



## DEBATE PACK

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# The Good Parliament

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## Summary

This debate pack has been compiled ahead of the 90-minute debate on *The Good Parliament report* to be held on **Wednesday 2 November 2016** in Westminster Hall.

The Member in charge of the debate is Kirsty Blackman.

[The Good Parliament](#) report was launched on 20 July 2016. It makes recommendations on how the House of Commons can meet the Inter-Parliamentary Union's globally influential "Gender Sensitive Parliaments" framework.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

# 1. Background

## 1.1 The Good Parliament

[\*The Good Parliament\*](#) report was launched on 20 July 2016. It makes recommendations on how the House of Commons can meet the Inter-Parliamentary Union's globally influential "Gender Sensitive Parliaments" framework.

The report was written by Professor Sarah Childs, who was seconded to the House of Commons, from the University of Bristol, in September 2015 to work on the report, at the request of the Speaker.

Professor Childs made 43 recommendations. Each is attached to a named, responsible decision-maker. The recommendations focus on three elements:

- **Equality of participation.** The report asks how a diverse group of MPs might be selected for, and elected to, Parliament and how, once present they could be most effective in representing their constituents' interests, scrutinising laws and holding the government to account. Specific recommendations are made to the new Reference Group, the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, the House of Commons Commission, the Women and Equalities Committee, and the political parties.
- **Parliamentary Infrastructure.** This covers everything from the buildings and furniture of Parliament to the official rules and working practices. Recommendations are made to the Speaker, the House of Commons Commission, the Leader of the House, the Liaison Committee, and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.
- **Commons Culture.** This dimension looks beyond the formal rules to examine Parliamentary culture and its effect on diversity. Recommendations are aimed at the Speaker of the House, the House of Commons Commission, the Women in Parliament All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), and the Works of Art Committee.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion

The Speaker has convened the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion,<sup>2</sup> which will examine the independent report with the aim of taking forward its recommendations. In its inaugural year, the Speaker will chair the Group, which will be cross-party and be comprised of both women and men.

The Speaker said:

I am delighted to launch Sarah's report, along with my Parliamentary colleagues, which is the result of a great deal of

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<sup>1</sup> University of Bristol news, [A female Prime Minister is not enough: Britain needs a representative Parliament too](#), 20 July 2016

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Commission, [Decisions 18 July 2016](#), Item 3

work and extensive consultation with Members and staff. Not everyone will agree with every recommendation or suggested outcome, which is a condition of an independent report, but I am confident that my colleagues on the Commons Reference Group will scrutinise its contents very closely with a view to taking on board a good number of its suggestions.<sup>3</sup>

The first meeting of the Commons Reference Group is scheduled to take place in November 2016.

### 1.3 A gender-sensitive parliament

In 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) began a collaborative project to examine the gender sensitivity of parliaments around the world. In 2011, the IPU published a review of good practice. In that review, it highlighted what was meant by a gender-sensitive parliament (see Box 1) and reported on the project's three objectives:

- 1 Increase knowledge on gender-sensitive parliaments
- 2 Provide tools for parliaments and other stakeholders on gender-sensitive parliaments and gender mainstreaming
- 3 Build capacity for gender-sensitive parliaments

#### Box 1: A gender-sensitive parliament

The IPU has defined a gender-sensitive parliament as one whose structures, operations, methods and work respond to the needs and interests of both men and women.

A gender-sensitive parliament is founded on the principle of gender equality – that is, that both men and women have an equal right to participate in its structures and processes, without discrimination and without recrimination. A gender equality policy provides direction for the setting of priorities and strategic, well targeted interventions to achieve them.

In its report, *Equality in Politics*, the IPU considered a range of changes to foster more gender-sensitive parliamentary environments. These included changes to promote less aggressive parliamentary language and behaviour; more family-friendly sitting hours; the introduction of childcare facilities and parental leave for members; and gender-sensitive training programmes for all members. The rules of a parliament may be changed to ensure they are accessible to all members, do not exclude, restrict or discriminate against women, and provide for gender-neutral language. More radically, parliaments may change their structures by establishing a dedicated committee on gender equality, or by rotating positions of parliamentary authority between men and women, providing an opportunity for all members to participate.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons news, [“The Good Parliament” report launched](#), 21 July 2016

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Gender-Sensitive Parliaments – A Global Review of Good Practice](#), Reports and Document No 65, 2011, p6

## 2. Parliamentary material

At Business Questions on 13 October 2016, Valerie Vaz, the Shadow Leader of the House of Commons suggested that a debate on "[The Good Parliament](#)" could be "consolidated with the debate that is to be held on restoration and renewal". David Lidington, the Leader of the House, said that he would reflect on that question. He also noted that the "Select Committee on Women and Equalities is looking into the implications of "The Good Parliament" report as part of its own work at the moment".<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1 Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry: Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 Election

The Select Committee on Women and Equalities' inquiry on Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 Election was launched on 9 August 2016. When the inquiry was launched, Maria Miller, the Committee's Chair referred to *The Good Parliament*.

Nearly 100 years on since the first female MP took their seat in the House of Commons we have seen just 451 female MPs elected. There are more men in the House of Commons now than the total number of women MPs ever elected. We need to see proper diversity in public life – an important part of this is making sure the House of Commons is representative of the nation at large. Encouraging women into politics is an important first step but much more could and should be done to improve the retention of women MPs. If the number of seats in the House is reduced we need to ensure that it is not at the expense of a representative, modern Parliament. Our new inquiry will build on the work of The Good Parliament report and explore issues surrounding female representation in the House of Commons.

The Committee asked for written evidence to address, among other things:

What additional issues relating to retention of women MPs need to be considered? What are the parties doing in response to the Administration Committee's 2015 and 2016 report on interview studies with women MPs and leaving MPs? How can a consensus be reached on emerging proposals from The Good Parliament report?<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2 Recent related debates

Westminster Hall debate on [Houses of Parliament \(Family-friendliness\)](#), 10 November 2015

Backbench Business debate on [Parliamentary Representation](#), 27 February 2014 (held in the Chamber). This was the second biennial debate, recommended by the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary

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<sup>5</sup> [HC Deb 13 October 2016 c451](#), c452

<sup>6</sup> Women and Equalities Committee, [Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 Election](#), 9 August 2016

Representation. The Speaker's Conference recommended such debates be held:

We recommend that the Government should find time for a debate on the implementation of the Speaker's Conference's recommendations and progress towards just representation in the House of Commons in 2010, 2012, and every two years thereafter to 2022.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [\*Final Report\*](#), 11 January 2010, HC 239-I 2009-10

## 3. Press Articles and Blogs

### 3.1 Blogs

Sarah Childs, "[The Good Parliament: it is about more than breastfeeding and trans-toilets](#)", *Constitution Unit Blog*, 1 August 2016

Rebecca Coulson, "[Breastfeeding in the Commons? Fine. But gender quotas for committees witnesses would be absurd](#)", *ConservativeHome*, 27 July 2016

### 3.2 Press reports

Matthew Weaver, "[Commons 'should have gender neutral loos and allow MPs to breastfeed'](#)", *Guardian*, 21 July 2016

Laura Hughes, "[Breastfeeding could be allowed in Commons as 'role model' to society, as Speaker John Bercow prepares to tackle 'antiquated' practices](#)", *Telegraph*, 20 July 2016

Heather Stewart, "[Parties urged to ensure female MPs do not lose out in constituency changes; Committee of MPs launches inquiry aimed at ensuring that UK boundary changes do not disadvantage women](#)", *The Guardian*, 9 August 2016

## 4. Further reading

### 4.1 Commons Library Briefings

[\*Diversity in the UK's democratic institutions\*](#), CBP 7720, 28 September 2016

[\*Women in Parliament and Government\*](#), SN01250, 22 July 2016

[\*Ethnic Minorities in Politics and Government\*](#), SN01156, 4 March 2016

[\*The family-friendliness of the Houses of Parliament\*](#), CDP-2015-0096, 9 November 2015

[\*All-women shortlists\*](#) SN05057, 7 March 2015

### 4.2 Members and Members' Staff Interview Project

Administration Committee, [\*Report for the House of Commons Administration Committee on the findings of the interview study with Members on women's experience in Parliament\*](#), 21 August 2015

### 4.3 All-Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Parliament

APPPG Women in Parliament, "[\*Improving Parliament: Creating a better and more representative House\*](#)", July 2014

### 4.4 Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation

[\*Speaker's Conference \(on Parliamentary Representation\): Final Report\*](#), 11 January 2010

The Speaker's conference looked at the reasons why women, ethnic minorities and disabled people are all under-represented in the House of Commons.

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