



ACCA Guide to Parliament

Green and White Papers

Context

The Government regularly publishes Green and White Papers on issues that affect ACCA's work. We respond to the subsequent consultations to provide well evidenced advice to Government departments and others that influence policy, in order to represent our members' interests to Government and to ensure that we are engaging at the highest levels.

Green Paper

A Green Paper is a consultation document, issued by the Government, which contains proposals for future government policy to be raised for debate and discussion. Each proposal usually includes several alternatives which are discussed before a final decision on the best policy option is made.

The government would then issue stronger recommendations in a White Paper.

White Paper

A White Paper is a major policy proposal which could result in changing legislation.

They are 'white' because they used to be bound in white paper, rather than having a proper cover.

A White Paper is the last stage before the proposals it contains are brought before Parliament in the guise of a Bill. It is sometimes, but not necessarily always, produced following the consultation process undertaken when the government issues a Green Paper.

Unlike a Green Paper, a White Paper is issued by the government department to which it relates (e.g. Health, Employment, etc.) and will contain in-depth proposals for legislation.

The introduction of a White Paper is made to the House by the Secretary of State responsible for the department sponsoring the proposals. The introduction usually includes a statement concerning the contents of the White Paper and its implications for future legislation.

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What is the difference between a White and a Green Paper?

A Green Paper is an exploratory one that is designed to stimulate discussion amongst a wide audience. A White Paper is a statement of intent regarding the bringing forward of legislation, where the government is fairly definite in what it thinks is required. If the issue is an open one, a Green Paper usually comes before a White Paper to allow for an expansive debate on the issue. One single issue can have both a Green and a White Paper released on it so that the public can have an insight into what the government wants but also has access to a document that presents an across-the-board selection of arguments.

Both ministers and civil servants acting on behalf of the government participate in this process. Indeed in many instances, the details of a bill are left to experts within a civil service department.

Parliamentary Counsels (government lawyers) are responsible for actually drafting the bill.

Before words are put to paper, a period of consultation occurs. Either a 'Green' Paper or a 'White' Paper is published and members of the public are invited to comment on future bills using these papers as a basis for discussion and contact with their MP if they feel that this is necessary.

If the government want a bill to pass, it is in their interest to ensure that all the areas that need to be analysed have been. Therefore, extensive consultations are carried out to ensure that what the government wants, comes into being. For a bill that is deemed by the government to be important, many groups are consulted: experts, Treasury officials if there are major monetary implications, trade union leaders especially, if there are employment issues at stake, MP's, trade organisations etc.

To allow for full public consultation, a draft bill might be published to allow the public at large and the Parliamentary opposition to see what the effective final act might be. Prior to 1997, releasing a bill in draft form was quite rare. However, since 1997, this has become more and more common. In one sense, this process is seen as the government being more responsive to the people and giving the people the opportunity of making the government responsible to them rather than the other way round.

Only after a bill has been drafted and agreed on by Ministers, does it go to the House of Commons for its first reading.

PAMR

ACCA's Public Affairs and Media Relations (PAMR) department is based in the UK, co-ordinating with colleagues in local offices. We also have an office in Brussels and a permanent staff member in Ukraine, focussed on Central and Eastern Europe.

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The PAMR team aims to ensure that the views of our global membership are reflected in the world's media, and that issues of concern to finance professionals and the wider business community are raised with governments and regulators in order to protect and enhance ACCA's reputation and to increase our influence.

The Public Affairs team exists to protect and enhance the reputation of ACCA with government, policy advisers, key civil servants and other political and business stakeholders. It aims to build positive relationships with key decision makers, and to influence and inform legislation and policy ensuring the best possible outcomes for ACCA's work. We lead on all engagement with Parliament, monitoring Parliamentary activity and providing advice to colleagues.

The Media Relations team works to provide timely and useful comment to the world's media on key issues affecting not only the accounting profession, but business and personal finances. Our global network of offices engaged in communications ensures that every day of the year ACCA is offering wide ranging responsible advice or commentary on key issues on every continent.

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