

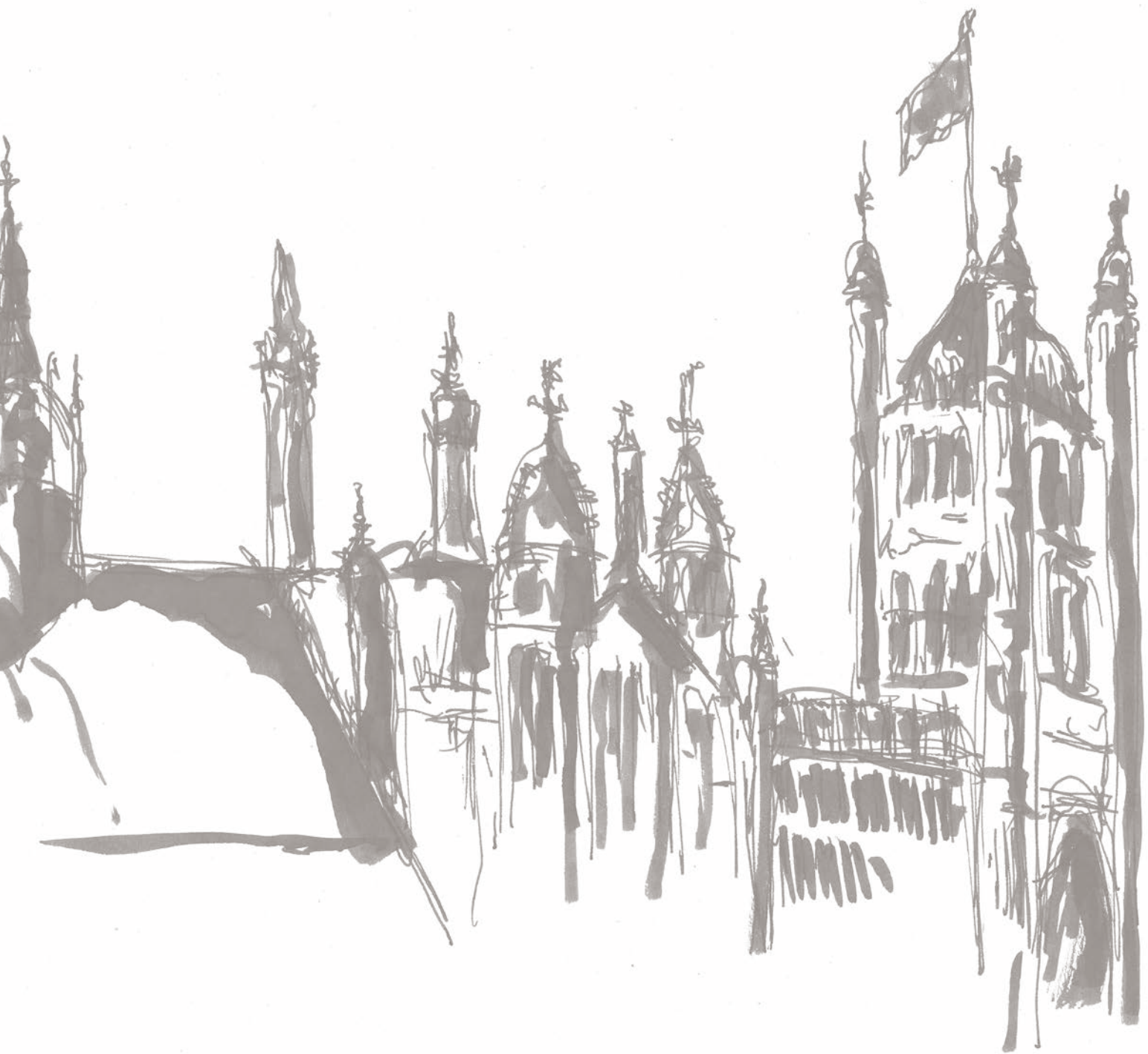


The Houses of Parliament Fast Stream

The Fast Stream route to a career in Parliament

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The Houses of Parliament Fast Stream

The Fast Stream route to a career in Parliament

What could I do?

Working in either House of Parliament is fascinating for anyone interested in the constitution, politics, current affairs and public policy. A career in Parliament will give you the opportunity to develop a range of skills and allow you to be close to the parliamentary process while remaining outside the cut and thrust of politics. It offers a unique political perspective. You will work directly with MPs or Peers and with senior staff, and have the chance to be involved in everything from working for a wide range of committees to supporting work in the Chamber of the House of Commons or House of Lords – for example, relating to the passage of legislation or the scrutiny of Government policy.

Fast Streamers spend the majority of the programme working as a Clerk, supporting

select committees or in a “procedural office” (an office which supports the work of the Chamber). The core role of a Clerk in either House is to support MPs or Peers in their parliamentary duties, helping them to challenge policies, scrutinise legislation and respond effectively to constituency-based work. In both Houses political impartiality is essential to ensure the confidence of Members of Parliament of all parties. The management of projects and teams is increasingly important for those pursuing a career in Parliament so the Fast Stream allows you to demonstrate your capacity to lead and deliver results. The overall aim of the programme is to give entrants the experience and skills they need to become leaders of the organisation in future.

Fast Streamers in the Houses of Parliament are not civil servants: they serve Parliament, not Government, although conditions of service and the grading structure are linked to, and kept

broadly in line with, the Civil Service. There are about three vacancies a year for Fast Streamers to join each House.

How is being a Fast Stream Clerk different from the Civil Service Fast Stream?

You will be given responsibility very early on, coupled with substantial support—including being assigned a ‘buddy’ to help you settle in and show you the ropes during your first weeks and months on the job.

You can expect to spend most of your career working in Parliament. Both Houses have a 4 year Fast Stream development programme where you will receive tailored training and support whilst you gain a range of skills intended to equip you for promotion to A2 grade (Senior Clerk—broadly equivalent to Civil Service Grade 7) at the end of that time. You will also have the opportunity to attend many of the Civil Service Fast Stream training courses. Although based at Westminster, during your Fast Stream training you are likely to travel in the UK and abroad for short periods – usually a maximum of a week – for example to Brussels or to accompany select committees on a visit. In the Lords, and sometimes in the Commons too, you will gain line management experience. Most Fast Stream postings are for a year or more, so you really have the chance to develop in each role. You will be given responsibility

very early on, coupled with substantial support—including being assigned a ‘buddy’ to help you settle in and show you the ropes during your first weeks and months on the job.

The Houses of Parliament invite those who have passed the initial Fast Stream online tests to a few Open Days, which are an ideal opportunity to explore whether the Parliament Fast Stream is for you. At the Open Day you’ll meet current Fast Streamers from both Houses and have the chance to discuss informally any queries you might have.

Fast Stream Learning and Development

Training for Fast Streamers is a mixture of on the job learning and more formal training. Fast Streamers in each House participate in courses and seminars on parliamentary procedure, and have the opportunity to take part in a wide variety of other internal and external training courses, including Civil Service Learning opportunities.

Learning about the interactions between Westminster and other parliaments is an important part of a Fast Streamer's training. In recent years, Fast Streamers in both Houses have visited Brussels for a two-day study visit to learn about the EU institutions, and House of Lords Fast Streamers have visited the Scottish Parliament to gain an understanding of how a devolved parliament operates.

Fast Streamers in each House are encouraged to take on additional duties to broaden their experience, such as 'division duty', which involves recording the votes of MPs or Peers. Fast Streamers undertake a variety of roles during the programme, which gives them the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills and competencies.

Under the Houses of Parliament Fast Stream, you will be assigned to work either for the House of Lords or the House Commons, which are separate institutions and separate employers. Although the work is similar in nature, both Houses have a unique character and culture, and there are some differences in the format of the Fast Stream programme in each House.



Profiles

Current Fast Streamers

Lloyd Owen, House of Commons Fast Streamer (year three)

I joined the House of Commons in 2011, four years after I graduated. When I applied for the Fast Stream I knew very little about the work of the House Service, but visiting Parliament on one of the Fast Stream Open Days made it clear that this was somewhere I would enjoy working. I was attracted by the opportunity to work at the heart of political life in the UK and the variety offered by a career here. Clerks at all levels regularly move between roles to broaden their skills and experience, meaning you are unlikely to get stuck in a rut!

In my first two years I worked for the Department of Chamber and Committee Services in the Journal Office, one of the “procedural” offices supporting the work of the Chamber. I spent a year as Clerk of Public Petitions, advising MPs, their staff and the public about

petitioning the House of Commons and then a year as Clerk of Papers, advising Government Departments about providing documents to Parliament for use by MPs. I also undertook regular research tasks in order to advise MPs or colleagues and worked as Second Clerk to the Committee on Standards and Privileges and then the Procedure Committee. In fact it was so varied that explaining my job to friends and family was something of a challenge!

Now in my third year, for the past nine months I have been working outside DCCS for Parliamentary Outreach. As Head of Campaigns Management I am responsible for the team which delivers events throughout the UK focused on engaging the public with parliament. This role has given me the chance to develop my line-management skills as well as allowing me to take charge of strategic planning for the team, a challenge I am very much enjoying.





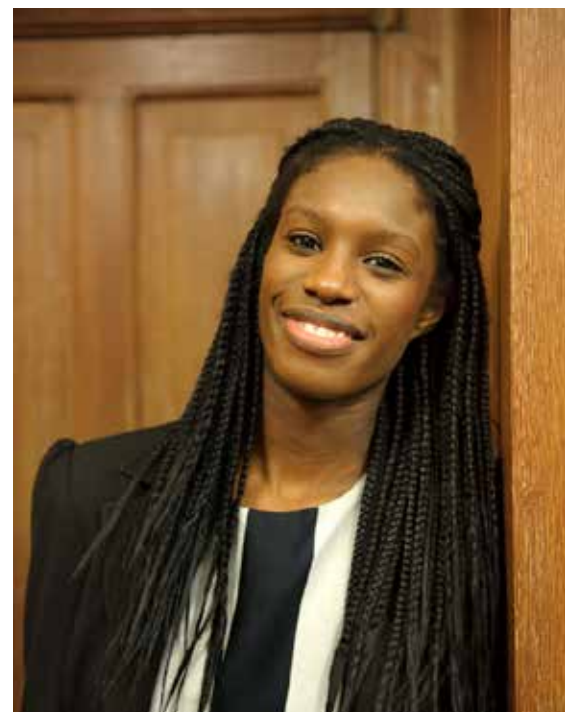
Nicole Mason, House of Lords Fast Streamer (year two)

I joined the Fast Stream in 2012 having spent a year working in project management for an IT company. Prior to that, I had taken a Master's degree in law. I accepted a Clerkship with a certain amount of nervousness; although I knew the role involved Parliamentary service, I did not know what exactly such an unusual job title entailed. Within my first week in post I realised that the variety offered by the role of a House of Lords Clerk makes it extremely interesting, albeit not the easiest job to explain!

I started work in the Committee Office and have now been in my role for over 18 months. I have already had the opportunity to accomplish many milestones: in addition to taking on line management responsibilities from day one, I helped to draft a report which was the subject of much debate in the House of Lords and made the pages of newspapers as far abroad as the New York Times. On top of this, I have travelled with the Committee to interesting conferences and meetings in different places in Europe. I have just finished working on a report on youth unemployment, a topic I feel privileged to be able to report on, as a young graduate. Alongside my 'day job', I spend time

carrying out work related to the procedure of the House of Lords. This includes being on 'division duty', which means recording the votes of Members of the House, often on 'headline grabbing' issues.

Although most Clerks start in the Committee Office, this is not always the case. The career of a House of Lords Clerk does not follow a set path and we tend to move between roles frequently. This means that it is impossible to get bored, since there is always a new and interesting opportunity around the corner!



House of Commons Fast Stream

The four-year Fast Stream programme at the House of Commons offers you the chance to be part of a dynamic and evolving institution at the heart of UK democracy, able to witness at first hand the democratic processes and political events that shape the nation. You're likely to begin your career working for a select committee, or in an office which helps to support the work of the House of Commons Chamber. Your work will centre on supporting MPs in their parliamentary duties, which in practice could involve:

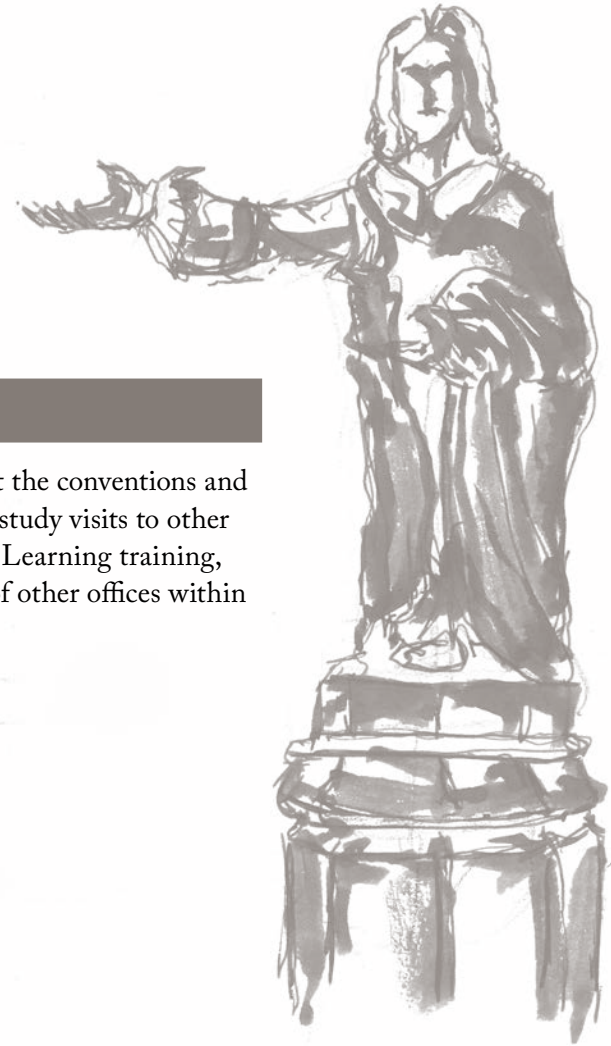
- Managing committee inquiries, including: providing oral and written briefing material for committee members, liaising with and briefing committee witnesses, accompanying committees on visits and drafting committee reports;
- Helping to manage a committee's workload, agenda, advisers and staff;
- Responding to queries from MPs/Peers and members of the public about the work of Parliament; and
- Advising MPs/Peers on the customs, practices and 'rules' of Parliament.

Your third year will normally be spent in a different House department, giving you a flavour of the breadth of the organisation and developing new skills. In recent years, Fast Streamers have been posted to:

- The Outreach Service, working to improve public engagement with and understanding of Parliament;
- The Parliamentary Estates Directorate, working as part of the Restoration and Renewal Project Team to help plan for the refurbishment and renovation of Parliament's buildings; and
- The House of Commons Library, which provides first-class research services and briefings to MPs.

Throughout the programme you will receive extensive training from external and internal providers, based on your own development needs. Each year you will build on your experience and skills, deepening your understanding of the House as an institution and the challenges it faces, and helping it to become more efficient, effective and better understood by the public.

Fast Streamers in each House are encouraged to take on additional duties to broaden their experience...



House of Lords Fast Stream

No two Fast Stream careers in the Lords are the same, but as a Fast Streamer you'll get a wide range of experiences designed to develop and stretch you in your role as a procedural expert, manager and the first port of call for your Chairman and members of your Committee.

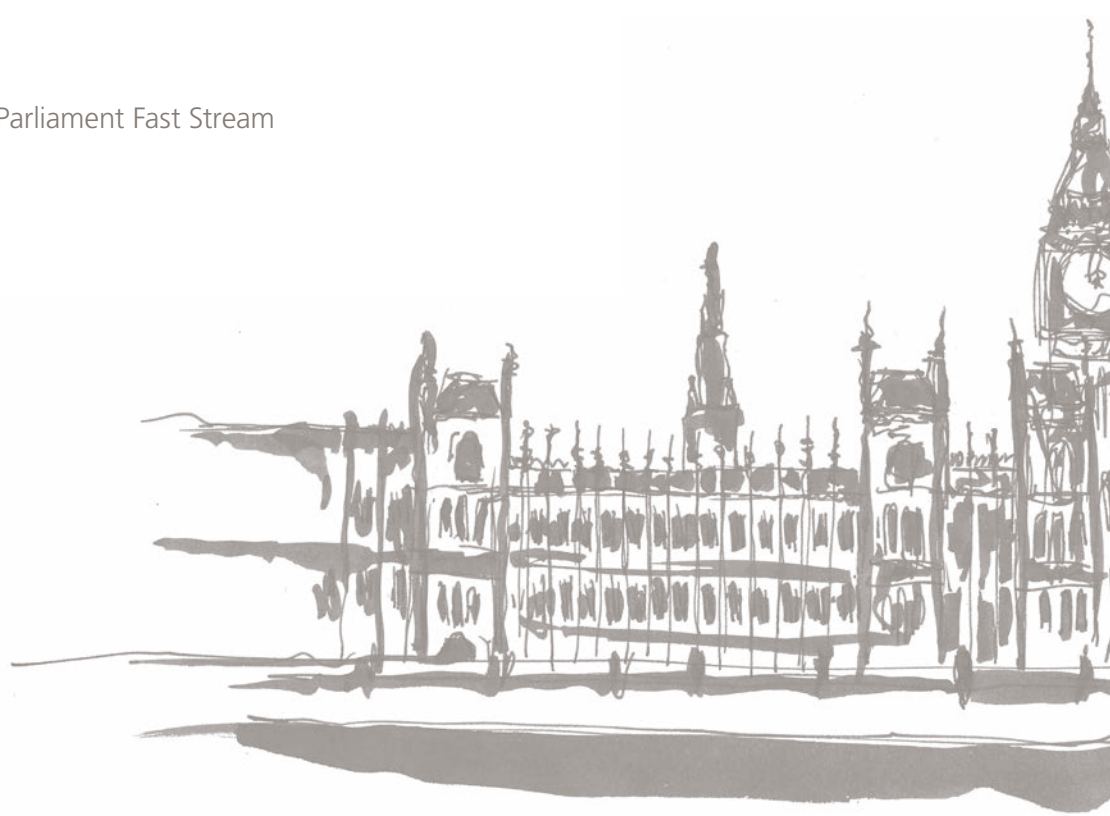
Many Fast Streamers begin in the Committee Office where you support a Committee in its work, and may soon be given line management of one or two other people. Your role can include: organising inquiries; booking witnesses to speak to the Committee; producing briefing notes and papers to support an inquiry or legislative scrutiny work; preparing speeches for the Chairman of your Committee; organising inquiry visits; and drafting the Committee's report, which is often the greatest challenge of all.

You'll also be involved in recording Members' votes on 'division duty' and helping to prepare the House's business papers. This usually involves working one or two evenings a week when the House is sitting, for which an allowance is paid. There is a clear training programme which ranges from procedural

seminars specifically about the conventions and practices of the House, to study visits to other parliaments, Civil Service Learning training, and shadowing the work of other offices within the House.

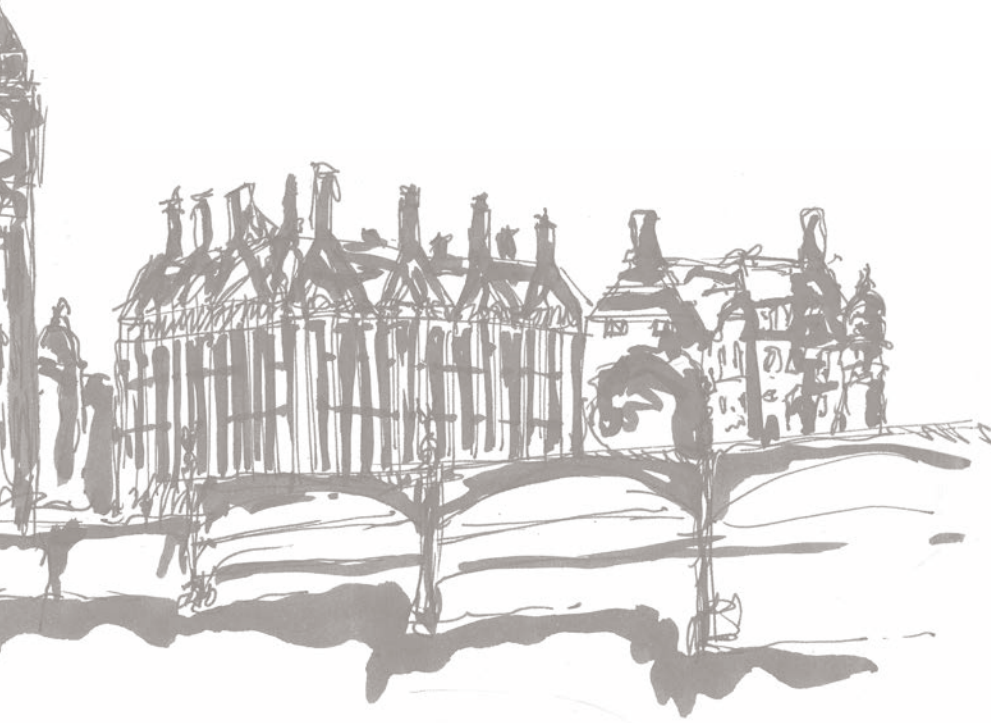
'I have already had the opportunity to accomplish many milestones: in addition to taking on line management responsibilities from day one...'

Nicole Mason



***A note from the Speaker
at the House of Commons,
Rt Hon John Bercow:***

“The House of Commons is a wonderful place to work; it is the very heart of UK democracy, staffed by world-class people who are committed public servants. I firmly believe that it is important that the staff of the House reflect modern Britain. Employment opportunities are open to any qualified person, regardless of gender, race, age, religion, physical ability or sexual orientation. Indeed, because of the size and make-up of the organisation, the House of Commons offers fantastic opportunities for career development to all our new graduate recruits.”



A note from the Lord Speaker, Baroness D'Souza:

“I am often struck by the high quality of the employees of the House of Lords administration. Regardless of their background, they are united by a commitment to excellence, expertise in their field, and a desire to learn and develop. The work of the House can be demanding and fast-paced, and I know I speak for all of the Members when I say the quality, diligence, impartiality and enthusiasm of our staff is much appreciated. So I'm delighted that you are considering making an application to join us.”



We are committed to developing working practices which will allow every member of staff to contribute their best



Message from the Clerk of the House of Commons

Throughout the programme you will receive extensive training from external and internal providers...

The House of Commons is an historic institution as well as the seat of a modern Parliamentary democracy. The House of Commons Service is a highly professional organisation of some 2,000 people supporting every aspect of the Parliamentary process as well as caring for one of the world's greatest buildings. We are not civil servants – we serve the Legislature, and not the Executive – and we are rigidly politically neutral, able to command confidence in the quality of our advice, no matter how controversial the subject.

A Fast Streamer's career at the House will be challenging and exciting. You will be close to great events, sometimes part of them. We will give you responsibility very early, and you will be a member of a supportive Service which values expertise and enthusiasm. I have hugely enjoyed my career at the House; it has been rewarding (and great fun); I have worked with outstanding people; and I have always felt that what I was doing was really worthwhile. I still feel that way, and I hope you will have a chance to share this experience.

We will expect you to display intellectual prowess and curiosity, common sense, and diplomacy

and tact in difficult situations. From your first day here we are looking for precision without pedantry, helpfulness combined with an ability to hold a firm principled line, and political impartiality. The modern House of Commons Service also needs strong managerial skills. You will develop your ability to manage people, resources, projects and programmes; to improve efficiency and achieve value for money. In this, as in all aspects of your work, we will give you the support and training you need to succeed.

It's our aim to help the House of Commons work ever more effectively and to be valued as the central institution in our democracy: effective in holding Governments to account, deciding great issues, scrutinising legislation and representing the diverse views of the electorate. Our Fast Stream graduates are a key part of our strategy to develop the skills and leadership that we need in the 21st century. I hope you find the prospect exciting!

Sir Robert Rogers

Clerk of the House of Commons



Message from the Clerk of the Parliaments, House of Lords

The House of Lords plays a vital role in scrutinising legislation and holding the Government to account. Clerks in the House of Lords fill a range of varied, demanding and rewarding posts supporting the work of the House. Together with our Commons colleagues we are uniquely placed at the heart of politics in Westminster. All House of Lords Fast Stream Clerks spend part of their career supporting Select Committees and work closely with members. Other roles which may be filled by Clerks include those of Secretary to the Management Board and private secretaries to the Lord Speaker, the Chairman of Committees (another senior office holder) and to the Clerk of the Parliaments. At present we also operate an arrangement whereby two Clerks are loaned to the Cabinet Office as private secretaries to the Leader of the House and Government Chief Whip. Clerks currently also serve as Finance Director and Director of Human Resources.

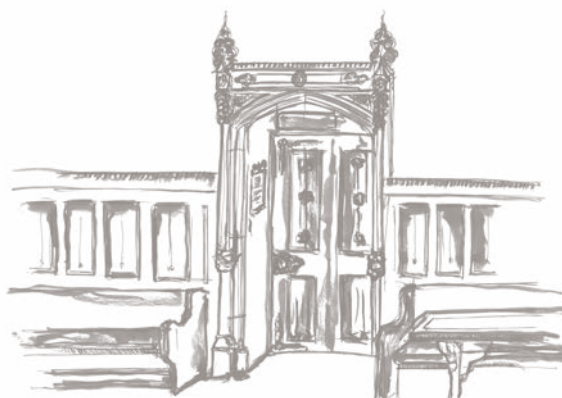
The wide range of roles means that Clerks can look forward to a varied career. One feature of all posts is the need to respond to new demands and the ability to think on one's feet. I have now enjoyed nearly 40 years working at the House of

Lords during which I have been lucky enough to undertake many different challenges. None of them has been dull!

In recent years the House has become more active and influential and it seems widely accepted that the second chamber should continue to perform broadly its present functions of legislation, scrutiny (both in the Chamber and in committees) and the provision of a forum for debate. Someone joining as a Clerk can look forward to playing a valuable part in supporting the machinery of the British constitution.

David Beamish

Clerk of the Parliaments, House of Lords





Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are committed to attracting and retaining the best talent from the widest possible pool. Recruitment and promotion are strictly based on ability and performance, and we strongly encourage applications from all qualified individuals, from a diverse array of backgrounds.

We are committed to developing working practices which will allow every member of staff to contribute their best, regardless of, for example, race, sex, marital status, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other characteristic.

The House of Commons and House of Lords have established Workplace Equality Networks (WENs), which support the equality, diversity and inclusion agendas of both Houses, and provide a forum for people to discuss important issues in a supportive environment, hold informative and educational events, challenge policies and practices, and meet people with shared interests.

There are currently four WENs:

- ParliAble—a network in support of people with disabilities in Parliament
- Parliagender—a network for gender equality
- ParliOUT—a network in support of issues relating to LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning) people in Parliament.
- ParliREACH—a network to increase awareness and appreciation of race, ethnicity and cultural heritage issues in Parliament.



Fast Stream Skills and Competencies

What skills do I need to be a Fast Streamer in Parliament?

To be eligible to be a Fast Streamer in the Houses of Parliament you need to have at least a 2:2 degree in any subject. You'll also need to demonstrate the key competencies expected of all Fast Streamers. Other key qualities which are tested during the final selection board interview process include:

- An interest in current affairs: working at the centre of British politics you need to know, and have an appetite to want to know, what is going on around you.
- Nonetheless, you need to demonstrate political impartiality at all times, being sensitive to political events and aware of different interpretations and implications of those events.
- Communication is key. You need to be able to communicate effectively, clearly and confidently in person and in writing, often to tight timescales.
- Being able to handle pressure and work in a fast-paced environment will stand you in good stead. As will relating well to others and working in a team. You will normally find yourself working in a small team (often on a committee), which requires the ability to work with others, both in and out of the House, to produce detailed briefings in complex and quickly-evolving situations.
- Organisation and the ability to plan and distribute work are essential to helping the Houses and their Members achieve their objectives.

Pay, promotions and conditions

Fast Stream Clerks for both the House of Commons and the House of Lords pay scale starts from circa £27,000; where appropriate allowances will be paid, for example for working additional hours in line with the sitting of the Houses. Successful completion of the Fast Stream programme in the Houses of Parliament is designed to equip you for promotion to A2

grade (Senior Clerk, broadly equivalent to Civil Service Grade 7).

Excellent service conditions apply with generous annual leave (which usually can be taken only when Parliament is not sitting), a choice of pensions, interest free season ticket loan and child-care vouchers. Membership of an in-house gym is available on payment of an annual membership fee.

'...visiting Parliament on one of the Fast Stream Open Days made it clear that this was somewhere I would enjoy working.'

Lloyd Owen

Recruitment process

How to Apply

Fast Stream appointments in the House of Commons and House of Lords are offered through the Civil Service Fast Stream Development Programme. The Fast Stream Competition is rigorous, open and fair and, for posts in Parliament, consists of five stages:

1. All Fast Stream applicants will be required to undertake a self-assessment test, comprising a verbal and numerical reasoning test at the start of the online application process. This will help you gauge your likely success at the first round of online tests. There is then another opportunity to practise online verbal and numerical reasoning tests.
2. Having had an opportunity to familiarise yourself with the Fast Stream online tests candidates then complete the verbal and numerical reasoning test and a competency questionnaire. These are taken within a specified timeframe at your own PC. Successful candidates will then be asked to complete an application form before proceeding to...
3. The “E-Tray Exercise”. This is a 3½ hour test which you can take on any PC with an internet connection. An example e-tray exercise can be found at <http://faststream.civilservice.gov.uk/application-process/application-advice/>
4. Successful candidates then proceed to the one-day Fast Stream Assessment Centre (FSAC). This will be held in central London and will assess candidates’ interpersonal skills, intellectual capacity and delivery skills. For a full copy of the Civil Service Competency Framework please consult the following link:
<http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Civil-Service-Competency-Framework-July-2012.pdf>
5. The last stage for candidates successful at the Fast Stream Assessment Centre will be a Final Selection Board (FSB), held at the Houses of Parliament in April. Typically the FSB consists of a panel with four or five members. The members are



likely to come from the senior service in the two Houses, including a senior Clerk from each House as well as an external member. The competency-based interview lasts about 30–40 minutes. The Board will have your application papers and a report of your performance at FSAC. The FSB provides the opportunity to resolve, through an interview, any uncertainties arising from this earlier evidence, to explore your motivation and aptitude and to test your ability to think on your feet, as will sometimes be required in practice. The topics to be discussed will not therefore be predictable.

The Houses of Parliament can consider only candidates who have expressed a preference to join the House of Parliament Fast Stream. The Final Selection Board interview (FSB) takes place after the Fast Stream Assessment Centre (FSAC) for the candidates with the strongest scores from among those who have selected the Houses of Parliament as their first choice option. As you will already have passed the FSAC, you will still be offered a post within one of the Central Government Departments even if you are unsuccessful at the Houses of Parliament FSB. In other words, if you apply for the Houses of Parliament Fast Stream you have nothing to lose!

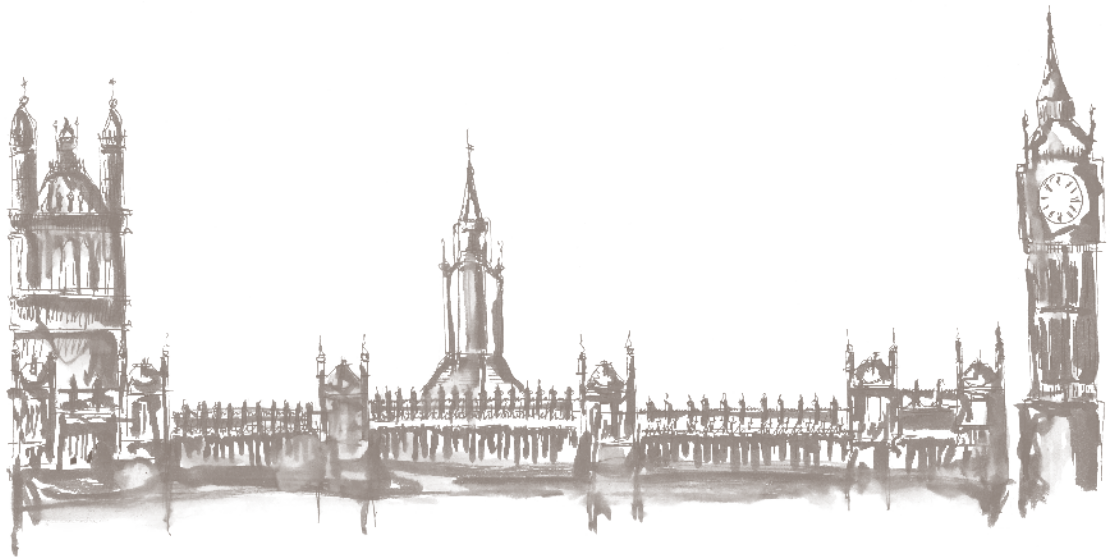
It is not possible to apply to the Diplomatic Service, to Parliament and to the Science and Engineering options within the General Fast Stream in the same year, as they operate separate final selection boards after the Assessment Centre.

Beyond the Fast Stream: former Fast Streamers

What happens after the Fast Stream?

After the Fast Stream, Clerks in both Houses go on to become permanent staff in a wide range of posts. Past examples include in research services for MPs in the Commons and in finance and HR in the Lords. In addition to Committee and procedural work you will need to develop your ability to manage people, resources, projects (for

example ICT and buildings) and programmes. Again, training is provided to support you in this. Please see our “Beyond the Fast Stream” profiles to get a sense of what colleagues have gone on to do after successfully completing the Houses of Parliament Fast Stream.



Alison Groves, former House of Commons Fast Streamer

I joined the House of Commons Fast Stream in October 2009, as Second Clerk to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Affairs Committees. I was quickly given responsibility for writing briefing papers and reports for the Committee, and was also expected to learn the rules of procedure governing how Committees and the House operate. I was also fortunate enough to travel to Ireland, Scotland and Wales with the Committee, a fantastic way of getting to know MPs and the team better.

After my first year I moved to the Public Bill Office, a 'procedural office', where my work ranged from giving advice to MPs, their staff and the wider public on how Bills pass through the House of Commons, to clerking committees of MPs that consider legislation, to doing 'division duty' and recording the votes of MPs. This role gave me a high level of responsibility and involved regular contact with senior staff, senior MPs and the Speaker of the House.

I have just completed a one-year secondment to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in their Parliamentary Relations Department, which has highlighted how the civil service works and the many differences between the Foreign Office

and Parliament. I've briefed Ministers and civil servants on all aspects of parliamentary procedure but in return learnt how things get done in Government. My latest role involves representing the House of Commons in the National Parliament Office in Brussels, where the House of Lords also has a representative.

The Fast Stream, and the wider House, welcomes everybody. I went to a state school and studied languages at Nottingham, and was nervous that I wouldn't fit in. I do, and everyone does, regardless of your background, your hobbies, your tastes in music or your favourite restaurant.



Simon Blackburn, former House of Lords Fast Streamer



I joined the House of Lords Fast Stream in 2006 having previously worked in the City and for a sport national governing body. Since then I have had member-facing jobs in the Committee and Legislation Offices; an internally-focused role as secretary to the Administration's Management Board; a very outward-looking job as head

of the bicameral visitor services directorate, where I managed a team of 50 and ran our award winning tourist attraction; and now I am the Lord Speaker's private secretary. Like Nicole, I also assist with recording Members' votes and preparing the House's business papers. This is a fairly typical progression – most Fast Streamers and senior Clerks spend about half their career working closely with members as Clerks to Select Committees.

If your only impressions of the House stem from watching the State Opening then don't worry. First, many of us were in the same position

before we came to the open day. Second, the organisation is – despite appearances – a changing one. The culture in the House of Lords gives staff a lot of involvement in member activity and decisions. You'll also help members undertaking their work in the House, which in turn holds the Government to account.

This culture of involving staff in decisions extends to the roles which are more "behind the scenes". The House is always evolving to meet society's expectations of a legislature so we do our job best when we lead and innovate, while protecting and preserving the worthwhile traditions. A curious mind is a great advantage, along with an ability to work on about twenty things at once! If you're tempted to apply then do – and good luck!

Further information and contact

A great advantage in applying for the Houses of Parliament Fast Stream is that there is so much information available online about the work you will be doing. All Select Committee reports are published on the parliamentary website (www.parliament.uk) for example, so you can decide for yourself whether you would enjoy drafting them!

Watch our new Fast Stream video:

www.parliament.uk/about/working/jobs/faststream/

www.parliament.uk – read select committee reports and news from Parliament

www.parliamentlive.tv – watch a committee evidence session or debate in the Lords or Commons Chamber

www.parliament.uk/get-involved/outreach-and-training/resources-for-universities/open-lectures/ – build your knowledge of how Parliament works through Open Lectures

The textbook *How Parliament Works* by Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters is edited by current and former Clerks.

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