

# HOUSE OF LORDS BRIEFING

## MEMBERSHIP

*Types of Member*  
*Routes to membership*  
*Parties & groups*



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## The membership of the House of Lords

Since its origins as a gathering of feudal magnates and churchmen, the House of Lords has occupied a central role in the United Kingdom's parliamentary system. Members no longer pass on sitting and voting rights to their offspring when they die, although a small proportion of hereditary Members remains (see below). Recent and ongoing changes are a continuation of our evolving constitution. Today there are various routes by which Members are appointed to the House and three main categories of Member:

### Life Peers

Appointed for their lifetime, life Peers make up the majority (about 630) of the total membership (about 750). The power to appoint belongs formally to the Crown, but Members are essentially created on the advice of the Prime Minister. Life Peers' titles cease on death.

### Archbishops and bishops

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. This is because the Church of England is the 'established' Church of the State. When they retire as bishops their membership of the House ceases.

### Elected hereditary Members

The House of Lords Act 1999 ended the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. Until then there had been about 700 hereditary Members. While the Bill was being considered, an amendment was passed which enabled 92 of the existing hereditary peers to remain as Members until the next stage of reform. The 92 elected hereditary peers are made up as follows:

- 15 'office-holders', i.e. Deputy Speakers and Deputy Chairmen, elected by the House;
- 75 party and Crossbench Members, elected by their own party or group;
- two who hold royal appointments—the Lord Great Chamberlain, who is the Queen's representative in Parliament, and the Earl Marshal, who is responsible for ceremonies such as the State Opening of Parliament.



## From Announcement to Introduction

- The **Announcement** is made by No. 10 Downing Street—and, since 2000, by the House of Lords Appointments Commission—that certain people are to become Members of the House. Before anyone becomes a Member, a title has to be agreed, and documents—the Writ of Summons and Letters Patent—prepared. This takes 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 received. 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** (right) 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. A writ accompanies the Letters Patent to a new Member.

**Elizabeth the Second** by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Our other Realms and Territories Queen Head of the Commonwealth Defender of the Faith To Our right trusty and well beloved Counsellor **Bruce Bernard Weatherill of North East Croydon in Our London Borough of Croydon** Chevalier Greeting WHEREAS by the advice and assent of Our Council for certain arduous and urgent affairs concerning Us the state and defence of Our United Kingdom and the Church We have ordered a certain Parliament to be holden at Our City of Westminster on the thirteenth day of June next ensuing and there to treat and have conference with the Prelates Great Men and Peers of Our Realm We strictly enjoining **COMMAND** you upon the faith and allegiance by which you are bound to Us that the weightness of the said affairs and imminent perils considered (waiving all excuses) you be at the said day and place personally present with Us and with the said Prelates Great Men and Peers to treat and give your counsel upon the affairs aforesaid And this as you regard Us and Our honour and the safety and defence of the said Kingdom and Church and dispatch of the said affairs in nowise do you omit **WITNESS** Ourself at Westminster the fourteenth day of May in the fiftieth year of Our Reign

PHILLIPS

To **BRUCE BERNARD LORD WEATHERILL**

*A Writ of Summons to Parliament*

PHILLIPS



*An Introduction*

- The **Introduction** (left) is a short ceremony lasting about five minutes which takes place at the beginning of business. Sometimes there are two Introductions a day. Each new Member has two supporters (usually, but not necessarily, of their party or group). After they have been introduced, party affiliations are confirmed by party whips, or by the Convenor of the Crossbench Peers.

- The **Oath of Allegiance** must be taken or solemn affirmation made by all Members before they can sit and vote in the House. Members need to take the Oath on Introduction, in every new Parliament and on the death of a monarch.

- 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 non-controversial.

## Different routes to becoming a Member of the House of Lords

### House of Lords Appointments Commission

The Government announced its intention to establish the House of Lords Appointments Commission in its White Paper: *Modernising Parliament; Reforming the House of Lords* (January 1999). The Commission, set up in May 2000, is a non-statutory non-departmental advisory public body. It has two main functions: to make recommendations to the Queen for non-political Peers and to vet for propriety all nominations for peerages, including those from political parties. The Commission began its search for new Members on 13 September 2000 and announced its first list of 15 non-party political Members in April 2001. As early as March 1998, the press had anticipated that these Members would be different from the usual honours lists and more representative of society at large, and dubbed them 'Peoples' Peers'.

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

**New Year's Honours and Birthday Honours** (to celebrate the Queen's official birthday in early June).

Since the establishment of the Appointments Commission in 2000, life peerage announcements on these occasions have become rare.

### Dissolution Honours

At the end of a Parliament, peerages may be given to some MPs from all parties who are leaving the House of Commons.

### 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 — 'working Peers'

Although the term 'working Peer' does not denote any officially recognised class of Member, it has been used by the press to refer to Members who have been appointed on a party basis, to boost each of the three main party groups' strengths and on the expectation that they will attend regularly and take on frontbench work as spokesmen or whips.

### One-off announcements

These can cover peerages for someone appointed as a minister who is not a Member of the House.

### Archbishops and bishops

Since the mid-nineteenth century the number of bishops in the House has been limited to 26. The remaining diocesan bishops qualify for membership according to seniority, the longest serving bishop outside the Lords succeeding to a vacancy among the Lords Spiritual. The archbishops of Canterbury and York are usually given life peerages on retirement.

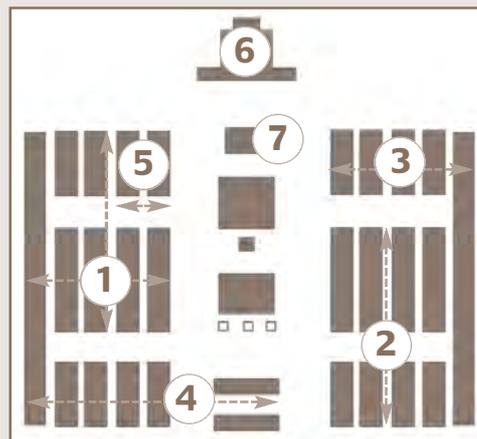
### Speakers

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



### Groups and seating in the Chamber

- 1: Government benches
- 2: Opposition benches
- 3: Liberal Democrat benches
- 4: Crossbenches
- 5: Bishops' benches
- 6: The Throne
- 7: The Woolsack



## Party organisation

Members of the House of Lords are organised on a party basis in much the same way as the House of Commons, but with important differences: Members of the Lords do not represent constituencies and many are not Members of a political party. Those who do not support one of the three main parties are known as Crossbenchers or independent Peers. There is also a small number who are not affiliated to any of the main groups. Members sit in the Chamber according to the party or group they belong to (see plan).

### The changing membership of the Lords



- **14<sup>th</sup> century** The Lords begin 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 Commons' Members represent the shires and boroughs.
- **15<sup>th</sup> century** Lords Temporal become known as 'Peers'.
- **18<sup>th</sup> century** Acts of Union with Scotland (1707) and Ireland (1800) entitle Scottish and Irish Peers to elect representatives to sit in the Lords.
- **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.
- **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.
- **2005 Constitutional Reform Act** Provides for the separating of the House's judicial function from Parliament and changes the role of Lord Chancellor; ending his role a 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. The current Law Lords become the first justices of the Supreme Court.