



HOUSE OF LORDS



## People and Membership



The House of Lords is an essential part of the UK Parliament. It scrutinises and challenges the work of government and considers all legislation. Its members come from different social, political and professional backgrounds and most faiths and ethnic groups in the UK are represented. Many members remain active in their careers and apply this experience to their work in the House.

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# Members



Members work on behalf of the UK public, making and shaping laws and holding government to account. They bring specialist knowledge and independent experience as they check and change bills before they become law.

## Diversity and breadth of knowledge

Most members are life peers. Many have a political background; some don't. There are doctors, soldiers, technology experts, business people, nurses, scientists, writers, judges, lawyers and police officers.

Many are appointed for their knowledge and experience and chosen from communities for making a difference through involvement with charitable, voluntary and civil society organisations.

## Independence of thought

The Lords is characterised by independence of thought and commitment to in-depth consideration of public policy.

- Backbench members who belong to political parties are not subject to the same degree of discipline as in the House of Commons.
- A proportion of the membership is non-party-political, for example, crossbenchers and bishops.
- Members work on the issues that concern them, rather than on behalf of geographical constituencies.

# Becoming a member

Members of the House of Lords are appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister. Some non-party-political members are recommended by an independent body, the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

## How members are appointed

Appointments to the House of Lords are made in the following ways.

- Life peerages may be given to some MPs (all parties) when they leave the House of Commons at the end of a parliament.
- When a prime minister resigns, he or she may recommend 'resignation honours' for politicians, their political advisers and others who have supported them.
- Members can be appointed on a party basis on political lists to 'top up' each of the three main party groups' strengths, on the expectation that they will attend regularly and perhaps take on frontbench work.
- One-off announcements can cover peerages for particular individuals such as someone appointed as a minister who is not a member of the House.
- Non-party-political members can be recommended for appointment via the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

## Role of the Appointments Commission

The Appointments Commission recommends individuals for appointment as non-party-political life peers. It also vets nominations for life peers, including those nominated by the UK political parties, for propriety.

The goal of the Commission, when recommending individuals for appointment, is to make the House more representative of the diversity of the UK population. Any British, Irish or Commonwealth citizen who is a UK resident and taxpayer over the age of 21 is eligible to be nominated or can apply to become a member.

The Commission looks for certain qualities and characteristics. These include:

- the ability to make an effective contribution across the wide range of issues that come before the House
- a record of significant achievement that demonstrates a range of experience, skills and competencies
- outstanding personal qualities, in particular integrity and independence; with a strong commitment to the principles and highest standards of public life
- independence from any political party – whatever their past party-political involvement.

## From announcement to appointment

It normally takes several weeks from the time a potential new member is announced, by the government or the House of Lords Appointments Commission, before their actual appointment when they become eligible to sit in the Lords.

Before anyone becomes a member, a title has to be agreed and the Letters Patent and Writ of Summons documents must be prepared.

Letters Patent are issued by the Queen and create a life peerage. Recipients become members when Letters Patent are sealed. They can then be written to at the House of Lords, using their new title of Lord or Baroness. They cannot sit or vote until their 'introduction'.

The Writ of Summons confers membership of the House. A new writ is issued to every member at the beginning of each Parliament (after a general election). A writ accompanies the Letters Patent for a new member.

**Elizabeth the Second** by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen Head of the Commonwealth Defender of the Faith To Our right trusty and well beloved Peter John Hennessy of Nymansfield in Our County of Gloucestershire Chevalier Greeting **Wherreas** Our Parliament for arduous and urgent affairs concerning Us the state and defence of Our United Kingdom and the Church is now met at Our City of Westminster We strictly enjoining command you upon the faith and allegiance by which you are bound to Us that considering the difficulty of the said affairs and dangers impending (waiving all excuses) you be personally present at Our aforesaid Parliament with Us and with the Prelates Nobles and Peers of Our said Kingdom in treat and give your counsel upon the affairs aforesaid And thus as you regard Us and Our honour and the safety and defence of the said Kingdom and Church and dispatch of the said affairs in nowise do you omit **Wherreas** Ourself at Westminster on the eighth day of November in the fifty-ninth year of Our Reign

CHAKRABARTI

To **PETER JOHN LORD HENNESSY OF NYMANSFIELD**

A Writ of Summons to Parliament

CHAKRABARTI



A new member during the short ceremony of introduction

## Introductions to the Lords

A new member takes up their seat at a short ceremony of introduction, which takes place at the beginning of business. Each new member is accompanied on their introduction by two supporters (usually members of the House of Lords from their party or group, but sometimes by friends or colleagues). The letters patent are read during the introduction ceremony.

An oath or affirmation to the monarch must be taken by all members before they can sit and vote in the House, and this must subsequently be retaken in every new parliament and on the death of a monarch. The first speech of a newly introduced member is called their maiden speech. Maiden speeches are normally short and uncontroversial.

# Numbers

There are about 800 members who are eligible to take part in the work of the House of Lords. The majority are life peers. There is no upper limit on the total membership and numbers in each party and group fluctuate.

## Members by party or group



House of Lords membership figures are not fixed. This graph indicates the proportions of the parties and groups (as at December 2017). The most up-to-date figures are at [parliament.uk/lords](http://parliament.uk/lords).

## Types of members

### Life peers

These are members who are appointed for their lifetime by the Queen. Their titles are not passed on to their children.

### Archbishops and bishops

The 26 most senior archbishops and bishops in the Church of England sit in the Lords. When they retire as bishops, their membership of the House ceases and they are replaced by the next most senior bishop who is not already a member of the House.

### Elected hereditary members

The House of Lords Act 1999 ended the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House, and membership of the Lords is no longer passed down through families. During the passage of the legislation, an amendment was accepted enabling 92 hereditary members to remain pending further reform: two hereditary officeholders and 90 who were elected from among their own number.

# Key people

Principal office holders play important roles in the work of the House of Lords.

### Lord Speaker

The Lord Speaker is politically impartial. As well as overseeing proceedings in the chamber, he acts as an ambassador for the Lords in the UK and abroad.

### Leader of the House of Lords

The Leader of the House is the most senior member of the government in the Lords, responsible for its business in the House. She leads a team of about 25 ministers and whips. The Leader also has obligations to the House as a whole: expressing its collective feelings on formal occasions and giving procedural advice.

### Government Chief Whip

The Government Chief Whip is responsible for ensuring the successful passage of government business in the House of Lords and one of the panel of Deputy Speakers.



Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler



Leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Evans of Bowes Park



Government Chief Whip, Lord Taylor of Holbeach

# Conduct and accountability

The House has put procedures in place to ensure the public can have confidence in the way members perform their parliamentary duties.

## The Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is intended to reinforce public confidence in the way members perform their parliamentary duties. Since 2010, an undertaking to abide by the code is signed by every member after they have taken the oath or affirmation.

The Code makes it clear that members of the House are required to act in the public interest, and in accordance with the seven general principles of conduct identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

## Register of Interests

The Code also requires that all financial and relevant non-financial interests are disclosed in the Register of Lords' Interests. The register lists all interests which might reasonably be thought to influence members' parliamentary actions. Members are also required to declare when speaking in the House any interest which is relevant to the subject under debate.

## Commissioner for Standards

The independent House of Lords Commissioner for Standards investigates allegations that members have breached the Code of Conduct, including the rules governing members' financial support and the use of parliamentary facilities.

Anyone wishing to make a complaint against a member of the House of Lords concerning a breach of the Code of Conduct should write to the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards, providing the following information:

- in what respect the member concerned has breached the Code of Conduct
- as much evidence as possible in support of the complaint
- name, address, telephone number and, if possible, email address.

Complaints against members should be made to: The House of Lords Commissioner for Standards, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW. Full details are online: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/the-commissioner-for-standards/>

***Please note that complaints submitted by telephone or email will not be considered.***

# Financial support

Members are eligible to claim certain allowances and expenses.

Members of the House of Lords do not receive salaries or other employment benefits, including pensions. There are two exceptions:

- a few office holders are paid a salary, eg Lord Speaker, Senior Deputy Speaker
- some ministers receive a government salary.

## Allowances and expenses

Members who are not paid a salary are eligible to receive allowances and, within certain limits, travel expenses.

Members may claim a flat rate attendance allowance of £300 for each sitting day if they attend a sitting of the House and/or committee proceedings. Members can also elect to claim a reduced daily allowance of £150 or may choose not to submit a claim at all.

As membership of the House of Lords is neither an office nor employment, allowances and expenses payments are not liable for income tax.

Members who receive a ministerial or office holder's salary are not entitled to claim the allowances based on attendance.



# Keeping in touch

Members examine matters of public interest, so you may find you want to raise subjects with specific members, for example to ask them about a bill they are working on.

## Online channels

Look at the website – [parliament.uk/lords](http://parliament.uk/lords) – for the latest news from the chamber and committee meetings. Follow the Lords on [parliamentlive.tv](http://parliamentlive.tv), Twitter, YouTube and Facebook to keep in touch with what's going on in the House. Find out what peers are saying about current business at [www.lordsdigitalchamber.co.uk](http://www.lordsdigitalchamber.co.uk).

## Sign up to the email newsletter

The weekly email newsletter highlights the key business, covering the latest chamber and committee work, and includes a look ahead to upcoming Lords business by subject area.

## Contact us

If you want broader, factual information about the House of Lords you can contact the House of Lords enquiry service by email: [hlinfo@parliament.uk](mailto:hlinfo@parliament.uk), or call 020 7219 3107.

## Contacting members

Find a member's email address on their biography page:

**[www.parliament.uk/lordsmembers](http://www.parliament.uk/lordsmembers)**

Or use this generic email address:

**[contactholmemb@parliament.uk](mailto:contactholmemb@parliament.uk)**

Make sure to include the member's full title in the subject field.

To write to members by post, make sure your correspondence is addressed to a specific member and use this address:

House of Lords  
London SW1A 0PW

Mailshots are accepted only if individually stamped and addressed.

# See the Lords at work

Watch members at work (for free) from the gallery. Lords debates are also on Parliament TV.

The House sits from Monday to Thursday and there are normally around ten 'sitting Fridays' during the year. There are no debates during recess periods. Allow plenty of time to get through security and, for high profile debates, you may need to queue.

Go to the Cromwell Green visitor entrance on Abingdon Street. The queue opens an hour before business in the House begins.

## Watch committees at work

Lords committees usually meet at least once every sitting week. Details of upcoming meetings can be found at [parliament.uk/lords](http://parliament.uk/lords). You can also sign up to the weekly email newsletter (see page 8).

Everyone is welcome to attend meetings. Entry is on a first come first served basis. Visitors should arrive at the Cromwell Green visitor entrance one hour before the session begins.



# Find out more

Contact us or go online for information about business, membership and outreach activities.

Call or email us to request this publication in an alternative format.

## House of Lords Communications

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