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Tony Blair's legacy: 20% jump in amount of legislation introduced per year

∞ Research by Sweet & Maxwell

Tony Blair's ten years in office have been marked by a dramatic jump in new legislation reveals research by Sweet & Maxwell, the information provider. According to figures from Sweet & Maxwell's Westlaw UK and Lawtel online legal information services it is estimated an average of 2,685 new laws were added every year under Blair, a 22% increase from the average of 2,196 per year for the preceding ten years (graph below).

Critics of the Blair Government claim it has been marked by its love of new legislation and a willingness to burden businesses with "red tape". This has been most marked in areas, such as criminal law, where 40 Criminal Justice Acts have been introduced since 1997, and in employment law.

The research by Sweet & Maxwell, a Thomson business (NYSE: TOC; TSX: TOC), shows that 98% of new legislation introduced over the last ten years (26,302 out of the 26,849 new statutes and statutory instruments) have been introduced as statutory instruments.

Sweet & Maxwell explain that statutory instruments receive less Parliamentary debating time and, potentially, less scrutiny than statutes. It is why Governments prefer to use statutory instruments and opposing parties feel they stifle the scrutiny new legislation demands.

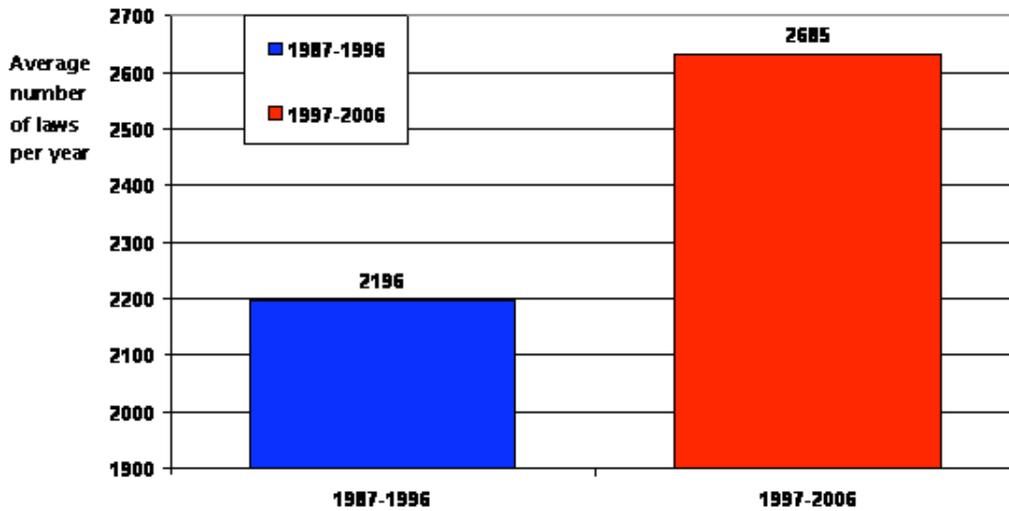
Len Sealy, Professor of Law, University of Cambridge, and Sweet & Maxwell author, comments: "The trend towards higher volumes of new legislation and the introduction of laws via statutory instruments preceded Blair but his time in office has certainly not seen an end to this rising tide."

Professor Sealy also points out that the Blair years have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of EU legislation that becomes law in the UK without it ever having to be passed through UK Parliament as a statute or statutory instrument (i.e. they would **not** be included in the above statistics).

Says Professor Sealy: "There were over 2,100 European Regulations in 2006. A random selection shows the huge range of subjects they cover: cross-border insolvency; importing of bed-linen; import values of certain fruit and vegetables; the buying-in of butter; evaluation of statistics on labour costs; access of poultry to open-air runs. All became law here without our legislators having to lift a finger."

Professor Sealy says another recent phenomenon is not simply the number of statutes but also their size. Of the 2006 Acts, five had over 100 pages, three over 200, one over 300, one over 500 and one over 700!

Average number of laws introduced per year between January 1 1987 and January 1 2007



Source: Westlaw UK and Lawtel

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Launched just recently, the new Westlaw UK has been designed to reflect the way that legal research is carried out in the UK. It is now significantly easier to use and combines the very best content with a high performance online engine and improved functionality.

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Press enquiries:

Professor Len Sealy
Tel: 01223 332 400

Nick Mattison or Paul Arvanitopoulos
Mattison Public Relations
Tel: 020 7645 3636

Peter Wylie
Corporate Communications Manager
Sweet & Maxwell
Tel: 020 7393 7000