

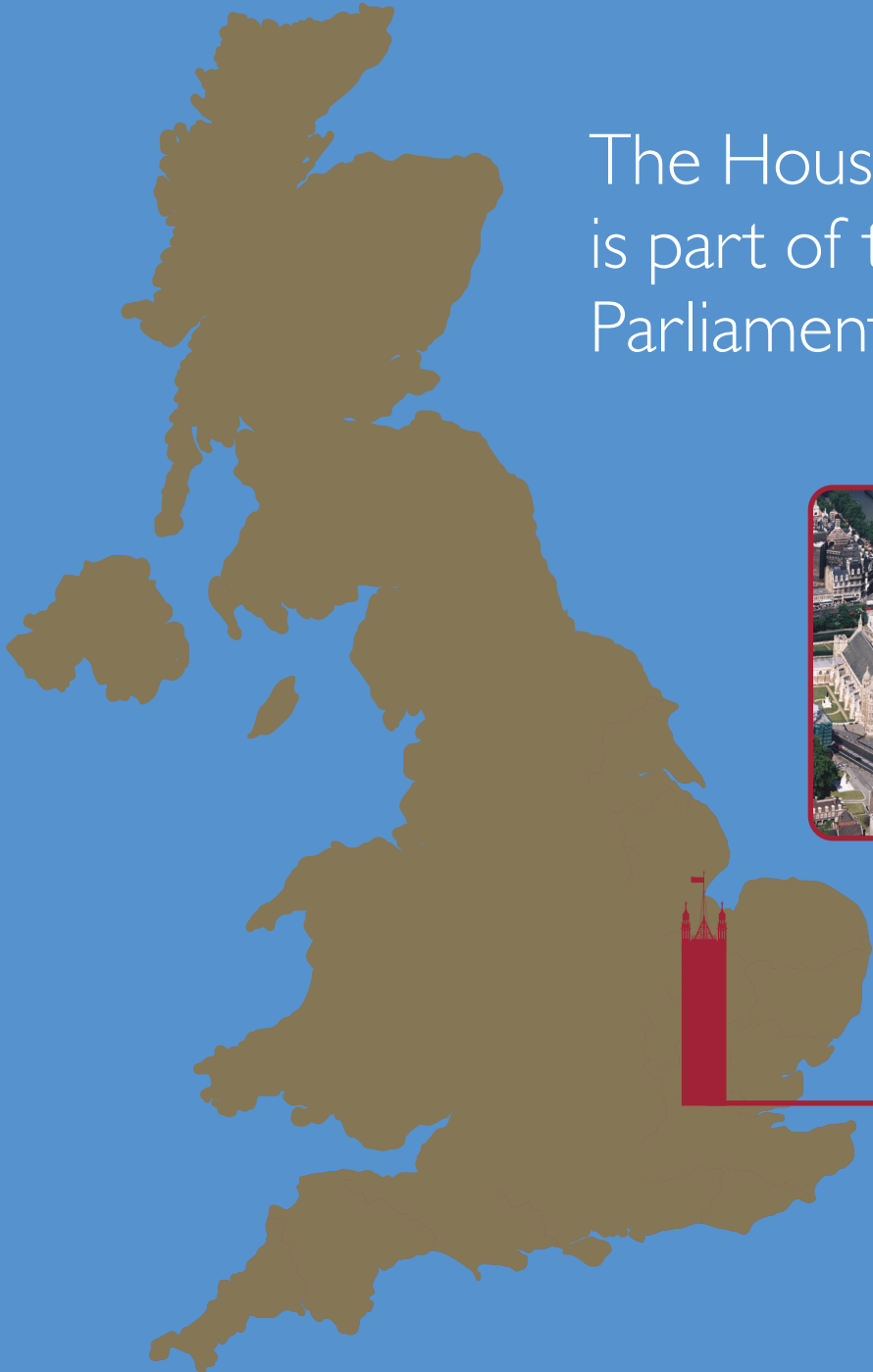


HOUSE OF LORDS

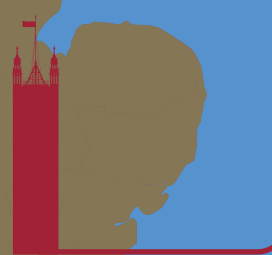
House of Lords Explained

Playing a vital role in making laws
Investigating public policy
Checking government action

2022 edition



The House of Lords is part of the UK Parliament in London

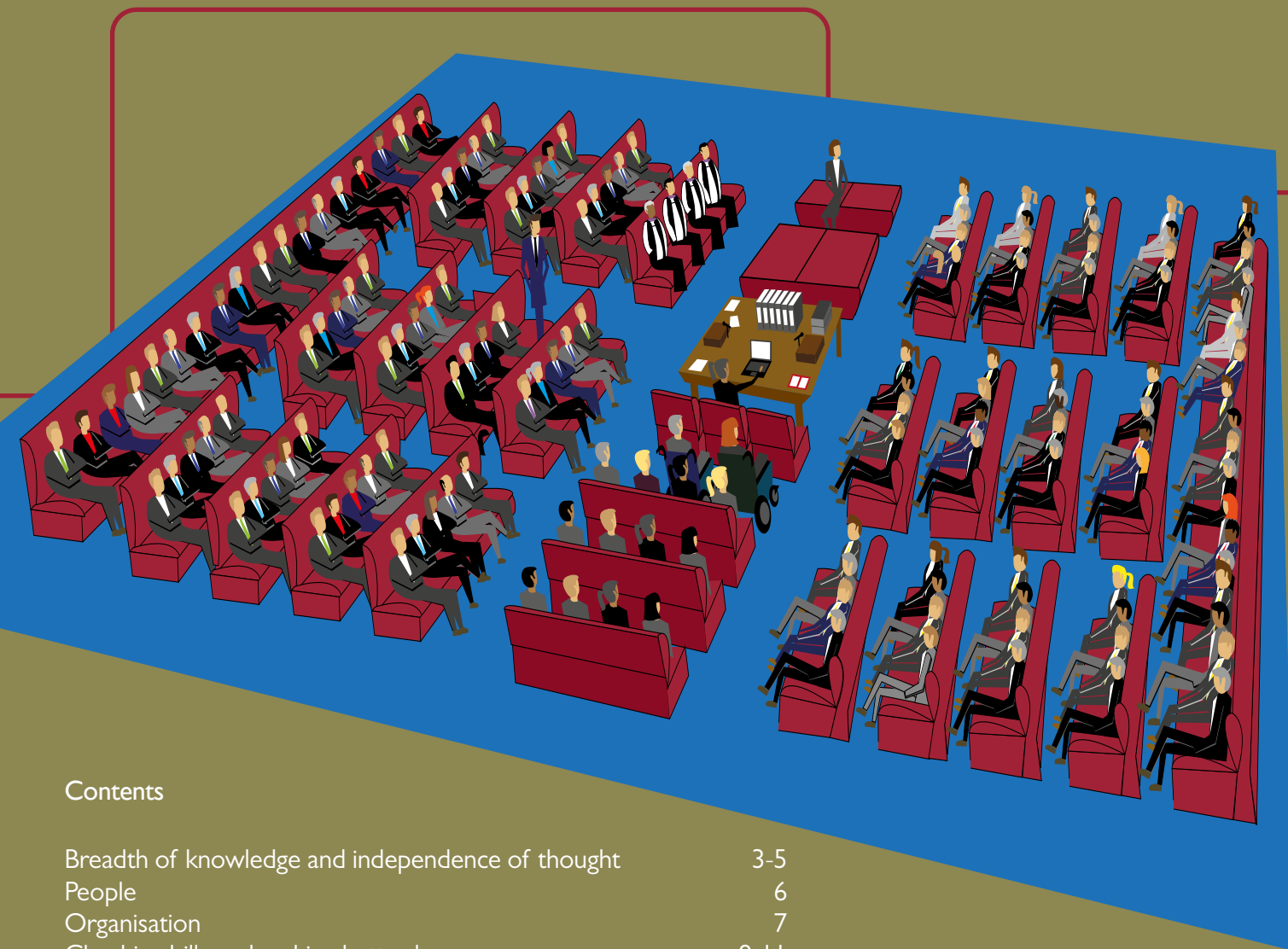


Parliament is the heart of our democracy. It is the meeting place for the House of Commons and the House of Lords.



The House of Lords is the second chamber of Parliament

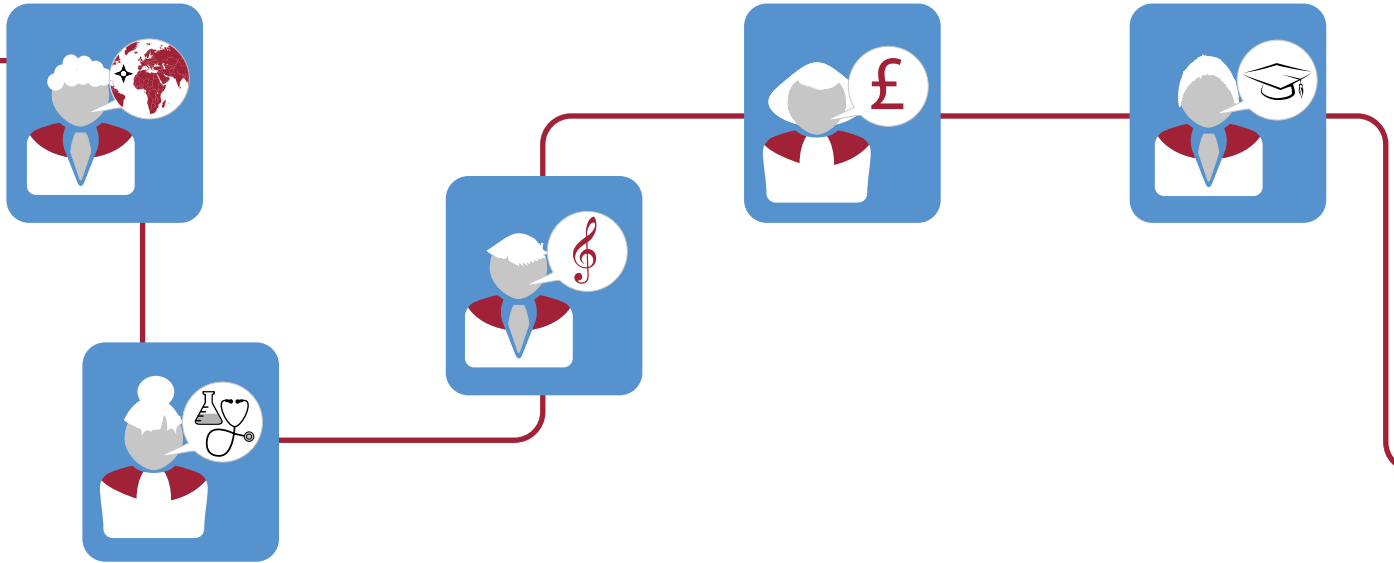
It is independent from and complements the work of the elected House of Commons – they share responsibility for making laws and checking government action.



Contents

Breadth of knowledge and independence of thought	3-5
People	6
Organisation	7
Checking bills and making better laws	8-11
Committee investigations into public policy	12-15
Questioning government action and debating current issues	16-19
Reaching out	20
Lords online	21

Breadth of knowledge and independence of thought



Members of the House of Lords come from different backgrounds and professions. Many remain active in their careers and are experts in their fields – the House draws on this professional experience in its examination of legislation and government actions and during its investigative committee work.

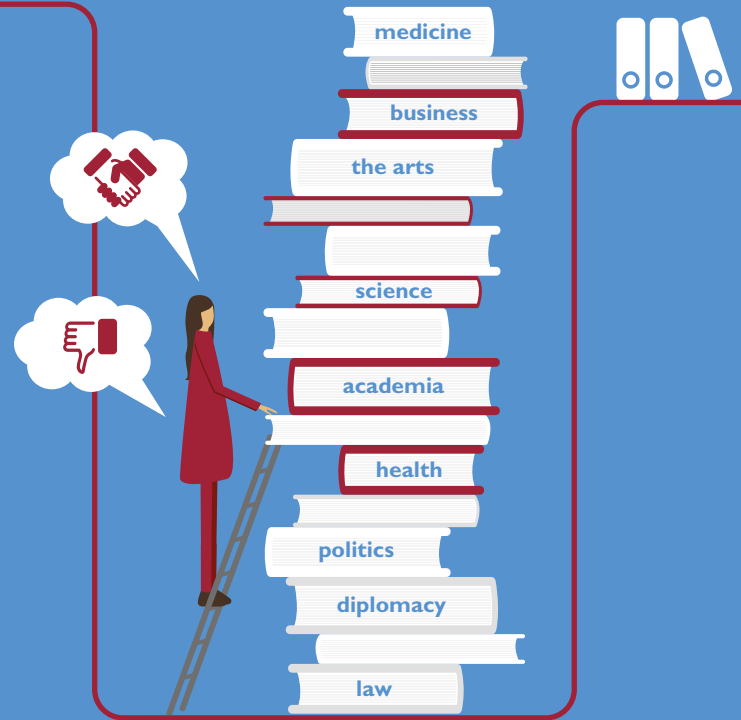
Diversity and breadth of knowledge

Some members of the House have a political background, while others have worked as doctors, soldiers, technology experts, business people, nurses, scientists, writers, judges, lawyers and police officers. Many members are also involved with charitable, voluntary and civil society organisations.

Independent thinkers

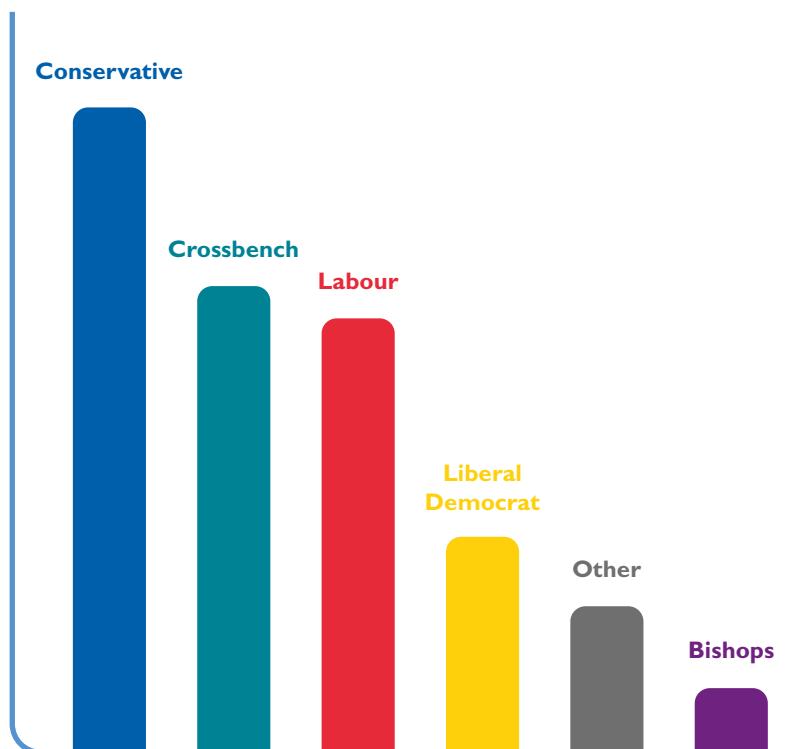
The House of Lords is characterised by independence of thought and a commitment to in-depth consideration of public policy.

- Members who belong to political parties are not subject to the same degree of discipline as in the House of Commons – they do not necessarily vote according to their party's policy.
- A significant part of the membership is non-party political: the crossbenchers and the bishops.
- Members represent the issues that concern them, not geographical constituencies.



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 (lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk).

Members by party or group



There are about 800 members who are eligible to take part in the work of the House of Lords.

House of Lords membership figures are not fixed or capped. For up to date figures go to www.parliament.uk/lords

2017-19
session

458

Average daily
attendance

The unit which defines Parliament's work is a session. It varies in length but, whether calculated by session, calendar or financial year, the working year averages around 150 sitting days. The figures in this booklet relate to the 2017-19 session*.

* unless stated elsewhere.

People



Leader of the House of Lords



Lord Speaker



Clerk of the Parliaments



Black Rod

Leader of the House of Lords

The Leader of the House of Lords is the most senior government representative in the House and a member of the cabinet. She is responsible for the government's business in the Lords and 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, eg in disputes over who will speak next during questions.

Lord Speaker

The Lord Speaker presides over business in the chamber. The House of Lords is self-regulating so, unlike the Commons' Speaker, the Lord Speaker does not call the House to order or choose who will speak next. The Lord Speaker is elected by the House and is politically impartial.

Clerk of the Parliaments

The Clerk of the Parliaments is the most senior official in the Lords, he employs the staff and is responsible for its management, administration and finances. He also has responsibilities in the chamber during business.

Black Rod

Black Rod is responsible for controlling access to and maintaining order within the House and its precincts. She also has important ceremonial duties.

Organisation

How the business of the House is run

The government and the main opposition party or parties each have a leader, business managers ('whips') who organise the work of the House and spokespeople who sit on the frontbench. The crossbenchers have a convenor.

The administration

The administration supports the whole House in carrying out its duties. It is responsible for advising on parliamentary procedure and is politically impartial. It also performs a range of everyday corporate functions, from finance and catering to property management and security.

Decisions about how the House operates are made by groups of members or staff with responsibility for these issues.



Checking bills and making better laws

The Lords plays an essential role in improving bills (draft laws): highlighting potential problems and ensuring they will be workable laws.

How a bill becomes a law

All bills except tax and spending bills must be approved by the House of Lords and the House of Commons to become law. A bill goes through these steps in each House:



Differences in the House of Lords

Most MPs (members of the House of Commons) belong to the party of government so the government usually wins votes on bills in the Commons. Most members of the House of Lords do not belong to the governing party; the crossbenchers and the bishops don't belong to any political party.

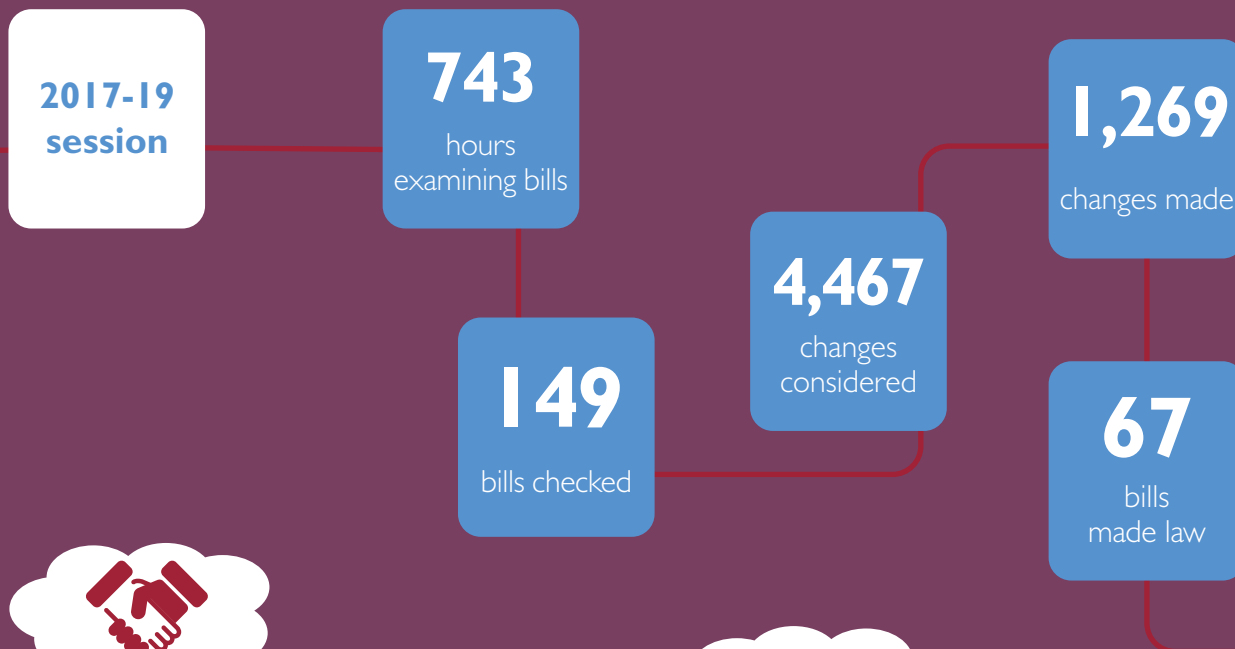
There are also important differences between the Houses in how they carry out some of the steps (left) in checking a bill. In the Lords, at:

- **committee stage** – there is no selection of amendments: all can be considered
- **committee stage** – debate on amendments is not time limited
- **third reading** – 'tidying up' amendments can be made.

Value of the House of Lords

The lack of a government majority, the more relaxed party discipline, and the fact that Lords procedures give members freedom to propose and debate changes (amendments), mean that the Lords sometimes reaches different conclusions on bills, and agrees amendments asking the Commons and the government to 'think again'. And Lords committees check all bills for changes to the constitution and to government powers.

The House of Lords spends most of its time in the chamber checking bills



Asking the government to think again

Here are some recent examples of bills where the House of Lords has used its knowledge and experience to ask the government to think again on proposed legislation:

Agriculture Bill

The Agriculture Bill dealt with spending, regulations and standards following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union.

House of Lords members raised concerns about the standards of food imports. In particular, members pressed the government to always ensure standards were met in new agreements. Following this, when the bill returned to the Lords, the government agreed to report to Parliament on all new free trade agreements and their levels of consistency with UK protections on human, animal or plant health, plus animal welfare and the environment. The government also committed to legislating for a permanent Trade and Agriculture Commission as part of the Trade Bill.

Domestic Abuse Bill

The Domestic Abuse Bill aimed to increase awareness of domestic abuse, strengthen support for victims and improve the effectiveness of the justice system.

During the course of its progress through the House of Lords, members successfully campaigned to make non-fatal strangulation and threats to release intimate images offences. The House also agreed to government compromises to conduct reviews of child contact centres and the sharing of migrant victim data. There was also a commitment to publish a strategy for prosecution and management of abusers and stalkers following proposed Lords changes to the bill.



Environment Bill

The Environment Bill aimed to establish a new environmental governance system, including the setting of long-term targets and the creation of an Office for Environmental Protection. It also included measures on improving air quality, waste management and recycling, water management, biodiversity and conservation covenants.

The House of Lords successfully asked the government to consider changes to reduce the impact of sewage discharges into rivers and coastal waters, and courts' powers to enforce the new law. The Commons also accepted Lords changes to reduce single-use items.

Trade Bill

The Trade Bill aimed to introduce measures to support the UK in implementing an independent trade policy, having left the European Union.

The House of Lords asked the government and the Commons to think again on the UK's future trade deals in relation to: Parliament's role, human rights, countries that commit genocide, and environment and welfare standards.

As a result of Lords scrutiny, the government agreed to make compromises to the bill on dealing with countries that commit genocide and Parliament's role in scrutinising new trade agreements.

Wide-ranging committee investigations into public policy

Committee work is a way for the House to investigate public policy and government activity in detail. The experience of the House's membership is an especially useful resource in carrying out this work.

Committees are smaller groups of members regularly meeting individuals, organisations and government representatives during their investigations. They investigate broad, long-term issues and produce in-depth reports on their findings. The reports are debated by the House in the chamber and often provoke discussion outside Parliament. The government always responds to House of Lords reports, which the committee follows up.

Everyone can watch committees at work. Entry to watch meetings is free and meetings are broadcast online.

68
reports

published by committees between
April 2020 and March 2021

The main investigative committees examine:

- the built environment
- the constitution
- economic affairs
- environment and climate change
- European affairs
- industry and regulators
- international agreements
- international relations and defence
- justice and home affairs
- media, communications and creative industries
- public services
- science and technology.

Committee reports

Below are some recent examples of committee reports and their recommendations to government:

Afghanistan

In January 2021, the International Relations and Defence Committee published its report on the relationship between the UK and Afghanistan.

The report and preceding inquiry focussed principally on the situation in Afghanistan at the time of writing and the country's future prospects, rather than on past events.

The report published over 120 conclusions and recommendations to the government. It covered a range of subjects including: the Afghan state and government, the Afghan economy, the Taliban and other security issues, Afghan National Security Forces and Nato training and peace talks in Doha.

As part of the report, the committee urged the UK government to emphasise to the US and Nato allies the importance of their ongoing presence in Afghanistan until a peace deal is reached.

Battery and fuel cell technologies

In 2021 the Science and Technology Committee conducted an inquiry into the role of battery and fuel cell technologies in achieving the UK's ambition to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

After hearing evidence from a range of industry experts and academics, the committee warned that the UK risked losing its existing automotive industry and falling further behind global competitors in battery manufacture. The report warned that without further investment in supply chains, training and research, there is the very real risk that the manufacturing of batteries will move overseas.

The committee called for long-term commitments to give the UK a future competitive advantage in fuel cells and next generation batteries.



Healthy ageing

In July 2019, the Science and Technology Committee launched an inquiry into ageing. After hearing evidence from a range of health experts, charities, academics and older people, the committee concluded that the government's Ageing Society Grand Challenge target is not on track and urgent action is needed.

The report stated that health services should be coordinated to better treat people with multiple age-related illnesses, and technology and services should be deployed more widely to support independent living in old age.

The committee set out a range of recommendations across science, technology, and health services to improve health in old age.

Freedom of expression

From November 2020 to July 2021, the Communications and Digital Committee examined freedom of expression online – seeking to understand how this right could be enhanced alongside keeping users safe.

The committee heard from a range of witnesses, including the social media platforms, the government, campaigning organisations, and individuals who had been banned from Twitter; as well as holding engagement events with members of the public.

The government has proposed, through the Online Safety regime, to regulate 'legal but harmful' content. The committee opposed this and warned that these plans would be both ineffective and a threat to freedom of expression. The report also recommended a package of measures to ensure that the internet is free as well as safe.

Future of journalism

The Communications and Digital Committee investigated the landscape of the journalism industry, which has radically changed due to factors including the opportunities created by new technologies and the decline in advertising revenues.

The committee found that although online platforms have created new opportunities for publishers to distribute content, they have challenged established funding models and disrupted the relationship between publishers and consumers.



The committee made a number of recommendations to government including ensuring the online advertising market is regulated effectively. The committee argued there was currently an imbalance of power between online platforms and publishers resulting in a “dysfunctional market”.

Public services

In November 2021 the Public Services Committee published a report in the role of public services in overcoming child vulnerability.

In the report, the committee called on the government to publish a national strategy on child vulnerability, supported by substantial, long-term investment in local early intervention services.

Recommendations to the government in the report included a statutory duty on local authorities, the NHS and police to collaborate to improve children’s life chances.

Universal Credit

In July 2020, the Economic Affairs Committee published a report on the economic impacts of Universal Credit and if it meets the needs of claimants in today’s labour market and changing world of work.

The report identified three main aspects of Universal Credit that require substantial reform: its design and implementation, the adequacy of its awards, and how it supports claimants to navigate the system and find work.

The report made several recommendations to government including that the Universal Credit system must be fair and flexible, providing claimants with adequate income, security and stability.

Other recent reports from committees have explored:

- meeting UK’s housing demand
- trade in goods and services one year on from Brexit
- strengthening and protecting the Union between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- concerns on the scrutiny of secondary legislation and use of delegated powers.
- tackling youth unemployment
- creating a National Plan for Sport and Recreation.

Download or order our ‘Guide to Work in Committees’ publication for detailed information about the work and role of House of Lord committees.

Questioning government action, seeking information and debating current issues

Another important function of the House of Lords is to hold government to account.

Questions

Questions are asked in the chamber at the start of business. They are a chance to seek information about government decisions and actions and also asked in writing.

Recent questions have covered topics including:

- adding folic acid to flour
- Afghanistan
- anti-Semitic attacks
- boycott of Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics
- homeowner cladding-related costs
- national security law in Hong Kong
- rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations
- safe standing at football matches
- shortage of lorry drivers.

2017-19
session

19,489

questions
asked

382

debates
held





Private Notice Questions (PNQs)

A private notice question (PNQ) gives a member of the House of Lords the opportunity to ask an urgent and important topical question to the government on any sitting day. If the Lord Speaker accepts the request, a government minister or spokesperson must come to the House of Lords Chamber and give an immediate answer without prior notice.

Recent PNQs have covered topics including:

- building fire safety
- COVID-19
- racism in sport
- the sentencing of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe
- UK fishing industry
- Windrush Compensation Scheme.



Statements

The government makes statements to the House about developments and emergencies, or to report back after international meetings. Statements provide valuable time for members to ask questions and probe government activity.

Recent statements include:

- Afghanistan
- COVID-19 in education settings
- EU relations
- employment rights
- future of Britain's railways
- health incentives scheme
- Northern Ireland Protocol
- police sexual misconduct
- trade negotiations with Australia
- race and ethnic disparities
- violence against women
- violence in Israel and Palestine.



Debates

Debates take place on public policy and on specialist issues. They are an opportunity to draw the government's attention to concerns.

Recent debates include:

- achieving the UK's net-zero carbon emissions targets
- art and music-based intervention in dementia care
- building an inclusive society post COVID-19
- challenges to freedom of speech
- empowering women (for International Women's Day)
- Universal Credit for people with mental health problems.

Assisted Dying Bill debate

The Assisted Dying Bill is a private members' bill (introduced by an individual member of the House) which seeks to enable adults who are terminally ill to be provided at their request with specified assistance to end their own life.

Nearly 140 members took part in a wide-ranging debate representing a range of professions and diverse personal experiences covering the ethical issues involved. They often raised personal experiences of dying friends and relatives: a letter was read out from a member who has been staying in a hospice for end of life care.

Some members raised concerns about safeguards for vulnerable people, other members argued for freedom of choice at end of life.



Reaching out

Members connect with new audiences and open up new ways of explaining the work of the House.



Increasing awareness

Members play an active ambassadorial role in building an understanding of the House and its membership as part of their contribution to parliamentary life.

The House of Lords Engagement Programme encourages members to meet with and hear from individuals and groups from every part of the UK, with activities including:

- *Learn with the Lords*: engaging young people aged 7-18 through school and college visits, online sessions and visits to the Education Centre on the parliamentary estate
- welcoming groups to the House of Lords for shadowing events and tours
- hosting an annual event for people from across the UK to debate in the chamber.

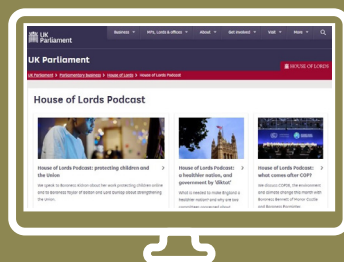
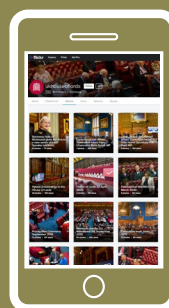
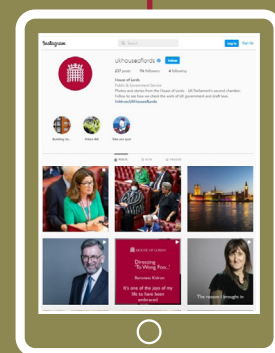
To register your school or college in the *Learn with the Lords* programme, email: learnwiththelords@parliament.uk.

Find out more about House of Lords engagement initiatives via the 'get involved with the lords' pages at parliament.uk

Lords online

Find out more about the House of Lords through a range of digital resources.

- **Flickr** – view photos from the House of Lords: www.flickr.com/ukhouseoflords
- **Facebook** – like the House of Lords on Facebook: facebook.com/ukhouseoflords
- **House of Lords Podcast** – hear our members talk about how they check and challenge government on the latest issues: listen and subscribe from your podcast provider
- **Instagram** – find out what's happening in the House of Lords: @ukhouseoflords
- **LinkedIn** – regular updates from the House of Lords @UKHouseofLords
- **Twitter** – live updates from the House of Lords: @ukhouseoflords
- **Website** – catch up on the latest news and what's on in the House of Lords: www.parliament.uk/business/lords/
- **YouTube** – watch films explaining the work of the House of Lords: www.youtube.com/ukhouseoflords



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

 0800 223 0855 (freephone) or 020 7219 3107
Textphone 18001 020 7219 3107

@ hinfo@parliament.uk

 House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW

Follow, like and subscribe to [@UKHouseofLords](https://twitter.com/UKHouseofLords)

