

Research Briefing

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# Evolution and changing composition of select committees



## Summary

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Numbers of committees and members
- 3 Women on select committees
- 4 1979 Parliament
- 5 1983 Parliament
- 6 1987 Parliament
- 7 1992 Parliament
- 8 1997 Parliament
- 9 2001 Parliament
- 10 2005 Parliament

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Numbers of committees and members</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Size of select committees</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Women on select committees</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>1979 Parliament</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>1983 Parliament</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>1987 Parliament</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Changes during the Parliament</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>1992 Parliament</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Changes during the Parliament</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>1997 Parliament</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>2001 Parliament</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>9.1</b>	<b>Changes during the Parliament</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>2005 Parliament</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>10.1</b>	<b>Changes during the Parliament</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>10.2</b>	<b>Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>2010 Parliament</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>2015 Parliament</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>12.1</b>	<b>2016 – Changes under Theresa May’s administration</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>2017 Parliament</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>13.1</b>	<b>Changes during the Parliament</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>2019 Parliament</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>14.1</b>	<b>Changes during the Parliament</b>	<b>37</b>

<b>15</b>	<b>Speeding up the nomination of committee members?</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Further data</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>Key to committee names in graphic</b>	<b>43</b>
	<b>Appendix: Key to committees for charts</b>	<b>44</b>

## Summary

When they were first established in 1979, there were 14 departmental select committees, including the Welsh Affairs Committee and the Scottish Affairs Committee, which were established shortly after the first 12.

Over time the number of departmental select committees appointed under what is now Standing Order No 152 has increased to 20. In addition, following the creation of the Department for Exiting the European Union, in 2016, a temporary Standing Order was agreed, in both the 2015 and 2017 Parliaments, to establish the Exiting the European Union Committee, to scrutinise the work of the Department for Exiting the European Union. The Exiting the European Union Committee was re-established at the beginning of the 2019 Parliament, for 12 months. On 2 March 2020, following the closure of the Department, the Committee was renamed the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union.

The changes in the numbers and names of committees have generally followed changes to the structure of government. As departments were created, split, merged, or simply renamed committees were similarly established, replaced, abolished or renamed. However, from time to time committees have been established to scrutinise existing departments that either did not have a corresponding committee or were scrutinised by another committee.

This note revises and updates Appendix 2, Evolution of select committees, which appeared in the Library Research Paper [The Departmental Select Committee System](#), which was published on 15 June 2009.

It also reviews the composition of select committees, reporting on the number of places held by women when committees were first nominated at the beginning of each Parliament from 1979 to 2019.

Generally, it does not discuss non-departmental select committees, provided for by other Standing Orders.

# 1 Introduction

Select committees have featured in the work of the House of Commons for centuries. However, the current system of departmental select committees was established in 1979, and this review confines itself to committees since then.

On 25 June 1979, the House agreed to establish 12 departmental select committees, with either nine or 11 members.<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Affairs Committee was established on 26 June and the Scottish Affairs Committee on 31 October 1979.<sup>2</sup>

This note revises and updates Appendix 2, “Evolution of select committees”, which appeared in the Library Research Paper *The Departmental Select Committee System*,<sup>3</sup> which was published on 15 June 2009. It incorporates data on the changing composition of departmental select committees, providing information on the number of committees and members appointed to committees, and the number of women on select committees. It also reports the length of time it took to establish committees at the beginning of each Parliament since 1979.

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<sup>1</sup> [HC Deb 25 June 1979 cc33-251](#).

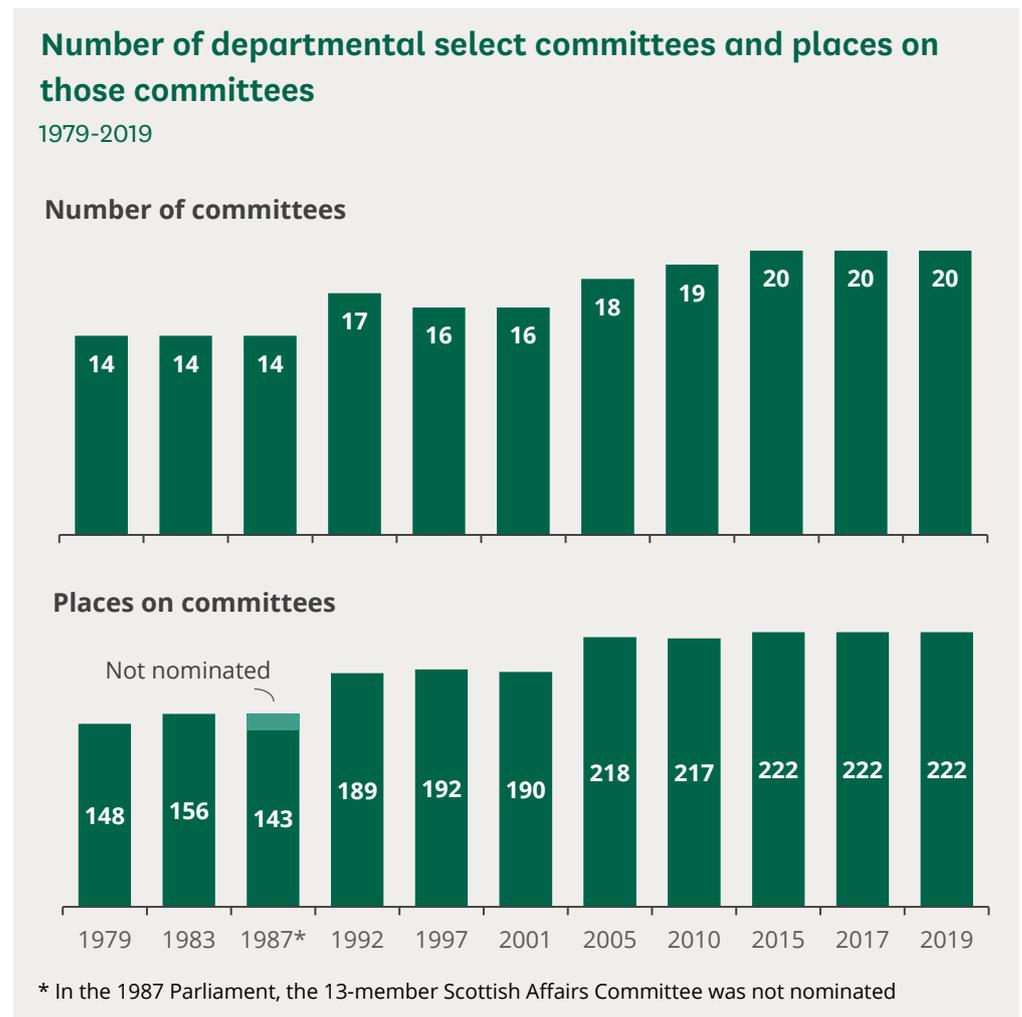
<sup>2</sup> [HC Deb 26 June 1979 cc359-361](#); [HC Deb 31 October 1979 1390-1391](#).

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library Research Paper RP 09/55, [The Departmental Select Committee System](#), 15 June 2009

## 2

# Numbers of committees and members

Over time, both the number of committee members and the number of committees increased. Figure 1 shows the number of places available on and the number of departmental select committees appointed at the beginning of each Parliament since 1979, under what is now [Standing Order No 152](#).



At the beginning of the current Parliament (the 2019 Parliament), there were 20 departmental select committees (under Standing Order No 152), with 222 places. In addition, the House appointed the temporary Exiting the European Union Committee, with up to 21 members. It was appointed for 12

months and ceased to exist on 16 January 2021.<sup>4</sup> The Committee had also been appointed part way through the 2015 Parliament, and in the 2017 Parliament, but it is not included in this analysis.

## 2.1 Size of select committees

Since 1979, the majority of departmental select committees nominated in each session have had 11 members. However, from time to time in order to address specific demands for places from Members, including from the smaller parties, ad hoc changes have been made to the size of individual committees in particular parliaments.

In 1997, following departmental mergers, two 17-member committees were appointed. Both had sub-committees to scrutinise the pre-merger subjects of the departments: the Environment, Transport and the Regions Committee and the Education and Employment Committee. In 2001, there were also two 17-member committees: the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee but only the latter had two permanent sub-committees.

Between 1979 and now, there have been occasions when the size of select committees was considered, in wider examinations of select committees.

In 2002, the Modernisation Committee recommended that select committees should increase in size to 15 members:

Our investigations were in part the result of the controversy last summer that arose from the competition between a large number of Members for a small number of places on the departmental select committees.

**We recommend that the standard size of departmental scrutiny committees should be fifteen.** Such an increase would retain the membership of any one committee to a manageable size but would enable up to fifty more Members of Parliament to play a full part in committee scrutiny.<sup>5</sup>

The recommendation was not implemented. However, at the beginning of the 2005 Parliament, six committees were increased in size to 14 members. In its report on [The work of committees in 2007-08](#), the Liaison Committee commented that:

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<sup>4</sup> The Exiting the European Union Committee was re-established at the beginning of the 2019 Parliament, for 12 months [[HC Deb 16 January 2020 cc1 267-1 268](#)]. On 2 March 2020, following the closure of the Department, the Committee was renamed the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union

<sup>5</sup> Modernisation Committee, [Select Committees](#), 12 February 2002, HC 224-I 2001-02, paras 44-50

The membership of many committees has risen over 30 years from nine to 11 and now to 14 – not at our request.

[...]

The increased number of select committee places has made it more difficult to replace Members when they leave committees. The length of time taken to appoint new Members was an issue raised in our report last year, and it remains a concern.

It recommended that:

... An end to unilateral action to increase committee sizes is required. In its place, there should be consultation between the Whips and committee chairmen with the aim of adjustment downward in the size of some committees no later than the start of the next Parliament.<sup>6</sup>

Later in the same year, the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons (the Wright Committee) noted the Liaison Committee's concerns about the size of select committees, and proposed that the "new House of Commons reduce the size of its standard departmental committees to not more than 11; Members in individual cases can be added to specific committees to accommodate the legitimate demands of the smaller parties".<sup>7</sup>

In the 2010 Parliament, four committees other than the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (14 members) had more than 11 members.

In the 2015, 2017 and 2019 Parliaments, the size of all departmental select committees, except the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (maximum of 13 members) has reverted to a maximum of 11 members. In 2019, including the elected chair, only 11 members were nominated to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

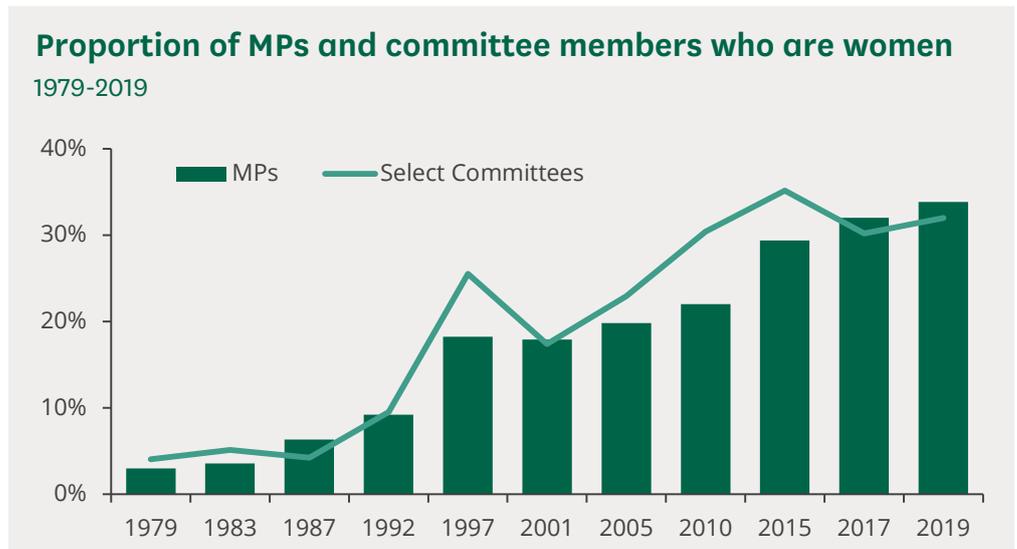
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<sup>6</sup> Liaison Committee, [The work of committees in 2007-08](#) (PDF), 11 March 2009, HC 291 2008-09, paras 78-80

<sup>7</sup> Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, [Rebuilding the House](#) (PDF), 24 November 2009, HC 1117 2008-09, para 55

### 3 Women on select committees

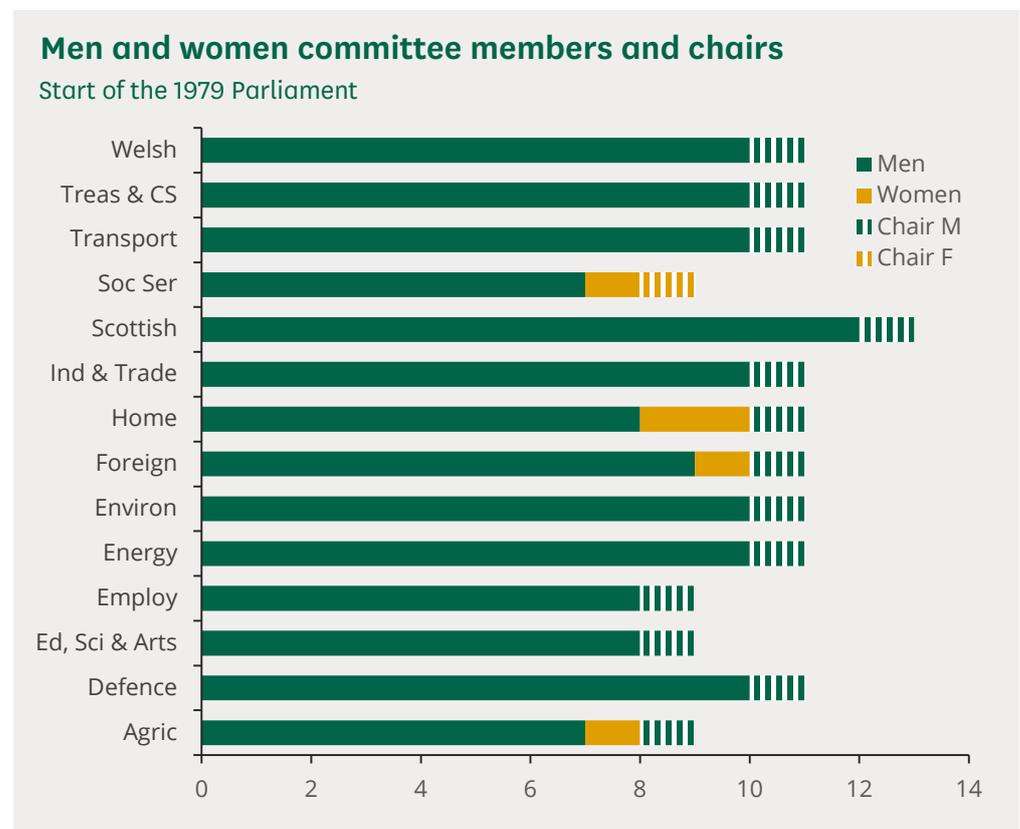
The proportion of women MPs appointed to departmental select committees has broadly mirrored the increasing proportion of women MPs elected to Parliament at general elections. The proportion of places held by women on select committees has usually been higher than the proportion of women in the House at the start of a parliament.



Among the initial nominations to departmental select committees in 1979, 1983 and 1987, more knights were appointed than women. In 1979 six women were nominated; in 1983 and 1987, it was eight women and seven women, respectively. At the beginning of each of the three Parliaments, nine knights were nominated to serve on select committees.

## 4 1979 Parliament

On 25 June 1979, the House agreed to establish 12 departmental select committees, four with nine members and eight with 11 members.<sup>8</sup> On 26 June 1979, it additionally agreed to establish an 11-member Welsh Affairs Committee,<sup>9</sup> and then on 31 October 1979, a 13-member Scottish Affairs Committee was established.<sup>10</sup> A total of 148 places were available on the 14 committees. All 148 members were appointed by the House on 26 November 1979.<sup>11</sup>



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

In accordance with the rules of the House, a decision was possible on the appointment of each individual that was nominated.<sup>12</sup> On 26 November

<sup>8</sup> [HC Deb 25 June 1979 cc33-251](#)

<sup>9</sup> [HC Deb 26 June 1979 cc359-361](#)

<sup>10</sup> [HC Deb 31 October 1979 1390-1391](#)

<sup>11</sup> [HC Deb 26 November 1979 cc1029-1069](#)

<sup>12</sup> Erskine May, Parliamentary Practice, 25th edition, 2011 9 p802, [para 38.5](#)

1979, a separate decision was taken on Keith Best's membership of the Welsh Affairs Committee.<sup>13</sup>

When the members of the committees were first nominated, six women were appointed to four committees and one – Renee Short – was chosen as the chair of the Social Services Committee.

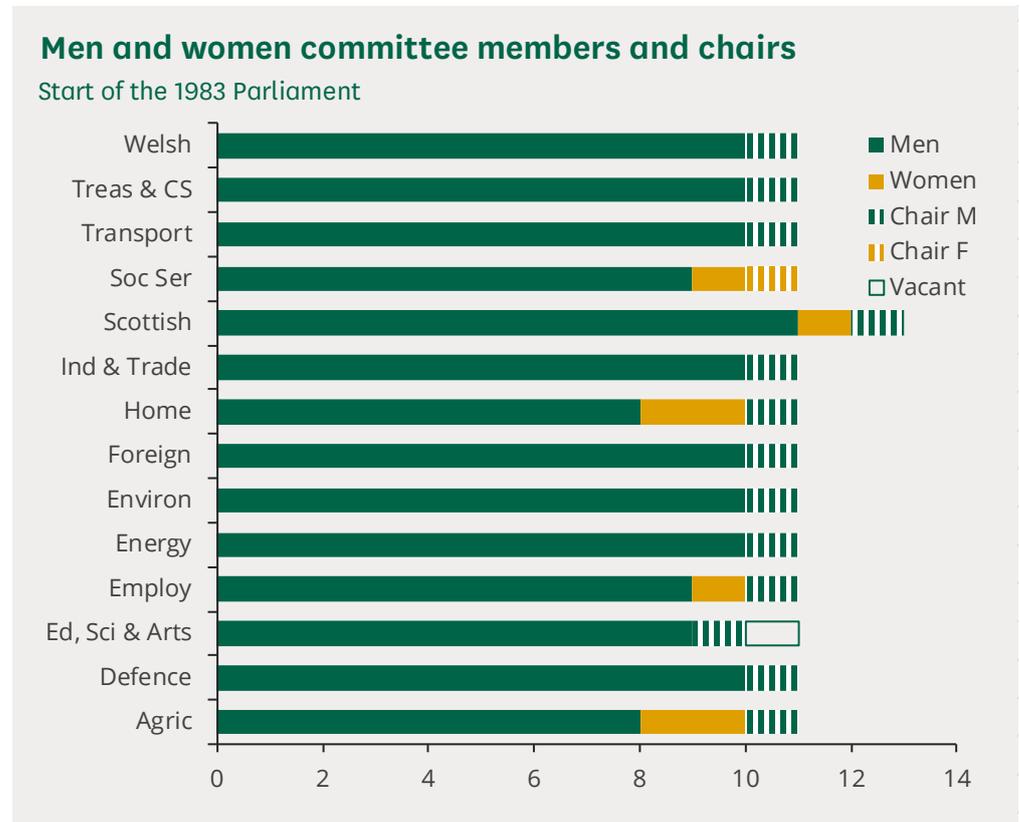
All 148 places were filled by different Members.

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<sup>13</sup> [HC Deb 26 November 1979 cc1068-1069](#)

## 5 1983 Parliament

On 14 December 1983, the House agreed that the maximum number of members on the Agriculture, Education, Employment and Social Services Committees should be increased to 11. The House also agreed that the Industry and Trade Committee should be renamed the Trade and Industry Committee (reflecting the merger of the previously separate Department of Trade and the Department of Industry). In the same debate, Alan Beith proposed increasing the size of the Welsh Affairs Committee to 13 members: this proposal was rejected by 129 votes to 26.<sup>14</sup>



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

When the members of the committees were first nominated, a total of 156 places were available on the 14 committees

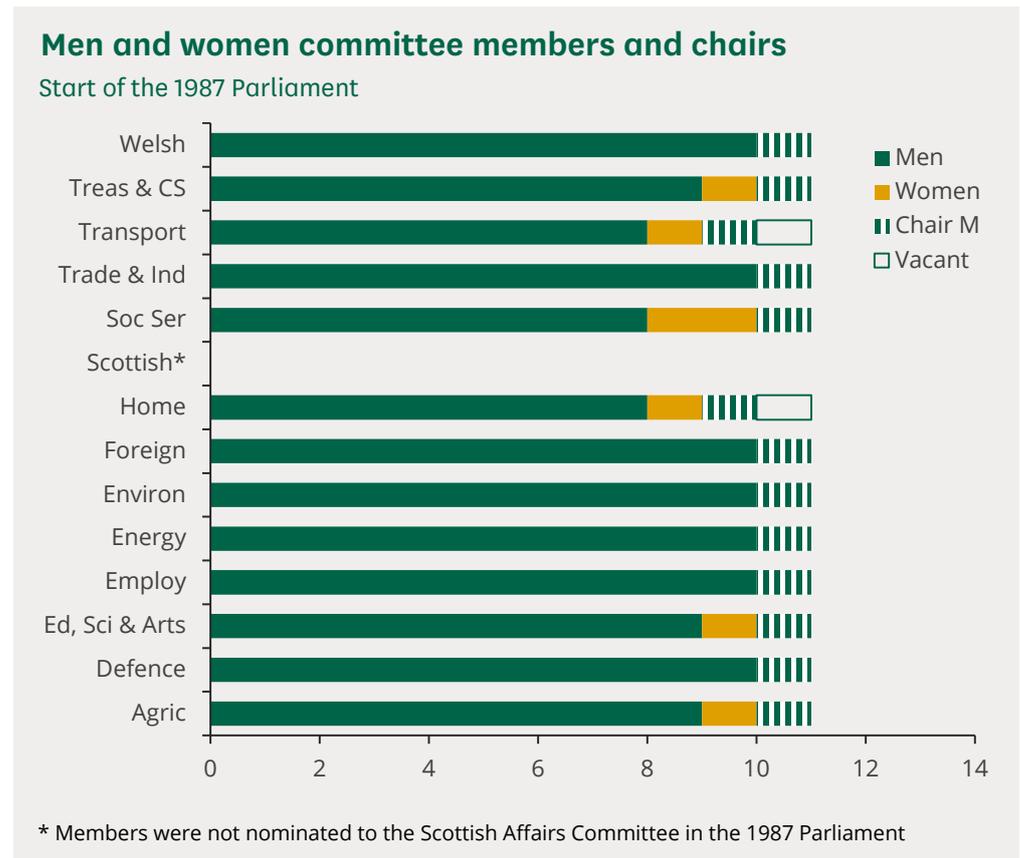
<sup>14</sup> [HC Deb 14 December 1983 cc1111-1117](#)

Eight women were appointed to five committees. Renee Short was again chosen as the chair of the Social Services Committee.

Initially, all but one place on the 14 committees was filled. The 155 filled places were all taken by different Members.

## 6 1987 Parliament

As members were not nominated to the Scottish Affairs Committee, a total of 143 places were available on the 13 remaining 11-member committees.



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

Seven women were appointed to six committees. At the beginning of this Parliament, no women were chosen as chairs of departmental select committees.

In all 141 different Members were nominated and there were two vacancies.

### 6.1 Changes during the Parliament

On 19 October 1990, the House agreed to replace the Social Services Committee of 11 members with two separate 11-member committees – the

Health Committee and the Social Security Committee – following the splitting of the Department of Health and Social Security.<sup>15</sup>

On 18 July 1991, the membership of the Education, Science and Arts Committee was increased to 13. Before the increase, the Committee had shadowed the Department of Education and Science; afterwards it shadowed the Department of Education and Science and the Office of Arts and Libraries. (At the same time details of the responsibilities of the Home Affairs, Scottish Affairs and Treasury and Civil Service Committees were amended.<sup>16</sup>)

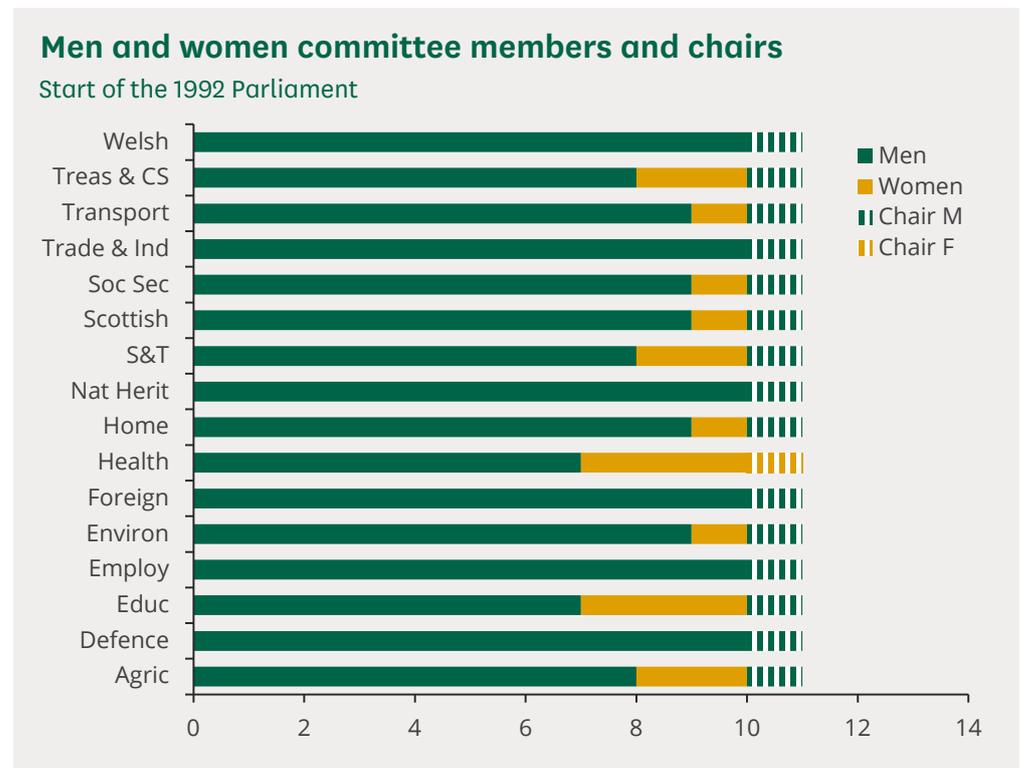
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<sup>15</sup> [HC Deb 19 October 1990 c1542](#)

<sup>16</sup> [HC Deb 18 July 1991 cc576-606](#)

# 7 1992 Parliament

On 30 June 1992, the Education, Science and Arts Committee became the Education Committee, and its membership was reduced to 11. The Scottish Affairs Committee's membership was also reduced to 11. The Energy Committee was abolished (following the abolition of the Department) and the National Heritage Committee was created (following the creation of a new department). The Science and Technology Committee was also created to shadow the work of the Office of Science and Technology, a departure from the strict departmental select committee system. (Changes were also made to the remit of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee.<sup>17</sup>)



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

In 1992, there were 16 11-member committees at the beginning of the new Parliament. A total of 176 places were available.

In all, 18 women were nominated to departmental select committees. One – Marion Roe – chaired the Health Committee.

<sup>17</sup> [HC Deb 30 June 1992 cc796-824](#)

All 176 places were filled but one MP was nominated to two committees.

## 7.1

# Changes during the Parliament

On 9 March 1994, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee was established with 13 members.<sup>18</sup> Speaking in the debate, Tony Newton, the then Leader of the House of Commons, commented on the size of the Committee:

On the size of the Committee, the Procedure Committee's first thoughts were for 16 members, but in its later report it recommended 13 or 15. The Government propose that the Committee should have a maximum of 13 members because, the larger the Committee, the more unwieldy it is likely to become. ...

... The Government strongly support the Procedure Committee's recommendation that each of the Northern Ireland parties should have a place on the Committee and that, in accordance with normal practice, the Government should expect to be able to command a majority on it.<sup>19</sup>

On 24 November 1994, the House debated the establishment of the Deregulation Committee, to examine proposals for deregulation orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. Its creation led to some changes to the Standing Order on departmental select committees.<sup>20</sup>

On 7 November 1995, to reflect machinery of government changes, the Education Committee and the Employment Committee were replaced by an Education and Employment Committee with 13 members (this change was effective from 1 March 1996). The House also agreed to a proposal to establish an 11-member Public Service Committee to shadow the Office of Public Service, and the Treasury and Civil Service Committee became the Treasury Committee.<sup>21</sup> The Public Service Committee was included in the list of departmental select committees.

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<sup>18</sup> [HC Deb 9 March 1994 cc340-371](#)

<sup>19</sup> As above, cc345-346

<sup>20</sup> [HC Deb 24 November 1994 cc764-789](#)

<sup>21</sup> [HC Deb 7 November 1995 cc752-776](#)

## 8 1997 Parliament

In 1997, the incoming Labour Government, made a number of changes to the structure of departments. These changes were reflected in a number of changes to the names of select committees.

The merging of the Department of Environment and the Department of Transport (to form the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions) led to the creation of a 17-member select committee. The size of the Education and Employment Committee was also increased to 17. Both of these committees were given the power to establish two sub-committees. An 11-member International Development Committee was appointed. The Public Service Committee's remit was given to the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC).<sup>22</sup> PASC also retained the responsibilities of the existing Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. PASC was not governed by Standing Order No 152.

Other departmental committees retained a membership of 11, with the following exceptions: the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee continued to have 13 members; and the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Treasury Committee had 12 members for the 1997 Parliament.<sup>23</sup>

On 25 July 1997, the National Heritage Committee was renamed the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.<sup>24</sup>

The establishment of the Environmental Audit Committee on 10 November 1997 also required some changes to the Standing Order on departmental select committees.<sup>25</sup>

A number of changes to the Standing Order were made to permit changes to European scrutiny,<sup>26</sup> changes to the remits of the Scottish and Welsh Affairs Committees to reflect the devolution settlement,<sup>27</sup> and to provide for joint meetings of select committees.<sup>28</sup> The establishment of the Regulatory Reform

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<sup>22</sup> [HC Deb 8 July 1997 c839](#)

<sup>23</sup> [HC Deb 10 July 1997 c1169](#)

<sup>24</sup> [HC Deb 25 July 1997 c1197](#)

<sup>25</sup> [HC Deb 10 November 1997 c683](#)

<sup>26</sup> [HC Deb 17 November 1998 cc778-807](#)

<sup>27</sup> [HC Deb 25 October 1999 cc775-780](#)

<sup>28</sup> [HC Deb 29 March 2001 c1194](#)

Committee, in place of the Deregulation Committee, also required changes to the Standing Order.<sup>29</sup>



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

Following the quite substantial machinery of government changes by the incoming Blair Government, 16 departmental select committees were established. Both the 17-member committees, the Education and Employment Committee (Ed & Emp) and the Environment, Transport and the Regions Committee (ETRA), appointed two sub-committees and chose two chairs each, to chair their sub-committees.

In all, 192 places were available. They were filled by 192 different MPs, of which 49 were women.

For the first time, at least one woman was nominated to each of the departmental select committees.

Two women were chosen as chairs. Both were joint chairs of the two 17-member committees.

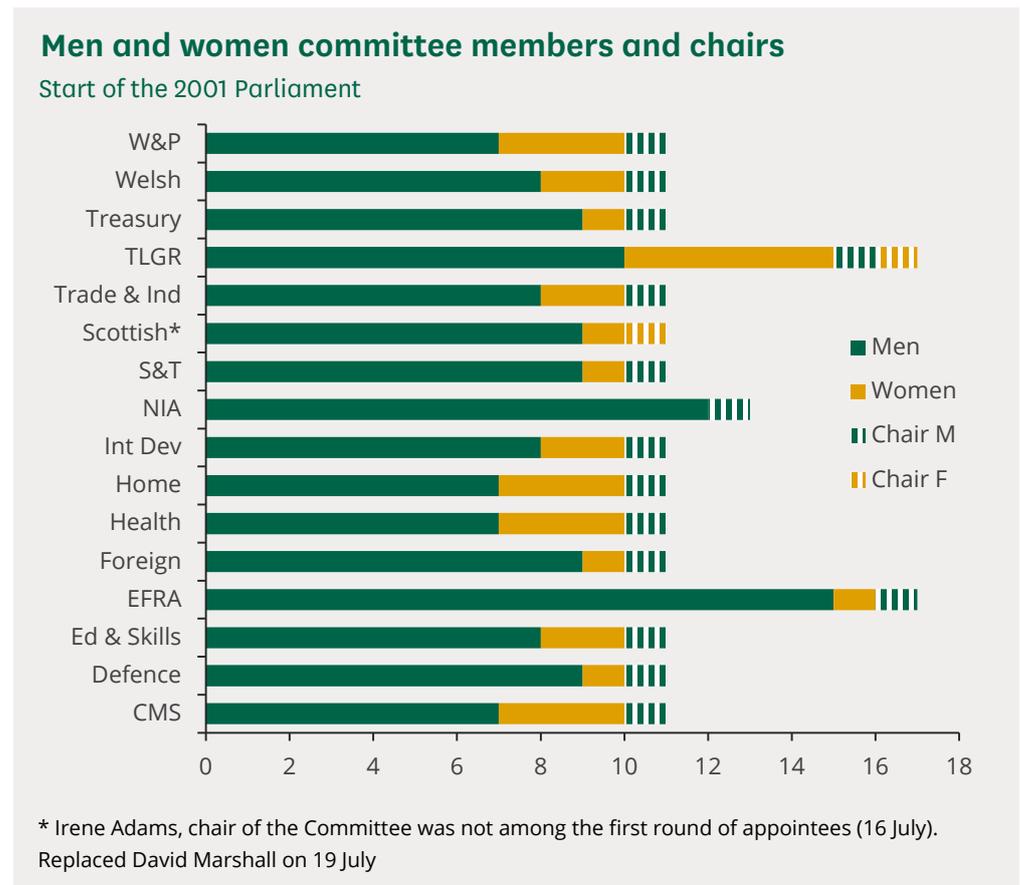
<sup>29</sup> [HC Deb 2 May 2001 cc869-903](#)

## 9 2001 Parliament

Major changes to the size of committees were made following the election in 2001, as a result of further machinery of government changes. The new committees were:

- Education and Skills – 11 members;
- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – 17 members;
- Transport, Local Government and the Regions – 17 members; and
- Work and Pensions – 11 members

These committees replaced the Agriculture; Education and Employment; Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs; and Social Security Committees.<sup>30</sup>



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

<sup>30</sup> [HC Deb 5 July 2001 cc478-512](#)

In 2001, there continued to be two 17-member committees – now the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee – although only the latter had two permanent chairs.

With the exception of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, all the remaining committees had 11 members so 190 places were available. They were filled by 187 different MPs. Only 33 places were taken by women.

Two women were again chosen as chairs.

## 9.1 Changes during the Parliament

Further changes were made in July 2002 following the splitting of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions into the Transport Department and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Two 11-member committees, the Transport Committee and the ODPM Committee were established.<sup>31</sup>

In January 2003, the Lord Chancellor's Department Committee was established to scrutinise the work of the Lord Chancellor's Department. It had 11 members.<sup>32</sup> (The work of the Lord Chancellor's Department had previously been scrutinised by the Home Affairs Committee.) In September 2003, following the establishment of the Department for Constitutional Affairs, the Committee was renamed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> [HC Deb 22 July 2002 cc729-732](#)

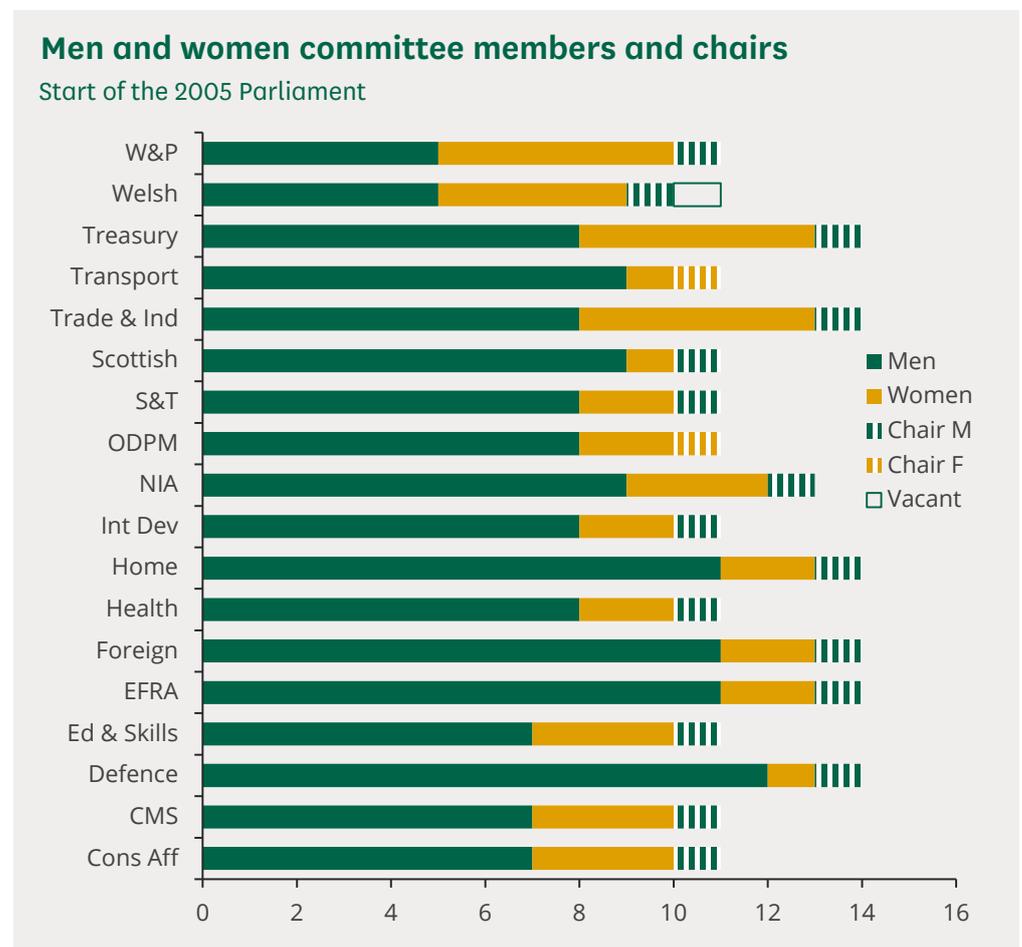
<sup>32</sup> [HC Deb 27 January 2003 cc677-688](#)

<sup>33</sup> [HC Deb 11 September 2003 c560](#)

# 10

## 2005 Parliament

After the 2005, General Election, changes were made to the size of select committees. The only remaining 17-member committee (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) saw its membership reduced to 14 but the House agreed to increase the membership of the Defence, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Trade and Industry and Treasury Committees from 11 to 14, “reflecting the considerable interest in serving on those committees”.<sup>34</sup>



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

In total there were 18 committees, with 218 places: 50 places were filled by women.

<sup>34</sup> [HC Deb 13 July 2005 c838-929](#)

A vacancy on the Welsh Affairs Committee was filled on 20 July 2005, the day after the initial nominations were agreed by the House.<sup>35</sup>

The 217 places filled on 19 July 2005 were taken by 215 MPs.

Two women were again chosen as chairs.

## 1 0.1

### Changes during the Parliament

On 25 July 2007, following Gordon Brown's appointment as Prime Minister, changes were made to select committees following machinery of government changes that saw the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills replace the Department for Education and Skills; the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform replace the Department for Trade and Industry; and the Ministry of Justice replace the Department for Constitutional Affairs. Controversially, the Science and Technology Committee was abolished and its responsibilities largely transferred to the Innovation, Universities and Schools Committee (the IUS Committee). Despite the creation of new committees, the House agreed that serving select committee chairs would continue as chairs of the new committees, with their existing service counting towards their term limits:

for the purposes of Standing Order No. 1 22 A (Term limits for chairmen of select committees) the Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Committee, the Children, Schools and Families Committee, the Innovation, Universities and Skills Committee and the Justice Committee shall be deemed to be the same committees as the Trade and Industry Committee, the Education and Skills Committee, the Science and Technology Committee and the Constitutional Affairs Committee respectively.<sup>36</sup>

On 11 March 2008 the two committees had their titles changed without any change in remit. This was done at their own request. The IUS Committee wanted the word 'Science' to feature in its name; the Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Committee wanted the words 'Regulatory Reform' to be dropped to avoid confusion with the Regulatory Reform Committee that already existed, with rather different functions.<sup>37</sup>

On 28 October 2008 a new committee, the Energy and Climate Change Committee, was appointed with effect from 1 January 2009.<sup>38</sup> This followed the establishment of the Department for Energy and Climate Change early in October 2008.

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<sup>35</sup> CJ (2005-06) 1 45 [19 July 2005], 1 52 [20 July 2005]

<sup>36</sup> [HC Deb 25 July 2007 cc939-940](#)

<sup>37</sup> [HC Deb 11 March 2008 c255](#)

<sup>38</sup> [HC Deb 28 October 2008 cc843-868](#)

On 5 June 2009, the Government announced further machinery of government changes. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, which had been established in 2007, was incorporated into the expanded Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

On 25 June 2009, the House agreed to changes to Standing Order No 152. The Business and Enterprise Committee was replaced by the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee was replaced by the Science and Technology Committee.

The House agreed a motion to effect these changes of name, to deem that the proceedings of the former committees were proceedings of the new committees, and that for the purposes of the Standing Order relating to length of service of select committee chairs, the chairs of the new committees were deemed to be continuing in the same posts. The motion was agreed without a division,<sup>39</sup> and the changes came into effect from 1 October 2009.

In the course of the debate, the remit of the new Science and Technology Committee was considered. In an intervention during Barbara Keeley, the Deputy Leader of the House's, opening speech, Brian Iddon noted that the Committee was being established as a departmental select committee, "whereas it was a free-standing Committee before, with cross-cutting oversight of all Departments, including outside agencies". He asked the minister to "confirm that, despite the Committee being set up today as a departmental Select Committee, it will still have the remit of the former Science and Technology Committee". In response, the Minister confirmed that it would continue to have a remit across Government. She said that:

The motion and the steps to be taken reflect the position between 1992 and 2007, when the Science and Technology Committee was appointed to examine the work of the Office of Science and Technology, part of the old Department for Trade and Industry. The role of the Government Office for Science is somewhat narrower than that of the old Office of Science and Technology. Although the interpretation of the Committee's terms of reference is a matter for the Committee itself, the Government hope that it will take a wide-ranging approach to its remit, examining the full scope of science policy and related matters across the Government. That approach certainly worked well for the old Committee, which conducted inquiries into subjects as diverse as evidence-based policy making, classification of illegal drugs, regulation of hybrid embryos and the work of the research councils.

There is an argument for establishing an explicitly cross-cutting Committee with its own Standing Order to examine such issues, and we are sympathetic to that idea, but at this stage in the Parliament, the new Committees can be expected to run for only seven months from October, so we think it right for us to revert to the old status quo, retaining the existing membership and

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<sup>39</sup> [HC Deb 25 June 2009 c1 01 7-1 01 8](#)

chairmanship of the two Committees, but changing their titles and terms of reference.<sup>40</sup>

## 1 0.2

# Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons

In July 2009, the House appointed the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, to consider, among other things “the appointment of members and chairs of select committees”.<sup>41</sup> The Committee’s Report, *Rebuilding the House*, was published in November 2009.<sup>42</sup> It made a number of recommendations which the House considered on 22 February and 4 March 2010. In relation to select committees, the House agreed that:

- the principal select committees ought to be appointed within six weeks of the beginning of the Session at the start of a new Parliament;
- the maximum number of Members on departmental select committees should be 11 – an exception was made for the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (13 members) – with effect from the beginning of the 2010 Parliament;
- the Liaison Committee should carry out a review of the role, resources and tasks of select committees.<sup>43</sup>
- “chair” should be used rather than “chairman” etc.;
- the chairs of the following select committees should be elected by the House –
  - departmental select committees appointed under Standing Order No. 152;
  - Environmental Audit Committee;
  - Select Committee on Public Administration;
  - Committee of Public Accounts; and
  - Select Committee on Procedure

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* cc987-988

<sup>41</sup> [HC Deb 20 July 2009 cc689-719](#)

<sup>42</sup> Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, [Rebuilding the House](#) (PDF), 24 November 2009, HC 1117 2008-09

<sup>43</sup> [HC Deb 22 February 2010 c130](#)

- elections should be used to replace chairs who resign or are removed;
- parties should elect members of select committees in a secret ballot by whichever transparent and democratic method they choose; and
- there should be a process that could lead to the discharging of members from a committee, where their attendance in any Session is below 60 per cent of the Committee’s formal meetings (following a more detailed recommendation from the Liaison Committee).<sup>44</sup>

Further details of the decisions taken by the House in February and March 2010 are given in the Library Briefing Paper Reform of the House of Commons: Decisions taken on 22 February and 4 March 2010. This note also provides links to background information on the establishment of the Reform Committee.<sup>45</sup>

Note: On 4 March 2010, the House agreed with a recommendation from the Select Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons that references to ‘chairman’ etc in Standing Orders should be replaced by references to ‘chair’ etc.<sup>46</sup> This briefing paper has referred to chairs throughout but in quotations the terms ‘chairman’ and ‘chairmen’ are retained.

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<sup>44</sup> [HC Deb 4 March 2010 cc1 062-1 095](#)

<sup>45</sup> House of Commons Library Standard Note, [Reform of the House of Commons: Decisions taken on 22 February and 4 March 2010](#), SN/PC/5368

<sup>46</sup> HC Deb 4 March 2010 cc1 086-1 088

## 2010 Parliament

As noted above, in March 2010, the House agreed to recommendations from the Wright Committee that the chairs of principal select committees (that is departmental and certain other committees<sup>47</sup>) should be elected by the House. The first elections took place on 9 June 2010, and the results were announced by the Speaker the following day.<sup>48</sup>

Although the incoming Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government renamed the Department for the Children, Schools and Families the Department for Education, a chair was elected to the Children, Schools and Families Committee. Sir George Young, the Leader of the House explained that:

The House may have spotted that the motion refers to the Children, Schools and Families Committee. It is the Government's intention to change the name of that Committee to the Education Committee, reflecting the new name of the Department. However, our priority today is to press ahead without further delay, so we will seek the House's approval for the change of name at a later date, along with any further changes that may be proposed to the Select Committee structure.<sup>49</sup>

The House was asked to agree the change of name on 15 June 2010. It agreed, after a debate on a number of House matters (including the establishment of the Backbench Business Committee), and the Children, Schools and Families Committee became the Education Committee.<sup>50</sup>

The Government also tabled a motion for debate on the same day that would have increased the maximum size of the Defence, Justice and Treasury Committees from 11 to 16 members, and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee from 13 to 14 members.<sup>51</sup>

A number of amendments were tabled to this motion, and the Government did not move the motion. Sir George Young explained why:

<sup>47</sup> Initially the other principal select committees were Environmental Audit, Public Accounts, Public Administration (as recommended by the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons) and Procedure, as added by the House. Then in June 2010, the House created a new select committee the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, which was added to the list [[HC Deb 7 June 2010 cc136-148](#)]

<sup>48</sup> [HC Deb 10 June 2010 c465](#)

<sup>49</sup> [HC Deb 26 May 2010 c172](#)

<sup>50</sup> [HC Deb 15 June 2010 c846](#)

<sup>51</sup> House of Commons, [Order Paper](#), 15 June 2010, Motion 13,

However, having looked at the Order Paper, I recognise that a large number of colleagues, many of whom are distinguished Chairs of Select Committees, have concerns about the course of action that we have proposed. In line with this Government's desire for a more collaborative relationship with the House than a confrontational one, it is not our intention to move that motion at the end of today, but to come back to the House soon, after further consultation with the interested parties.<sup>52</sup>

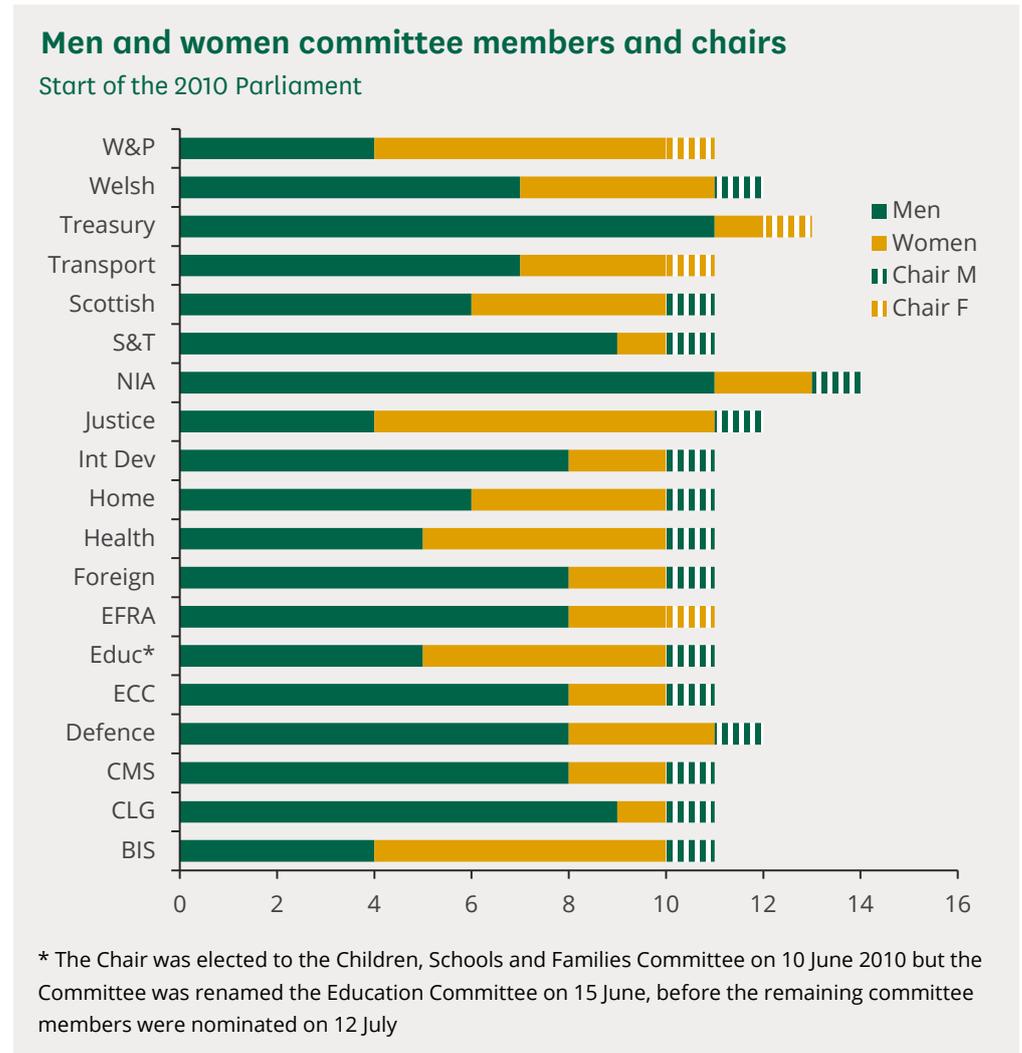
On 30 June 2010, after discussions had been held with select committee chairs, the House approved a motion to change the maximum number of Members that could be appointed to five Committees for the rest of the Parliament.

The Defence Committee, Justice and Welsh Affairs Committees increased from 11 to 12; the Treasury Committee increased from 11 to 13; and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee increased from 13 to 14.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> [HC Deb 15 June 2010 c786](#)

<sup>53</sup> [HC Deb 30 June 2010 cc965-967](#)



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

In 2010, committees generally reverted to 11 places but again some exceptions were made to reflect interest in subjects. In all 217 places were available on 19 committees. These places were all filled by different MPs, including 66 women.

Three women were elected as chairs of departmental select committees by the whole House.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee was established for the length of the Parliament.<sup>54</sup> It was appointed to consider political and constitutional reform. In moving the motion to establish the Committee, David Heath, the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, said that it “reflects the new portfolio of the Deputy Prime Minister”.<sup>55</sup> It is not included in this analysis.

<sup>54</sup> [HC Deb 7 June 2010 cc136-148](#)

<sup>55</sup> [HC Deb 7 June 2010 c137](#)

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## 12

## 2015 Parliament

From the beginning of the 2015 Parliament, the maximum number of members of select committees reverted to 11 members for all but the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which had 13 members.

The temporary standing order agreed in the previous Parliament that established the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee expired and was not revived. However, the remit and the name of the Public Administration Select Committee were changed: “to consider constitutional affairs” was added to its remit and it became the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.<sup>56</sup> (The Committee is not a departmental select committee, in that its remit is not set out in Standing Order No 152 but in SO No 146.)

The Women and Equalities Committee was appointed “until the end of the current Parliament” on 3 June 2015. It was appointed to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office. It was added to the list of committees appointed under Standing Order No 152, at the beginning of the 2017 Parliament, and had 11 members.<sup>57</sup>

In 2015, members were nominated to 20 committees (including the temporary Women and Equalities Committee, which was made permanent at the beginning of the 2017 Parliament).

All had 11 members except the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and in all 222 places were available.

All the places were filled by 210 different MPs.

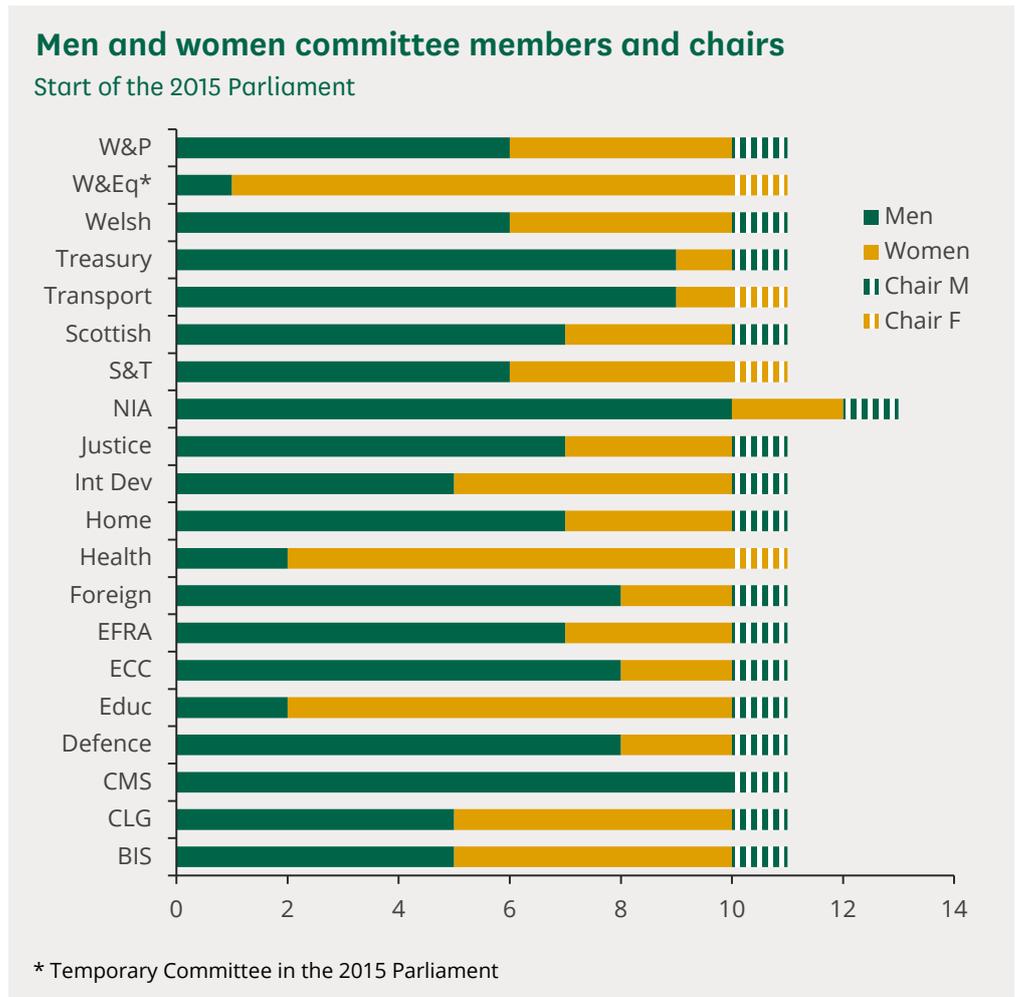
A total of 78 places were filled by women – four women each sat on two committees.

Four women were elected as chairs of departmental select committees by the whole House.

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<sup>56</sup> [HC Deb 3 June 2015 cc704-720](#)

<sup>57</sup> [HC Deb 3 June 2015 cc704-720](#)



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

## 1 2.1

### 2016 – Changes under Theresa May’s administration

Following her appointment as Prime Minister, after the UK had voted to leave the European Union in the referendum, Theresa May made a number of machinery of government changes to co-ordinate the UK’s departure from the EU.

On 18 July 2016, a written statement from the Prime Minister confirmed the establishment of a new department to oversee the UK’s negotiations with the EU and other changes:

- “A new Department for Exiting the European Union has been created, with responsibility for overseeing preparations for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU and conducting these withdrawal negotiations in support of the Prime Minister. It will also lead work to establish the future relationship between the UK and EU.”

- “A new Department for International Trade has also been created, with overall responsibility for promoting British trade across the world.”

In addition, functions were transferred from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) to the Department for Education (DfE) and the remaining functions of DBIS and all the Department of Energy and Climate Change’s functions were merged to form a new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy:

The functions of the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in respect of higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and skills have been transferred to the Department for Education. ...

The Department for Energy and Climate Change and the remaining functions of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have been merged to form a new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, bringing together responsibility for business, industrial strategy, and science and innovation with energy and climate change policy.<sup>58</sup>

Following these machinery of government changes, in response to a question from David Nuttall, David Lidington, the Leader of the House of Commons, confirmed at Business Questions on 21 July that there would be new select committees to scrutinise these departments. He hoped that “we can proceed with that as soon as possible in the autumn”.<sup>59</sup>

The necessary changes to Standing Orders were made on 11 October 2016, effective from 17 October 2016:

- The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee became the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee;
- The Energy and Climate Change Committee was abolished;
- The International Trade Committee was established as a departmental select committee (under Standing Order No 152); and
- A temporary Standing Order was agreed to establish the Exiting the European Union Committee, for the remainder of the Parliament.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> [HCWS94](#), 18 July 2016

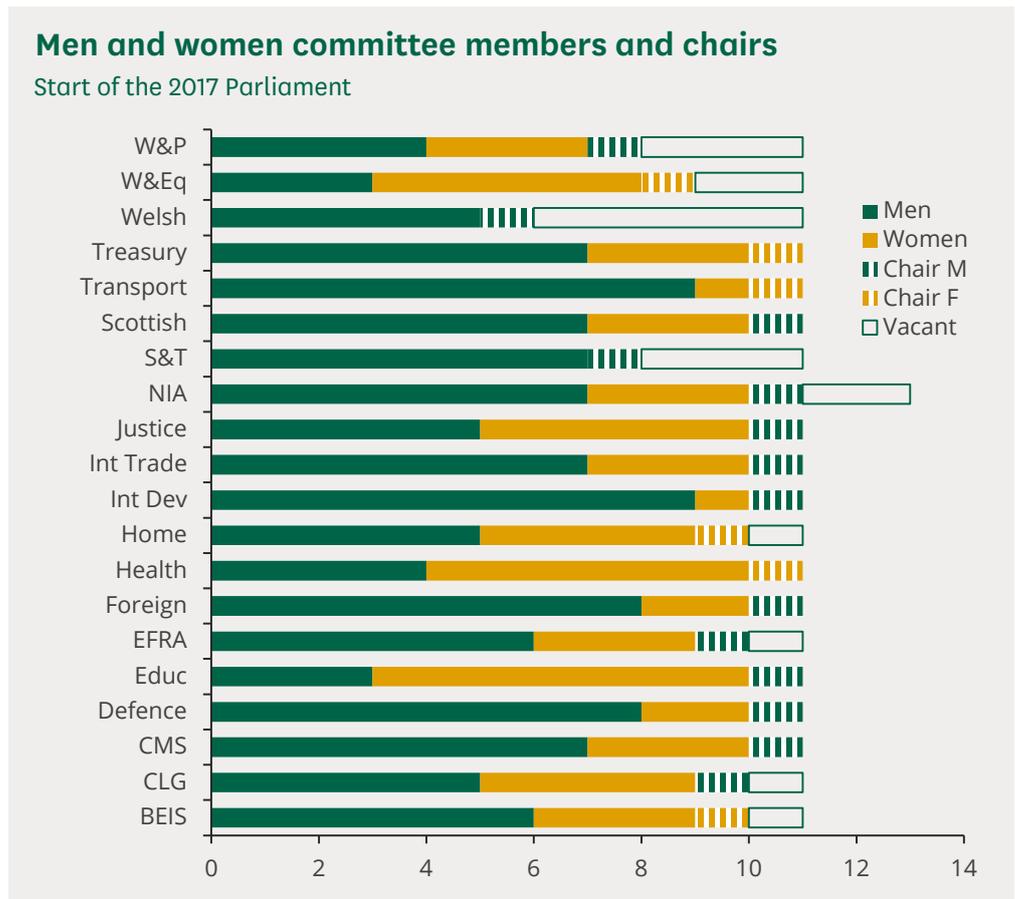
<sup>59</sup> [HC Deb 21 July 2016 c990](#)

<sup>60</sup> [HC Deb 11 October 2016 cc260](#)

# 13

## 2017 Parliament

The Women and Equalities Committee was made a permanent Committee (in the list in Standing Order No 152) on 4 July 2017.<sup>61</sup>



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

In 2017, there continued to be 222 places on 20 departmental select committees. When the initial nominations were made, 19 places were unfilled. In all 136 places were filled by men and 67 by women. Five MPs had places on two committees.

Five women were elected as chairs of departmental select committees by the whole House.

<sup>61</sup> [HC Deb 4 July 2017 cc1 077-1 088](#)

The temporary Exiting the European Union Committee, first appointed in the course of the 2015 Parliament, was re-established. It is not included in this analysis.

## 13.1

### Changes during the Parliament

On 12 September 2017, following the change of name of the Department, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee was renamed the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee.<sup>62</sup>

On 20 February 2018, following changes to the names of Government departments, the Communities and Local Government Committee was renamed the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee; and the Health Committee was renamed the Health and Social Care Committee.<sup>63</sup>

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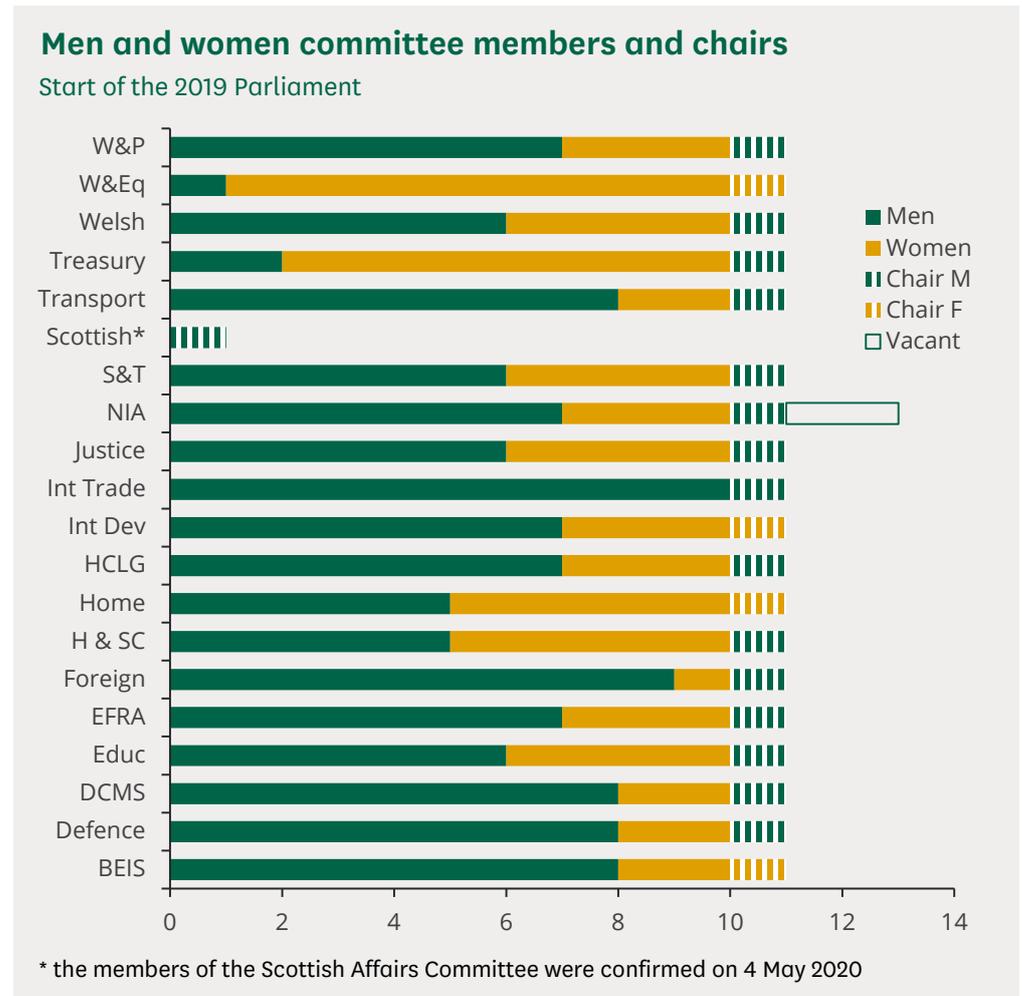
<sup>62</sup> [HC Deb 12 September 2017 cc766-810](#)

<sup>63</sup> [HC Deb 20 February 2018 cc129-130](#)

# 14

## 2019 Parliament

In 2019, there continued to be 222 places on 20 departmental select committees.



Note: see Appendix: Key to committees for full names

The initial nominations were considered by the House on 2 March 2020. The nominations to the Scottish Affairs Committee were not agreed that evening. A debate began and continued to the moment of interruption, when it was adjourned.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> [HC Deb 2 March 2020 c714ff](#). The motion to nominate members of the Scottish Affairs Committee was being debated at the moment of interruption – the debate was adjourned. The Scottish National Party called for the composition of the Committee to reflect better the parties’ share of

Following the election of chairs and the nominations being agreed, two places on the Northern Ireland Affairs and 10 places on the Scottish Affairs Committee were unfilled.

Of the 210 filled places, 139 were filled by men and 71 by women.

Four women were elected as chairs of departmental select committees by the whole House.

Initially seven MPs had places on two committees.<sup>65</sup> This reduced to six when one week later John Howell was replaced by Paul Howell on the BEIS Committee.

## 14.1

### Changes during the Parliament

On 16 June 2020, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced that he had “decided to merge DFID with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to create a new Department: the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office”.<sup>66</sup> The new department was established on 2 September 2020.<sup>67</sup>

Following this decision, the Government was asked to retain a separate International Development Committee in the House of Commons.<sup>68</sup> On 3 September 2020, the Leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg noted that “departmental Select Committees, as a rule, need to follow Departments”.<sup>69</sup> However, on 10 December 2020, he confirmed that the International Development Committee was being retained.<sup>70</sup>

On 20 May 2021, the House agreed to abolish the Regulatory Reform Committee and transfer its functions to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.<sup>71</sup>

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seats in Scotland

A motion to nominate the ten members of the Scottish Affairs Committee was agreed on 4 May 2020 [[HC Deb 4 May 2020 c474](#)] Five men and five women were nominated to the Scottish Affairs Committee

<sup>65</sup> Brendan Clarke-Smith (HCLG and Int Dev); Virginia Crosbie (Welsh Affairs and W&Eq); Geraint Davies (EFRA and Welsh Affairs); Rosie Duffield (EFRA and W&Eq); John Howell (BEIS and Justice); Anna McMorrin (BEIS and Welsh Affairs); and Graham Stringer (Foreign and S&T)

<sup>66</sup> [HC Deb 16 June 2020 c667](#)

<sup>67</sup> [HC Deb 2 September 2020 c187](#)

<sup>68</sup> For example, Wendy Chamberlain (LD) - [HC Deb 18 June 2020 c946](#); Lisa Cameron (SNP) - [HC Deb 9 July 2020 c1172](#); Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Lab) - [HC Deb 2 September 2020 c195](#); Patrick Grady (SNP) [HC Deb 3 September 2020 c310](#);

<sup>69</sup> [HC Deb 3 September 2020 c311](#)

<sup>70</sup> [HC Deb 10 December 2020 c1008](#); [DEP 2020/0793](#)

<sup>71</sup> [HC Deb 20 May 2021 cc963-964](#)

On 23 September 2021, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced the creation of a new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. On 24 November 2021 the House agreed to rename the Housing Communities and Local Government Committee and it became the Levelling Up, Housing Communities Committee.<sup>72</sup>

On 7 February 2023, the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, announced the creation of four new departments:

- A new Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
- A dedicated Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
- A combined Department for Business and Trade
- A re-focused Department for Culture, Media and Sport<sup>73</sup>

The Department for International Trade ceased to exist.

Consequential changes to departmental select committees were agreed on 27 March 2023, to take effect on 26 April 2023:

- The International Trade Committee was abolished.
- A new Energy Security and Net Zero Committee was appointed to scrutinise the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.
- The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee was replaced by the Business and Trade Committee. This Committee continued to have responsibility for scrutinising legislative reform orders.
- The Science and Technology Committee was replaced by the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee and it was given the role of scrutinising the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.
- The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee was renamed the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> [HC Deb 23 September 2021 cc1 8WS-20WS](#); [HC Deb 24 November 2021 c425](#)

<sup>73</sup> [HCWS547](#), 7 February 2023

<sup>74</sup> [HC Deb 27 March 2023 cc798-800](#)

## 15

# Speeding up the nomination of committee members?

In 1979, the members of all 14 committees were nominated by the House on 26 November 1979 – the 70th sitting day of the session. Over time the process speeded up (see Figure 14). Despite this, both the Liaison Committee, in 2000, and the Wright Committee, in 2009, commented on delays in nominating select committee members.

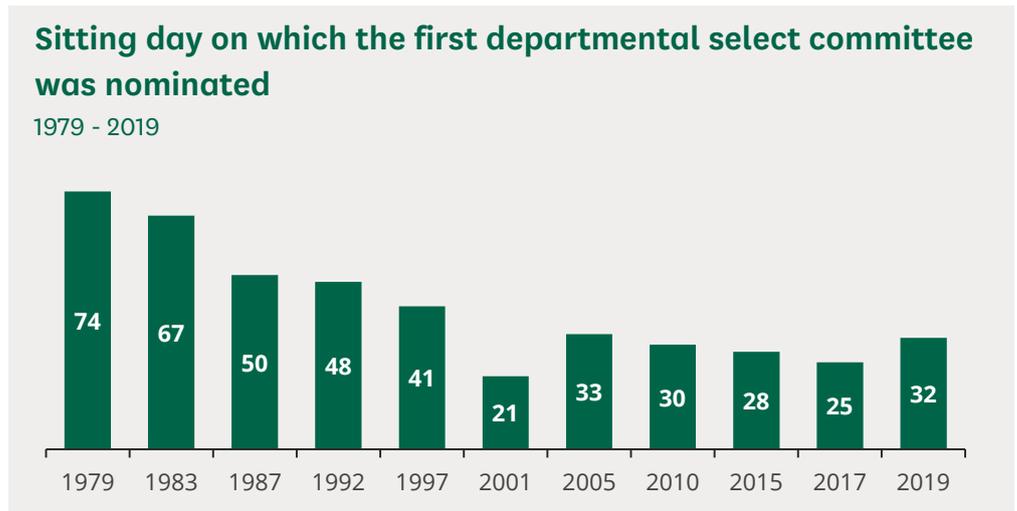
The Liaison Committee, in *Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive*, noted that:

on some occasions there have been long delays - whatever their cause - in setting up select committees at the beginning of a Parliament, at the very time when committees need to put in maximum effort to establish their approach, plan their programme and begin work. These delays are of course convenient for the government of the day.<sup>75</sup>

In 2009, the Wright Committee recommended that “the principal select committees should be nominated within no more than six weeks of the Queen’s Speech and that this should be laid down in Standing Orders and capable of being enforced by the Speaker”.<sup>76</sup> This target was almost met in 2015, when the Queen’s Speech took place on 27 May and the first (but not all) departmental select committees were nominated on 6 July.

<sup>75</sup> Liaison Committee, *Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive*, 25 July 2000, HC 841 1999-2000, para 12

<sup>76</sup> Select committee on Reform of the House of Commons, *Rebuilding the House*, 24 November 2009, HC 1117 2008-09, para 56



## 16

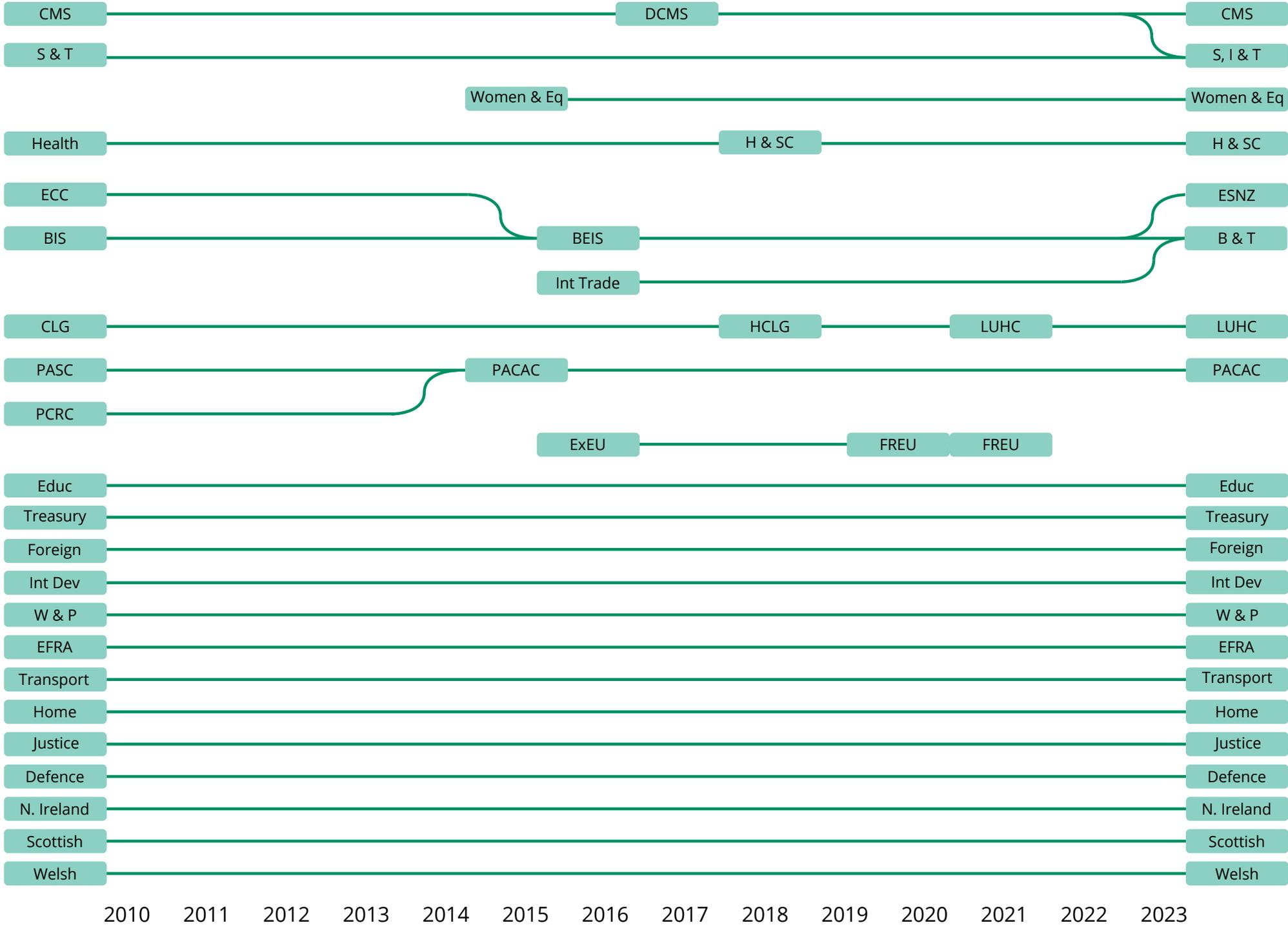
## Further data

The information presented above is a snapshot of the initial membership of departmental select committees at the start of each parliament. We have not tracked changes in membership during the course of a parliament.

Mark Goodwin, Stephen Holden Bates and Stephen McKay have written on various aspects of select committee members' parliamentary activities and their dataset, **Membership of all select committees, 1979-80 to 2014-15**, is available online:

- Goodwin, M., Holden Bates, S., & McKay, S. (2019) UK House of Commons Select Committee Data Archive. Available from: [osf.io/ywgh5](https://osf.io/ywgh5)

# Select committee changes, 2010 to 2023



## Key to committee names in graphic

CMS	Culture, Media and Sport Committee
DCMS	Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee
S & T	Science and Technology Committee
S, I & T	Science, Technology and Innovation Committee
Women & Eq	Women and Equalities Committee
ExEU	Exiting the European Union Committee
FREU	Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union
ECC	Energy and Climate Change Committee
BIS	Business, Innovation and Skills Committee
BEIS	Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee
Int trade	International Trade Committee
ESNZ	Energy Security and Net Zero Committee
B & T	Business and Trade Committee
CLG	Communities and Local Government Committee
HCLG	Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee
LUHC	Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee
PASC	Public Administration Select Committee
PCRC	Political and Constitutional Reform Committee
PACAC	Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Health	Health Committee
H & SC	Health and Social Care Committee
Educ	Education Committee
Treasury	Treasury Committee
Foreign	Foreign Affairs Committee
Int Dev	International Development Committee
W & P	Work and Pensions Committee
EFRA	Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
Transport	Transport Committee
Home	Home Affairs Committee
Justice	Justice Committee
Defence	Defence Committee
N. Ireland	Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
Scottish	Scottish Affairs Committee
Welsh	Welsh Affairs Committee

## Appendix: Key to committees for charts

Agric	Agriculture
BEIS	Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BIS	Business, Innovation and Skills
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CMS	Culture, Media and Sport
Cons Aff	Constitutional Affairs
DCMS	Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
ECC	Energy and Climate Change
Ed & Emp	Education and Employment
Ed & Skills	Education and Skills
Ed, Sci & Arts	Education, Science and Arts
Educ	Education
EFRA	Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Employ	Employment
Environ	Environment
ETRA	Environment, Transport and the Regions
H&SC	Health and Social Care
HCLG	Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ind & Trade	Industry and Trade
Int Dev	International Development
Int Trade	International Trade
Nat Herit	National Heritage
NIA	Northern Ireland Affairs
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
S&T	Science and Technology
Soc Sec	Social Security
Soc Ser	Social Services
TLGR	Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Trade & Ind	Trade and Industry
Treas & CS	Treasury and Civil Service
W&Eq	Women and Equalities
W&P	Work and Pensions

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