



## Statistics on the Size and Composition of the House of Lords

### Background and Methodology

This briefing provides summary data on the size and composition of the House of Lords. The information is taken from the House of Lords registry database and is correct as at 11 December 2017. The briefing refers to ‘absolute’ membership and ‘actual’ membership. The absolute membership of the House includes all Members that may, at a point, exercise their right to sit in the House (this includes those currently disqualified from sitting, but who may be qualified to sit in future). Actual membership includes those Members who are currently eligible to sit (eg this does not include those on leave of absence or those disqualified due to holding certain offices).

On 5 December 2016, the House of Lords debated a motion on the subject of the size of the House.<sup>1</sup> The motion sought agreement that the size of the House, “should be reduced, and methods should be explored by which this could be achieved”.<sup>2</sup> The motion was carried unanimously. As a result, on 20 December 2016, the Lord Speaker announced the establishment of the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House, to examine the possible methods by which the House could be reduced in size.<sup>3</sup> The report of the Committee was published on 31 October 2017.<sup>4</sup> A debate on the report is due to take place in the House of Lords on 19 December 2017.

The report recommended reducing the size of the House of Lords to 600 Members and capping the size at that number.<sup>5</sup> New Members would be appointed on 15 year terms with political appointments shared between the parties in line with the result of the previous general election, to create a House with no party allowed an absolute majority.<sup>6</sup> Under the proposals, the House would reach the target size of 600 Members in just over a decade.<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on the publication of the report, the Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, stated:

This is the House of Lords reforming itself. It is being done without the benefit of legislation and relies on the agreement of Members of the House [...] This report presents the Lords with an important opportunity. A smaller, more effective House will be able to build public confidence and support for its crucial constitutional role.<sup>8</sup>

Professor Meg Russell, Director of the Constitution Unit at University College London, welcomed the report but stated that its implementation would require coordinated action from party groups in the House and the Prime Minister:

In the best tradition of previous successful Lords reforms, this report is narrow in its scope, and focused on what can be implemented straightaway. It’s easy to snipe at proposals such as these for being under ambitious, but the point is they are realistic [...] Those who are serious about the need to strengthen parliament, and cut the cost of politics, should welcome these proposals [...] These

proposals require coordinated action across the party groups so that Members of the House of Lords retire to meet the targets. But the Prime Minister also needs to act for these proposals to succeed—to commit to limiting future appointments—if we are to achieve a smaller and more rational House of Lords.<sup>9</sup>

However, the pressure group Unlock Democracy, which campaigns for an elected second chamber, stated its disappointment with the report’s scope and recommendations:

While the report proposes long-needed reforms and is a step in the right direction, it deliberately ignores the issue of how Members of the second chamber should be selected. Disappointingly therefore, it only offers a piecemeal approach to reforming the second chamber rather than offering the radical, wholesale solutions we need to make the chamber fit for a twenty-first century democracy.<sup>10</sup>

### Size of the House of Lords

As at 11 December 2017:

- The absolute membership of the House was 824.
- The actual membership was 798.
- Average daily attendance in the last full session, 2016–17, was 484.<sup>11</sup>

Chart 1 below shows changes in the absolute membership, actual membership and average daily attendance figures, recorded at the end of each parliamentary session, from 1992–93 to 2016–17:

**Chart 1: Changes in Membership and Attendance since 1992–93**

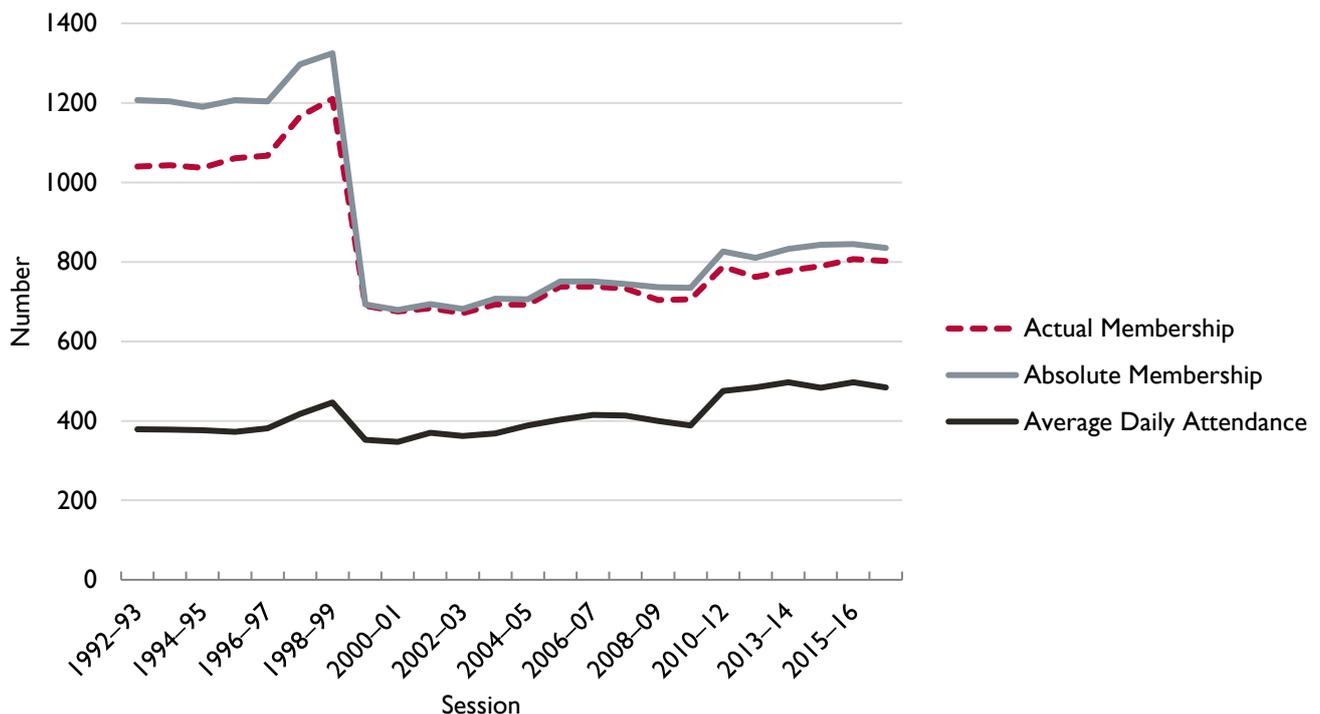
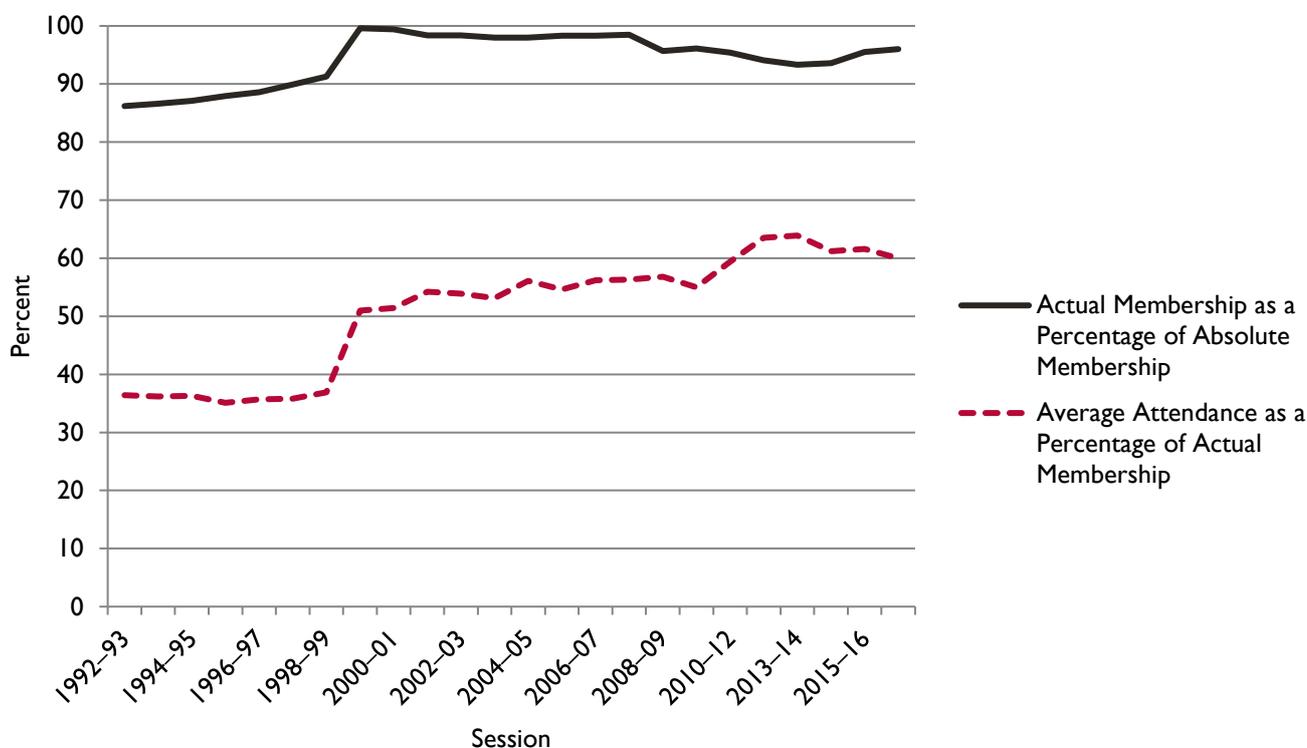


Chart 1 above shows a significant decrease in membership in 1999, when the House of Lords Act 1999 removed a large proportion of the hereditary peers. Since then, the membership has steadily increased. Following the 1999 reforms, average daily attendance remained relatively static until the 2010–12 session, when average attendance increased. The increased level of attendance has remained relatively constant up to the present.

Chart 2 below shows the actual membership as a percentage of the absolute membership, and average attendance figures as a percentage of actual membership. These figures are all given as at the end of each parliamentary session, from 1992–93 to 2016–17:

**Chart 2: Actual Membership as a Percentage of Absolute Membership and Percentage Attendance of Actual Membership**



## Composition of the House of Lords

### Party Affiliation

The current composition of the actual membership, in terms of party and group affiliation, is set out in the following chart.

**Chart 3: Composition of the Actual Membership by Party/Group Affiliation (Numbers)**

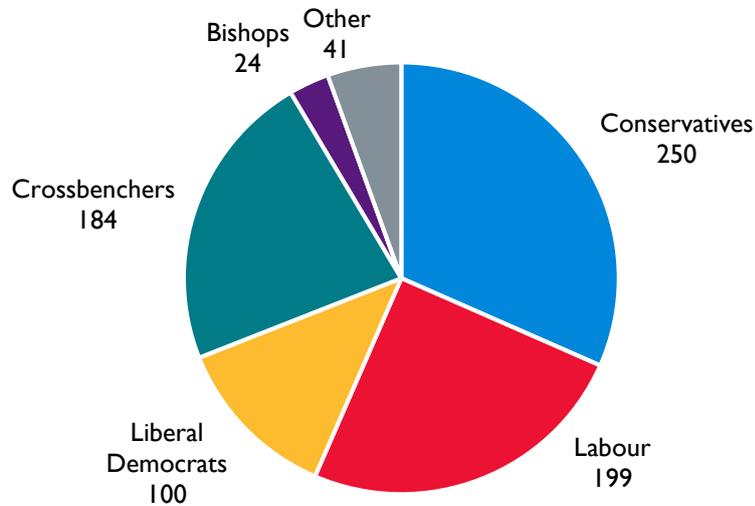


Chart 3 above shows that the Conservatives are the largest party (31 percent), followed by Labour (25 percent), and the Liberal Democrats (13 percent). Crossbenchers comprise 23 percent of the House.

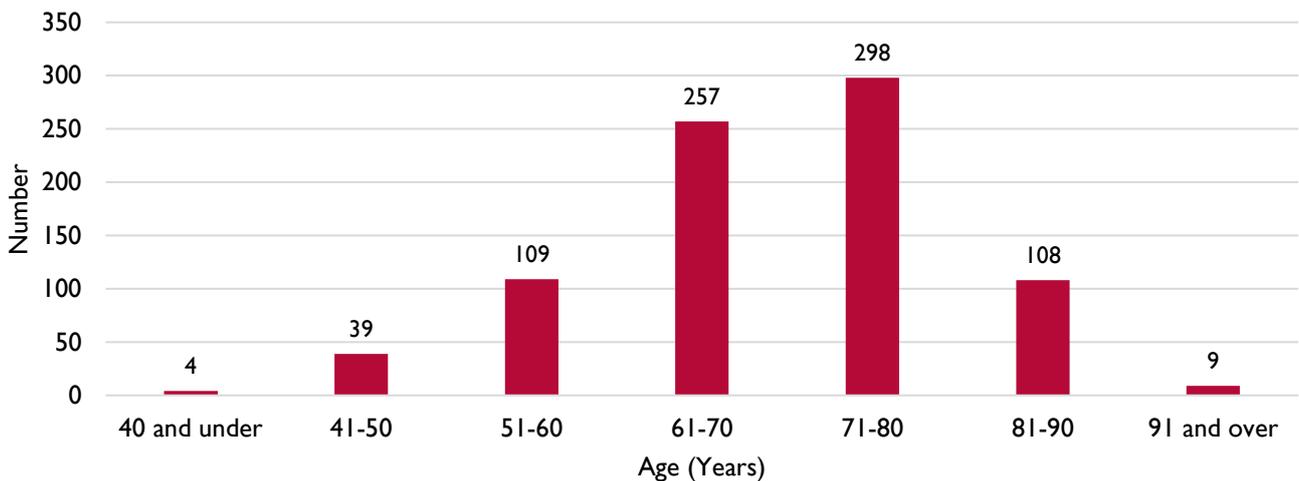
**Age and Gender**

Of the absolute membership, as at 11 December 2017:

- The oldest Member was aged 98.
- Two Members shared the youngest age of 39.
- The mean age was 69.<sup>12</sup>
- There were 216 female Members (26 percent), an increase from 24 percent in June 2015.<sup>13</sup>

Chart 4 below shows the age profile of the absolute membership, by age band:

**Chart 4: Age of the Absolute Membership by Age Band**



## Length of Membership

As at 11 December 2017, of the absolute membership, the average length of membership was 14 years. Chart 5 below shows the length of membership by year bands:

**Chart 5: Length of Membership by Year Bands**



## Members Joining and Leaving the House

Since 1 January 2015, there have been 82 life Peers created. This number includes five crossbench creations [announced on 12 October 2017](#). The average age of the 82 new Peers, at the time of their announcement, was 57 years. Table 1 shows the party or group affiliation of the 82 Peers created since 1 January 2015, by Prime Minister in power at the time of announcement:<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1: Party/Group Affiliation of New Peerage Creations by Prime Minister in Power<sup>15</sup>**

Prime Minister in Power	Affiliation	Number
David Cameron	Conservative	34
	Labour	8
	Liberal Democrat	11
	Crossbench	5
Theresa May	Conservative	16
	Labour	1
	Crossbench	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>82</b>

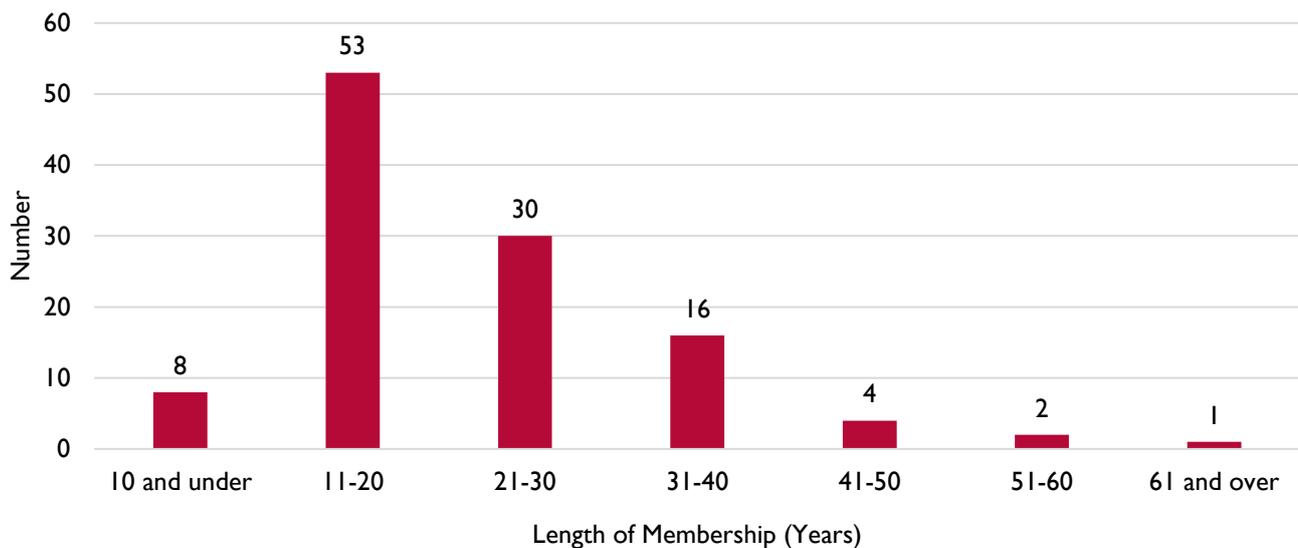
Since 1 January 2015, the number of Members who have left the House was 114 (excluding Bishops).<sup>16</sup> This number included 106 life Peers (of whom nine were ‘judicial’ life Peers), and eight ‘excepted hereditary’ Peers. Table 2 below provides information relating to the reason for leaving the House:

**Table 2: Reasons for Cessation of Membership**

Reason	Number
Retirement	69
Death	39
Non-attendance	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>

For those who have left the House since 1 January 2015, the average age at the time of leaving was 83 years. The average length of membership was 23 years. Chart 6 below shows the length of membership, in year bands, for those who have left the House since 1 January 2015 (excluding Bishops):

**Chart 6: Length of Membership (by Year Bands) of Members Leaving the House**



### Further Information

Further information on the size and composition of the House, including commentary and debates on the subject of potential reform, can be found in the House of Lords Library briefing, [Size of the House of Lords](#), 29 January 2016. Members may also be interested in the following House of Lords Library briefings:

- [Hereditary By-elections: Results](#), 20 July 2017
- [House of Lords: Party and Group Strengths and Voting](#), 15 March 2017
- [House of Lords: Statistical Profile of Membership](#), 6 February 2017
- [Peerage Creations: Appointments to the House of Lords Since 1997](#), 3 February 2016

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<sup>1</sup> [HL Hansard, 5 December 2016, cols 500–92.](#)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, [col 500.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [HL Hansard, 20 December 2016, col 1541.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House, [Report of the Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House](#), 31 October 2017.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p 2.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p 3.

<sup>8</sup> Parliament website, ['Reduce House of Lords to 600 Members. Says Committee'](#), 31 October 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Constitution Unit, University College London, ['Burns Report on Lords Size: A Rare Opportunity to be Seized'](#), 31 October 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Unlock Democracy, ['House Of Lords Reform: A Piecemeal Solution to a Seismic Issue is Not Good Enough'](#), 7 November 2017.

<sup>11</sup> House of Lords, [Statistics on Business and Membership: Session 2016–17: 18 May 2016 to 27 April 2017](#), 2017, p 1.

<sup>12</sup> The median age was 71, modal age was 75.

<sup>13</sup> House of Lords Library, [Women in the House of Lords](#), 30 June 2015, p 3.

<sup>14</sup> Statistics for Theresa May include 16 peerages nominated by David Cameron as part of his resignation honours.

<sup>15</sup> Source: House of Lords Library.

<sup>16</sup> Bishops have a maximum retirement age of 70.