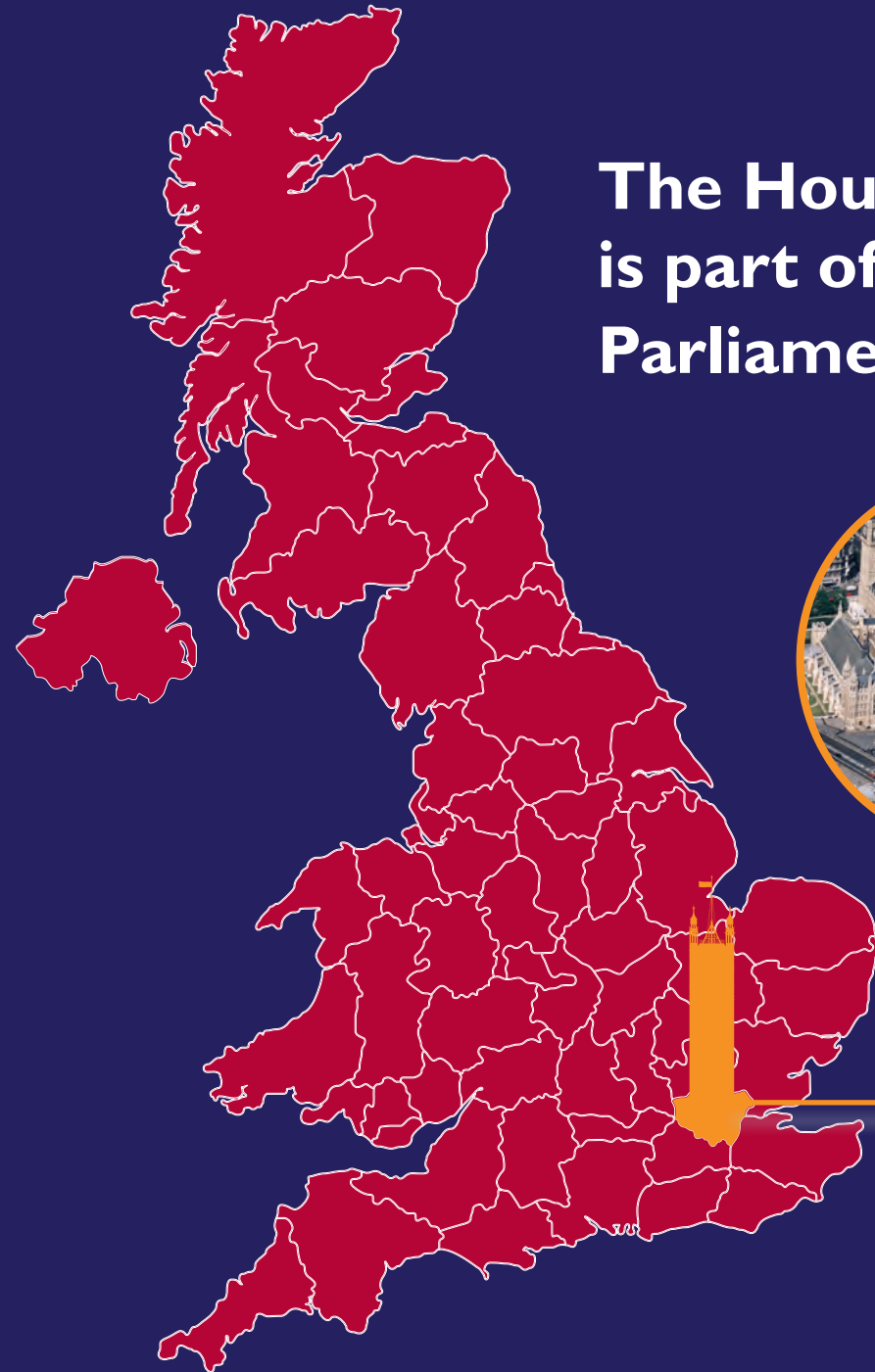


HOUSE OF LORDS

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.



### The House of Lords is the second chamber of Parliament.

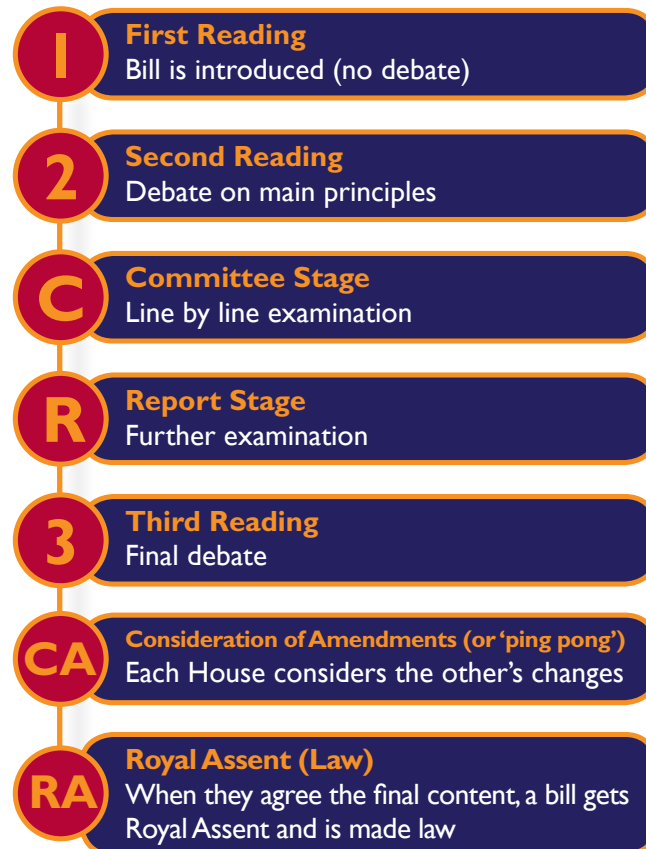
It is independent from, and complements the work of, the elected House of Commons – they share responsibility for making laws and checking government action.

## Checking bills and making better laws

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

### How a bill becomes a law

All 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:



### Differences in the House of Lords

Most bills are brought to Parliament by the government and most of the MPs in the House of Commons belong to the party or parties of government, so the government usually wins votes on bills in the Commons. Fewer than half the members of the House of Lords belong to the government parties. This is because many members don't belong to a political party; the crossbenchers and bishops.

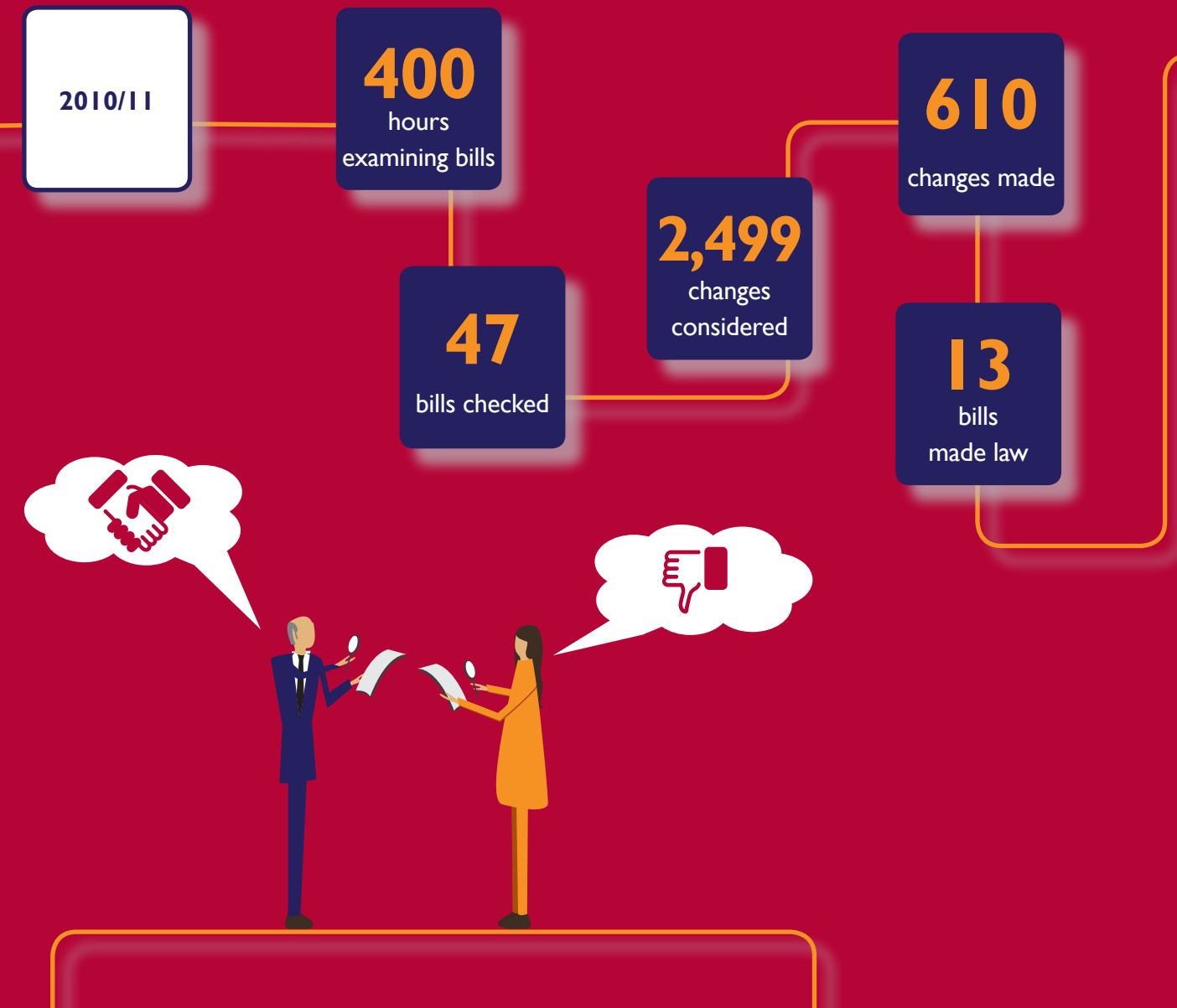
There are also important differences between the Houses in how they carry out some of the steps (left) in checking a bill. In the Lords, at:

- 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 the House's procedures give members great freedom to propose and debate amendments, mean that the Lords sometimes reaches different conclusions on bills, and agrees amendments asking the Commons and the government to 'think again'.

## 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 that meet away from the chamber, regularly meeting people, 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.

# 39 reports

made by the five main committees in 2010/11

**The permanent five committees examine these subjects:**

- the constitution
- communications
- economic affairs
- the European Union
- 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.

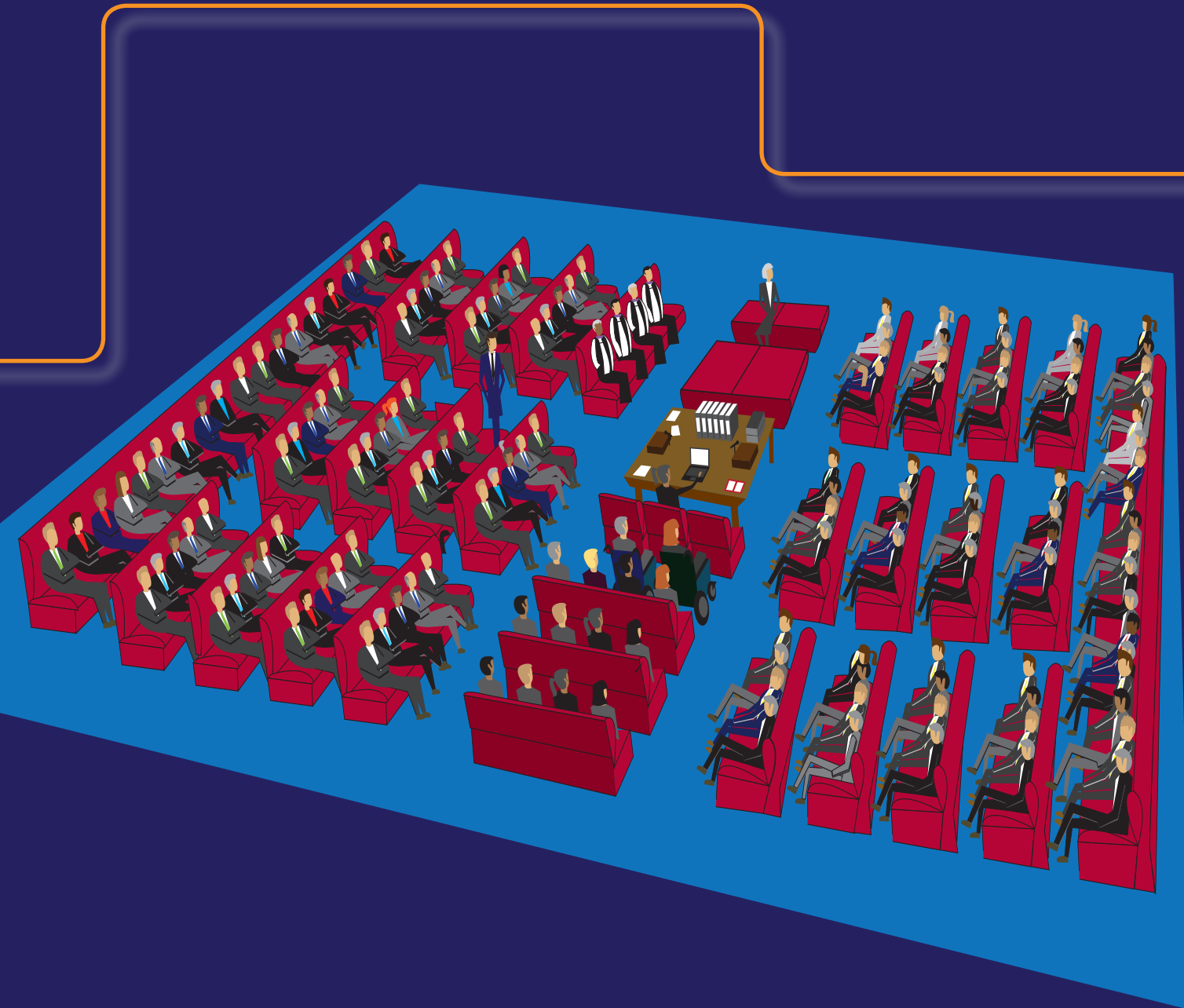
- **Questions** are asked in the chamber at the start of business. They are also asked in writing. They are a chance to seek information about government decisions and actions.
- The government makes **statements** to the House about developments and emergencies, or to report back after international meetings. They 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.

2010/11

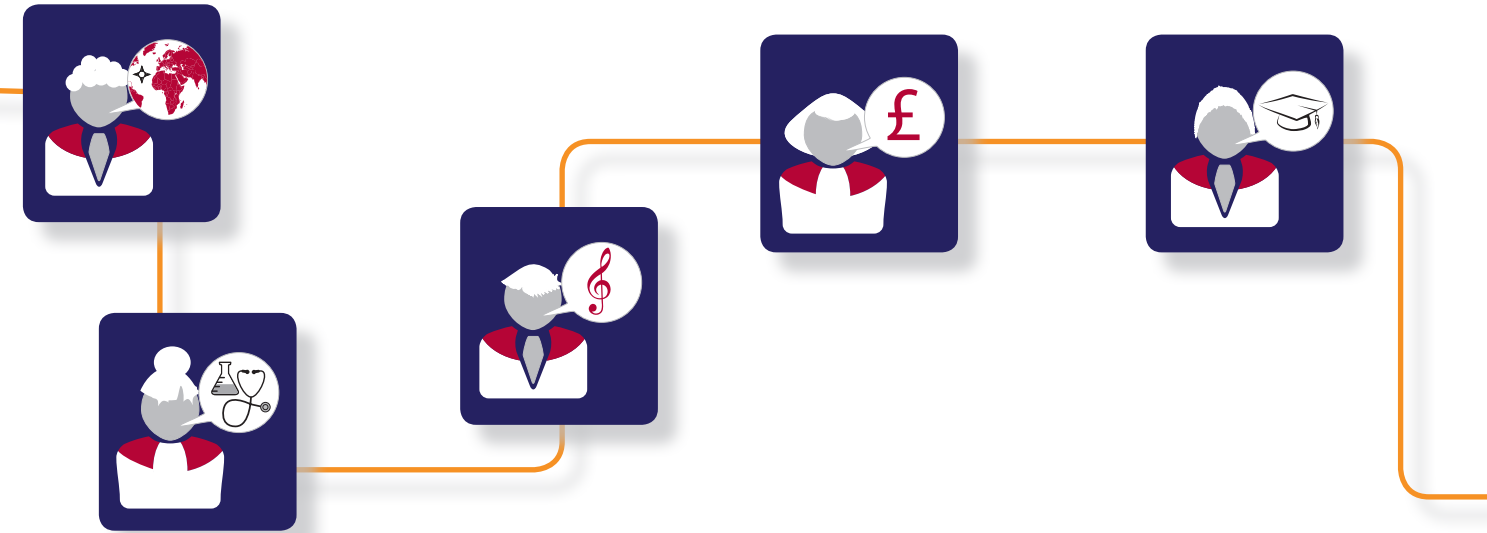
**7,546**  
questions  
asked

**73**  
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, and to carry out its investigative committee work.

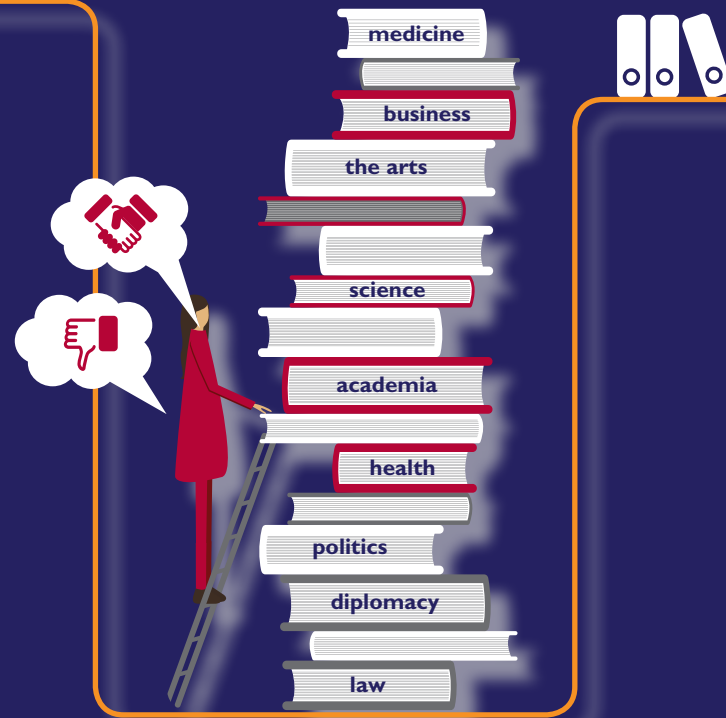
### Diversity and breadth of knowledge

Most members have a political background, some don't. All come from different walks of life, from across the UK, and represent a wide range of professions – in medicine, law, business, the arts, science, sports, education, the armed forces, diplomacy and public service.

### Independence of thought

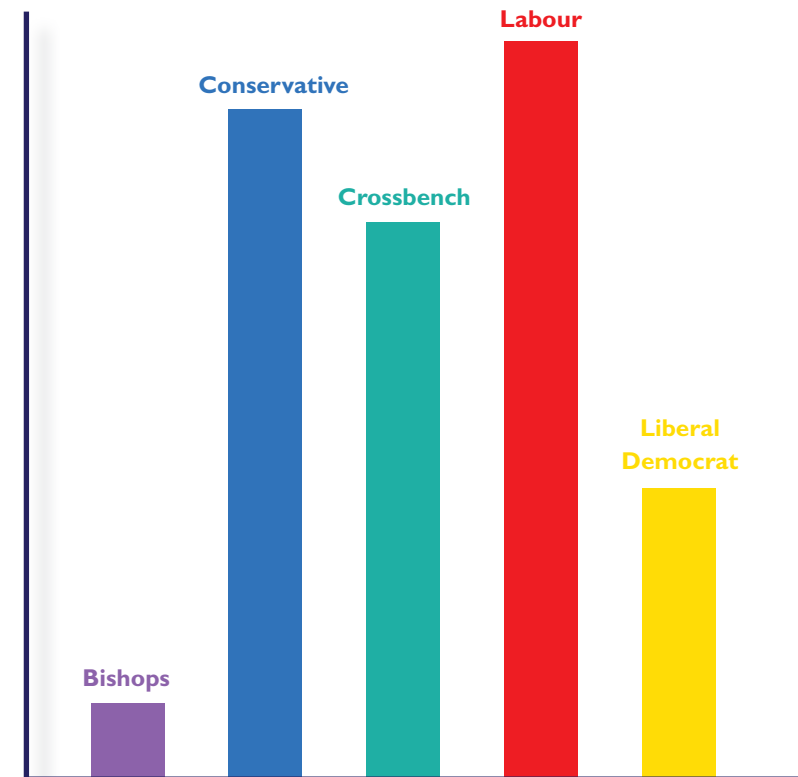
The House of Lords is characterised by independence of thought:

- members who belong to the 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 of the House of Lords 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 the House of Lords Appointments Commission, an independent body ([www.lordsappointments.gov.uk](http://www.lordsappointments.gov.uk)).

### Members by party or group



House of Lords membership figures are not fixed. There are approximately 800 members. This graph indicates proportions of the parties and groups (as at 31 March 2011).

2010/11

429

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 statistics in this booklet relate to the 2010/11 financial year.



# 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 is a member of the Cabinet and the most senior member of the government in the Lords, responsible for its business in the House. He 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, e.g. 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 security, controlling access to and maintaining order within the House and its precincts. He 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.



### Members of the Lords reach out

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 young people to debate in the chamber.

Members have visited over 500 schools. Register your school in the Peers in Schools programme, email: [lordspeaker@parliament.uk](mailto:lordspeaker@parliament.uk). Find out more about our initiatives from [www.parliament.uk/lords](http://www.parliament.uk/lords)

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 delivers free training and 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 multimedia and online resources that complement our website, including:

- Facebook and Twitter activities
- House of Lords photo and video content available from Flickr and YouTube
- Lords of the Blog ([lordsoftheblog.net](http://lordsoftheblog.net)) – hear firsthand about life and work in the House from its members





## Find out more

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

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