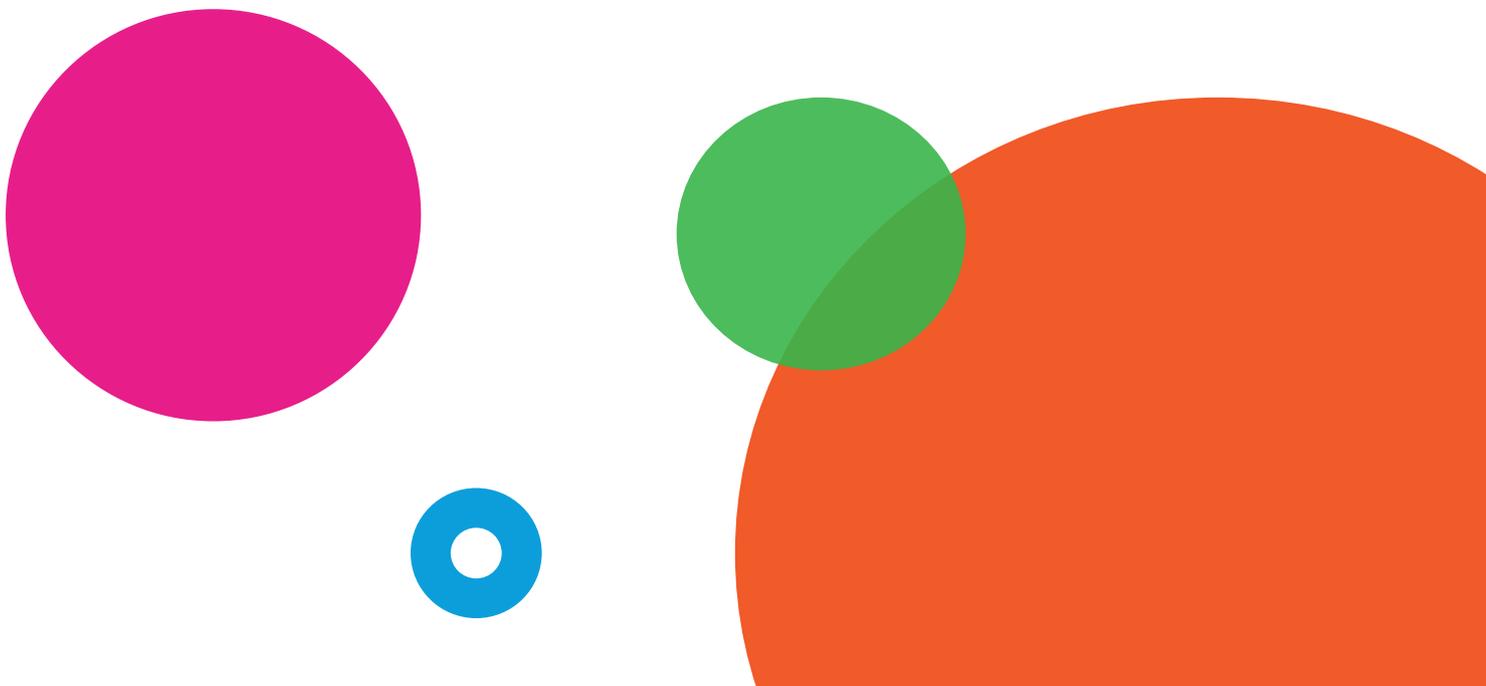


# The Queen's Speech

## Key points

- The government committed to enshrine the NHS multi-year funding settlement into law through an NHS Funding Bill.
- The government will embark on an “ambitious” programme of domestic reform that delivers on the people’s priorities through a NHS Long Term Plan Bill.
- The government stated its commitment to seeking a cross-party long term reform for social care so that everyone has the dignity they deserve and nobody who needs care has to sell their home.
- The government stated that it would work to reform the Mental Health Act.
- The government outlined its aim to introduce a new points-based system for immigration, including introducing a new fast-track NHS Visa to attract the best healthcare professionals from around the world via the Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill.
- The government committed to the Health Services Investigations Bill.
- The government will introduce a bill on medicine and medical devices that will ensure that NHS and patients can have faster access to innovative medicines, while supporting the growth of our domestic sector.

Read the **full transcript** of the speech.



# Background

On Thursday 19 December 2019, the Queen set out her legislative agenda for the new Conservative-majority government, just two months after the last Queen's Speech. In the speech in October, the NHS Confederation noted that the planned legislative shopping list that had been presented before parliament was unlikely to be achieved because of a working majority of minus 40.

Since then, there has been a general election which has tipped the scales to give the country a Conservative Party Government with a majority of 80. With that, it appears that the next five years will return some much-needed stability to parliament with MPs unlikely to face significant barriers to taking forward this agenda.

As expected, the NHS has taken centre stage in the planned legislation but details are lacking on whether this will be enough to make sure the service can be fit for the future, especially given the lack of specificity on how the social care crisis will be addressed, how the NHS will be protected following the UK's departure from the European Union and on reversing cuts to public health.

## NHS and social care

On the campaign trail, the Prime Minister hailed his number one domestic priority to be the NHS, which he has claimed is in line for the "largest cash injection in its history". The NHS Funding Bill will enshrine in law the government's commitment to spend an extra £33.9bn in cash per year by 2023/4. It will also include a plan to fast-track visas for qualified health professionals, make it easier for hospitals to manufacture and trial innovative medicines, and scrap hospital car parking charges "for those in greatest need". The Queen's Speech reinforced this message, stating that her government would enshrine funding increases in law.

To put this commitment in context, the extra funding amounts to a 3.4 per cent year-on-year increase in expenditure - which is a significant increase on what the NHS has received since 2010 when the Conservatives entered No.10.

However, it is still significantly less than the 6 per cent average annual increases seen under Labour between 1997-2010, and when adjusted for inflation, and factoring in the increased cost of equipment, medicines and staff pay, it could actually be worth £20.5 billion by 2023/4. The speech also committed ministers' to ensuring that "steps will be taken to ensure the growth in the NHS workforce". This follows on from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care's speech on Wednesday 18 December which set out the government's plans to offer grants worth up to £8,000 a year for student nurses, deliver an extra 50 million appointments a year in general practice and a pledge to fix the pensions system so senior doctors and nurses can take on extra shifts without the fear of an unexpected tax bill.

The speech was short and to the point on social care and mental health too, simply noting that "ministers will seek cross-party consensus on long-term reform for social care ensuring that everyone has the dignity they deserve and nobody who needs care has to sell their home" and that the government will continue to reform mental health services.

The Queen's Speech has now set in stone a number of Conservative Party manifesto pledges including: doubling the funding for dementia research, providing £74 million over three years for additional capacity in community care settings for those with learning disabilities and autism, and extending the leave entitlement for unpaid carers to one week.

Notable by its absence was any mention that the controversial Health and Social Care Act 2012 would be repealed. Instead, the NHS Long Term Plan Bill is being introduced to ensure that the health service is fit for the future. This is the clearest indication yet that there will be no top-down reorganisation of the NHS.

## Brexit

Among the various commitments announced in the Queen's Speech, another of significance was legislation to take the UK out of the EU on 31 January. Such a bill might seem odd considering that the Prime Minister required all parliamentary candidates from the Conservative Party to sign a pledge to support the Government on its Brexit plans, if elected. While this may be another tactical message to emphasise to the electorate the sincerity of the Conservative government's commitment to Brexit, it is a key focussing event for the health sector.

# How does the Queen's Speech affect the health and care sector?

## NHS multi-year funding settlement enshrined in law

The government committed to enshrine in law the NHS multi-year funding settlement that has been agreed already until 2023/4. This appears to be largely symbolic and will not change the terms of the settlement that has already been agreed.

## Delivering the NHS Long Term Plan

The government committed to present a draft bill to deliver the NHS Long Term Plan. NHS England and Improvement's legislative proposals will likely shape the nature of this bill with work already underway to transform delivery of services serving as a foundation for primary legislation.

## Steps will be taken to ensure growth in the NHS workforce

No concrete actions were laid out on how the government will ensure growth in workforce and no bills were proposed. It is likely that the government's future policy proposals will be guided by the upcoming NHS People Plan.

## New visa for clinical staff to fast-track entry

On immigration, the speech promised a new visa for clinical staff to fast-track entry to the UK. In another part of the speech, a points-based immigration system was proposed. It is likely that any visa for NHS staff would sit outside of the points-based system. No mention was made of whether this visa would cover social care staff.

## Hospital car parking charges removed for those in greatest need

No detail was given on how any shortfall in revenue for trusts would be matched by central funding. Moreover, the designation of free parking for those in 'greatest need' suggests that it would not be removed entirely.

## Cross-party consensus on social care reform to ensure it provides dignity and equity

The government committed to a cross-party consensus on social care reform, although was scant on details. It remains to be seen whether this consensus will form the basis of a green paper or indeed new legislation.

## Continue work to reform the Mental Health Act

The government promised reform in this area, a continuation of Professor Sir Simon Wessely's Mental Health Act review. A white paper is expected by February 2020.

## Health Service Safety Investigations Bill to be reintroduced to parliament

This bill was presented in the 2017 parliament but was dropped following its dissolution for the general election. This would give statutory powers to the Health Service Safety Investigations Body to investigate breaches of patient safety.

Health authorities will be required to work with other public services to prevent serious crime. These measures would create new duties on some public services to work together and share data that might help prevent and reduce serious violence. It is unclear what levers would exist to enforce these duties.

## What next?

- In December 2019, the NHS Confederation and its Networks wrote to the **Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care** setting out member priorities for the incoming government both the short and long term in order to support the health service and enable improvement and transformation. These have formed the basis of its report, ***Time to deliver***.
- The chief executive of the NHS Confederation has called for a meeting with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and members to discuss urgent priorities of the NHS.
- The NHS Confederation and networks will be writing to all MPs with top priorities for members ahead of key debates in parliament expected early next year.
- The NHS Confederation-led Brexit Health Alliance and NHS Employers-led Cavendish Coalition will be continuing to lobby the government to ensure that patients and staff are at the heart of Brexit negotiations.
- The NHS Confederation will continue to represent the interests of its members and looks forward to working with the government in taking forward this legislative agenda.

## NHS Confederation reaction

Responding to the speech, Nick Ville, director of policy at the NHS Confederation, which represents organisations across the healthcare sector, said:

“The NHS is rightly at the heart of the incoming government’s new plans after an election campaign underlining its importance to the public.

“The legally binding NHS spending commitment is welcome but we need to be realistic about what this extra investment will buy and how soon patients will benefit from it. Immediate priorities must now be setting an appropriate budget in the 2020 Spending Review to restore investment in training clinicians and creating an emergency capital infrastructure fund for NHS trusts with maintenance backlogs deemed high or significant risk.

“‘Get Brexit done’ was Boris Johnson’s election campaign mantra but he must do this in a way that looks after the nation’s health and wellbeing.

“The government’s plan to add a new clause to the Brexit bill to rule out extension to the transition period beyond the end of next year will put significant pressure on negotiations.

“The short timescales to agree a future trade deal with the EU present a challenge, and a significant risk that the safety and health of patients and citizens could be overlooked during negotiations.

“The promise of a points-based system opens up new opportunities to recruit NHS staff from overseas but the government must ensure the criteria avoid being too prescriptive or arbitrary. This is vital if we are looking to recruit talent from abroad to tackle the workforce shortages in social care.”

# About the NHS Confederation

The NHS Confederation is the membership body that brings together and speaks on behalf of the whole NHS. We represent over 500 members across health and social care, including hospitals, community and mental health providers, ambulance trusts, independent sector organisations providing NHS care, and clinical commissioning groups.

To find out more, please visit [www.nhsconfed.org](http://www.nhsconfed.org) or email [ExternalAffairs@nhsconfed.org](mailto:ExternalAffairs@nhsconfed.org)



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