



Northern Ireland Act 1998

1998 CHAPTER 47

PART II

LEGISLATIVE POWERS

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C1** Pts. II-IV applied in part (1.1.2007) by [The Equality Act \(Sexual Orientation\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2006 \(S.R. 2006/439\)](#), [reg. 53\(6\)](#)

General

5 Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

- (1) Subject to sections 6 to 8, the Assembly may make laws, to be known as Acts.
- (2) A Bill shall become an Act when it has been passed by the Assembly and has received Royal Assent.
- (3) A Bill receives Royal Assent at the beginning of the day on which Letters Patent under the Great Seal of Northern Ireland signed with Her Majesty's own hand signifying Her Assent are notified to the Presiding Officer.
- (4) The date of Royal Assent shall be written on the Act by the Presiding Officer, and shall form part of the Act.
- (5) The validity of any proceedings leading to the enactment of an Act of the Assembly shall not be called into question in any legal proceedings.
- (6) This section does not affect the power of the Parliament of the United Kingdom to make laws for Northern Ireland, but an Act of the Assembly may modify any provision made by or under an Act of Parliament in so far as it is part of the law of Northern Ireland.

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6 Legislative competence.

- (1) A provision of an Act is not law if it is outside the legislative competence of the Assembly.
- (2) A provision is outside that competence if any of the following paragraphs apply—
 - (a) it would form part of the law of a country or territory other than Northern Ireland, or confer or remove functions exercisable otherwise than in or as regards Northern Ireland;
 - (b) it deals with an excepted matter and is not ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Act or previously enacted) dealing with reserved or transferred matters;
 - (c) it is incompatible with any of the Convention rights;
 - (d) it is incompatible with [F1EU] law;
 - (e) it discriminates against any person or class of person on the ground of religious belief or political opinion;
 - (f) it modifies an enactment in breach of section 7.
- (3) For the purposes of this Act, a provision is ancillary to other provisions if it is a provision—
 - (a) which provides for the enforcement of those other provisions or is otherwise necessary or expedient for making those other provisions effective; or
 - (b) which is otherwise incidental to, or consequential on, those provisions;
 and references in this Act to provisions previously enacted are references to provisions contained in, or in any instrument made under, other Northern Ireland legislation or an Act of Parliament.
- (4) Her Majesty may by Order in Council specify functions which are to be treated, for such purposes of this Act as may be specified, as being, or as not being, functions which are exercisable in or as regards Northern Ireland.
- (5) No recommendation shall be made to Her Majesty to make an Order in Council under subsection (4) unless a draft of the Order has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

Textual Amendments

F1 Words in Act substituted (22.4.2011) by [The Treaty of Lisbon \(Changes in Terminology\) Order 2011 \(S.I. 2011/1043\)](#), arts. 2, 3, 6 (with arts. 3(2)(3), 4(2), 6(4)(5))

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

C2 [S. 6\(2\)\(d\)](#) restricted (1.3.2019) by [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018 \(c. 16\)](#), s. 25(4), Sch. 8 para. 41(5)(9) (with s. 19, Sch. 8 para. 37); S.I. 2019/399, reg. 2

[F26A Restriction relating to retained EU law

- (1) An Act of the Assembly cannot modify, or confer power by subordinate legislation to modify, retained EU law so far as the modification is of a description specified in regulations made by a Minister of the Crown.
- (2) But subsection (1) does not apply to any modification so far as it would, immediately before exit day, have been within the legislative competence of the Assembly.

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- (3) A Minister of the Crown must not lay for approval before each House of Parliament a draft of a statutory instrument containing regulations under this section unless—
- (a) the Assembly has made a consent decision in relation to the laying of the draft, or
 - (b) the 40 day period has ended without the Assembly having made such a decision.
- (4) For the purposes of subsection (3) a consent decision is—
- (a) a decision to agree a motion consenting to the laying of the draft,
 - (b) a decision not to agree a motion consenting to the laying of the draft, or
 - (c) a decision to agree a motion refusing to consent to the laying of the draft;
- and a consent decision is made when the Assembly first makes a decision falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (c) (whether or not it subsequently makes another such decision).
- (5) A Minister of the Crown who is proposing to lay a draft as mentioned in subsection (3) must—
- (a) provide a copy of the draft to the relevant Northern Ireland department, and
 - (b) inform the Presiding Officer that a copy has been so provided.
- (6) See also section 96A (duty to make explanatory statement about regulations under this section including a duty to explain any decision to lay a draft without the consent of the Assembly).
- (7) No regulations may be made under this section after the end of the period of two years beginning with exit day.
- (8) Subsection (7) does not affect the continuation in force of regulations made under this section at or before the end of the period mentioned in that subsection.
- (9) Any regulations under this section which are in force at the end of the period of five years beginning with the time at which they came into force are revoked in their application to any Act of the Assembly which receives Royal Assent after the end of that period.
- (10) Subsections (3) to (8) do not apply in relation to regulations which only relate to a revocation of a specification.
- (11) Regulations under this section may include such supplementary, incidental, consequential, transitional, transitory or saving provision as the Minister of the Crown making them considers appropriate.
- (12) In this section—
- “the relevant Northern Ireland department” means such Northern Ireland department as the Minister of the Crown concerned considers appropriate;
- “the 40 day period” means the period of 40 days beginning with the day on which a copy of the draft instrument is provided to the relevant Northern Ireland department,
- and, in calculating that period, no account is to be taken of any time during which the Assembly is dissolved or during which it is in recess for more than four days.]

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Textual Amendments

F2 S. 6A inserted (26.6.2018 for specified purposes) by [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018 \(c. 16\)](#), [ss. 12\(6\), 25\(2\)\(c\)](#) (with s. 19, [Sch. 2 paras. 3\(5\), 14\(5\)](#), [Sch. 8 paras. 37, 41](#))

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

C3 S. 6A: power to repeal conferred (4.7.2018) by [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018 \(c. 16\)](#), [ss. 12\(9\)-\(11\), 25\(4\)](#) (with s. 19, [Sch. 8 paras. 37, 41](#)); S.I. 2018/808, [reg. 3\(c\)](#)

7 Entrenched enactments.

(1) Subject to subsection (2), the following enactments shall not be modified by an Act of the Assembly or subordinate legislation made, confirmed or approved by a Minister or Northern Ireland department—

- (a) the ^{M1}European Communities Act 1972;
- (b) the ^{M2}Human Rights Act 1998; ^{F3}...
- (c) section 43(1) to (6) and (8), section 67, sections 84 to [^{F4}86B], section 95(3) and (4) and section 98 [^{F5F6}....
- ^{F5}(d) section 1 and section 84 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.][^{F7}; and
- (e) the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018]

(2) Subsection (1) does not prevent an Act of the Assembly or subordinate legislation modifying section 3(3) or (4) or 11(1) of the European Communities Act 1972.

[^{F8}(2A) Subsection (1) does not prevent an Act of the Assembly or subordinate legislation modifying—

- (a) paragraph 1(11) or (12) or 2(12) or (13) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018,
- (b) paragraph 21 of Schedule 8 to that Act, or
- (c) any regulations made under that Act.]

(3) In this Act “Minister”, unless the context otherwise requires, means the First Minister, the deputy First Minister or a Northern Ireland Minister.

Textual Amendments

F3 Word in s. 7(1) repealed (12.4.2010) by [Justice \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2002 \(c. 26\)](#), s. 87(1), [Sch. 13](#); S.R. 2010/113, [art. 2](#), [Sch. para. 21\(r\)](#)

F4 Word in s. 7(1)(c) substituted (11.3.2009) by [Northern Ireland \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 2006 \(c. 33\)](#), [ss. 30\(1\), 31](#), [Sch. 4 para. 10](#); S.I. 2009/448, [art. 2](#)

F5 S. 7(1)(d) and word immediately preceding it inserted (16.4.2007) by 2002 c. 26, [ss. 84\(1\), 87\(1\)](#); S.R. 2007/237, [art. 2](#), [Sch.](#)

F6 Word in s. 7(1)(c) omitted (26.6.2018) by virtue of [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018 \(c. 16\)](#), s. 25(1)(b), [Sch. 3 para. 51\(2\)\(c\)](#) (with s. 19, [Sch. 8 para. 37](#))

F7 S. 7(1)(e) and word inserted (26.6.2018) by [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018 \(c. 16\)](#), s. 25(1)(b), [Sch. 3 para. 51\(2\)\(d\)](#) (with s. 19, [Sch. 8 para. 37](#))

F8 S. 7(2A) inserted (26.6.2018) by [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Act 2018 \(c. 16\)](#), s. 25(1)(b), [Sch. 3 para. 51\(4\)](#) (with s. 19, [Sch. 8 para. 37](#))

Marginal Citations

M1 1972 c.68.

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M2 1988 c.42.

[^{F9}7A Cross-community support required for Bill altering size of Assembly

(1) The Assembly shall not pass a relevant Bill without cross-community support.

(2) In this section—

“pass”, in relation to a Bill, means pass at the stage in the Assembly's proceedings at which the Bill falls finally to be passed or rejected;

“relevant Bill” means a Bill containing a provision which deals with a matter falling within a description specified in paragraph 7A of Schedule 3 (size of Assembly).]

Textual Amendments

F9 S. 7A inserted (13.5.2014) by Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 (c. 13), ss. 6(3), 28(4)

8 Consent of Secretary of State required in certain cases.

The consent of the Secretary of State shall be required in relation to a Bill which contains—

- (a) a provision which deals with an excepted matter and is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with reserved or transferred matters; or
- (b) a provision which deals with a reserved matter.

Scrutiny and stages of Bills

9 Scrutiny by Ministers.

- (1) A Minister in charge of a Bill shall, on or before introduction of it in the Assembly, make a statement to the effect that in his view the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly.
- (2) The statement shall be in writing and shall be published in such manner as the Minister making the statement considers appropriate.

10 Scrutiny by Presiding Officer.

- (1) Standing orders shall ensure that a Bill is not introduced in the Assembly if the Presiding Officer decides that any provision of it would not be within the legislative competence of the Assembly.
- (2) Subject to subsection (3)—
 - (a) the Presiding Officer shall consider a Bill both on its introduction and before the Assembly enters on its final stage; and
 - (b) if he considers that the Bill contains—

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- (i) any provision which deals with an excepted matter and is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with reserved or transferred matters; or
 - (ii) any provision which deals with a reserved matter,
- he shall refer it to the Secretary of State; and
- (c) the Assembly shall not proceed with the Bill or, as the case may be, enter on its final stage unless—
 - (i) the Secretary of State’s consent to the consideration of the Bill by the Assembly is signified; or
 - (ii) the Assembly is informed that in his opinion the Bill does not contain any such provision as is mentioned in paragraph (b)(i) or (ii).
- (3) Subsection (2)(b) and (c) shall not apply—
- (a) where, in the opinion of the Presiding Officer, each provision of the Bill which deals with an excepted or reserved matter is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with transferred matters only; or
 - (b) on the introduction of a Bill, where the Bill has been endorsed with a statement that the Secretary of State has consented to the Assembly considering the Bill.
- (4) In this section and section 14 “final stage”, in relation to a Bill, means the stage in the Assembly’s proceedings at which the Bill falls finally to be passed or rejected.

11 Scrutiny by the ^{F10}Supreme Court].

- (1) The ^{F11}Advocate General for Northern Ireland or the] Attorney General for Northern Ireland may refer the question of whether a provision of a Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly to the ^{F12}Supreme Court] for decision.
- (2) Subject to subsection (3), he may make a reference in relation to a provision of a Bill at any time during—
 - (a) the period of four weeks beginning with the passing of the Bill; and
 - (b) the period of four weeks beginning with any subsequent approval of the Bill in accordance with standing orders made by virtue of section 13(6).
- (3) If he notifies the Presiding Officer that he does not intend to make a reference in relation to a provision of a Bill, he shall not make such a reference unless, after the notification, the Bill is approved as mentioned in subsection (2)(b).
- (4) If the ^{F13}Supreme Court decides] that any provision of a Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Assembly, ^{F14}its decision] shall be taken as applying also to that provision if contained in the Act when enacted.

Textual Amendments

- F10** Words in sidenote of s. 11 substituted (1.10.2009) by virtue of [Constitutional Reform Act 2005 \(c. 4\)](#), ss. 40, 148, [Sch. 9 para. 109\(1\)](#); S.I. 2009/1604, [art. 2\(a\)\(d\)](#)
- F11** Words in s. 11(1) inserted (12.4.2010) by [Justice \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2002 \(c. 26\)](#), s. 87(1), [Sch. 7 para. 1\(2\)](#); S.R. 2010/113, [art. 2](#), [Sch. para. 19\(a\)](#)
- F12** Words in s. 11(1) substituted (1.10.2009) by [Constitutional Reform Act 2005 \(c. 4\)](#), ss. 40, 148, [Sch. 9 para. 109\(2\)](#); S.I. 2009/1604, [art. 2\(a\)\(d\)](#)

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- F13** Words in s. 11(4) substituted (1.10.2009) by Constitutional Reform Act 2005 (c. 4), ss. 40, 148, **Sch. 9 para. 109(3)(a)**; S.I. 2009/1604, **art. 2(a)(d)**
- F14** Words in s. 11(4) substituted (1.10.2009) by Constitutional Reform Act 2005 (c. 4), ss. 40, 148, **Sch. 9 para. 109(3)(b)**; S.I. 2009/1604, **art. 2(a)(d)**

12 Reconsideration where reference made to ECJ.

- (1) This section applies where—
- (a) a reference has been made under section 11 in relation to a provision of a Bill;
 - (b) a reference for a preliminary ruling has been made by the [^{F15}Supreme Court] in connection with that reference; and
 - (c) neither of the references has been decided or otherwise disposed of.
- (2) If the Assembly resolves that it wishes to reconsider the Bill—
- (a) the Presiding Officer shall notify the [^{F16}Advocate General for Northern Ireland and the Attorney General for Northern Ireland] of that fact; and
 - (b) the [^{F17}person who made the reference in relation to the Bill under section 11 shall request the withdrawal of the reference] .
- (3) In this section “reference for a preliminary ruling” means a reference of a question to the European Court of Justice under—
- [^{F18}(a) Article 267 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; or]
 - (c) Article 150 of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community.

Textual Amendments

- F15** Words in s. 12(1)(b) substituted (1.10.2009) by Constitutional Reform Act 2005 (c. 4), ss. 40, 148, **Sch. 9 para. 110**; S.I. 2009/1604, **art. 2(a)(d)**
- F16** Words in s. 12(2)(a) substituted (12.4.2010) by Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (c. 26), s. 87(1), **Sch. 7 para. 1(3)(a)**; S.R. 2010/113, art. 2, Sch. para. 19(a)
- F17** Words in s. 12(2)(b) substituted (12.4.2010) by Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (c. 26), s. 87(1), **Sch. 7 para. 1(3)(b)**; S.R. 2010/113, art. 2, Sch. para. 19(a)
- F18** S. 12(3)(a) substituted (1.8.2012) for s. 12(3)(a)(b) by The Treaty of Lisbon (Changes in Terminology or Numbering) Order 2012 (S.I. 2012/1809), art. 2(1), **Sch. Pt. 1** (with art. 2(2))

13 Stages of Bills.

- (1) Standing orders shall include provision—
- (a) for general debate on a Bill with an opportunity for members to vote on its general principles;
 - (b) for the consideration of, and an opportunity for members to vote on, the details of a Bill; and
 - (c) for a final stage at which a Bill can be passed or rejected but not amended.
- (2) Standing orders may, in relation to different types of Bill, modify provisions made in pursuance of subsection (1)(a) or (b).
- (3) Standing orders—
- (a) shall include provision for establishing such a committee as is mentioned in paragraph 11 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement;

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- (b) may include provision for the details of a Bill to be considered by the committee in such circumstances as may be specified in the orders.
- (4) Standing orders shall include provision—
 - (a) requiring the Presiding Officer to send a copy of each Bill, as soon as reasonably practicable after introduction, to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and
 - (b) enabling the Assembly to ask the Commission, where the Assembly thinks fit, to advise whether a Bill is compatible with human rights (including the Convention rights).
- (5) Standing orders shall provide for an opportunity for the reconsideration of a Bill after its passing if (and only if)—
 - (a) the [^{F19}Supreme Court decides] that any provision of the Bill would not be within the legislative competence of the Assembly;
 - (b) a reference made in relation to a provision of the Bill under section 11 has been withdrawn following a request for withdrawal under section 12;
 - (c) a decision is made in relation to the Bill under section 14(4) or (5); or
 - (d) a motion under section 15(1) is passed by either House of Parliament.
- (6) Standing orders shall, in particular, ensure that any Bill amended on reconsideration is subject to a final stage at which it can be approved or rejected but not amended.
- (7) References in subsection (5) and other provisions of this Act to the passing of a Bill shall, in the case of a Bill which has been amended on reconsideration, be read as references to the approval of the Bill.

Textual Amendments

F19 Words in s. 13(5)(a) substituted (1.10.2009) by [Constitutional Reform Act 2005 \(c. 4\)](#), ss. 40, 148, [Sch. 9 para. 111](#); S.I. 2009/1604, [art. 2\(a\)\(d\)](#)

Royal Assent

14 Submission by Secretary of State.

- (1) It shall be the Secretary of State who submits Bills for Royal Assent.
- (2) The Secretary of State shall not submit a Bill for Royal Assent at any time when—
 - (a) [^{F20}the Advocate General for Northern Ireland or] the Attorney General for Northern Ireland is entitled to make a reference in relation to a provision of the Bill under section 11; or
 - (b) any such reference has been made but has not been decided or otherwise disposed of by the [^{F21}Supreme Court] .
- (3) If—
 - (a) the [^{F22}Supreme Court has] decided that any provision of a Bill would not be within the legislative competence of the Assembly; or
 - (b) a reference made in relation to a provision of the Bill under section 11 has been withdrawn following a request for withdrawal under section 12,
 the Secretary of State shall not submit the Bill in its unamended form for Royal Assent.

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- [^{F23}(3A) The Secretary of State shall not submit a Bill for Royal Assent if the Assembly has passed the Bill in contravention of section 7A (cross-community support required for Bill altering size of Assembly).]
- (4) The Secretary of State may, unless he consents to it, decide not to submit for Royal Assent a Bill containing a provision—
- (a) which the Secretary of State considers deals with an excepted matter and is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with reserved or transferred matters; or
 - (b) which the Secretary of State considers deals with a reserved matter,
- if the Bill has not been referred to him under subsection (2) of section 10 (whether by virtue of subsection (3)(a) of that section or otherwise) before the Assembly enters on its final stage.
- (5) The Secretary of State may decide not to submit for Royal Assent a Bill which contains a provision which he considers—
- (a) would be incompatible with any international obligations, with the interests of defence or national security or with the protection of public safety or public order; or
 - (b) would have an adverse effect on the operation of the single market in goods and services within the United Kingdom.

Textual Amendments

- F20** Words in s. 14(2)(a) inserted (12.4.2010) by [Justice \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2002 \(c. 26\), s. 87\(1\), Sch. 7 para. 1\(4\)](#); [S.R. 2010/113, art. 2, Sch. para. 19\(a\)](#)
- F21** Words in s. 14(2)(b) substituted (1.10.2009) by [Constitutional Reform Act 2005 \(c. 4\), ss. 40, 148, Sch. 9 para. 112\(a\)](#); [S.I. 2009/1604, art. 2\(a\)\(d\)](#)
- F22** Words in s. 14(3)(a) substituted (1.10.2009) by [Constitutional Reform Act 2005 \(c. 4\), ss. 40, 148, Sch. 9 para. 112\(b\)](#); [S.I. 2009/1604, art. 2\(a\)\(d\)](#)
- F23** [S. 14\(3A\)](#) inserted (13.5.2014) by [Northern Ireland \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 2014 \(c. 13\), ss. 6\(4\), 28\(4\)](#)

15 Parliamentary control where consent given.

- (1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a Bill to which the Secretary of State has consented under this Part shall not be submitted by him for Royal Assent unless he has first laid it before Parliament and either—
- (a) the period of 20 days beginning with the date on which it is laid has expired without notice having been given in either House of a motion that the Bill shall not be submitted for Royal Assent; or
 - (b) if notice of such a motion is given within that period, the motion has been rejected or withdrawn.
- (2) Subsection (1) shall not apply to a Bill if the Secretary of State considers that it contains no provision which deals with an excepted or reserved matter except a provision which is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with transferred matters only.

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- (3) Subsection (1) shall not apply to a Bill if the Secretary of State considers that by reason of urgency it should be submitted for Royal Assent without first being laid before Parliament.
- (4) Any Bill submitted by virtue of subsection (3) shall, if given Royal Assent, be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State after Royal Assent, and if—
 - (a) within the period of 20 days beginning with the date on which it is laid notice is given in either House of a motion praying that the Act of the Assembly shall cease to have effect; and
 - (b) that motion is carried,Her Majesty may by Order in Council repeal that Act with effect from such date as may be specified in the Order.
- (5) An Order in Council under subsection (4) may make such consequential and transitional provisions and such savings in connection with the repeal as appear to Her Majesty to be necessary or expedient.
- (6) Any notice of motion for the purposes of subsection (1) or (4) must be signed by not less than 20 members of the House in which it is given; and the period mentioned in that subsection shall be computed, in relation to each House, by reference only to days on which that House sits.

Changes to legislation:

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Changes and effects yet to be applied to the whole Act associated Parts and Chapters:

- Act modified (cond.) by [2006 c. 17 Sch. 2 para. 2\(5\)](#) (This amendment not applied to legislation.gov.uk. Conditional amendment never in force)

Whole provisions yet to be inserted into this Act (including any effects on those provisions):

- s. 27(4A) inserted by [2018 c. 16 Sch. 3 para. 56\(5\)](#)
- s. 31(2)-(2D) substituted for s. 31(2) (cond.) by [2006 c. 17 Sch. 3 para. 2\(1\)](#) (This amendment not applied to legislation.gov.uk. Conditional amendment never in force)
- s. 31(2)-(2D) substituted for s. 31(2) (cond.) by [2006 c. 53 Sch. 3 para. 2\(1\)](#) (This amendment not applied to legislation.gov.uk to legislation.gov.uk. It is a conditional amendment that was never brought into force. Sch. 3 repealed (10.5.2007) by Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 (c. 53), s. 2(5) (as amended by 2007 c. 4, s. 1(1)), Sch. 4 para. 3 (with s. 1(3)); S.I. 2007/1397, art. 2)
- s. 31(2E) inserted (cond.) by [2006 c. 17 Sch. 3 para. 3\(1\)](#) (This amendment not applied to legislation.gov.uk. Conditional amendment never in force)
- Sch. 2 para. 9B inserted by [2009 c. 8 s. 27](#) (This amendment not applied to legislation.gov.uk. The amending provision was repealed (16.2.2011) without ever being in force by 2010 c. 36, ss. 2(1), 4(2))