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The former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland signing the same-sex marriage regulations for Northern Ireland on 19 December 2019.

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Delegated Legislation: What types are there, and how are they made?

A procedural explainer by Stephanie Pywell and Tom West

December 2023
1. INTRODUCTION

This explainer is designed to aid understanding of delegated legislation, the most common form of legislation in the United Kingdom.

After defining key terms, this explainer presents a series of diagrams with explanatory text that illustrate and describe different forms of delegated legislation. These diagrams are then combined to give an overview of delegated legislation and Parliament’s involvement in it.

Further resources, including a guide setting out where to find different forms of delegated legislation, are included in the Appendices.

2. A BRIEF GUIDE TO TERMINOLOGY

Legislation is law passed by, or under the authority of, a legislature (a law-making body). The UK-wide legislature is the Westminster Parliament, and the devolved nations of the UK also have their own legislatures: the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Each has powers to make laws that are known as primary legislation.

The UK Government, which is also referred to as the executive, proposes most UK-wide primary legislation. The executives in the devolved nations do likewise within their jurisdictions. The main forms of UK primary legislation are:

i. Acts of Parliament: Acts are the supreme form of law passed by the Westminster Parliament. The normal process for passing an Act is that a Bill – an Act in draft form – is debated and amended in both Houses of Parliament, and then receives Royal Assent, which makes it an Act. Unless otherwise stated, this explainer refers to legislation passed by, or made under powers delegated by, the Westminster Parliament.

ii. Acts of the devolved legislatures: each legislature can pass primary legislation within its competence.

iii. Orders in Council and Orders of Council that are made under the Royal Prerogative: these are made at the Privy Council, which consists of about 700 current and former senior politicians, judges and religious leaders. Meetings are usually attended by the Monarch and four serving Government Ministers.

Primary legislation can create legal powers for bodies or individuals, such as Government Ministers, to make delegated legislation on specified matters. Acts that do so are called parent, or enabling, Acts. Delegated legislation is also known as secondary legislation or subordinate legislation.

A Statutory Instrument (SI) is the means by which most delegated legislation is made. Every piece of delegated legislation made by SI has a unique identifier consisting of its year and a number (for example, SI 2020/350); the numbering sequence starts at 1 each year and SIs are numbered in chronological order by the National Archives, which publishes all SIs on legislation.gov.uk.

Relatively few Acts are passed each year compared to the number of SIs, as Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate.

![Figure 1: Number of Public and General Acts of Parliament passed per calendar year, 2000-2022](image1)

Source: National Archives

![Figure 2: Number of Statutory Instruments made per calendar year, 2000-2022](image2)

Source: National Archives
Most, but not all, delegated legislation has to be laid before Parliament to ensure that the legislature retains oversight of the executive’s law-making. There are varying degrees of parliamentary control, which are outlined in Section 5. This explainer also includes some other papers that are laid before Parliament and have some legal effect, but which are not delegated legislation.

3. DELEGATED LEGISLATION

The three main forms of delegated legislation that are covered by this explainer are shown in Diagram A. Information about each one is set out in more detail in the rest of this Section.

3.1 UK Statutory Instruments

UK Statutory Instruments (UK SIs) are normally, but not always, made by a UK Government Minister; some are made by Government agencies, such as HMRC. The three most common types (shown in purple in Diagram B) are as follows:

- **Regulations**: these normally set out substantive obligations – for example, the Passport (Fees) Regulations 2022 specify the fees charged for passports and related services from 5 July 2022.
**Rules**: these normally set out procedural matters – for example, the *Magistrates’ Courts (Amendment) Rules 2022* permit courts to make arrangements to protect vulnerable witnesses while they are giving evidence, if this serves the interests of justice.

**Orders**: these normally entail a one-off change. Three specialised, but rare, kinds of Order are:

- **Remedial Orders**: these are made when a piece of legislation has been declared incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. For example, the *Human Rights Act 1998 (Remedial) Order 2020* allowed courts to award damages if a judge has ordered a person’s detention in a way that breaches their right to a fair trial.

- **Legislative Reform Orders**: these enable Ministers to remove regulatory burdens in primary legislation. For example, the *Legislative Reform (Provision of Information etc. Relating to Disabilities) Order 2022* provides that a ‘registered healthcare professional’, rather than only a
‘registered medical practitioner’, can be authorised to comment on whether someone suffers from a disability that is relevant to their holding a driving licence.

- **Public Bodies Orders**: these are used by Ministers to abolish ‘quangos’. For example, the Public Bodies (Abolition of Public Works Loan Commissioners) Order 2020 abolished the office of Public Works Loan Commissioner.

Whether an SI takes the form of Regulations, Rules or an Order does not itself make any legal or procedural difference; section 105 of the Deregulation Act 2015 allows these different types of SI to be used interchangeably. There is now a tendency to use Regulations rather than Orders for most purposes.

Two less common, and procedurally distinct, types of UK SI (shown in red in Diagram B) involve the Privy Council. These are:

- **Orders in Council**: these are formally made by the King on the advice of Ministers at the Privy Council. They are used where an SI made by a Minister would be inappropriate, such as Orders that are in effect constitutional documents.

- **Orders of Council**: these are made by the Privy Council, and normally approve changes to how professional bodies or universities operate.

Some Orders in Council and Orders of Council are not delegated legislation, but a form of primary legislation. These include:

- Orders made under the Royal Prerogative, such as Orders made at the Accession Council meeting immediately preceding the formal Proclamation of the Accession of King Charles III, which dealt with ceremonial matters such as gun salutes and further proclamations. They are not made by SI.

- **Northern Ireland Orders in Council**, which are made when the Northern Ireland Assembly is suspended. Despite being primary legislation, they are made by SI.

Other, more unusual, types of SI include:

- **Church Rules, Church Orders, Church Regulations and Church Resolutions** (shown in black in Diagram B): these are made by Church of England authorities such as the Church Commissioners or the Archbishops’ Council using powers delegated by Church Measures.

- **Byelaws made by the Ministry of Defence and Forestry Commission** (shown in pink in Diagram B): Ministry of Defence byelaws are not laid before Parliament; Forestry Commission byelaws are laid before Parliament.
SIs can also be classified by where they apply (this aspect is not shown in Diagram B for clarity). The two classifications are:

- **General SIs**: most SIs are general and apply to one or more of the four nations of the UK.

- **Local SIs**: these are used if an SI’s content is personal, local or private. For example, the Air Navigation (Restriction of Flying) (Tottenham Hotspur Football Stadium) Regulations 2022 prohibited low flying over the stadium while an American football game was taking place.

UK SIs can also regulate policy matters in areas of devolved legislative competence. These may require the involvement of Ministers from a devolved executive and/or a devolved legislature and can be further sub-categorised (for clarity, these distinctions are not shown in Diagram B, but they are in Diagrams E and H). The three main types are:

- **Joint Instruments**: these are made jointly by a UK Minister and a Minister from a devolved executive – for example, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017, which apply in England and Wales.

- **Composite Instruments**: these contain a combination of provisions, some of which are made by a UK Minister and some by a devolved Minister. For example, the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (England and Wales) Regulations 2011; these enable the Environment Agency to set up local committees to manage flood and coastal erosion risks in the two nations.

- SIs made by a UK Minister alone, but with varying degrees of prior involvement by a devolved executive and/or legislature. In Diagrams E and H, these are referred to (imperfectly and unofficially) as ‘devolved UK SIs’.

### 3.2 Devolved delegated legislation

The main types of delegated legislation made by the executives of the devolved nations of the UK are:

- **Scottish Statutory Instruments** (shown in blue in Diagram C): these are made by the Scottish Government using powers in parent Acts of either the UK or the Scottish Parliament. They have a discrete numbering system and may be subject to scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament. They are distinct from UK SIs that apply to Scotland only, which are numbered as a subseries of UK SIs.

- **Welsh Statutory Instruments**, also known as ‘Wales SIs’ (shown in red in Diagram C): these are made by the Welsh Government using powers in parent Acts of either the UK Parliament or the Senedd. They may be subject
to scrutiny by the Senedd. They are numbered as a subseries of UK SIs, so they have two numbers – for example, the Trade in Animals and Related Products (Wales) Regulations 2011 is numbered as SI 2011/2379 (W. 252).

Devolved delegated legislation

Diagram C: Delegated legislation from the devolved legislatures

- **Northern Ireland Statutory Rules** (shown in dark green in Diagram C): these are made by the Northern Ireland Executive using powers in parent Acts of either the UK Parliament or Northern Ireland Assembly, or in Northern Ireland Orders. They have a discrete numbering system and may be subject to scrutiny by the Northern Ireland Assembly and/or the UK Parliament.

England does not have its own executive or Parliament, so SIs that affect England only are UK SIs.

3.3 Other delegated legislation

The forms of delegated legislation discussed in this section are *not* SIs.

3.3.1 Other delegated legislation made by Ministers

These are shown in teal in Diagram D.

- **Ministerial Orders and Directions**: The National Archives publish some Ministerial Orders as a form of delegated legislation on legislation.gov.uk. The majority of Ministerial Orders listed are designations of marine conservation zones under section 123(5) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009; there are only four covering other matters – these were made between 1972 and 1992.
Some other kinds of Ministerial Order are not published on legislation.gov.uk. For example, section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 2000 allows the Secretary of State to make orders approving local authorities’ proposals for pilot schemes for local elections.

Some Acts, such as section 3ZA of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and Schedule 5 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, give Ministers powers to give ‘Directions’ which have legislative character. There is a section for Ministerial Directions on legislation.gov.uk, but at the time of writing only one has been published there: Exiting the European Union: The Exception from the Duty to Publish (Department for Business and Trade) (No.1) Direction 2023.

- **Pre-1948 Orders in Council:** these are Orders made prior to the coming into force on 1 January 1948 of the Statutory Instruments Act 1946. An example is the Naval and Marine Pay and Pensions (Hong Kong Locally Engaged Ratings’ Service Pensions Increase) Order 2023.
• **Immigration Rules**: these set out the practices to be followed in the administration of immigration law in the UK.

• **Compensation schemes**: these provide legal redress. These include:
  
  • The [Financial Services Compensation Scheme](https://www.fscs.org/) (FSCS), which provides for those who lose money if an authorised financial firm fails.
  
  • The [Armed Forces Compensation Scheme](https://www.army.mod.uk/army-life/army-life-matters/compensation) (AFCS), relating to illness, injury or death in service.
  
  • The [Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme](https://www.cics.gov.uk/) (CICS), which compensates victims of violent crime.
  
  • A [Compensation scheme for Group Litigation Order case postmasters](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/group-litigation-order-compensation-scheme) affected by the Horizon IT scandal (GLO Scheme).

The legal nature of these schemes varies: the FSCS is set up by primary legislation and the AFCS is underpinned by a combination of SIs, but the CICS depends on a standalone Instrument that is not an SI. No legislative basis is identified for the GLO Scheme in its published materials as of November 2023.

• **Public Notices**: these, if made by a Minister, may have legal effect – for example, notices made under the [Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/8).

• **Codes of practice**: these are authoritative statements of practice that are usually not legally enforceable, but which may have some significant legal effects. Ministers and regulators can make codes of practice, and some codes of practice are brought into effect by SIs.

Codes that can be categorised as delegated legislation because they have some legal effect include:

  • The [Highway Code](https://www.gov.uk/highway-code).
  

Codes that primarily give guidance as to how legislative requirements can be met include:

  
  • The [Code of Best Practice on Service Charges, Tips, Gratuities and Cover Charges](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-best-practice-on-service-charges-tips-gratuities-and-cover-charges) explains that employers in specified sectors must exclude these payments from their calculations of employees’ wages, and must publicise their policies regarding these types of payment.
- The Pensions Regulator’s codes of practice give practical guidelines on how to comply with the legal requirements of pensions regulation.

3.3.2 Other delegated legislation not made by Ministers

- **Byelaws** (shown in pink in Diagram D): most byelaws are made by local authorities but may require the approval of a Minister. They usually apply only to a specified local area.

  Official bodies other than local authorities that can make byelaws include the Marine Management Organisation, Transport for London, the National Trust and airport operators.

- **Regulator and agency Instruments** (shown in grey in Diagram D): every regulator has a bespoke set of statutory powers and duties to enable it to regulate the conduct of a specified sector of society. The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA), for example, have powers under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 to make rules about the conduct of people and businesses in the financial sector, and to impose sanctions if those rules are broken. These are found in the ‘Financial Conduct Authority Handbook’ and the ‘Prudential Regulation Authority Rulebook’.

  Some regulators of professional bodies – for example, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the General Optical Council and the General Chiropractic Council – can make rules about how their professions operate. These rules must be approved by an Order of Council, to which the rules themselves form a Schedule – for example, the General Optical Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules Order of Council 2013.

  HMRC also has powers to make delegated legislation, some of which is made by SI, and some as ‘non-Statutory Instrument secondary legislation’.

- **Other Church subordinate legislation** (shown in black in Diagram D): Church of England authorities, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, formerly had powers to make delegated legislation that was not made by SI. This included Church Instruments, which normally brought into force provisions specified in Church Measures that had received Royal Assent and are published on legislation.gov.uk.
4. DELEGATED LEGISLATION: A SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW

Diagram E brings together in schematic form all the types of delegated legislation discussed so far in this explainer and set out previously in Diagrams A to D. The dotted grey line encloses the legislation that is published on legislation.gov.uk.

Diagram E: Overview of types of delegated legislation

* Some Orders in Council, including all NI Orders in Council, are primary legislation
** Some Schemes and Codes of Practice are not delegated legislation
† Orders in Council made under pre-1948 parent Acts
5. PAPERS LAID BEFORE PARLIAMENT

Most SIs and a number of other papers – such as reports, announcements and statements – are laid before Parliament: this simply means that they have been formally presented to Parliament. Lists of papers laid before Parliament each day can be found towards the end of the daily Votes and Proceedings in the House of Commons’ Business Papers and in the House of Lords Business Papers. Most papers are either:

- **Laid by Act**: this means that there is a statutory requirement for the Government to lay the paper; or
- **Laid by Command**: this means that the paper has been laid voluntarily by the Government.

Some of the papers that are laid before Parliament are subject to parliamentary control, which means that there is a procedure by which Parliament can either approve or reject the document.

This section describes some papers that are laid before Parliament, and the different procedures that apply to them. It is divided into two parts, one dealing with SIs, and one dealing with other papers that have some legal effect.

5.1 Parliamentary control over Statutory Instruments

*Diagram F: Degrees of parliamentary control over SIs*
Made only SIs (shown in purple in Diagram F) are not laid before Parliament. They are simply published on legislation.gov.uk. Local SIs and commencement regulations normally fall into this category.

Laid only SIs (shown in orange in Diagram F) are not subject to any parliamentary control. They are laid before Parliament but they are not debated and cannot be rejected.

Parent Acts can specify a number of different procedures for SIs that are subject to parliamentary control (all shown in red in Diagram F). Most involve both Houses, but a small number – notably those concerning taxation and some financial matters – involve only the House of Commons. SIs can be grouped into categories according to these procedures:

- **Made negative SIs**: these are laid before Parliament after they have been made – signed – into law by a Minister, but may be annulled if a motion to do so is passed by either House within 40 days of the SI being laid before Parliament.

- **Draft negative SIs**: these are laid before Parliament before being made into law. They are deemed to have Parliament’s consent if no motion against them is agreed within 40 days of laying, but they cannot be made into law until that scrutiny period has expired.

- **Made affirmative SIs**: these are laid before Parliament after they have been made into law by a Minister, but cannot remain law unless debated and approved by the House of Commons and in most cases also the House of Lords within a statutory period, usually 28 or 40 days.

- **Draft affirmative SIs**: these are laid before Parliament as drafts and cannot be made into law by a Minister unless and until they have been debated and approved by the House of Commons and in most cases also the House of Lords.

- **SIs subject to strengthened scrutiny procedures**: bespoke procedures apply to SIs laid under specific powers in a small number of Acts of Parliament. These bespoke procedures may entail ‘sifting’ of proposed negative SIs by parliamentary select committees to determine whether the scrutiny procedure to which they are subject should be upgraded. These procedures may also involve statutory consultation requirements and longer scrutiny periods. They include the enhanced affirmative and super-affirmative procedures, and apply to particular types of SI, including Legislative Reform Orders, Remedial Orders and Public Bodies Orders.
• **Special Procedure Orders**: these include provisions for people or bodies especially affected by an Order to petition against it in Parliament.

The made negative and draft affirmative are by far the most common scrutiny procedures.

Joint Instruments, Composite Instruments and ‘devolved UK SIs’ may be laid before – and subject to parliamentary control in – more than one of the UK’s legislatures.

### 5.2 Parliamentary control over other papers laid before Parliament

Many other papers laid by Act before Parliament are subject to some degree of parliamentary control. This includes some of the other forms of delegated legislation detailed in Section 3.3.1, as well as other documents which, while non-legislative in character, may play an important role in the interpretation and/or implementation of law.

*Diagram G: Other papers with legal effect that are laid before Parliament*

*Not all documents of these kinds are laid*
• **Guidance** (shown in orange in Diagram G): this is not delegated legislation but helps people to understand their legal rights and duties. Some guidance – usually when there is a statutory duty to ‘have regard’ to the guidance – must be laid before Parliament.

• **Policy statements** (shown in orange in Diagram G): these have some legal effect and must be laid before Parliament, but they are not delegated legislation. Examples include the energy Policy Statements made under section 5 of the Planning Act 2008, and the environmental principles policy statement made under section 18 of the Environment Act 2021. Some policy statements, including those made under the Planning Act, are subject to approval or rejection by the House of Commons.

• **Schemes** (shown in teal in Diagram G): these are described in Section 3.3.1 and can be subject to parliamentary procedure.

• **Codes of practice** (shown in teal in Diagram G): some codes of practice can be classified as delegated legislation (as noted in Section 3.3.1), whereas others cannot. Codes of practice made by Ministers or regulators can be laid and subject to parliamentary control. Examples include changes to the Highway Code, codes issued under section 30 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 and codes under section 26 of the Human Tissue Act 2004.

• **Immigration Rules** (shown in teal in Diagram G): these are usually laid by Act but can occasionally be laid by Command; in either case, they are in effect subject to the ‘made negative’ scrutiny procedure.

• **Proposed Negative SIs** (shown in purple in Diagram G): these are proposals for legislation, which are currently used only in relation to retained EU law. Dedicated Committees in each House can recommend whether they should be subject to the negative or affirmative scrutiny procedure when they are formally laid as SIs.

• **Church Measures** (shown in black in Diagram G): these are a form of primary legislation made by the General Synod of the Church of England. Before they can be presented for Royal Assent, they are submitted to the Ecclesiastical Committee, which must report on them, and are subject to approval by both Houses.

• **Treaties** (shown in red in Diagram G): these are agreements that the UK enters into with other countries – they form part of international law. Treaties do not automatically form part of the UK’s domestic law but can be incorporated into it via primary or delegated legislation. Before a treaty can be ratified (ie enter into force for the UK), the Government must lay it by
Command before Parliament. Most treaties are subject to the procedure specified in section 20 of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, but the Government has the power to bypass this.

6. BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER
The bafflingly labyrinthine nature of delegated legislation in the UK is depicted in

Diagram H: Overview of delegated legislation and other legal papers subject to parliamentary control

* Some NI Statutory Rules are laid before the Westminster Parliament

Diagram H. If you can understand it all, congratulations!

And finally…

…if you have any feedback or comments on the content of this explainer, please email them to contact@hansardsociety.org.uk.
# APPENDIX A: WHERE TO FIND DELEGATED LEGISLATION

| legislation.gov.uk (maintained by The-National Archives) | UK Statutory Instruments (including most statutory Orders in Council and Orders of Council)  
| | Scottish Statutory Instruments  
| | Welsh Statutory Instruments  
| | Northern Ireland Statutory Rules  
| | Some Ministerial Orders and Ministerial Directions  
| | Church of England Measures, Instruments, and other legislation made by SI  
| | Codes of Practice made by SI  
| gov.uk | Immigration Rules  
| | Public Notices  
| | HMRC [non-Statutory Instrument secondary legislation](https://www.gov.uk)  
| | Codes of Practice made by central Government departments  
| | Guidance  
| | Policy Statements  
| | [Treaties](https://www.gov.uk)  
| Privy Council | Orders in Council made under the Royal Prerogative ([in Minutes](https://www.gov.uk))  
| | Orders of Council not made by SI ([from 2017](https://www.gov.uk))  
| The Gazette | Orders in Council made under pre-1948 parent Acts  
| Financial Conduct Authority | FCA Handbook  
| Prudential Regulation | PRA Rulebook  
| Church of England | Church of England Canons and subordinate legislation  
| Local Authority and other organisations' websites | Byelaws (for example, [Oxford City Council](https://www.gov.uk))  
| | Regulator Instruments and Codes of Practice |
APPENDIX B: FURTHER READING

- Ruth Fox and Joel Blackwell, *The Devil is in the Detail: Parliament and Delegated Legislation* (Hansard Society, 2014)
- Daniel Greenberg (ed), *Craies on Legislation* (Chapters 1.3, 3 and 6) (Sweet & Maxwell, 12th edition, 2022)
- House of Commons Library, *Local authority byelaws* (Briefing Paper Number 01817) (March 2016)
- House of Commons Library, *Statutory Instruments* (Briefing Paper Number 06509) (December 2016)
- Legislation.gov.uk, *Understanding legislation*
- Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, *Drafting guidance* (Part 9, Subordinate Legislation) (June 2020)
- Stephanie Pywell, ‘Aspects of empowerment in legislation and education’, The Open University Inaugural Lectures (6 December 2022)
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