Your UK Parliament

THE UK PARLIAMENT AFFECTS ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.

BUT WHAT IS IT? HOW DOES IT WORK? AND HOW CAN YOU GET YOUR VOICE HEARD?

This guide explores the work and role of MPs and members of the House of Lords, and how they can help you. Learn about how laws are made and how they directly impact your life, what happens at a general election and how Parliament holds the Government to account.

You’ll also find out how you can get involved and have a say on the issues that matter to you.

For supporting teachers’ notes and additional resources go to: www.parliament.uk/education

For younger pupils ... Our fact filled guide will answer many of the important questions to help you get to know your UK Parliament.

www.parliament.uk/education
Welcome

In the UK, Parliament plays a role in almost every aspect of our lives, from the laws that govern us to the public services that we use and how we interact with the wider world. Parliament has a huge influence on our lives. But what is it and how does it work? And, most importantly, how does it affect you and what can you do to make a difference?

This guide explores the work and role of MPs and members of the House of Lords, and how they can help you. Learn about how laws are made and how they directly impact your life, what happens at a general election and how Parliament holds the Government to account. You'll also find out how you can get involved and make your voice heard.

You’ll find the following great features in the guide:

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Fascinating facts to improve your understanding

**Stop & think!**
Some of the big issues in more depth for you to consider

**HAVE YOUR SAY!**
Great ideas and advice on how you can make your voice heard

**Glossary**
A handy guide to UK Parliament terminology (pages 38-39)
The main business of Parliament takes place in the two Houses. Usually, the agreement of both Houses is needed before a law can be made or changed.

The UK Parliament is made up of three parts:

- the House of Commons
- the House of Lords
- the Monarch (king or queen)

The UK Parliament has ‘devolved’ or transferred some of its powers to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. This gives those countries the power to make laws on issues such as education and health in those parts of the UK.

**PARLIAMENT VS. GOVERNMENT**

Both Parliament and the Government have important powers and each play a part in making the laws of the United Kingdom. But what is the difference between them?

‘The Government’ in the UK refers to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and their junior ministers. These people make up the team responsible for leading and running the UK. The political party that wins the most seats at a general election forms the Government. The Government is in charge of managing the country and deciding how our taxes are spent.

Parliament is made up of people who have been elected or appointed to represent our interests and make sure they are taken into account by the Government. The Government cannot make new laws or raise new taxes without Parliament’s agreement.

Parliament’s role is to look closely at the work of the Government and monitor the way it is running things. Parliament does this by examining the work of ministers and their officials, by checking, amending and passing any laws, debating the important issues of the day, and by speaking up for people who may be affected unfairly.

**Government:** in charge of managing the country and deciding how taxes are spent

**Parliament:** represents our interests and makes sure they are taken into account by the Government

Devolution

The UK Parliament has ‘devolved’ or transferred some of its powers to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. This gives those countries the power to make laws on issues such as education and health in those parts of the UK.
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The House of Commons is made up of 650 Members of Parliament (MPs), one for each of the 650 constituencies in the country.

MPs are elected by the public in a general election, when everyone in the UK over the age of 18, who is registered to vote, can vote for the candidate they want to represent their interests and concerns in Parliament. An MP represents all the people in their constituency, even people that didn’t vote for them. MPs usually represent a political party, although some MPs are not part of a political party and are known as ‘independent’.

If an MP dies or resigns, a local by-election takes place to choose a new MP in that area.

DID YOU KNOW?
Women were first allowed to be MPs in 1918 and were allowed to be members of the House of Lords in 1958.

An MP represents all the people in their constituency, even people that didn’t vote for them.

At a glance ...

650 Members of Parliament

1 MP for each constituency in the country

MPs ARE ELECTED by the people in their constituency to represent them in Parliament.
What do MPs do?

MPs have the important job of representing people from their constituency in Parliament. They raise issues affecting their constituents, propose new laws, and check and challenge the work of the Government.

On most sitting days, MPs have the opportunity to question government ministers directly about their decisions and policies. You might have seen Prime Ministers Questions on TV, where the Prime Minister answers questions from MPs in the House of Commons Chamber.

MPs often work together in smaller groups called select committees to monitor the performance of specific government departments such as those for education, defence and health. This process allows them to look into issues closely and make recommendations to the Government on what might be improved.

On the days that MPs spend in their constituencies, they may hold surgeries where they can meet with local people and hear their concerns. They can then go back and raise these issues in the House of Commons.

What can MPs do for you?

If there is an issue you are concerned about, then your MP could help. MPs can help their constituents with individual cases as well as support wider causes and raise issues publicly. You could also request that your MP speaks at an event, pledges their support to a campaign or writes to the local media on your behalf.

Support from an MP can make a big difference!

Find out who your MP is and how you can contact them:

www.parliament.uk/findyourmp

Find out other ways you can get more involved with the UK Parliament and have your say on page 34.

There are lots of ways you can contact your MP:

PHONE
EMAIL
LETTER
SOCIAL MEDIA

IN PERSON at an MP’s surgery in your constituency or at Parliament
THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The House of Lords is independent from, and complements the work of, the House of Commons.

Members of the House of Lords are appointed for their experience and expertise in a number of different professions outside of Parliament. They use this specialist knowledge to challenge the work of the Government and scrutinise new laws closely.

Currently there are around 800 members of the House of Lords. Almost all are life peers and there are also 26 archbishops and bishops, and 92 hereditary peers.

The majority of Members are appointed for their lifetime by the Monarch, on the advice of the Prime Minister. Some non-party-political Members are recommended by an independent body, the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Around a quarter of Members are independent of political parties: they are called 'crossbenchers'. The participation of Members from a range of backgrounds allows a much wider range of voices to be heard in the political process.

Because of the crossbenchers, no political party has a majority in the House of Lords, so the Government also does not have a majority, as it usually does in the House of Commons.

This means that the House of Lords can present a second opinion, and they often ask the Government to think again about new laws or other decisions affecting our lives.

The House of Lords is independent from, and complements the work of, the House of Commons.

Includes experts in many fields

Most Members are appointed for their lifetime

y = mx + b
What do members of the House of Lords do?
The House of Lords works in a similar way to the House of Commons: Members debate and amend new laws, ask government ministers questions and campaign on issues that affect people across the country.

Both Houses have to agree the contents of a Bill before it becomes law. The House of Lords also shares the task of checking and challenging the work of the Government through questions and debates. Because members of the House of Lords have considerable experience in many professions and fields, they are able to put their knowledge and expertise to good use during debates.

Members of the House of Lords also sit on select committees, but these committees are not linked to government departments. Instead, House of Lords select committees look at wider issues such as the economy or science and technology, using the expertise of their Members to inform their work.

Ad hoc committees, which are disbanded when their task is complete, are set up each year to look into current pressing issues. For example, the Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence was appointed in 2017 to look at the economic, ethical and social implications of advances in artificial intelligence, and to make recommendations.

What can members of the House of Lords do for you?
If there is an issue you are concerned about, a member of the House of Lords could help. They have expertise and interest in areas ranging from housing to the health service, science to sports, and many of them have experience of campaigning. Because there are no time limits on discussing new laws in the House of Lords and because any Member can take part in these stages, it can be a good place to get changes made.

Find out more about members of the House of Lords and their areas of interest, and see who you might contact about an issue you care about:

www.parliament.uk/lordsmembers

DID YOU KNOW?
Past and current members of the House of Lords have won over 45 Olympic and Paralympic medals between them.
Elections and voting

In the UK, a general election is usually held every five years.

In a general election, everyone in the UK who is over the age of 18, and registered to vote, can vote for the candidate they want to represent them in Parliament. Voting in elections gives you the chance to have a say on who contributes to decisions that will affect your life.

Who can vote in UK elections?

YOU CAN VOTE IF YOU ARE:

- 18 years old or over (but you can register at the age of 16)
- a British citizen
- an Irish, British Commonwealth or European Union citizen who is resident in the UK
- Citizens of the European Union who are not Commonwealth citizens can vote in European and local elections in the UK, but are not able to vote in UK general elections.

In the UK you can register to vote at the age of 16.

ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

Register online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or fill out and post a registration form. Every year the local authority sends each household a registration form, which you can return by post or complete online.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Go to the government website and print off and complete an Electoral Registration Form. Return it to your Area Electoral Office.

Registering deadlines

You can register to vote at any time of year, but if there is an election coming up that you want to vote in, make sure you register before the deadline.
WHO GETS YOUR VOTE?

In the UK we vote using a method called a ‘secret ballot’. This means a voter’s choice is private and anonymous.

Deciding who you want to vote for is a personal decision and also very important. There are many factors that might influence your choice. A good starting point is to read party manifestos and candidate information to find out what their areas of focus and priorities are. You could also listen to their media interviews. Then weigh up who best represents your views.

DID YOU KNOW?

All candidates can demand a recount of votes on election night. In the 2015 General Election, three recounts were demanded in the seat of Derby North. The poor people counting the votes did not get to bed until the next day.

Stop & think!

Imagine you have just turned 18 and there’s an election coming up, and some of your friends have told you that they aren’t going to vote. Do you agree with their choice? If not, could you persuade them to change their minds? What reasons would you give them for voting?
VOTING SYSTEMS

Voting systems, also known as electoral systems, are the methods used to elect representatives. Each voting system has its own rules on how parties and candidates are elected.

First-past-the-post
This voting system is used in the UK to elect MPs to the House of Commons (and for local elections in England and Wales). Usually each political party nominates one candidate for a constituency.

So how does it work?
- Each voter is allowed to choose one candidate, and only one, by putting a cross by his or her name on a ballot paper.
- The candidate with the highest number of votes is the winner and becomes the constituency’s new Member of Parliament (MP).
- The party with the highest number of MPs forms the Government and their leader becomes the Prime Minister.
- The party with the second highest number of votes becomes the official Opposition.

The Single Transferable Vote
This is the system used to elect members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It results in multi-member constituencies, which means that constituencies are normally larger but they elect several representatives - not just one. Voters rank candidates in order of preference. Candidates who reach a target number of votes, which is decided beforehand, are elected; the remaining seats are filled using voters’ second, third, or fourth preferences. This system tends to produce narrower majorities and better representation for smaller parties.

The Additional Member System
This is the system used to elect Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and members of the Welsh Assembly (AMs). In this system voters are asked to vote twice; the first vote is used to elect a local constituency MP under the first-past-the-post system. The second vote is cast for a political party, rather than a candidate, and these votes are counted regionally. Regional seats are then allocated to parties based on their share of the votes. This system arguably ensures that seats better reflect vote share whilst also preserving the relationship between constituents and their local MP.

Stop & think!
What do you think about the first-past-the-post voting system? Is it fair? What are the pros and cons of the other types of voting system?
Making laws

One of Parliament’s main roles is to create and amend laws.

Almost every aspect of your life is governed by laws, from going to school to getting married and buying a house.

Laws are there to protect us, ensure fairness and equality, prevent abuse or criminal behaviour, resolve disputes and promote freedom and choice.

Laws can apply to everyone, to individuals or even to organisations. Your local council, for example, has laws which it has to obey. If it failed to do so, it would be acting unlawfully and could face sanctions.

WHY ARE LAWS IMPORTANT?

Laws affect almost every aspect of our lives, from how our schools and hospitals are run, to how we use the roads and operate businesses, and even how countries work together. Laws decide how your health care is funded, what medicines and treatments you can access, even your doctor’s medical education.

Everyday activities are controlled by the law too. Even taking the dog for a walk is subject to legal rules (The Dogs Fouling of Land Act 1996).

Why are new laws needed?

There are a variety of reasons why new laws might be needed. Newly elected governments often want to change some areas of how society is organised, for example with the education system or the health service, to fulfil manifesto promises they made during their election campaign. Existing laws can become out-of-date because of advances in technology or other issues such as the threat of terrorism. New laws are also needed to reflect changes in society.

For example, over time public opinion has become much more supportive of same sex marriage. This led to pressure on the Government to reform marriage laws and eventually resulted in the passing of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in 2013, which allowed same sex couples to marry and share the same legal rights as heterosexual couples.

What would it mean to you if society prevented you from marrying?
WHERE DO NEW LAWS COME FROM?

Ideas for new laws come from lots of different places. New laws may be proposed by the governing party in line with the promises made in their election manifesto, or by Members of opposition parties based on their political views in areas such as taxation, health, and education. Recommendations for new laws may also come from public inquiries, departmental consultations, pressure groups, or lobbyist and campaign groups.

New laws can be introduced by the Government, by individual MPs or members of the House of Lords. A proposal for a new law, or a proposal to change an existing law, is called a ‘Bill’. Bills are introduced in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

Bills go through broadly the same process in both Houses, but some of the details are different. For example, in the Commons, line-by-line scrutiny of a Bill is done by a small group of MPs, whereas in the House of Lords any member can take part.

Each House can make changes to the contents of a Bill but any changes that are made must be agreed to by both Houses before it can become law. When both Houses have agreed on the content of a Bill, it is then presented to the Monarch for approval. This is known as Royal Assent. Once Royal Assent is given, a Bill becomes an Act of Parliament and is law.

Types of Bill

Most Bills are Public Bills. Public Bills change the law as it applies to the general population and are the most common type of Bill introduced in Parliament. They include most Government Bills, which deliver pledges made in the governing party’s general election manifesto or in the speech given by the Monarch at the State Opening of Parliament. Public Bills may also be put forward by backbench MPs or members of the House of Lords.

There are also two other types of Bill: Private and Hybrid.

Private Bills only change the law as it applies to specific individuals or organisations, rather than the general public. They are promoted by local authorities or organisations to give themselves powers beyond the general law, for example local councils who want new powers to set littering penalties.

Hybrid Bills are less common and combine Public and Private Bills. The changes to the law proposed by a Hybrid Bill would affect the general public but also the private interests of some individuals or groups. An example is the High Speed Rail Bill which defines the route of the new line but also affects householders and landowners.

DID YOU KNOW?

Different types of Bill can be introduced by:

- the Government
- individual MPs or members of the House of Lords
- individuals or organisations

Stop & think!

Think about issues you would like to see new laws created for. For example, cyberbullying is a serious problem among young people. Think of all the ways young people can be at risk online. How would you describe cyberbullying in a new Bill so that it was effective in practice? How severe does the bullying need to get before the police intervene?

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Take a look online at the list of Bills currently in progress in Parliament: www.parliament.uk/bills

Is the Government changing something important to you? You can lobby your MP or a member of the House of Lords to persuade them to support a Bill that’s going through Parliament, or to support a policy or campaign you feel strongly about. Anyone can lobby their MP or a member of the House of Lords: it can be done in person, by sending letters and emails or via social media.

You could try to bring about a change in the law by starting a campaign about an issue you feel strongly about. Spread the word online, start a petition, contact the media to raise the profile of your campaign and persuade people to back your cause. Or ask your MP or a member of the House of Lords to support the campaign and raise the issue in Parliament.
From Bill to Act of Parliament

If Parliament wants to change an existing law or introduce a new one, it usually has to pass an Act of Parliament. Here are the main stages of a Bill's journey through Parliament to become law:

1. **FIRST READING**
   - The idea for a new law has reached Parliament and is introduced to either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. In the First Reading a government minister, an MP or a member of the House of Lords formally reads out the title of the proposed new law. The draft law, or ‘Bill’, is then published, printed and put online for people to read.

2. **SECOND READING**
   - During the Second Reading, the main principles and themes of the Bill are debated and any concerns or changes are identified. In the Commons, the House then votes on whether the Bill should proceed any further. If the vote loses then the Bill ends here, but if the vote is in favour then it moves on to the committee stage.

TURN OVER FOR THE NEXT STEPS
When a Bill has completed its journey through Parliament, it is signed by the Monarch. Today this is a formality, but once the Bill is given Royal Assent it becomes an Act of Parliament.

If the Bill started in the House of Commons it now goes to the House of Lords for its First Reading, and repeats the debating and committee stages again. If the Bill started in the House of Lords it goes to the House of Commons for its First Reading, and it goes through the same process. If changes are made to the Bill in the second House it must then be sent back to the first House so that these changes can be agreed to there. In fact, the Bill can go back and forth many times between the Houses to try to agree on final changes. If no agreement is reached, then the House of Commons can vote to pass the law without the approval from the House of Lords, but it’s very unusual for this to happen: usually the two Houses reach a compromise.

The Third Reading is the final chance for Members to discuss the content of a Bill. In the House of Commons, the Third Reading is usually short and no further amendments can be made. In the House of Lords, the Third Reading gives Members the chance to ‘tidy up’ a Bill, making sure there are no loose ends, and that the new law will work properly, without any loopholes.

The Bill now returns to the Chamber, where it is examined further. Members have the opportunity to make further amendments at this stage. It is also a chance for the Government to address last minute changes that were considered at earlier stages.

The Bill is now looked at in detail, line-by-line. In the House of Commons, most Bills are examined by a Public Bill Committee (a small group of MPs). Often Public Bill Committees invite the public to send their views in at this stage, and may also take oral evidence.

The House of Lords committee stage usually takes place in the main chamber: all amendments are considered, there is no time limit on discussion of amendments and any member of the House of Lords can take part and vote.

When a Bill has completed its journey through Parliament, it is signed by the Monarch. Today this is a formality, but once the Bill is given Royal Assent it becomes an Act of Parliament.
One of the most important roles of Parliament is to examine and challenge the work of the Government – known as ‘scrutiny’.

Parliament does this to ensure that the Government remains accountable for what it does. This is done by questioning government ministers, taking part in debates, and through the investigative work of select committees.

**Checking the work of the Government**

**Debates**

Participating in debates is a core part of the work of an MP or a member of the House of Lords.

Apart from debating the Government’s proposals and topics suggested by the Opposition, MPs raise the concerns of their own constituents and at every debate a minister must be present to listen and respond to the points made. Debates in the House of Commons are chaired by the Speaker, who calls MPs to speak one by one.

In the House of Lords, general debates are scheduled to take place, but other short debates may happen when required. These debates allow members of the House of Lords to discuss a broad range of issues of public interest and concern. Unlike in the House of Commons where the Speaker chairs debates, members of the House of Lords manage debates themselves: debates are not chaired by the Lord Speaker.

**Asking Questions**

### Oral questions:

MPs and members of the House of Lords get the opportunity to question government ministers on a regular basis during sessions in the Chambers of both Houses.

In the House of Commons, ministerial question time takes place for an hour every day from Monday to Thursday. Ministers from each government department are scheduled to appear on different days and they must answer the questions they receive.

In the House of Lords, the day starts with a half hour question session where a government spokesperson may be asked to respond to questions on any issue within the Government’s responsibility.

### Written questions:

MPs and members of the House of Lords can also submit questions in writing, to obtain information, press for action or follow-up on ministerial commitments. Government ministers and their teams are required to answer each one quickly and accurately so that they can be made publicly available online.

You can see the oral and written questions that are coming up here: [www.parliament.uk/parliamentary-questions](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary-questions)

### Prime Minister’s Questions:

Prime Minister’s Question Time (PMQs) is one of the most well-known events of the parliamentary week. For half an hour, usually every Wednesday, MPs are given the opportunity to ask questions directly to the Prime Minister in the House of Commons Chamber, on any subject for which the Government is responsible.

PMQs are broadcast live and regularly feature on the news and on social media. You can watch Prime Minister’s Questions at: [www.parliamentlive.tv](http://www.parliamentlive.tv)
DID YOU KNOW?

There is a Youth Select Committee, made up of young people from around the UK. It looks into issues, takes evidence, publishes reports and makes recommendations to the Government on topics important to young people. Their inquiries have looked at how religious discrimination and racism can lead to bullying in schools, and how body image can negatively impact teenagers.

To find out more visit www.byc.org.uk/uk/youth-select-committee

SELECT COMMITTEES

Select committees are made up of a small number of MPs or members of the House of Lords who carry out detailed scrutiny of a particular matter from a cross-party perspective. Select committees hold inquiries to investigate problems and collect evidence, then they make recommendations to the Government. Their findings are public and usually require a response from the Government.

The committee structure in the Commons mirrors the way that the Government is organised, so that, for each department – Health, Education, Defence etc – there is a committee of MPs who monitor their work.

The House of Lords has some permanent select committees that can look into broader subjects such as Europe, science, economics and international relations. These committees utilise the expert knowledge of the members of the House of Lords and you’ll often find specialist doctors looking at health issues, or former diplomats looking at foreign relations. The House of Lords also sets up ‘ad hoc’ committees, which are disbanded when their task is complete, to look at topical issues from artificial intelligence to citizenship and civic engagement.

There are also joint committees, which are made up of both MPs and members of the House of Lords. Some are permanent, like the Joint Committee on Human Rights, but others are set up for specific, short-term investigations.

Select committees in both Houses base their recommendations on the evidence they have collected from appropriate sources, including from members of the public with relevant knowledge or experience. It could even be you!

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Parliament looks closely at the Government’s tax and spending plans and tries to make sure that public money is being spent fairly and efficiently. The Government cannot raise new taxes or spend public money without Parliament’s agreement.

Parliament scrutinises the Government’s finances through the Commons Treasury Select Committee. This is a cross-party committee that investigates the Government’s annual budget and reports back to the House of Commons with recommendations. There is also a Public Accounts Committee, which monitors all government spending, focusing on value for money. They have the power to look into any government department and advise them on how to become more efficient.

Each year the Chancellor of the Exchequer presents the Budget. This sets out how the Government plans to manage public spending for the coming year. These measures are then contained in the annual Finance Bill. Parliament debates the Budget and scrutinises the Finance Bill.
Petitioning Parliament

A petition to Parliament is a formal written request calling for some sort of action from the House of Commons or the Government.

Petitions can be a great way to get your voice heard in Parliament on an issue you feel strongly about. You can send Parliament two types of petition: a paper petition or an online e-petition.

Paper petitions
A paper or ‘public’ petition asks the House of Commons to do something; for example, to make a new law or amend an existing one, or put pressure on the Government to take action on a particular issue. Paper petitions are often about a local issue. This isn’t a rule, but if you start a paper petition you will need to collect handwritten signatures, which is obviously easier to do close to home. Your paper petition can be either handwritten or printed. Once the petition is ready, you need to contact your MP to ask them to present it on your behalf in the House of Commons Chamber. You can find more information on how to submit a paper petition online: www.parliament.uk/paper-petitions

E-petitions
An online e-petition can ask the Government, as well as the House of Commons, to do something. If you want to petition about a national issue, then this is the best way to get signatures from around the country as you will be putting your petition online for anyone to sign. There is no age limit on who can start or sign an e-petition so they can be a great opportunity for you to get your voice heard in Parliament.

How to submit, publish and promote an e-petition:

1. Write your petition. In your petition you need to ask the Government or the House of Commons to do something they have the power to do.
2. Submit your petition online at: petition.parliament.uk
3. Gather support. You’ll need to give the details of five people who support your petition before it’s published online.
4. Your petition is checked. House of Commons staff will check your petition to make sure it meets the standards for petitions. Sometimes a petition might be rejected, but this doesn’t mean Parliament or the Government disagree with it. Most of the time it’s because a similar petition already exists and rather than splitting support for a cause across multiple petitions, petitioners are directed to sign the existing petition.
5. Your petition is published online, ready to collect signatures.
6. Share and promote your petition through social media to gain support.

Sign on the line!
Any petition with 10,000 signatures receives a response from the Government and if a petition gets 100,000 signatures it is automatically considered for debate in Parliament.
The Petitions Committee
Since 2015, the House of Commons has had a dedicated Petitions Committee. The Committee is made up of a group of 11 MPs from across the different political parties.

The Committee makes decisions about which petitions to take action on, for example it might decide that the issue raised by a petition needs to be looked into further. That might mean the issue needs to be debated by MPs or investigated by a different committee, such as the Women and Equalities Select Committee. The Petitions Committee can also conduct an investigation into a petition themselves and make recommendations to the Government for action.

Once a week the Petitions Committee also meets to consider petitions with 100,000 signatures for debate in Parliament. It reviews all Government responses to petitions with over 10,000 signatures, and if Committee members feel the response doesn’t address a petitioner’s request, they will press the relevant government department for further clarification.

H ave Your Say!
Take a look at some of the petitions on Parliament’s website: petition.parliament.uk

Is there already a petition about an issue that’s important to you? If there is, then sign and share it! If not, think about starting your own petition. Who might agree with you?

Think about whether other people might also be motivated to sign the petition. Who can you team up with? Get in touch and work together to get as many signatures as possible. Remember, your petition could be discussed in Parliament!

D ID  Y O U KNOW?
In the 2015—2017 Parliament, 56 petitions were debated in Parliament. Topics included making mental health education compulsory in schools, introducing a sugar tax, and putting a cap on car insurance for 18-25 year-olds.

S top & think
Think about something you would like to start a petition on, something important to you that you would like to change. Make sure it’s something that the Government is responsible for, but it could be a local, national or global issue.
Get involved

Are you passionate about a local or national issue?
It could be anything from the environment to youth services or bullying on social media, as long as it matters to you! There are many ways you can get involved with Parliament and have your say on the issues that affect you.

Contact your MP
You can contact your MP by email, phone, letter or on social media. You could even arrange to meet them in person at the MP’s local surgery to discuss any issues you are concerned about.
Find details for how to get in touch with your MP online: www.parliament.uk/findyourmp

Contact a member of the House of Lords
You can contact members of the House of Lords about issues you care about. Find contact details for each member of the House of Lords online and search members by area of policy interest: www.parliament.uk/lordsmembers

Give evidence to a select committee
If you have relevant knowledge or experience of an issue being investigated by a select committee, then they’ll want to hear from you! You can make a written submission online and you may be invited to give oral evidence at the public inquiry in Parliament. Find out more at: www.parliament.uk/get-involved/committees

Petition Parliament
You can start or sign a petition about an issue you feel strongly about. E-petitions do not have to be presented by an MP and are therefore a more direct way for you to get your voice heard. The Petitions Committee looks at all public petitions on their merits but those with over 100,000 signatures are automatically considered for debate in the Commons. To start a new e-petition, or sign an existing one, visit: petition.parliament.uk

Lobby your MP or a member of the House of Lords
Lobbying is when an individual or a group tries to persuade someone in Parliament to support a particular policy or campaign. Lobbying can be done in person, or by email, letter or via social media.
Anyone can lobby their MP or a member of the House of Lords, but it can be more effective if you can find other people who share your concerns to lobby with you as a group. Businesses, charities, pressure groups and trade unions lobby Parliament regularly.
Find out more about how you can get involved in lobbying your MP or a member of the House of Lords at: www.parliament.uk/lobbying

DID YOU KNOW?
In the UK we have a Youth Parliament. Anyone between the ages of 11–18 can join or stand as a Member of Youth Parliament (MYP), or vote in their annual elections. Members hold debates, run campaigns in their local areas, and inform politicians about the important concerns of young people. Find out more here: www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk
Visit Parliament
Parliament is free to visit, without an appointment. You can also visit on an organised school trip. Watch live debates in one of the Chambers or sit in on select committee sessions, or even apply for a ticket to watch the Prime Minister being grilled at Prime Minister’s Question Time (an appointment is required for this).
Find out more about visiting Parliament at: www.parliament.uk/visiting

Keep up to date with Parliament online
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Glossary

Act of Parliament – a Bill approved by Parliament and therefore now law
Backbencher – backbenchers are MPs or members of the House of Lords that are not government ministers or Opposition spokespeople. They sit in the rows of benches behind their parties’ spokespeople, who are known as frontbenchers
Ballot – a method of secret voting
Ballot paper – a piece of paper used to secretly record a voter’s choice
Bill – proposed legislation (law) which is under consideration by Parliament
Budget – the annual Budget set by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, balancing income raised by taxation with public spending and supporting government policy
By-election – an election to fill an empty constituency, due to the death or resignation of the previous MP
Chamber – the House of Commons and the House of Lords both have a Chamber. These are the rooms where Members meet, debate, and make important announcements and decisions.
Candidate – someone who stands for election as an MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer – the MP and member of the Government responsible for all economic and financial matters, such as government spending or setting taxes
Constituency – an electoral district that an MP is elected to represent
Cross-party – when the members of two or more political parties work together
Crossbencher – a member of the House of Lords who is not aligned with a political party
Devolution – the transfer of political power from a central government to a regional or local government
Election – the voting process to select a person for a public position
E-petition – a collection of signatures gathered online calling for an action or change
General election – when MPs are elected to the House of Commons to represent each of the 650 UK constituencies
Government – the Government is in charge of managing the country and is usually formed by the political party that wins the most seats at a general election
House of Commons – the publicly elected chamber of the UK Parliament where MPs debate the big political issues of the day and proposals for new laws
House of Lords – the second chamber of the UK Parliament where Members help check new laws, challenge the work of the Government and shape public policy
Hybrid Bill – a Bill that combines qualities of both a Private and Public Bill
Lobby – to seek to persuade an MP or member of the House of Lords, specifically on politics or legislation
Lobbyist – a person who lobbies Parliament, usually working on behalf of an organisation
Lord Speaker – the person who oversees proceedings in the House of Lords, guiding and assisting debates rather than controlling or managing them
Manifesto – a set of aims and intentions by a political party and its plans to achieve those goals
MP – a Member of Parliament
Opposition – the political parties without enough MPs elected to Parliament to form a government; these MPs may oppose, scrutinise or challenge the Government’s policies
Parliament – in the UK, Parliament is made up of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarch
PMQs – Prime Minister’s Questions; a weekly session when MPs can ask the Prime Minister questions
Petition – a collection of signatures calling for an action or change
Polling station – a place where voters go to cast their votes in an election
Postal vote – a vote made on your behalf by someone else
Proxy vote – a vote made on your behalf by someone else
Public Bill – a Bill that seeks to change the public law as it applies to everyone
Public Bill – a Bill that seeks to change the public law as it applies to everyone
Q&A – questions and answers
Royal Assent – the signing of a Bill by the Monarch, turning it into an Act of Parliament (a law)
Scrutiny – an intensive examination or investigation
Select committee – a parliamentary committee set up to look into a specific problem or issue
Speaker – the person who chairs debates in the House of Commons, calls MPs to speak and keeps order in the Chamber
State Opening of Parliament – the ceremony marking the start of Parliament’s year; in the House of Lords, the Monarch reads a speech written by the Government with their agenda for the coming session
Surgery – the time when an MP is available to meet with constituents at his or her local office
Voting system (also ‘electoral system’) – a set of rules defining how elections are run and how the results are measured
Youth Parliament – an organisation of young people elected to represent the political views of their peers
Youth Select Committee – a committee of young people that investigates specific youth-related issues and reports to Parliament

Private Member’s Bill – a Bill put forward by an individual MP or member of the House of Lords rather than the Government
