



HOUSE OF LORDS

Briefing

Membership

Diverse membership
Becoming a Member
Party and group organisation



✉ House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

☎ 020 7219 3107

@ hinfo@parliament.uk

🌐 www.parliament.uk/lords

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Diverse membership of the House of Lords

Members of the House of Lords come from many walks of life, and bring experience and knowledge from a wide range of occupations. Many remain active in their fields and have successful careers in business, culture, science, sports, academia, health, politics and public service. They bring this wealth of knowledge and experience to the role of examining matters of public interest that affect all UK citizens. Members also represent the House of Lords and UK Parliament at home and abroad. Through a range of formal and informal outreach activities, Members explain the work of the House of Lords and encourage people to actively engage with Parliament which is at the heart of our democracy.

Currently, there are about 800 Members of the House of Lords. There is no upper limit on the total number of Members, and numbers in each party group fluctuate (up-to-date figures can be found on the House of Lords website). There are three main categories of membership.

Life peers

The Life Peerages Act 1958 reformed the composition of the House of Lords to introduce women and people from different backgrounds and occupations. The majority (about 680) of Members (peers) are appointed for their lifetime (titles are not passed on to their family) by the Queen, on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Any British, Irish and 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, via the independent House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Archbishops and bishops

A limited number of 26 Church of England archbishops and bishops sit in the House. When they retire as bishops their membership of the House ceases and is passed on to the next most senior bishop. The Anglican archbishops of Canterbury and York, the bishops of Durham, London and Winchester and the 21 senior diocesan bishops of the Church of England have seats in the House.

Elected hereditary Members

The House of Lords Act 1999 ended the right of most hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House; 92 remain until the next stage of reform. They are: 15 office-holders elected by the House; 75 party and Crossbench Members (elected by their own party or group); and two who hold royal appointments.



Becoming a Member of the House of Lords

House of Lords Appointments Commission

The House of Lords Appointments Commission is an independent, advisory non-departmental public body, established by the Prime Minister in 2000. The Commission has two main functions, to:

- recommend individuals for appointment as non-party-political life peers
- vet nominations for life peers, including those nominated by the UK political parties, to ensure the highest standards of propriety.

The Commission has seven members, including the chair. Three members were appointed to represent the main political parties. The other three members and the chair are non-political and independent of government.

The House of Lords Appointments Commission is an independent body. It is not part of the House of Lords.

✉ The Appointments Commission, 35 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BQ

☎ 020 7276 2005 @ enquiry@lordsappointments.x.gsi.gov.uk 🌐 www.lordsappointments.gov.uk

Dissolution Honours

Peerages may be given to some MPs from all parties when they leave the House of Commons at the end of a Parliament.

Resignation Honours

When a prime minister resigns, he or she may recommend peerages and other honours for politicians, their political advisers and others who have supported them.

Political lists

Members can be appointed, on a party basis, to 'top up' each of the three main party groups' strengths and on the expectation that they will attend regularly and perhaps take on frontbench work as spokespersons or business managers ('whips').

One-off announcements

One-off announcements can cover peerages for someone appointed as a minister who is not a Member of the House.

Archbishops and bishops

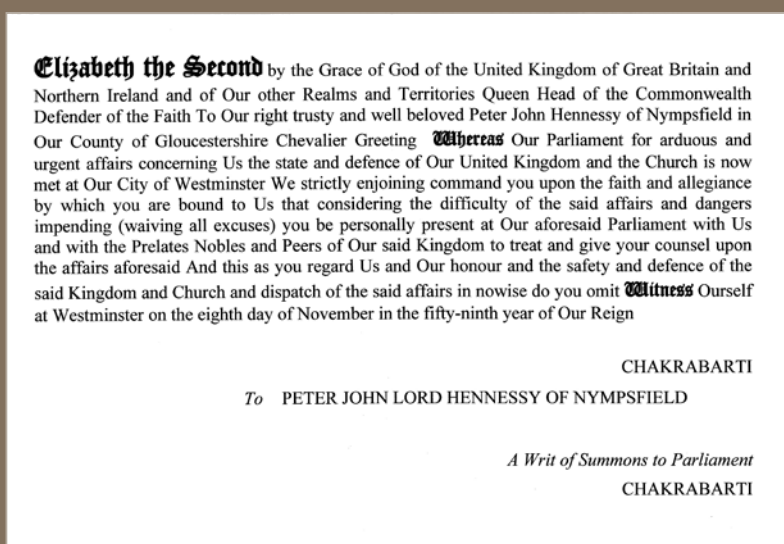
A limited number of 26 Church of England archbishops and bishops sit in the House. When they retire as bishops their membership of the House ceases and is passed on to the next most senior bishop. The archbishops of Canterbury and York are usually given life peerages on retirement.

Speakers

Former Speakers of the House of Commons have traditionally been awarded a peerage at the request of the House of Commons.

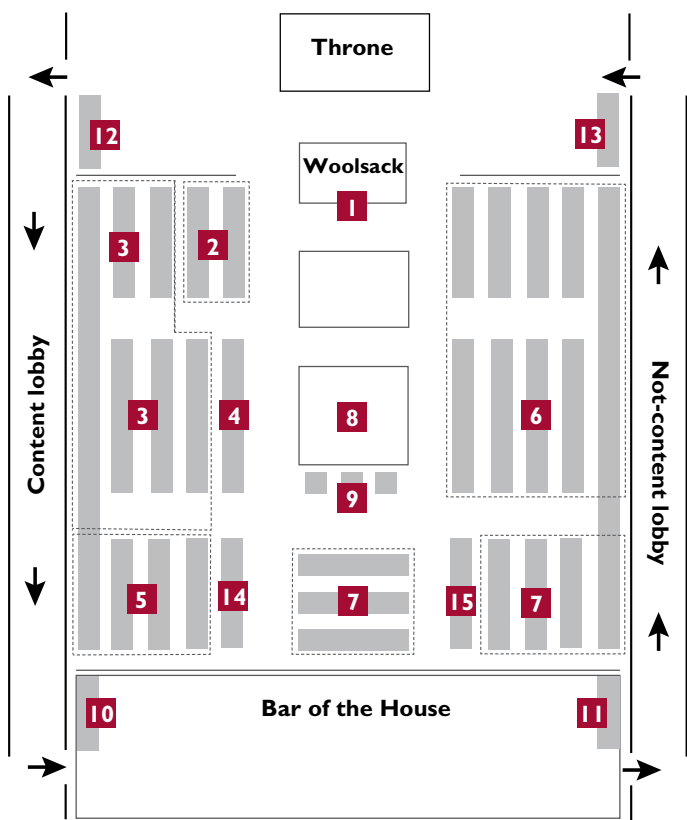
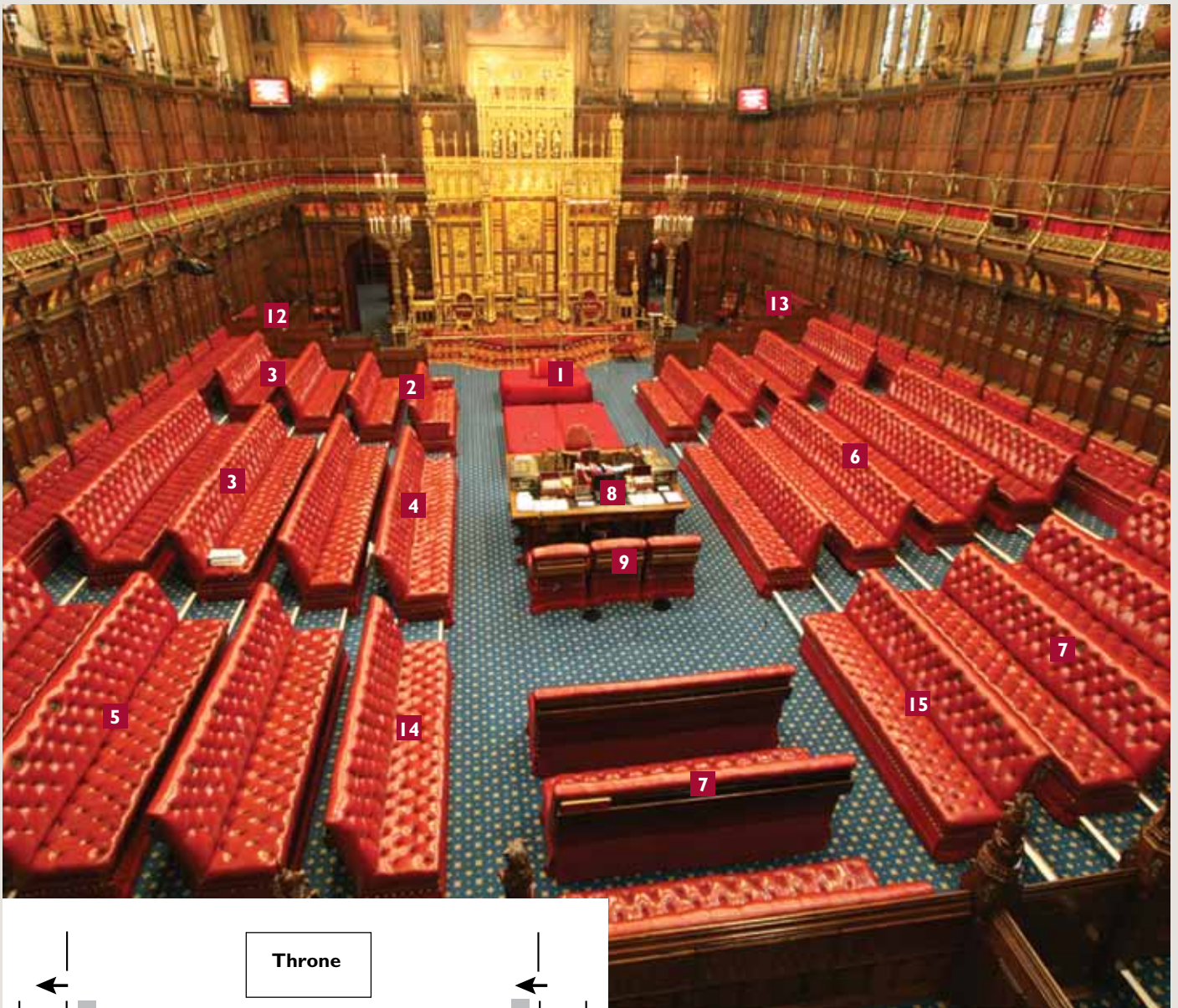
From announcement to introduction

- The **announcement** that certain people are to become Members of the House is made by No. 10 Downing Street or the House of Lords Appointments Commission. Before anyone becomes a Member, a title has to be agreed, and documents – the Writ of Summons and Letters Patent – prepared. This can take several weeks.
- **Letters Patent** are issued by the Queen. They create a life peerage. Recipients become Members of the House automatically when Letters Patent are signed. 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** (below) is the document which calls the Member to the House and then acts as their ‘entry ticket’. A new writ is issued for every Member at the beginning of each Parliament (i.e. after a general election). A writ accompanies the Letters Patent for a new Member.



The Writ of Summons

- The **introduction** is a short ceremony lasting about five minutes which takes place at the beginning of business. There are normally no more than two introductions a day (or exceptionally three when there has been a large number of new appointments). Each new Member has two supporters (usually, but not necessarily, of their party or group).
- The **Oath of Allegiance** must be taken or solemn affirmation made by all Members before they can sit and vote in the House. Members take the oath on introduction, in every new Parliament and on the death of a monarch. On taking the oath, Members also sign an undertaking to abide by the House of Lords **Code of Conduct** in carrying out their parliamentary duties.
- The first speech a newly introduced Member makes is known as a **maiden speech**. This takes place during a debate in the chamber and is traditionally an occasion marked with respect by the House, uninterrupted and congratulated by the next speaker. The speech itself is short and uncontroversial, not expressing views that would provoke an interruption.



- 1. Lord Speaker
- 2. Bishops
- 3. Conservatives
- 4. Government ministers
- 5. Liberal Democrats
- 6. Labour
- 7. Crossbenchers
- 8. Despatch boxes
- 9. Clerks
- 10. Hansard reporters
- 11. Black Rod's box
- 12. Government officials and civil servants
- 13. Staff of the House
- 14. Government Privy Counsellors*
- 15. Opposition Privy Counsellors*

(* Mostly former Cabinet ministers)

Party and group organisation

Most Members belong to the main political parties. Many Members do not support any political party – these independent Members are known as ‘Crossbenchers’. Their independence is a distinctive feature of the House of Lords and their participation allows voices that might not otherwise be heard in the political process to contribute to discussion of draft laws and government policy.

Members sit in the chamber according to the party or group they belong to. The government and the main opposition party or parties each have a leader, business managers (‘whips’) who organise the work of the House and spokespersons who sit on the frontbench. The Crossbenchers have a convenor but, because they have no party affiliation, no whip system.

The changing membership of the Lords

14th century	The Lords begins to sit in a separate House from the Commons. Members of the House of Lords are drawn from the Church (Lords Spiritual) and from magnates chosen by the Monarch (Lords Temporal), while Members from the Commons represent the shires and boroughs.
15th century	Lords Temporal become known as ‘peers’.
18th century	Acts of Union with Scotland (1707) and Ireland (1800) entitle Scottish and Irish peers to elect representatives to sit in the Lords.
19th century	1876 Appellate Jurisdiction Act creates Lords of Appeal in Ordinary (Law Lords) to carry out the judicial work of the House as the final court of appeal.
20th century	1958 Life Peerages Act creates peerages for life for men and women; women sit in the House for the first time. 1963 Peerage Act allows hereditary peers to disclaim their peerages, and allows hereditary peeresses and all Scottish peers to sit in the House. 1999 House of Lords Act removes all except 92 hereditary peers from the House.
21st century	2005 Constitutional Reform Act provides for the separating of the House’s judicial function from Parliament and changes the role of the Lord Chancellor; ending his role as judge and as Speaker of the House of Lords. 2006 The House holds its first election for a Lord Speaker. 2009 The House’s judicial function ends and transfers to the new Supreme Court.