What is the House of Lords? Teachers’ Pack

This pack contains:

1. ‘What is the House of Lords?’ - Key topics and questions
2. ‘Hold a select committee session’ - Instructions and worksheets
3. ‘What do people think of the House of Lords?’ debate - Instructions and XX cards
4. Background information:
   - History of the House
   - What does the House of Lords do?
What is the House of Lords?

**Animation**

Explore what the House of Lords does, how it has evolved over time, and how it may change in the future.

**Step 1**

Ask your students to openly share their views on the work and history of the House of Lords by asking a few key questions:

- Who are the Lords and why do we have them?
- What do you think are the origins of the House of Lords?
- What do you think are the differences between the House of Lords and the House of Commons?
- Have you heard of the Life Peerages Act which created Life Peers?

**Step 2**

Watch the animation, which introduces the House of Lords with a focus on its history and possible changes in future:

www.youtu.be/-U0LhurGWOc

**Step 3**

Encourage your students to share their thoughts on the film:

- Did the history of the House match your expectations?
- How much has the make-up of the House changed over time?
- What do you think about the group called ‘crossbenchers’?
- Did anything surprise you about the role of the House of Lords today?

**Optional extension activities**

- Run the ‘Hold a select committee session’ activity (full instructions and worksheets below) to give students the chance to try out one of the main roles of the House of Lords themselves and explore the possible options for the make-up of the House of Lords in the future.
- Alternatively, go straight to the ‘What do people think of the House of Lords’ film to spark further debate about the role of the House of Lords and use the debate cards in this pack to get your class talking.
Hold a select committee session

Challenge your students to put into practice one of the main roles of the House of Lords, explored in the previous animation, by running their own committee session.

Groups can explore the future of the House of Lords in their committee or another subject of your choice.

More information on the role of committees is included in the Background Information section of this pack.

Learning aims:
- To introduce the importance of scrutiny and investigation in the work of the House of Lords and in particular the work undertaken in committees
- To explore the options for the future of the House of Lords from a range of viewpoints
- To encourage students to empathise with others and consider different perspectives
- To work effectively in a group
- To use presentation skills to present ideas to the class

Learning outcomes

Must (all)
- Understand the purpose of a committee and committee procedure in the House of Lords
- Understand the purpose of the House of Lords in the context of today’s society
- Work as a group to debate the pros and cons of the purpose, function and routes into the House of Lords

Should (most)
- Have expressed their own opinions to others through discussion, debate and voting
- Understand that there are different arguments for and against the House of Lords and its current function and make-up

Could (some)
- Have engaged with and reflected on different ideas, opinions, beliefs and values when exploring a topical issue
- Have empathised with other people’s points of view
Classroom instructions

Step one
Introduce the topic by asking students what they would do if they were given a large group project to do together (i.e. split up the work, undertake research, speak to experts etc.)

Explain that the House of Lords splits its work by forming groups called select committees which investigate particular subjects, so they can give advice to the government on specific topics.

Step two
Divide the students into groups and ask them to imagine that they are members of a committee of the House of Lords. Explain that they are going to explore the topic ‘The Future of the House of Lords’

Step three
Ask students to identify the key issues involved and the people most affected, and to think about the impact on the country as a whole, for example:

- How does an unelected House fit within modern democracy?
- Would there be a cost of running elections for the House?
- Would elections impact on the sorts of people interested in joining the House?

Ask the students how they can find out more about the subject and how their committee is going to examine the issue, for example:

- What organisations would their committee need to hear from to learn more about the issue?
- Are there any individuals that the committee should speak to – from a variety of viewpoints?
- How will they research the topic fairly to make sure they have a rounded view of the issues?

Ask each group to fill out the worksheet using research where necessary.

Step Four
Explain the group will now run an evidence session.

Divide each group in half – one half will role play the parts of different witnesses, the other half will act as the committee.

The committee must prepare questions for their witnesses, while the witnesses need to think about the viewpoint of their characters, for example:

- Are they for or against reform?
- What expertise and knowledge do they bring to this discussion?

Explore other topics using this activity

You can effectively explore the role of Committees within a wider context by running this activity with different topics – for example crime, transport or health. If you want to base this work on a real select committee for the House of Lords, visit www.parliament.uk for more information.

You can also extend the activity by allowing the groups to choose their own topic by researching topical issues using newspapers and online.
## Select committee session plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of select committee:</th>
<th>Description of issue:</th>
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### Organisations the committee is asking to provide evidence:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of Organisation:</th>
<th>Why would their evidence be valuable?</th>
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### Individuals the committee is asking to provide evidence:

<table>
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What does the public think about the House of Lords?

Step 1
Watch the video at youtu.be/z9dxOQDovWs to hear the opinions of the public on the ‘What’ of the House of Lords and inspire discussion and debate in the classroom.

But watch out, some of what the public says is factually correct but the films also include some common misconceptions – can your students spot them?

Step 2
Pose the three key questions to your class to inspire debate – additional questions are also included. Use the information below, which includes the correct answers, to direct the discussion. You can run this activity as a class or divide into pairs or small groups. Debate cards can be shared out so that each group explores a different point and can then present their opinions back to the class for further discussion.

1. What does the House of Lords do?

The answer: The House of Lords has three main roles outlined below – further details are included in the Background Information in this pack:

- Questioning and challenging
- Shaping and making laws
- Investigating issues

Note: In the films some of the people answering the question mention that the House of Lords checks the work of ‘Parliament’.

‘Parliament’ describes both Houses. The House of Lords challenges the work of ‘Government’.

Further discussion:
- What does it mean to ‘question and challenge’ the work of Government?
- What sorts of people should ‘shape and make’ new laws?

2. Why do we have two Houses?

The answer: In the 14th century, two distinct Houses of Parliament began to emerge. Representatives from the towns and counties began to meet separately as the House of Commons. Archbishops, bishops, abbots and priors (Lords Spiritual) and noblemen (Lords Temporal) formed the House of Lords. For more information please refer to the ‘History of the House’ in this pack.

In our modern Parliament, we refer to our two-house system as ‘bicameral’. This comes from the Latin meaning bi = two + camera = chamber. The concept of bicameralism can be traced back to early ancient and classical civilisation but firstly arose in medieval Europe. The main benefit of a bicameral system is that each chamber is able to check and challenge the content of a draft Bill before it becomes law.

Further discussion:
- What other options could be considered if the UK decided not to have two Houses – and what are the pros and cons?
- What expertise and skills does a second House need to question, challenge and investigate?
3. Should the House of Lords be elected?

The answer: This question is subjective, and a great theme to discuss in class.

In terms of the current make-up of the House of Lords, peers are appointed, they are not elected. Two events have changed the way members of the House of Lords are appointed: the 1999 House of Lords Act, which ended hereditary peers’ right to pass membership down through family, and the introduction of the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

The House of Lords Appointments Commission is an independent body established in 2000. The commission is made up of seven people, including four members of the Lords and three non-political members independent of the government.

The House of Lords Appointment Commission recommends individuals to become non-party-political life peers. It also vets nominations for life peers, including those nominated by the UK political parties, to ensure the highest standards of propriety. Members can be nominated by the public and political parties. Once approved by the Prime Minister, appointments are formalised by the Queen.

Further discussion:

- What might an appointment panel look for in a potential peer?
- Should there be quotas for representation of particular groups (i.e. women or ethnic minorities) in the House of Lords?

You can explore the membership of the House of Lords further at www.parliament.uk/education/teaching-resources-lesson-plans/house-of-lords-who/.
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The history of the House

Background information

11th century: Parliament originates in the Anglo-Saxon king’s council – a political body made up of councils consulted by Saxon kings and attended by religious leaders, magnates and the king’s ministers.

13th century: The de Montfort Parliament of 1265 includes representatives of counties, cities and boroughs.

14th century: Two distinct Houses of Parliament emerge. Representatives from the towns and counties begin to meet separately as the House of Commons. Archbishops, bishops and sometimes abbots and priors (Lords Spiritual) and noblemen (Lords Temporal) form the House of Lords.

15th century: Lords Temporal attend the House of Lords on an almost entirely hereditary basis. ‘Peers’, as they become known, are accountable to each other and divide into five ranks: duke, marquess, earl, viscount and baron.

16th century: After the 1539 suppression of the monasteries, only bishops attend the House and the Lords Temporal form a majority for the first time.

17th century: In 1642 during the Civil War, bishops are excluded from the House of Lords but return under the Clergy Act 1661. In 1649, after the Civil War, the monarchy and the House of Lords are abolished. After Charles II’s restoration (1660) the House is reinstated. The 1689 Bill of Rights establishes Parliament’s authority over the king.

18th century: The Acts of Union with Scotland (1707) and Ireland (1800) create a single parliament for Great Britain and then for the United Kingdom. The acts entitle Scottish and Irish peers to elect representatives to sit in the Lords.

19th century: The Bishopric of Manchester Act 1847 (and later acts) limits the number of bishops entitled to sit to 26. Retired bishops cannot sit or vote in the House. The Appellate Jurisdiction Act 1876 enables the appointment of professional judges as Lords of Appeal and Ordinary (Law Lords) to continue to sit and vote. They were, in effect, the first ‘life peers’.

The 20th century

1909: The Lords rejects the Liberal government’s budget. The government then introduce a Bill to curb the power of the Lords to reject legislation approved by the Commons.

1911: The Parliament Act 1911 limits the powers of the House of Lords by stating that money Bills can become law if not passed without amendment by the Lords within one month.

1922: Elections for Irish representative peers cease.

1941: The Commons chamber is destroyed during World War II. The Lords give up their chamber to the Commons and use the Robing Room when they sit.

1949: The Parliament Act 1949 reduces the delaying power of the 1911 Act for some public Bills from two years to one year.

1958: The Life Peerages Act 1958 permits the creation of peerages for life. Around the same time allowances for peers’ ‘out-of-pocket’ expenses and the system of ‘leave of absence’ for members are introduced.

1963: The Peerage Act 1963 allows hereditary peeresses to be members of the House.
1968: The government abandons its Parliament (No.2) Bill which suggested a two-tier House of created members who could speak and vote, and others who could speak but not vote.

1999: The House of Lords Act 1999 removes the right of most hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House. During the passage of the legislation an amendment is accepted, enabling 92 hereditary peers (elected by those within the House from amongst their own number) to remain until further reform is proposed.

The 21st century

2005: The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 sets up the Supreme Court separating the House’s judicial function from Parliament. It ends the Lord Chancellor’s combined role as head of the judiciary, a member of the executive and Speaker of the House of Lords.

2006: The House holds its first election for a Lord Speaker and Baroness Hayman is elected on 4 July 2006.

2009: The House’s judicial function is transferred to the new UK Supreme Court. Law Lords became the first justices of the Supreme Court.

2010: The Coalition Government publishes an agreement in May, stating that a group would be appointed to bring forward proposals for an elected House of Lords. The group, consisting of front-bench spokespeople from the three main political parties, is asked to prepare a draft Bill.

2011: The deputy prime minister publishes a draft Bill on House of Lords Reform in May 2011. It sets out proposals for a House of Lords made up of 300 members (80 per cent elected and 20 per cent appointed). The draft Bill is referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses.

2012: Lords library publishes a note on public attitudes on Lords reform on 3 July. House of Commons debates Lords Reform Bill on 10 July and the Bill is given a second reading by 462 to 124 votes. In August the government announces that it plans to drop the Bill on Lords reform.

2014: The House of Lords Reform Act 2014 allows members of the House of Lords to retire or resign permanently. It also provides that members who did not attend and those convicted of serious offences should cease to be members of the House of Lords.

2015: The Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 allows for vacancies arising among the Lords Spiritual within 10 years of the Act passing to be filled by women bishops.

2016: The House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2016 enables the suspension of a member to run beyond the end of a Parliament. It also enables the House to expel members for reasons other than those set out in the House of Lords Reform Act 2014.
The House of Lords has three main roles:

- **Questioning and challenging**
  
  Members of the Lords scrutinise the work of the government during question time and debates in the chamber, where government ministers must respond. In the 2016-17 parliamentary session, members held the government to account with 7,380 oral and written questions and 154 debates on issues ranging from the digital economy to press regulation.

- **Shaping and making laws**
  
  Members spend nearly 60 per cent of their time in the House considering Bills (draft laws). All Bills have to be considered by both Houses of Parliament before they can become law. In the 2016-17 session, members checked 84 Bills on issues ranging from bus services to online safety. They considered 5,185 changes and 33 Bills became laws. During several stages, members examine each Bill, line-by-line, before it becomes an Act of Parliament (law). Many of these Bills cover crucial areas of everyday life such as welfare, health and education.

- **Investigating issues**
  
  Members use their extensive individual experience to debate public policy. Much of this investigative work is done in select committees which are small groups appointed to consider specific policy areas. In 2016-17, House of Lords select committees produced 41 reports on subjects including economic affairs, the process of leaving the European Union, and advances in science. Many select committee meetings involve questioning experts working in the field which is the subject of the inquiry. These meetings are open to the public.

### The role of committees

Committees are a crucial tool for scrutinising the work of government and a key way in which the Lords investigate issues. Most Committees fall into one of three categories: General Committees, Grand Committees and, the most common type, Select Committees.

Select committees in the House of Lords investigate specialist subjects, taking advantage of the Lords’ experience and knowledge in specific areas. These committees concentrate on five main areas: Europe, science, economics, communications and the UK constitution.

A committee will decide upon a line of inquiry and call for written and oral evidence from people involved in or affected by the topic being examined.

The outcome of the inquiry is presented as a report with recommendations to the government. In the Commons, there is a select committee for every government department. Joint select committees consist of both MPs and Lords and have similar powers to Commons or Lords select committees. Some are set up on a permanent basis, like the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and others deal with a specific matter, such as examining draft proposals for Bills on subjects ranging from gambling to stem cell research.

Your class can find out more about all the different types of committees on the Parliament website and try out the Get Active activity in this pack to put the skills of a committee into practice: [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/)