



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Membership of the House of Lords: Ethnicity, Religion and Disability

Members of the House of Lords are not required to provide information about their ethnicity, religious beliefs or any disabilities they may have. However, there is continued interest in the representativeness of the House, as currently composed. This Library Note provides background information on this subject: it summarises existing research on the representation in the House of Lords of minority ethnic groups, religions and disability, and sets out some of the challenges in collecting and interpreting this information. To provide further context, the Note charts some of key developments in appointments to the House. The Note concludes with consideration of the meaning of representation and how this applies to the House of Lords.

Matthew Purvis
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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the representativeness of the House of Lords has become an issue of increasing interest to politicians, commentators and academics. Since 1997, a number of proposals have been made for the reform of the House of Lords, including from successive Governments, the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords in 2000¹ and a number of private member's bills that sought to reform aspects of the House on a smaller scale.² In government proposals, in particular, as Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty have remarked, there was a notable “desire for the House of Lords to become more representative than it is at present”, but a lack of detail as to what “the House of Lords is supposed to represent, and what form that representation might take”.³ More significantly, as Bochel and Defty have argued, “little attention” was paid “to how the current House of Lords provides representation”.

In the context of representation in the House of Lords as constituted, the background of Members is therefore significant. To date, the House of Lords Library has produced Notes about women in the House,⁴ the age profile of membership⁵ and the regions Members are from.⁶ Following these, this Library Note considers the Membership of the House of Lords in the context of the representation of minority ethnic groups, religion and faith, and disability. In doing so, the Note sets out some of the challenges both in approaching aspects of an individual's identity such as these, but also the limitations in drawing any conclusions from estimated numbers or proportions of Members from minority ethnic backgrounds or those who have disabilities. To provide additional background, the Note also presents short chronologies to show how the diversity of membership of the House of Lords has developed over time. In referring to individuals, the Note seeks to highlight examples of appointments at various points to illustrate a general picture.

2. Ethnicity and Religion

The Office for National Statistics defines ethnicity as “very diverse, encompassing common ancestry and elements of culture, identity, religion, language and physical appearance”.⁷ Furthermore, conceptions of ethnicity are fluid and are dependent on the context in which they are viewed:

The terminology used to describe ethnic groups has changed markedly over time and however defined or measured, tends to evolve in the context of social and political attitudes or developments.⁸

¹ See House of Lords Library, [House of Lords Reform: Chronology 1900–2010](#), 21 July 2011, LLN2011/025.

² In May 2014, the [House of Lords Reform Act](#) received royal assent. The Act provides Members the ability to resign and enables cessation of membership due to non-attendance or conviction of a criminal offence that results in imprisonment of a year or more.

³ Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty, ‘A More Representative Chamber: Representation and the House of Lords’, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2012, vol 18 no 1, pp 82–97.

⁴ House of Lords Library, [Women in the House of Lords](#), 3 March 2014, LLN 2014/008.

⁵ House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Profile of Membership](#), 30 October 2013, LLN 2013/030.

⁶ House of Lords Library, [Regional Representation in the House of Lords](#), 10 February 2014, LLN 2014/005.

⁷ Office for National Statistics, [Measuring Equality: A Guide for the Collection and Classification of Ethnic Group, National Identity and Religion Data in the UK](#), accessed 19 March 2014.

⁸ *ibid.*

The House of Lords does not require its Members to provide information with regard to ethnicity. The Government has also confirmed it does not record such information.⁹ As a consequence of this, there are no comprehensive figures that provide either the number of Members from minority ethnic backgrounds or who have a particular religious affiliation.

Attempting to quantify numbers of either is fraught with methodological difficulties. Ethnicity and religious belief are personal to the individual and therefore need to be approached sensitively. It is self-defined and an aspect of an individual that cannot be assumed. As guidance produced by the Office for National Statistics explains, collecting data on ethnicity:

[...] is complex because of the subjective, multifaceted and changing nature of ethnic identification. There is no consensus on what constitutes an ethnic group and membership is something that is self-defined and subjectively meaningful to the person concerned.¹⁰

A consequence of this is that, any existing numbers or percentages can only be indicative, rather than comprehensive, and should be used with caution.

Available Information

Possibly the most authoritative source of information about diversity in the House of Lords is the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC). Since its establishment in May 2000, HOLAC has existed as an independent, advisory, non-departmental body that recommends individuals for non-party political life peerages and vets nominations for life peerages, including those from political parties, for propriety.¹¹ Part of HOLAC's remit is to consider nominees "who would broaden the expertise and experience of the House and reflect the diversity of the people of the United Kingdom".¹² It approaches diversity "in its broadest sense; for example, as well as taking into account the recognised protected characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity and disability, it is keen to ensure that nominees from all parts of the United Kingdom are considered".¹³ In its most recent report, the Commission stated that:

To date, of the 63 appointments it has made to the House of Lords, 23 are women and 13 are from a minority ethnic background, which equates to 37 percent and 22 percent of the Commission's appointments, respectively. This compares well against the current composition of the Lords, where just over 20 percent of Members are women and 5 percent are from minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁴

If this proportion is broadly correct, then ethnic diversity in the House of Lords has nearly doubled over the past decade, as HOLAC had estimated in 2001 that 2.6 percent of Members of the House were from minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁵ However, this is still somewhat short of

⁹ HC Hansard, 20 December 2012, [col 882W](#).

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics, [Measuring Equality: A Guide for the Collection and Classification of Ethnic Group, National Identity and Religion Data in the UK](#), accessed 19 March 2014.

¹¹ House of Lords Appointments Commission, [About us](#), accessed 18 March 2014.

¹² House of Lords Appointments Commission, [Annual Report: October 2011 to September 2013](#), October 2013, p 8.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ House of Lords Appointments Commission, [Annual Report 2001](#), April 2011, paras 21–4.

reflecting the ethnic diversity of the United Kingdom. Analysis of the 2011 Census by the ONS found that:

[...] the majority of the UK population described themselves as belonging to the White ethnic group (87 percent or 55 million). The remaining 13 percent (8.1 million) belonged to a minority ethnic group, representing one person in eight of the UK population. The Asian/Asian British (including Chinese) ethnic group accounted for 7 percent of the UK population (4.4 million people). The other minority groups were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (3 percent), Mixed (2 percent) and Gypsy/Traveller/Irish Traveller/Other groups (1 percent).¹⁶

Converting this proportion into numbers, 5 percent of the total membership of the House of Lords would mean there would be approximately 42 Members from a minority ethnic background.¹⁷ In November 2010, Operation Black Vote (OBV) stated that the number of Members from a minority ethnic background had risen from 37 to 42 following the second list of new peerages announced that year.¹⁸ More recently, a House of Commons Library Standard Note put the number at 44 (as at October 2013).¹⁹ However, the Members listed in this analysis excluded Lord Boateng, who became the first Black Cabinet minister in 2002,²⁰ Baroness Amos, who in 2003 became the first Black female Cabinet minister,²¹ Baroness Vadera,²² Baroness King of Bow,²³ Lord Ribeiro²⁴ and Lord Noon.²⁵ The number of Members from minority ethnic backgrounds could therefore be nearer 50. The names of Members from a minority ethnic background, published by Operation Black Vote and by the House of Commons Library, are reproduced in section 5 of this Note.

For similar methodological reasons it is equally difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of the representation of religions in the current House of Lords. Any such picture can be no more than partial. In 2011, Lord Norton of Louth, a Conservative Member, observed: “the House has Members drawn from a wide range of religions—not just the mainstream Christian churches but also Members who are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and, in one case, Parsi Zoroastrian—as well as Members of none: there is a Humanist Group in the House”.²⁶ The House of Lords Appointments Commission has played a part in this representation. Among those appointed are Lord Singh of Wimbledon, a Sikh, Lord Rana, a Hindu, Baroness Afshar, a Muslim and Lord Sacks, who at the time was Chief Rabbi. However, these appointments were made on the basis of merit: HOLAC’s criteria stipulate that appointments “will be made on individual merit and not on any other basis”.²⁷

¹⁶ Office for National Statistics, [Key Statistics and Quick Statistics for Local Authorities in the United Kingdom](#), 11 October 2013, p 5.

¹⁷ This figure has been calculated from membership of the House as 20 March 2014 including ineligible Members: see House of Lords, [Lords by Party, Type of Peerage and Gender](#), accessed 20 March 2014.

¹⁸ Operation Black Vote, [New BME Peers: Baroness Oona King](#), 19 November 2010.

¹⁹ House of Commons Library, [Ethnic Minorities in Politics, Government and Public Life](#), 16 October 2013, SN/SG/1156, p 7.

²⁰ BBC, [Black Minister Makes Cabinet History](#), 29 May 2002.

²¹ *Guardian*, [Amos is First Black Woman in Cabinet](#), 13 May 2003.

²² *Daily Telegraph*, [Shriti Vadera: A Profile](#), 24 September 2009.

²³ Operation Black Vote, [New BME Peers: Baroness Oona King](#), 19 November 2010.

²⁴ Ghana Web, [College of Surgeons Awards Dr Ribeiro](#), 9 February 2006.

²⁵ Operation Black Vote, [New BME Peers: Baroness Oona King](#), 19 November 2010.

²⁶ Professor the Lord Norton of Louth, [Stevenson Lecture: House of Lords Reform?](#), University of Glasgow, 25 January 2011.

²⁷ House of Lords Appointments Commission, [Criteria Guiding the Assessment of Nominations for Non-Party Political Life Peers](#), accessed 19 March 2014.

Background

The proportion of Members from minority ethnic backgrounds and those affiliated to non-Christian faiths has increased largely as a result of developments within the last 25 years. Certainly, ethnic diversity (or the lack of it) was rarely commented on before that. In his survey of the House of Lords between 1911 and 1957, Peter Bromhead described its composition in terms of the diversity in the rank of the hereditary peerage (the Life Peerages Act was passed the following year), the political affiliation of Members and the professional backgrounds represented. Ethnicity was not one such consideration.²⁸ This was possibly because at the time there was only one known non-white holder of a peerage: Lord Sinha, who inherited the title as the son of the first Lord Sinha. The title was created in 1919 for Satyendra Sinha who was appointed to the Government as Under Secretary of State at the India Office. On his appointment, the *Scotsman* noted the peerage was: “of unique interest as marking the entry into the House of Lords of the first Member who is not of pure European descent. The Dominions have made several contributions to the peerage, but they have taken little part in the proceedings of the Second Chamber”. The paper thought this could be “a step towards making the House of Lords more representative of the Empire, if the Prime Minister could call to its counsels prominent statesmen, whether of European or Indian descent, by giving them life peerages”.²⁹

By 1961, the holder of the peerage was still such a novelty that the Atticus column in the *Sunday Times* reported that the second Lord Sinha still travelled from Calcutta every March to attend the House as “the only Indian representative”.³⁰

In the New Year’s Honours List in 1969, it was announced that Sir Learie Constantine was to be awarded a life peerage. He was a former West Indies cricketer and had held a number of public offices, including High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago in the UK (1962–4). On appointment, he became the first person of non-European descent to be awarded a life peerage and was a noted Roman Catholic.³¹ Reporting his introduction to the House in March that year, the *Times* described the occasion: “instead of white flannels he was kitted out in crimson and ermine parliamentary robes and a cocked hat as he was introduced into the House of Lords as Baron Constantine, of Maraval in Trinidad and Tobago, and of Nelson in the County of Palatine in Lancaster”. The same article noted that, while he was the first West Indian Peer, there still remained only one other non-white peer, at that point the third Lord Sinha who had inherited the title in 1967 but had yet to take his seat.³²

Following Lord Constantine, only three further life peerages were awarded to individuals of non-European descent between 1970 and 1990.³³ David Pitt, a doctor by profession and also a Labour member of the London County Council,³⁴ became Lord Pitt of Hampstead in the New Year’s Honours List in 1975.³⁵ Pratap Chitnis, head of the Liberal Party Organisation between

²⁸ PA Bromhead, *The House of Lords and Contemporary Politics: 1911–1957*, 1958.

²⁹ Lord Sinha, *Speeches and Writings of Lord Sinha*, 1919, Appendix, p 3.

³⁰ *Sunday Times*, ‘Mainly about People’, 2 April 1961, p 12.

³¹ WD Rubinstein, *The Harvester Biographical Dictionary of Life Peers*, 1991, pp 128–9.

³² *Times*, ‘Sir Learie Triumphs in First Lords Test’, 27 March 1969, p 2.

³³ WD Rubinstein, *The Harvester Biographical Dictionary of Life Peers*, 1991, pp 128–9.

³⁴ This became the Greater London Council in 1965.

³⁵ *London Gazette*, 6 February 1975, no 46485, p 1661.

1966 and 1969, was awarded a life peerage in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 1977.³⁶ In a profile by the *Illustrated London News* in 1983, Lord Chitnis referred to his ethnicity:

I don't think of myself as Indian, but it is difficult to think of myself as entirely English, if only because so many people tell me I am not. Being Catholic is a very considerable factor in my life. I feel consciously Catholic, more than I feel radical or English or Indian.³⁷

In April 1990, Shreela Flather joined the House of Lords as "Britain's first Asian woman Peer",³⁸ taking her seat on the Conservative benches.

During the 1990s more individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds were appointed to the House of Lords,³⁹ which enabled a further number of 'firsts' to be reported. For example, in 1990, Lydia Dunn became the first Member of Chinese origin in the House of Lords.⁴⁰ Baroness Dunn later said that she was nominated for a peerage to give the people of Hong Kong, her birthplace, a voice in the British Parliament.⁴¹ In 1996, John Taylor, a barrister, became Lord Taylor of Warwick. Following his introduction, he was described by the *Times* as "the first black Tory [...] to take a seat in the Lords".⁴² The same year, Swraj Paul became a Labour peer. He later became the first Asian Deputy Speaker in the House of Lords.⁴³ In 1997, Raj Bagri was awarded a life peerage in the New Year's Honours List.⁴⁴ Lord Bagri was reportedly "the fifth Asian peer" and would sit on the Conservative benches.⁴⁵ In 1997, Valerie Amos, Patricia Scotland and Navnit Dholakia became Members of the House of Lords as part of Tony Blair's first full list of peerage nominations.⁴⁶ Baroness Amos went on to become the first Black female Cabinet minister in 2003, and Baroness Scotland of Asthal became not only the first female Attorney General, but also the first holder of the post from a minority ethnic background.⁴⁷ Lord Dholakia became the Liberal Democrats' Deputy Leader in the House of Lords in 2004, a post he still holds.⁴⁸ The first Asian religious leader to sit in the House of Lords also took place in 1999, with Michael Nazir-Ali taking his seat as the Bishop of Rochester.⁴⁹ In 2006, John Sentamu became the first Black Archbishop to sit in the House of Lords.⁵⁰

By the end of 1999, the proportion of Members from minority ethnic backgrounds had "doubled from roughly 1.5 percent to 3 percent" of the total membership of the House.⁵¹ This was a result of a number of further appointments, including Baroness Uddin, the first female Muslim Member,⁵² and Lord Alli, who became the youngest life peer and the first openly gay

³⁶ *London Gazette*, 21 July 1977, no 47281, [p 9451](#).

³⁷ Roger Berthoud, 'Encounters: Lord Chitnis's Three Elements', *Illustrated London News*, 26 November 1983, p 20.

³⁸ *Times*, 'First Among Equals?', 6 April 1990, p 21.

³⁹ Emma Crewe, *Lords of Parliament: Manners, Rituals and Politics*, 2005, p 125.

⁴⁰ *Times*, 'Peeress quits Hong Kong for Britain', 16 June 1995, p 13.

⁴¹ [Letter from Baroness Dunn to Michael Pownall, Clerk of the Parliaments, regarding the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010](#), 29 June 2010.

⁴² *Times*, 'Lords Welcome Voice of Afro-Saxon', 31 October 1996, p 10.

⁴³ BBC, '[UK Deputy Speaker is Indian-born](#)', 10 December 2008.

⁴⁴ *London Gazette*, 20 February 1997, no 54685, [p 2133](#).

⁴⁵ *Times*, 'Peers, Politics and the Asian vote', 27 February 1997, p 17.

⁴⁶ House of Lords Library, '[Peerage Creations Since 1997](#)', 18 December 2013, LLN 2013/040, pp 5–6.

⁴⁷ *Guardian*, '[Nobody Was Safe From Me](#)', 20 December 2008.

⁴⁸ Lib Dem Lords blog, '[Lord Dholakia in the Eastern Eye](#)', 8 November 2012.

⁴⁹ BBC, '[Asian Bishop Joins Lords](#)', 30 June 1999.

⁵⁰ BBC, '[First Black Archbishop Enthroned](#)', 30 November 2005.

⁵¹ Emma Crewe, *Lords of Parliament: Manners, Rituals and Politics*, 2005, p 125.

⁵² *Guardian*, '[Profile: Pola Uddin](#)', accessed 20 March 2014.

Member of the House,⁵³ and a reduction in the size of the House following the passing of the House of Lords Act in 1999, which saw over 650 hereditary Members leave.⁵⁴ The precise number of minority ethnic Members at this point, however, is still debatable. One source suggested that, in 1999, there were 21 black and Asian Members, which fell to 19 after two Asian hereditary Peers left the House as part of the reform.⁵⁵ The Parekh Commission's report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* stated that the "number of black and Asian life Peers tripled between 1997 and spring 2000, from six to 18. Fourteen of them were Asian, four black".⁵⁶ Nevertheless, by 2007 Donald Shell could comment that "even though the proportion of Members of the Lords drawn from ethnic minorities has been lower than in the population as whole, the House has had at least as high a proportion as the Commons".⁵⁷

Whilst it is clear that the proportion of Members from ethnic backgrounds has only risen in the last 25 years, it is arguable that the House of Lords has long included Members from a range of religions and none. The participation of the Bishops in public business dates back to the early feudal period when Bishops were summoned to Parliament by virtue of their feudal status as royal tenants by barony.⁵⁸ Following the Act of Supremacy 1534, the numbers representing the Church in the Lords diminished. Since 1847, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and 24 diocesan bishops from the Church of England have had seats in the Lords. Until disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, four Irish Bishops also sat in the House of Lords.⁵⁹ In terms of different faiths, the third Lord Stanley of Alderley was purported to be the first Muslim Peer. On his death in 1903, the *Times* noted "he was probably the only instance on record of a British Peer who embraced the mahomedan faith and followed it devoutly".⁶⁰ Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild was "the first British Jew to be raised to the peerage",⁶¹ while Lord Jakobovits was the first Chief Rabbi to become a Peer when he took his seat in 1988.⁶² Lord Eames was formerly Archbishop of Armagh and Lord Soper was a former Convenor of the Methodist Conference.⁶³ The Dukes of Norfolk have historically been Roman Catholics and successive Dukes were unable to sit in the House of Lords until the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829.⁶⁴

It may be assumed that Lord Sinha, on taking his seat in 1919, was the first peer of the Hindu faith. However, there can be no certainty. Following his death in 1928, there were difficulties in proving that his son was entitled to inherit the title due to the lack of birth and marriage records, and disputes over the validity of polygamous marriage. This was not resolved until 1939 when the Committee for Privileges decided the claim in his son's favour. In 1935, the

⁵³ BBC, '[Profile: Lord Waheed Ali](#)', 29 November 2000.

⁵⁴ The total membership fell from 1,326 Members on 1 November 1999 to 670 Members on 1 December 1999.

⁵⁵ Emma Crewe, *Lords of Parliament: Manners, Rituals and Politics*, 2005, p 125.

⁵⁶ Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, *Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, 2000, p 233.

⁵⁷ Donald Shell, *The House of Lords*, 2007, p 7.

⁵⁸ See House of Lords Library, '[House of Lords: Religious Representation](#)', 25 November 2011, LLN 2011/036.

⁵⁹ EA Smith, *The House of Lords in British Politics and Society 1815–1911*, 1992, p 82.

⁶⁰ *Times*, 'Lord Stanley of Alderley', 11 December 1903, p 6.

⁶¹ Victor Gray and Melanie Aspey, 'Rothschild, Nathaniel Mayer de, first Baron Rothschild (1840–1915)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

⁶² Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords, '[A House for the Future](#)', January 2000, Cm 4534, para 15.3.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Edward Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons*, 1963, p 139.

House of Lords debated whether non-Christian Members should be debarred from sitting in the House. Responding for the Government, Viscount Hailsham, the Lord Chancellor, stated:

[...] when we are asked whether His Majesty's Government have had their attention drawn to the position of the person to whom the Motion refers and whether Peers who are not of the Christian faith are in the future to be debarred from sitting in this House, I have only to say that the question is not one which concerns His Majesty's Government, and that neither now nor at any time has there been any question as to the faith of Members of this House.⁶⁵

He added that: "there have in fact been persons of various religious faiths who have sat in your Lordships' House. There have been Christians and Jews, Mahomedans, Hindus and Atheists".⁶⁶

3. Disability

Quantifying the number of Members with a disability is fraught with methodological difficulties: disability is personal to the circumstances of each individual and, consequently, is a matter for the individual to voluntarily declare. The complexity of the concepts involved is explored in guidance on the Equality Act 2010, produced by the Government Office for Disability Issues. This states that a "person has a disability for the purposes of the Act if he or she has a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".⁶⁷ This exemplifies some of the methodological challenges. First, as the guidance notes, "not all impairments are readily identifiable. While some impairments, particularly visible ones, are easy to identify, there are many which are not so immediately obvious".⁶⁸

To illustrate this, the guidance lists a range of disabilities, many of which would not necessarily be physically discernible. A disability could arise from a wide range of impairments which could be:

- sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing;
- impairments with fluctuating or recurring effects such as rheumatoid arthritis, myalgic encephalitis (ME)/chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), fibromyalgia, depression and epilepsy;
- progressive, such as motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy, forms of dementia and lupus (SLE);
- organ specific, including respiratory conditions, such as asthma, and cardiovascular diseases, including thrombosis, stroke and heart disease;
- developmental, such as autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia and dyspraxia;
- learning difficulties;
- mental health conditions and mental illnesses, such as depression, schizophrenia, eating disorders, bipolar affective disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, as well as personality disorders and some self-harming behaviour; or
- produced by injury to the body or brain.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ HL *Hansard*, 12 December 1935, [col 227](#).

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Office for Disability Issues, [Equality Act 2010: Guidance](#), August 2010, p 6.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p 7.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p 8.

Second, there is an issue concerning the effect, for “whether a person is disabled for the purposes of the Act is generally determined by reference to the effect that an impairment has on that person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.⁷⁰ Again, this is a matter for the individual to say.

Finally, there could be circumstances where someone may identify themselves as having a disability but yet may not qualify as such under the provisions of the Act. Alternatively an individual may regard an impairment that did qualify as a disability as not being so.

Available Information

The exact number or proportion of Members with disabilities is unknown.⁷¹ As with ethnicity and religion, neither the House of Lords nor the Government requires information from Members about any disabilities. Data is, however, available about appointments made by the House of Lords Appointments Commission. Of the 63 appointments made to date, seven (11 percent) have declared a disability.⁷²

Although no data is available to show the number or proportion of Members with a disability, anecdotally it is assumed that disabilities in the House of Lords are common. This was the view of Emma Crewe who, in her study of the House covering the period before, during and immediately after the House of Lords Act 1999, stated that “the number of Peers with physical disabilities is high partly because, with an average age of sixty-eight, conditions such as deafness and arthritis are common”.⁷³ She thought it also noteworthy that the Standing Orders did not disqualify those with mental health conditions.

If this assumption is correct then the House of Lords is likely to have always had Members with disabilities at various times throughout its history. It is known, for example, that Lord Lyndhurst, a former Lord Chancellor, was left, by the late 1840s, “totally blind; in 1850 a cataract operation partially restored his sight and a second was to follow”.⁷⁴ One of the first life Peers in 1958, Sir Ian Fraser, a former MP for Morecambe and Lonsdale, was blinded in the First World War. On taking his seat, the *Times* noted that Lord Fraser of Lonsdale’s introduction took place before “the large assembly, which included another blind Peer, Lord Kenswood”.⁷⁵

However, it was in the 1970s that public awareness of disabled Members first took place. In April 1970, the House of Lords considered the [Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Bill](#). In order to accommodate four Members in wheelchairs who wished to speak, the front bench of the crossbenches was removed. Three made their maiden speeches: Baroness Darcy de Knayth,⁷⁶ who was left paralysed by a car accident in 1964, Baroness Masham of Ilton,⁷⁷ who was also paralysed by an accident in 1958; and Viscount Ingleby, who had polio.⁷⁸ The fourth

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 7.

⁷¹ Gov.uk, [Equality Impact Assessment: House of Lords Reform Bill](#), July 2012.

⁷² House of Lords Appointments Commission, [Annual Report: October 2011 to September 2013](#), October 2013, p 8.

⁷³ Emma Crewe, *Lords of Parliament: Manners, Rituals and Politics*, 2005, p 120.

⁷⁴ Gareth H Jones, ‘Copley, John Singleton, Baron Lyndhurst (1772–1863)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

⁷⁵ *Times*, ‘Seven More Life Peers Introduced’, 23 October 1958.

⁷⁶ *HL Hansard*, 9 April 1970, [cols 267–70](#).

⁷⁷ *ibid*, [cols 272–6](#).

⁷⁸ *ibid*, [cols 280–1](#).

Member to speak from a wheelchair was Lord Crawshaw.⁷⁹ He described the four Members as “the mobile bench”.⁸⁰ In his memoirs, Jack Ashley, a Labour MP who was left permanently deaf after an operation on his ear in 1967,⁸¹ and who later sat in the House of Lords as Lord Ashley of Stoke, recalled setting up the All-Party Parliamentary Disablement Group (now the All-Party Parliamentary Disability Group), which he said “was well supported by Members of the House of Lords”, among which were the “wheel-chair brigade”,⁸² in which he included Baroness Lane-Fox, who had suffered from polio from the age of 12.⁸³

Donald Shell, profiling the Lords in 1988, noted that “from the early 1970s onwards a group of disabled Peers have taken an active part in the Lords, seeking to improve public awareness of the needs of the disabled, and urging Government to take action to alleviate the problems faced by disabled people”.⁸⁴ Shell added “the presence of several Peers in wheelchairs—sometimes four at a time—adds a certain immediacy to debates on the problems faced by the disabled”. He thought that this reflected well on the House because, at that time, disabled people were “less likely” to win election to the Commons “so their presence in the Lords has added significance”.⁸⁵

From this period through to the early 21st century, further peerages were awarded to individuals with disabilities, although due to factors described above it is impossible to list more than a few examples. Baroness Macleod of Borve was a wheelchair user⁸⁶ and Lord Campbell of Croy described himself as “partially disabled in World War II”. His obituary noted that he had been “gravely injured during battle for the River Elbe in 1945 [...] and was left with a permanent limp and constant pain”.⁸⁷ Since 2000, seven individuals with self-identified disabilities have been appointed to the House by the House of Lords Appointments Commission. These included Baroness Chapman, who in 2004 became “the first person with a congenital disability to be appointed to the House of Lords”⁸⁸ and Lord Low of Dalston, who has been blind since birth.⁸⁹ Currently, the House of Lords also has two medal winning paralympians among its membership following the appointment of Baroness Grey-Thompson in 2010 and Lord Holmes of Richmond in 2013.⁹⁰

It is noteworthy that the House of Lords has also made a number of changes over the years to reflect the needs of its disabled Members. In 1997, the House of Lords Offices Committee recommended that the Hansard reporters “should be moved [from seating in the Chamber] to the Peers’ Married Daughters’ Box to allow extra space to be created for disabled Peers”,⁹¹ and this was approved by the House shortly thereafter.⁹² This arrangement was made permanent in

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, [cols 281–6](#).

⁸⁰ *Times*, ‘Disabled Peers Put Aid Plea’, 10 April 1970, p 1.

⁸¹ *Guardian*, ‘[Lord Ashley of Stoke Obituary](#)’, 21 April 2012.

⁸² Jack Ashley, *Acts of Defiance*, 1992, p 316.

⁸³ See Felicity Lane-Fox, *Felicity Lane-Fox: Triumphant Over Disability*, 2008.

⁸⁴ Donald Shell, *House of Lords*, 1988, p 52.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ HL *Hansard*, 5 February 1974, [cols 762–3](#).

⁸⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, ‘[Obituary: Lord Campbell of Croy](#)’, 28 April 2005.

⁸⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, ‘[Doctors Said They Could Do No More and Sent Me Home to Die—I’m Still Here](#)’, 6 February 2005.

⁸⁹ Colin Low, ‘[Blind and a Peer of the Realm](#)’, *Braille Monitor*, November 2007.

⁹⁰ Disability News Service, ‘[Tory Peerage for Equality Watchdog’s Disability Chair](#)’, 2 August 2013.

⁹¹ House of Lords Offices Committee, *Third Report*, December 1997, HL Paper 49 of session 1997–98, para 2.

⁹² HL *Hansard*, 17 December 1997, [cols 627–8](#).

1998.⁹³ In 2010, the Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation referred to the “good progress towards meeting the needs of disabled Members” in the House of Lords.⁹⁴ The report stated that:

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton, a wheelchair user, paid tribute to the support she had been given by the House of Lords authorities, telling the Conference that she had found her need for reasonable adjustments had been “absolutely superbly met by the House authorities [who had] all been extremely positive about my requirements, and have gone out of their way to make things happen”. This includes the provision of a specially-adapted room close to the Lords Chamber. The Lords authorities for some years have put in place effective arrangements to help deaf and blind peers, and a number of peers with impaired mobility, to play a full part in debates.⁹⁵

The report also highlighted Baroness Campbell’s request for the House to allow her personal assistant to finish her speeches in the Chamber, because her condition left her short of breath. When this occurred, one newspaper reported, “she had to rely on fellow disabled Peers including Baroness Wilkins and Baroness Grey-Thompson to finish speeches on her behalf”.⁹⁶ In 2012, the House of Lords Procedure Committee considered the matter. The Committee noted in its report that current rules prohibited Baroness Campbell using her assistant in this way:

Standing Order 12, which dates from 1707, states that “when the House is sitting, no person shall be on the floor of the House except Lords of Parliament and such other persons as assist or attend the House.” The Report of the Committee of Privileges on which this standing order was based made it clear that this prohibition should apply to “all Persons, except the necessary Attendants of the House”. These “Attendants of the House” are the staff of the House—clerks and doorkeepers—whose work in supporting the House as a whole requires them to be on the floor of the House while the House is sitting. Thus standing order 12 prohibits the admission of a Member’s personal assistant (such as a researcher), and we are clear that this general prohibition should be maintained.⁹⁷

However, the Committee’s view was that:

In Lady Campbell’s exceptional case, not agreeing to her request for personal assistance in the Chamber would limit and ultimately prevent her from taking part in the work of the House. Moreover, the nature of the assistance she requires is such that it is more appropriately provided by her carers, rather than by other Members or by staff of the House. Her request that her assistant be on hand to provide her with personal and practical help is therefore, in our view, a reasonable one in the circumstances.

The same principles apply to Lady Campbell’s request that her assistant be authorised to read out speeches on her behalf. Hitherto other Members of the House have finished reading speeches which Lady Campbell has begun. However, we do not consider it

⁹³ House of Lords Offices Committee, [Sixth Report](#), 14 July 1998, HL Paper 130 of session 1997–98, para 4.

⁹⁴ Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [Speaker’s Conference \(on Parliamentary Representation\)—Final Report](#), 11 January 2010, HC 239–I of session 2009–10, para 304.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Independent*, ‘[Disabled Crossbench Peer Lady Campbell of Surbiton becomes First Person in 305 Years to be Allowed to Speak in the House of Lords with the Aid of a Personal Assistant](#)’, 14 November 2012.

⁹⁷ House of Lords Procedure Committee, [Assistance in the Chamber; Divisions; House of Lords Business](#), 25 July 2012, HL Paper 25 of session 2012–13, para 2.

appropriate that she should continue to be required to seek the help of other Members in order to be able to participate in the work of the House. We therefore conclude that this request too is a reasonable one in the circumstances: her words, when she cannot herself deliver them, should be spoken by an assistant, employed by her and whose presence will not be recorded in the Official Report.⁹⁸

The report was approved by the House of Lords on 24 July 2012.⁹⁹ On 14 November 2012, Baroness Campbell spoke for the first time since the new procedure was adopted. She told the House:

I am delighted to return to the Chamber today after a long period of illness. I am even more delighted to be accompanied by my assistant. She is a new, stronger voice who will enable me to continue contributing to debates in your Lordships' House. I thank your Lordships for your understanding and agreeing to this new and unique arrangement. This is equality in action; and it is how we achieve equality that I wish to address in this debate.¹⁰⁰

Following the Speaker's Conference report, the Director of Facilities in the House of Lords provided a memorandum for the Conference that outlined further work that was being carried out. This was published in a special report that followed:

There are a variety of small adjustments taking place in a range of locations such as the addition of stair nosings, new handrails and ancillary items on doors as well as the enabling of fire evacuation lifts for wheelchair users. There has also been a survey of light fittings and an upgrade is in progress. Formal listed building consent is awaited for a new handrail at Lord Speaker's entrance and the extension of the handrail to the Peers' Gallery. Projects for the coming year include improving door opening pressures, fitting of further handrails and numerous improvements to WCs including replacing most taps with lever mixer taps.

In respect of procedure in the Chamber, I can report that one deaf Member uses a palantype which provides a written version of actual speeches in the Chamber; a blind Member uses a Braille reader; and another Member has permission for another Member to finish her speech (and [for this to be properly reflected in Hansard as her speech](#)). I am also working with a voice recognition specialist to investigate whether "VR in reverse" is possible—ie for the software to finish a Member's speech in their voice should they become unable to do so due to a medical condition.

Finally, I am very pleased to report good progress in the development of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for all our Members with disabilities.¹⁰¹

4. Conceptualising Representation

The previous sections have provided information about the membership of the House of Lords in relation to minority ethnic groups, disabled people and those with religious affiliations. This

⁹⁸ *ibid*, para 5.

⁹⁹ HL *Hansard*, 24 July 2012, [cols 605–8](#).

¹⁰⁰ HL *Hansard*, 14 November 2012, [col 1541](#).

¹⁰¹ Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [First Special Report](#), 10 March 2010, HC 449 of session 2009–10, Appendix 2.

perhaps though only reflects one interpretation of representation that Alexandra Kelso has called microcosmic. This is “concerned with the representativeness of an institution in relation to the population or electorate”.¹⁰² Adherents of microcosmic representation, she notes, would argue “that the decision-making capabilities of a legislature are directly affected by the extent to which it is a reflection of the wider population”. She observes that “this kind of ‘politics of presence’ prioritises identity as the basis of representation, coupled with the argument that identities such as gender, race and ethnicity should enjoy enhanced inclusion inside representative institutions”.¹⁰³ The importance of this, for example, was put by RADAR in its submission to the Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation. With regard to the House of Commons, it stated that having very small numbers of openly disabled MPs presented “two significant problems”, which were:

Firstly, it is all too easy for a non-representative House of Commons to overlook the disability dimension to critical, mainstream policy issues. One third of all British children living in poverty has at least one disabled parent. One third of all British adults with no qualifications experiences disability. Health inequalities are acute between some groups of disabled people and their non-disabled peers (for example, people with long term mental health problems or learning disabilities are more likely to get some killer diseases like stroke and heart disease, more likely to get them young, and likely to die of them faster, than other citizens). Achieving targets on child poverty, skills or health inequalities can only succeed if the disability dimension is addressed. Yet these policy issues tend not to be viewed as “disability issues” by a non-representative House of Commons (with some exceptions). This is a disbenefit not only to disabled people but to Britain as a whole: child poverty and skills strategies that address disability successfully are quite simply more likely to be successful in meeting their overall objectives, because of the numbers involved.

Secondly, the absence of a critical mass of openly disabled MPs risks entrenching the view that disabled people are the passive recipients of public services and public policy—when disabled people can and should be part of the solution and leadership.¹⁰⁴

Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty interviewed a number of Members of the House of Lords for their paper on representation, in which they discuss several different conceptions of the term. On the issue of the importance of having Members appointed from previously underrepresented groups such as women, minority ethnic groups, religious groups or disabled people, the authors note that:

There was relatively little discussion by Peers of symbolic representation. Although many female Peers, a number of Peers from ethnic minorities, and a number of Peers with disabilities were interviewed, few spoke about their symbolic importance, although several did discuss how they ‘acted for’ these groups. However, when the idea was raised there appeared to be little opposition to the politics of presence, and while some Peers thought their role went some way beyond symbolism, they were happy to be perceived in that way. For example, one disabled Peer, who is active in the Chamber in

¹⁰² Alexandra Kelso, ‘[Reforming the House of Lords: Navigating Representation, Democracy and Legitimacy at Westminster](#)’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2006, vol 59 no 4, p 564.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation, ‘[Submission from RADAR \(SC-3\)](#)’, 27 May 2009, paras 6–7.

relation to disability issues, conceded that as a woman and somebody who used a wheelchair, she was sometimes seen “as a visible presence rather than as a spokesperson”.¹⁰⁵

In terms of descriptive representation—aspiring to numerically reflect the diversity of the population in the House—Bochel and Defty found that “several Peers stressed that the House is now more diverse than in the past, and to some extent more descriptively representative than the House of Commons. In particular the representation of women and ethnic minorities has increased to the extent that in descriptive terms women are now almost as well represented in the House of Lords as the House of Commons (21 percent of Peers are women compared with 22 percent of MPs), while ethnic minorities are somewhat better represented (4 percent of Peers come from ethnic minorities compared with 2 percent of MPs)”. However, the authors felt that “comparing the proportion of women and ethnic minorities in the two Houses rather masks the fact that in descriptive terms, when compared to the population as a whole, both Chambers still fall considerably short”.¹⁰⁶ Across further aspects of representation, the authors argue the House is also unrepresentative in terms of educational and professional backgrounds.

A more complex conception is substantive representation, which focuses on how a representative acts in practice. Bochel and Defty argue that schemes for the reform of the House of Lords have tended to approach the issue from a symbolic or descriptive aspect, in particular the recommendations of the Royal Commission on House of Lords Reform with regard to representation of a wider range of faiths.¹⁰⁷ The implication, they claim, is that such “Peers will act on behalf of those they represent” and:

Although proposals for an appointed element in the House stop short of stating that Peers should be required to act on behalf of any particular groups, it is often implied that the presence of a diverse range of Peers should enable people to feel they have a voice in the Chamber. However, if it is the case that descriptive representation may lead to substantive representation, the apparently limited nature of descriptive representation in the House of Lords may also limit the extent to which Peers ‘act for’ a wide range of groups.¹⁰⁸

However, the authors found that this line of thinking was difficult to prove:

[...] while many Peers claim to provide substantive representation for a range of different interests, there is very little evidence about how Peers act to provide substantive representation, and it is therefore difficult to make judgements about the extent to which those interests are actually represented. This is particularly striking when one considers that whilst Peers claimed to represent a diverse range of interests, party affiliation remains the most significant indicator of voting behaviour in the House. It is also not clear who is being represented in this way, and perhaps more importantly who is not.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty, ‘A More Representative Chamber: Representation and the House of Lords’, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2012, vol 18 no 1, pp 82–97.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords, [A House for the Future](#), January 2000, Cm 4534.

¹⁰⁸ Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty, ‘A More Representative Chamber: Representation and the House of Lords’, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2012, 18 (1), pp 82–97.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

A related point concerns the assumption that representation of a particular viewpoint, or in this case the interests of particular groups, is more likely to be advocated by an individual from that group. Mark Harper, as Minister of State at Cabinet Office, alluded to this point in an answer to a question at an evidence session of the Joint Committee on the Draft House of Lords Reform Bill in October 2011. Responding to a question about the Government's proposals for representation of minority groups in an elected House, Mr Harper argued:

[...] there is diversity in terms of the things that you mentioned about gender, ethnicity and disability. But I also take the view that we are interested in the views and beliefs that people have when they get elected, which do not necessarily map to any of those criteria.¹¹⁰

A consequence of focusing on symbolic or descriptive conceptions of representation is that it could exclude the work of Members who are not necessarily drawn from that group. For example, Lord Rix has been a long-term supporter and advocate of the rights of disabled people, as was Lord Morris of Manchester, who was the first minister for disabled people.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Joint Committee on the Draft House of Lords Reform Bill, [Oral Evidence: Mark Harper](#), 10 October 2011, Q27.

¹¹¹ BBC, ['Disabled Rights Pioneer Lord Morris of Manchester Dies'](#), 14 August 2012.

Appendix: Minority Ethnic Members of the House of Lords

The following table presents the names of those identified by Operation Black Vote and listed by the House of Commons Library as being from a minority ethnic background.

Operation Black Vote ¹¹²	House of Commons Library ¹¹³
Lord Adebawale	Lord Adebawale
Baroness Afshar	Baroness Afshar
	Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon
Lord Ahmed	Lord Ahmed
Lord Alli	Lord Alli
Baroness Amos	
Baroness Benjamin	Baroness Benjamin
	Lord Bhatia
Lord Bhattacharyya	Lord Bhattacharyya
Lord Bilimoria	Lord Bilimoria
Lord Darzi of Denham	Lord Darzi of Denham
Lord Desai	Lord Desai
	Lord Dholakia
Baroness Falkner of Margravine	Baroness Falkner of Margravine
Baroness Flather	Baroness Flather
Lord Hameed	Lord Hameed
Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick	Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick
Baroness Howells of St Davids	Baroness Howells of St Davids
	Lord Hussain
Baroness Hussein-Ece	Baroness Hussein-Ece
Lord Kakkar	Lord Kakkar
	Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon
	Lord Loomba
	Baroness Manzoor
Lord Morris of Handsworth	Lord Morris of Handsworth
Lord Ouseley	Lord Ouseley
Lord Parekh	Lord Parekh
Lord Patel	Lord Patel
Lord Patel of Blackburn	Lord Patel of Blackburn
Lord Patel of Bradford	Lord Patel of Bradford
	Lord Paul
Lord Popat	Lord Popat
Baroness Prashar	Baroness Prashar

¹¹² Operation Black Vote, '[Peers](#)', accessed 20 March 2014.

¹¹³ House of Commons Library, '[Ethnic Minorities in Politics, Government and Public Life](#)', 16 October 2013, SN/SG/1156, p 7.

Lord Rana	Lord Rana
Baroness Scotland of Asthal	Baroness Scotland of Asthal
Lord Sheikh	Lord Sheikh
	Lord Singh of Wimbledon
	Lord Taylor of Warwick
	Baroness Uddin
	Lord Verjee
Baroness Vadera	
Baroness Verma	Baroness Verma
Baroness Warsi	Baroness Warsi
	Lord Wei
Archbishop of York	Archbishop of York
Baroness Young of Hornsey	Baroness Young of Hornsey