation the government will be announcing. The government has already trailed in the press at least one, the “Electoral Integrity” Bill which amongst other things will be introducing a requirement for photo ID to be presented before one can vote in English and UK-wide elections. This has worrying overtones of similar US legislation which has been widely seen as a tool for voter suppression.

“I’m down to speak in Thursday’s debate on the Queens Speech, the subject of which is “A bright future for the next generation”. I’m sure your readers won’t be surprised to learn I will be touching – in the likely three minutes I’ll be allotted to make a contribution – on the impact of Brexit on prospects for our young people and, as the SNP’s spokesperson for COP26, on the immense challenges of climate change.”

Owen Thompson MP for Midlothian will definitely be there. He explained: "As SNP Whip I'm down working in London most weeks, so I'll be taking part physically. I will also have a role in ensuring limited seating in the chamber is managed for my group. I'd like to see us all back at work more quickly and efficiently – the Scottish Parliament could show this place how it's done – so I welcome any cut back on the pomp and ceremony circus. Thankfully the Serjeant at Arms has provided strict instructions to severely limit the numbers and nobody would want to incur the wrath of the man with the sword so hopefully it will be done safely and with minimum fuss.

"This session I want to continue my work to bring in tougher oversight to tackle any possible cronyism and corruption in public office and protect the public purse. In reserved policy areas I'll seek to support meaningful action to aid economic recovery, protect workers and boost jobs. In particular I'm looking for action to support the healthy revival of our live events sector – so crucial in the Lothians – and promote green jobs of the future, like the potential for geothermal energy production in Midlothian's old mineshafts. I will also be working on improving regulations to protect from digital harm and continuing with my roles on seven committees, largely relating to the business and procedures of the House."

Tommy Sheppard MP for Edinburgh Eastern told us he will be watching on the TV. He said: "I won't be present myself and will be listening in through parliament TV.

"In terms of content the most worrying thing is that the UK government is set to develop a programme of voter suppression by insisting on ID to vote. The effect of this will be to boost the Tories' fortunes in elections by making putting obstacles in the way of their opponents.

"Clearly, the elephant in the room, which I don't expect to be addressed is how Johnson's administration responds to the decision of the Scottish people to elect a parliament

committed to a further Indyref.”

The SNP Westminster Leader, Ian Blackford MP, is emphatic that independence must be on the agenda at Westminster.

He said: “Boris Johnson must respect the will of the Scottish people – who voted overwhelmingly to re-elect the SNP with a cast-iron mandate for a post-pandemic independence referendum.

“Last week’s election results in both countries show England and Scotland are on different political paths. We have two governments and Parliament’s with different priorities.

“When it comes to recovery, Scotland voted for a parliament that will back transformative policies to create a fairer society but instead the Tories are repeating the same damaging mistakes of the last economic crisis, by imposing austerity cuts, a hard Brexit, a public sector pay freeze and slashing Universal Credit – pushing millions of people into poverty.

“People in Scotland roundly rejected the Tories and voted for a strong, fair, and equal recovery – instead of the long-term damage of Tory cuts, Brexit and power grabs.

“If we are to deliver an investment-led recovery and the long-term fundamental changes needed to tackle inequality and build a fairer society, Scotland needs the full powers of an independent country. Once this crisis is over there will be a referendum, so that Scotland’s future is in Scotland’s hands – not Boris Johnson’s. The Tories must not stand in the way of democracy.”

State Opening is broadcast live on [Parliament TV](#) and a livestream of the Queen’s Speech will be on [House of Lords Twitter](#) from 11.25am.