



Inside the House of Lords



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Find out about the second chamber of the UK Parliament and what it does.

The UK Parliament is where big decisions are made about things that affect our lives, such as the environment, hospitals and schools. Parliament has three parts – the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch (currently Queen Elizabeth II). You may know about the House of Commons, where Members of Parliament (MPs), who are elected by the public, meet to discuss the important issues of the day. However, the House of Lords also has an important role to play in how the country is run.

What is the House of Lords?



The House of Lords is the second chamber of the UK Parliament. Like MPs in the House of Commons, members of the House of Lords check the work of the Government – the group of people led by the Prime Minister who are in charge of running the country – to make sure it's fair. They also debate important issues and suggest changes to new laws. Plans for new laws are known as bills, and they have to be approved by all three parts of Parliament before they can become the law (although the monarch hasn't rejected a new law since 1707).

What do they do?

There are around 800 members of the House of Lords, also known as peers. Most members have knowledge from their careers in areas like arts and culture, charities, education, health, the military, science and sport, and many of them have also been MPs in the House of Commons. They use this experience to check that the details in a bill make sense and are fair. Members who have been surgeons, for example, will have knowledge of how hospitals work, and they can use this knowledge to help make the law about healthcare better.



Inside the House of Lords.

WOW!
Past and current members of the Lords have won over 45 Olympic and Paralympic medals between them.

DID YOU KNOW?
The House of Lords can ask the House of Commons to think again about a bill (proposal for a new law) if they don't think it is fair or sensible.

Meet some of the members of the House of Lords



Lord Alli
Date appointed: 1998
Political party: Labour
Subjects of interest: Human rights, young people, media
Current and past jobs: Previously chairman of online fashion retailer Asos and former president of the National Youth Theatre.
Did you know... when Lord Alli was appointed almost 20 years ago, he was the youngest member of the Lords.



Baroness Benjamin
Date appointed: 2010
Political party: Liberal Democrats
Subjects of interest: Communities and families, education, culture and the arts, media
Current and past jobs: Vice-president of children's charity Barnardo's. TV and theatre actor, writer, producer and presenter.
Did you know... Baroness Benjamin voices Mama Mirabelle the elephant in *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies* on CBeebies.



Baroness Eaton
Date appointed: 2010
Political party: Conservative
Subjects of interest: Education, community relations, social services
Current and past jobs: She has spent a lot of time working for and supporting charities, as well as being a teacher.
Did you know... she is part of a Lords select committee (a small group of members) that is investigating children's understanding of politics.



Baroness Grey-Thompson
Date appointed: 2010
Political party: Crossbencher, meaning she does not belong to a political party
Subjects of interest: Sport, culture and the arts
Current and past jobs: She is a board member of the BBC and chair of UKactive, a charity promoting active lifestyles. Formerly, she was a very successful paralympic athlete.
Did you know... Baroness Grey-Thompson competed in five successive Paralympic Games.

Who are the members?

Many members of the Lords belong to a political party, which is a group of people who have similar ideas about how the country should be run, like the Conservatives, Labour or Liberal Democrats. However, many do not. These non-party-political members include independent crossbenchers. Crossbenchers are called this as they sit on benches that run across the Lords Chamber rather than down the sides, where members who belong to the Government or Opposition parties sit. Another independent group are the 26 bishops from the Church of England who are members of the Lords, alongside a range of other faith leaders who are life peers.



How do people join?



Members of the House of Lords are appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister or an independent group of people called the Appointments Commission. Members are chosen for their knowledge and experience and they are appointed for life. They come from many different backgrounds and have a wide range of interests and experience. Life peerages were brought in 60 years ago. Before then, members inherited their place in the House of Lords, passing membership from parent to child. These were known as hereditary peers. There are still around 90 hereditary peers and there are regular discussions about how the House of Lords should work in the future. Some people feel that peers should be elected, like MPs, so the public has more of a say in who helps to make the big decisions in Parliament. Others say that electing peers could result in the House of Lords losing the wide range of expertise that it currently has, and that the Lords could become less independent and less effective at challenging the Government.