



## Information Sheet - How the UK law is made

### Improving the law

Government committees are often asked to look into implications of the new legislation. If the impact of the new legislation is monitored then any problems may be put right. An **act** is sometimes **amended** to do this.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 has been **amended** twice to legislate for stem cell research and human cloning.

### Consultation

Before a **bill** gets to parliament lots of **consultation** usually occurs.

Consultations may be with interested parties such as pressure groups or professional bodies, often the general public will be encouraged to participate in consultations

Parliamentary committees may also undertake research to look at issues involved in the bill.

### The role of parliament

In order for a law to be made a bill must be introduced to parliament.

Bills are usually introduced to parliament by the government (but may be introduced by individual members of parliament).

New bills may be introduced because:

- The government needs to implement policies it promised before an election.
- The law needs to respond to changes in technology, society, economics etc. (stem cell research laws would fit into this category. New advances have made the research possible and laws may be required to regulate it).

Each bill usually need to be approved by both the **House of Commons** and the **House of Lords** (the two **Houses of Parliament**).

After being approved by the houses of parliament the bill must get royal assent from the Queen (she always gives her assent).



## UK Stem cell research law

The current law on stem cell research in the UK was an **amendment** to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

The **Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990** allowed research on embryos under 5 categories.

These were:

- Promoting advances in infertility treatment.
- Increasing knowledge of the causes of congenital disease.
- Developing more effective techniques of contraception.
- Developing methods for detecting the presence of gene or chromosome abnormalities in embryos before implantation.

In order to allow embryonic stem cell research, another category had to be added.

The HFE Act also stated that this research was only permitted with a licence from the HFEA. Consent must be given by the parents of the embryo and no embryos can be kept after 14 days of development. (These parts of the act were not changed)

Following the amendments to this law, **an additional bill** banning human reproductive cloning was also passed by parliament. This law was passed as a result of the Pro-Life Alliance **challenging the amendment** to the HFE Act in court.

Sources of information:

[www.parliament.co.uk](http://www.parliament.co.uk)

[www.explore.parliament.uk](http://www.explore.parliament.uk)

Stem Cells: Potent Research (LabNotes new biology and society) The Wellcome Trust January 2003

Stem Cell Research: Medical Progress with Responsibility. Report from the Chief Medical Officer's Expert Group. Department of Health. June 2002.