



## HOUSE OF LORDS

Playing a vital role in making laws  
Investigating public policy  
Checking government action

The House of Lords is part of the UK Parliament in London



Parliament is the heart of our democracy. It is the meeting place for the House of Commons and the House of Lords.



Making laws



Investigating



Questioning and debating



Asking government to think again

The House of Lords is the second chamber of Parliament

It is independent from and complements the work of the elected House of Commons – they share responsibility for making laws and checking government action.

# Checking bills and making better laws

The Lords plays an essential role in improving bills (draft laws): highlighting potential problems and ensuring they will be workable laws.

## How a bill becomes a law

All bills except tax and spending bills must be approved by the House of Lords and the House of Commons to become law. A bill goes through these steps in each House:

- 1 First reading**  
Bill is introduced (no debate)
- 2 Second reading**  
Debate on main principles
- C Committee stage**  
Line by line examination
- R Report stage**  
Further examination
- 3 Third reading**  
Final debate
- CA Consideration of amendments (or 'ping pong')**
- RA Royal assent (law)**  
When both Houses agree the final content, a bill gets royal assent and is made law

## Differences in the House of Lords

Most MPs (members of the House of Commons) belong to the party of government so the government usually wins votes on bills in the Commons. Most members of the House of Lords do not belong to the governing party; the crossbenchers and the bishops don't belong to any political party.

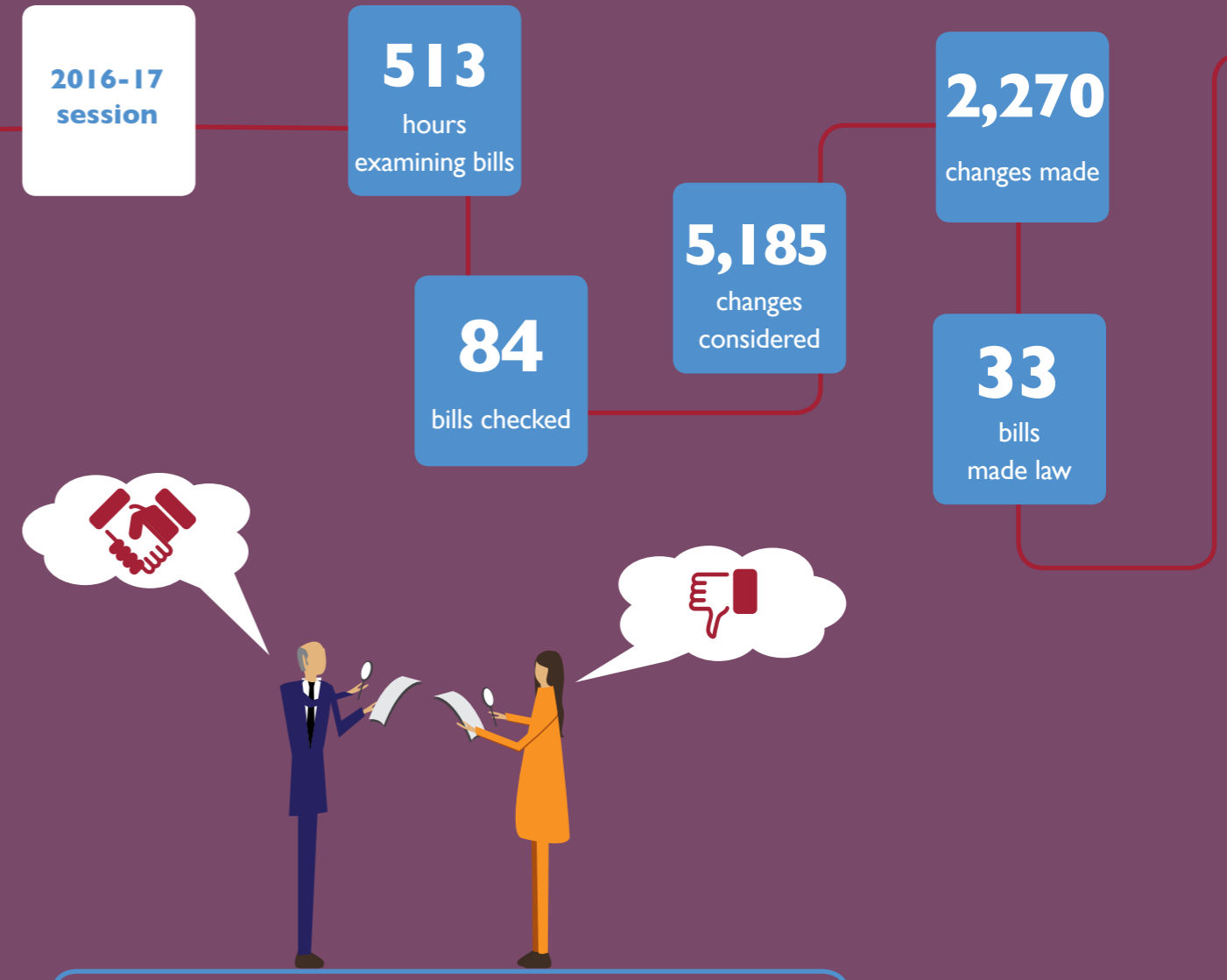
There are also important differences between the Houses in how they carry out some of the steps (left) in checking a bill. In the Lords, at:

- **committee stage** – there is no selection of amendments: all can be considered
- **committee stage** – debate on amendments is not time limited
- **third reading** – 'tidying up' amendments can be made.

## Value of the House of Lords

The lack of a government majority, the more relaxed party discipline, and the fact that Lords procedures give members freedom to propose and debate changes (amendments), mean that the Lords sometimes reaches different conclusions on bills, and agrees amendments asking the Commons and the government to 'think again'. And Lords committees check all bills for changes to the constitution and to government powers.

# The House of Lords spends most of its time in the chamber checking bills



## Wide-ranging committee investigations into public policy

Committee work is a way for the House to investigate public policy and government activity in detail. The experience of the House's membership is an especially useful resource in carrying out this work.

Committees are smaller groups of members regularly meeting individuals, organisations and government representatives during their investigations. They investigate broad, long-term issues and produce in-depth reports on their findings. The reports are debated by the House in the chamber and often provoke discussion outside Parliament. The government always responds to House of Lords reports, which the committee follows up.

Everyone can watch committees at work. Entry to watch meetings is free and meetings are broadcast online.

# 41 reports

made by the six main committees in 2016-17 session

### The main six investigative committees examine:

- the constitution
- communications
- economic affairs
- the European Union and Brexit
- international relations
- science and technology.

## Questioning government action, seeking information and debating current issues

Another important function of the House of Lords is to hold government to account.

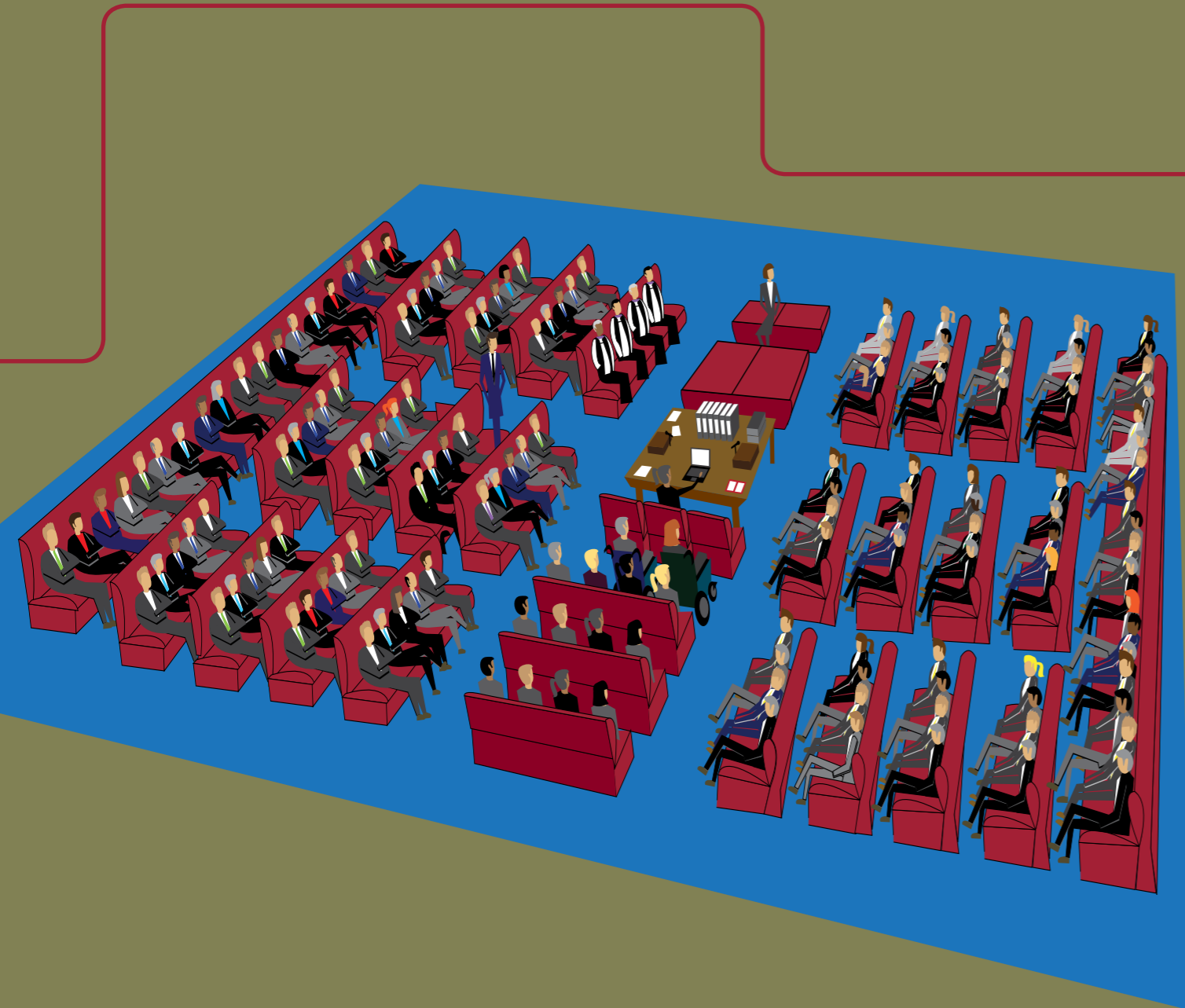
- **Questions** are asked in the chamber at the start of business. They are also asked in writing. They are a chance to seek information about government decisions and actions.
- The government makes **statements** to the House about developments and emergencies, or to report back after international meetings. Statements provide valuable time for members to ask questions and probe government activity.
- **Debates** take place on public policy and on specialist issues. They are an opportunity to draw the government's attention to concerns.

2016-17 session

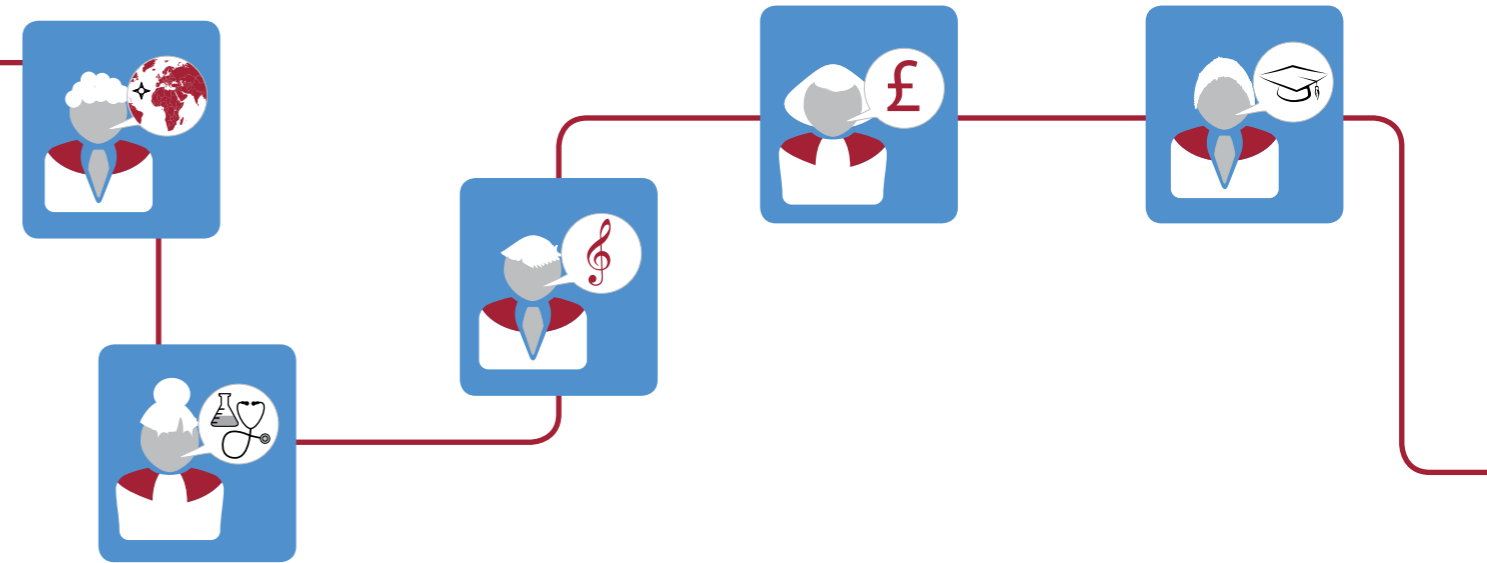
7,380 questions asked

154 debates held





## Breadth of knowledge and independence of thought



Members of the House of Lords come from different backgrounds and professions. Many remain active in their careers and are experts in their fields – the House draws on this professional experience in its examination of legislation and government actions and during its investigative committee work.

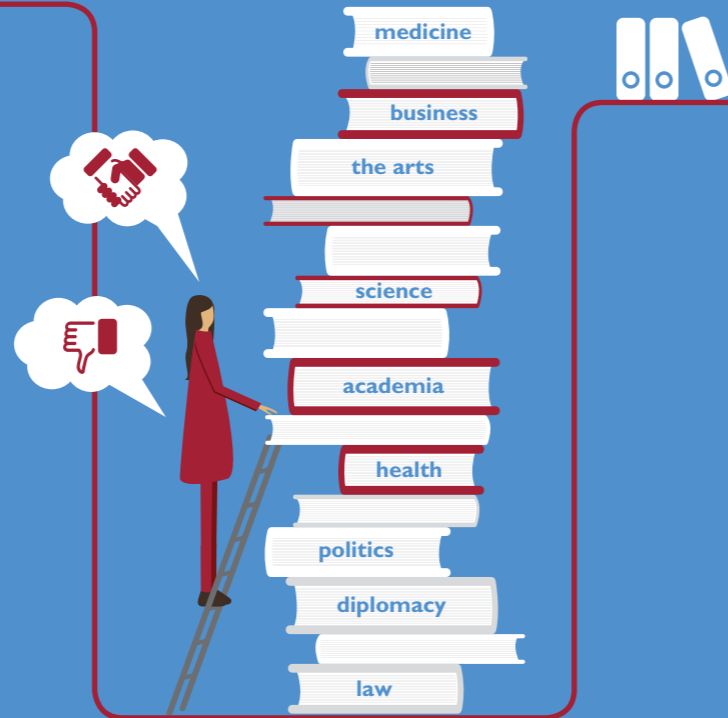
### Diversity and breadth of knowledge

Most members of the House have a political background, while others have worked as doctors, soldiers, technology experts, business people, nurses, scientists, writers, judges, lawyers and police officers. Many members are also involved with charitable, voluntary and civil society organisations.

### Independent thinkers

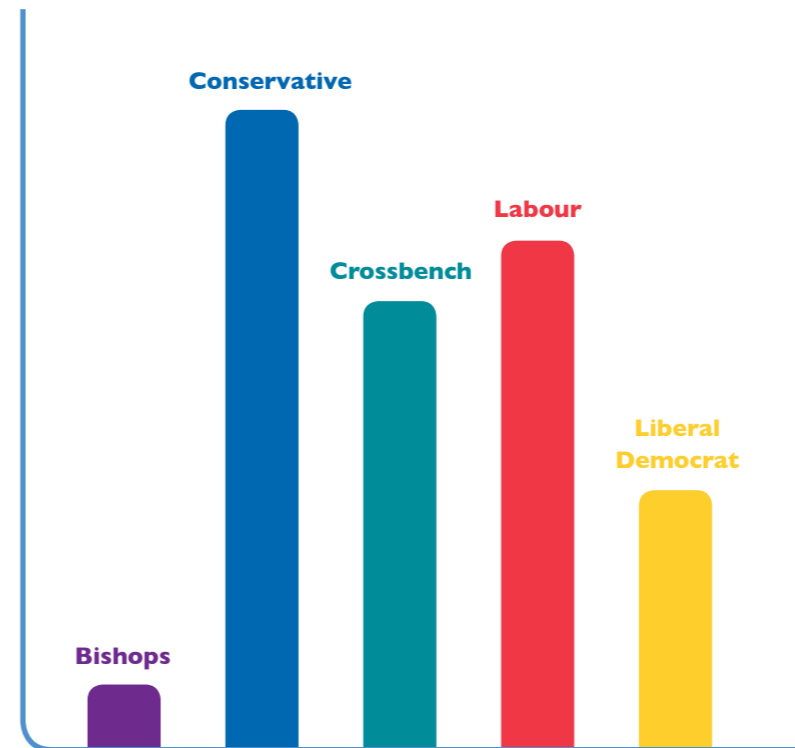
The House of Lords is characterised by independence of thought and a commitment to in-depth consideration of public policy.

- Members who belong to political parties are not subject to the same degree of discipline as in the House of Commons – they do not necessarily vote according to their party's policy.
- A significant part of the membership is non-party political: the crossbenchers and the bishops.
- Members represent the issues that concern them, not geographical constituencies.



Members of the House of Lords are appointed by the Queen on the advice of the prime minister. Some non-party political members are recommended by an independent body, the House of Lords Appointments Commission ([lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk](http://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk)).

### Members by party or group



There are about 800 members who are eligible to take part in the work of the House of Lords.

House of Lords membership figures are not fixed or capped. For up to date figures go to [www.parliament.uk/lords](http://www.parliament.uk/lords)

2016-17 session

484

Average daily attendance

The unit which defines Parliament's work is a session. It varies in length but, whether calculated by session, calendar or financial year, the working year averages around 150 sitting days. The figures in this booklet relate to the 2016-17 session.

## People



Leader of the House of Lords



Lord Speaker



Clerk of the Parliaments



Black Rod

### Leader of the House of Lords

The Leader of the House of Lords is the most senior government representative in the House and a member of the cabinet. She is responsible for the government's business in the Lords and leads a team of about 25 ministers and whips.

The Leader also has obligations to the House as a whole: expressing its collective feelings on formal occasions and giving procedural advice, eg in disputes over who will speak next during questions.

### Lord Speaker

The Lord Speaker presides over business in the chamber. The House of Lords is self-regulating so, unlike the Commons' Speaker, the Lord Speaker does not call the House to order or choose who will speak next. The Lord Speaker is elected by the House and is politically impartial.

### Clerk of the Parliaments

The Clerk of the Parliaments is the most senior official in the Lords, he employs the staff and is responsible for its management, administration and finances. He also has responsibilities in the chamber during business.

### Black Rod

Black Rod is responsible for controlling access to and maintaining order within the House and its precincts. She also has important ceremonial duties.

## Organisation

### How the business of the House is run

The government and the main opposition party or parties each have a leader, business managers ('whips') who organise the work of the House and spokespeople who sit on the frontbench. The crossbenchers have a convenor.

### The administration

The administration supports the whole House in carrying out its duties. It is responsible for advising on parliamentary procedure and is politically impartial. It also performs a range of everyday corporate functions, from finance and catering to property management and security.

Decisions about how the House operates are made by groups of members or staff with responsibility for these issues.





## Reaching out

Members connect with new audiences and open up new ways of explaining the work of the House.



### Increasing awareness

Members play an active ambassadorial role in building an understanding of the House and its membership as part of their contribution to parliamentary life.

The House of Lords outreach programme encourages members to meet with and hear from individuals and groups from every part of the UK, with activities including:

- sending members into schools to talk to and answer questions from GCSE and sixth-form students about the work of the House
- welcoming groups to the House for events and tours
- hosting an annual event for people to debate in the chamber.

To register your school in the Peers in Schools programme, email: [lordspeaker@parliament.uk](mailto:lordspeaker@parliament.uk). Find out more about this programme and other House of Lords outreach initiatives at: [www.parliament.uk/lordspeaker](http://www.parliament.uk/lordspeaker)

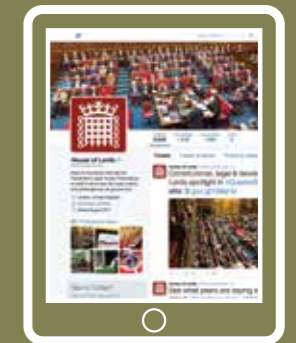
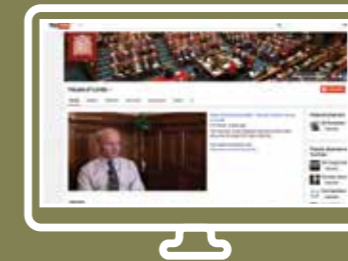
Parliament's Education Service offers resources and opportunities for teachers and students. Go to: [www.parliament.uk/education](http://www.parliament.uk/education)

Parliament's Outreach Service shows how you can get involved with parliamentary processes. Visit: [www.parliament.uk/outreach](http://www.parliament.uk/outreach)

## Lords online

Find out more about the House of Lords through a range of digital resources.

- **Twitter** – find out what's happening in the House of Lords: [@ukhouseoflords](https://twitter.com/ukhouseoflords)
- **Flickr** – view photos from the House of Lords: [www.flickr.com/ukhouseoflords](http://www.flickr.com/ukhouseoflords)
- **YouTube** – watch films explaining the work of the House of Lords: [www.youtube.com/ukhouseoflords](http://www.youtube.com/ukhouseoflords)
- **Facebook** – like the House of Lords on Facebook: [facebook.com/ukhouseoflords](https://facebook.com/ukhouseoflords)





## Find out more

Contact us or go online for information about business, membership and outreach activities.

Call or email us to request this publication in an alternative format.

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