



Further Information on Accession Councils

An Accession Council is usually convened within 24 hours of the death of a Sovereign and is customarily held at St James's Palace to make formal Proclamation of the death of the Monarch and the accession of the successor to the throne. The Accession Council should be held before Parliament meets, and Parliament should meet as soon as practicable after the death.

The Accession Council, which is presided over by the Lord President of the Council, is divided into two parts:

Part I

Formed of certain Privy Counsellors, Great Officers of State, the Lord Mayor and High Sheriffs of the City of London, Realm High Commissioners, some senior civil servants and certain others invited to attend, and is held (without the Sovereign) to formally announce the death of the Monarch and proclaim the succession of the new Sovereign and to make certain consequential Orders of Council mainly relating to the Proclamation.

Part II

The holding by The Sovereign of his or her first Council, which is attended by Privy Counsellors only.

Note: Part II does not always immediately follow Part I. On the death of King George VI during the early hours of Wednesday 6th February 1952, Part I of the Accession Council was held at 5pm on 6th February 1952. Part II of the Accession Council was held, on the return of Queen Elizabeth II from Kenya, two days later at 10am, on Friday 8th February.

The Privy Council Office is responsible for summoning or inviting Privy Counsellors and certain other dignitaries. An invitation to the meeting is sent to the Lord Mayor of London inviting him or her and certain senior Alderman to Part I of the Council. An invitation is also sent to the High Commissioners and Acting High Commissioners of the Realms to attend Part I of the Accession Council (The King is Head of State of 14 countries, in addition to the UK. Known as 'the Commonwealth Realms' they are: Australia, New Zealand, Canada,

Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Papua New Guinea, St Christopher and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Tuvalu, Grenada, Solomon Islands, St Lucia and The Bahamas).

When the meeting begins, the Lord President announces the death of The Sovereign and calls upon the Clerk of the Council to read aloud the text of the Accession Proclamation. The platform party (comprising any members of the Royal Family present who are Privy Counsellors, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop of York, the Prime Minister, the Lord Privy Seal, the Lord Great Chamberlain and the Earl Marshal, together with the Lord President) then sign the Proclamation. Once the Proclamation has been signed, the Lord President calls for silence and reads the remaining items of Business which deal with the dissemination of the Proclamation and various orders giving directions for firing guns at Hyde Park and the Tower of London.

Part II of the Council is, in effect, the new Sovereign's first Privy Council meeting and is attended by Privy Counsellors only. When the new Sovereign enters the room the business begins with a personal Declaration relating to the death of the previous Sovereign.

One of the first acts of the new Sovereign after making his or her Declaration is to take and subscribe to the Oath relating to the security of the Church of Scotland as required by the Union with Scotland Act 1706 c.11 6 Ann and the Union with England Act 1707 c.7. This Oath has been taken by every Sovereign at their Accession since George I in 1714. By way of background, in Scotland there is a division of powers between Church and State, with each supreme in their own sphere. The Church is self governing in all that concerns its own activities. Its supreme authority is the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, presided over by a Moderator chosen each year by the Assembly itself. So the Sovereign is required to take the Oath to preserve the security of the Church of Scotland at his or her Accession.

The new Monarch reads the Oath aloud.

"I, [INSERT TITLE] by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of My other Realms and Territories King, Defender of the Faith, do faithfully promise and swear that I shall inviolably maintain and preserve the Settlement of the true Protestant Religion as established by the Laws made in Scotland in prosecution of the Claim of Right and particularly by an Act intituled "An Act for securing the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government" and by the Acts passed in the Parliament of both Kingdoms for Union of the two Kingdoms, together with the Government, Worship, Discipline, Rights and Privileges of the Church of Scotland. So help me God."

The Sovereign signs two identical Instruments recording the taking of the Oath. The signature will be witnessed by any members of the Royal Family present who are Privy Counsellors, the Lord Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the First Minister of Scotland, the Lord Advocate of Scotland, the Advocate General for Scotland (if a Privy Counsellor) and the Lord President of the Court of Session. One copy of the signed Oath is sent to the Court of Session to be recorded in the Books of Sederunt; the other is preserved in the Books of the Privy Council. Once this is completed, the Lord President reads the remaining items on the List of Business. These Orders in Council, mainly concerning the use of the Seals of Office, facilitate the continuity of government.

Attendees will be invited to sign the Proclamation as they depart St James's Palace.

The official record of proceedings at the Accession Council will be published in a special supplement to the London Gazette. Paper copies will be available to purchase from the London Gazette, or can be read and downloaded from the Gazette's website. Copies of the Orders made at the Accession Council will be published on the Privy Council website and eventually sent to The National Archives for permanent preservation.

After the Accession Council, Garter King of Arms, accompanied by the Earl Marshal (who is responsible for the ceremonial arrangements relating to the Proclamation), other Officers of Arms and the Sergeants at Arms, will read the Proclamation from the Balcony above Friary Court, St James's Palace. Gun salutes will coincide with the Proclamation. Once the Proclamation has been read, the Heralds will travel to Mansion House in the City of London. The Proclamation will then be read at the Royal Exchange in the presence of the Lord Mayor of the City of London and the City Civic party. The Proclamation will also be read out publicly in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and in other locations according to custom.

Note: The timing of the first public Proclamation has varied considerably – see the table on our website.