



Size of the House of Lords: Recent Developments

Summary

This briefing presents information on the size of the House of Lords, focusing on developments since the establishment of a Lord Speaker's committee to look at this issue at the end of 2016. The committee had been set up following a House of Lords debate which showed strong support for reducing the size of the House.

Reporting in October 2017, the committee expressed concerns about the House's increasing size, fearing it may exceed a membership of 1,000 in the coming years. It described this scenario as unacceptable to the public and to the Lords itself, also believing it would make the House increasingly costly and inefficient. On this basis, it made recommendations as to how the House of Lords could reduce its membership to within a proposed cap of 600, and how the cap could be maintained whilst ensuring regular new appointments were still possible. This included the recommendation of 15-year term limits for new Members, and for appointments to be made on a "two-out, one-in" basis until the cap was achieved, and then a "one-out, one-in" basis thereafter. It also recommended that party appointments were made in line with the results of the most recent general election, and that the Crossbench group be maintained at a minimum of 20 percent of the House. The report was broadly welcomed in a subsequent House of Lords debate on 19 December 2017.

In a follow-up report published in October 2018, the committee welcomed the progress the House was making towards reducing its size, stressing that the number of departures were exceeding its suggested targets. It also welcomed statements by the Prime Minister, Theresa May, indicating support for aspects of the committee's recommendations, particularly her willingness to exercise restraint over the number of appointments to the House. The report of the Lord Speaker's committee was also been welcomed by the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which believed it set out "an achievable system for reducing the size of the House of Lords without need for legislation".

As at 18 January 2019, the total membership of the House of Lords was 807. This included 22 Members currently ineligible to sit (for example, due to being on leave of absence or disqualified due to a specific position held). This represented a reduction in the total membership from the end of the last session and from the size of the House at the time of publication of the two Lord Speaker's committee reports.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Lord Speaker's Committee
3. Statistics

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Lord Speaker's Committee	3
2.1 Establishment	3
2.2 Report and Recommendations	4
2.3 Debate on the Report.....	8
2.4 Follow-up Report.....	11
2.5 House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee	12
3. Statistics	14
3.1 Changes in the Size of the House	14
3.2 Members Joining and Leaving the House in Recent Years	16
3.3 Data Relating to Ages and Length of Service	17

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I. Introduction

This briefing provides an update on recent developments relating to the size of the House of the Lords. Section two of the briefing focuses on the report and recommendations of the Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House and section three provides updated statistics.¹ In particular, the statistics in section three look at:

- recent changes in the size of the House;
- Members joining and leaving since the beginning of 2015; and
- data on the ages and tenures of current and recently departed Members.

First, as stated in a memorandum produced by the then Clerk of the Parliaments, David Beamish, in 2013, the size of the House of Lords may be interpreted in two ways:

It can refer simply to the number of Members eligible to participate in proceedings, or it can refer to those Members who do in practice attend sittings. Measures to remove from membership those Members who play no significant part will reduce the size of the House in the first sense but will have no impact on crowding in the Chamber, pressure on facilities or costs.²

In line with this, the statistics in section three briefly considers both the numbers of Members eligible to attend and average attendance. It also sets out figures using the terms 'absolute' and 'actual' membership. The 'absolute' membership refers to all Members that may, at a point, exercise their right to sit in the House. Following the passing of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 and the House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015, there are now five ways Members can permanently leave the membership of the House:

- death;
- resignation;
- non-attendance for an entire session (subject to certain exceptions);
- if convicted of a serious offence resulting in a custodial sentence of a year or more; and/or
- upon the House exercising its powers to expel a Member for a breach of the code of conduct that arose or came to light after

¹ Information and commentary on the size of the House of Lords prior to the Lord Speaker's committee's report can be found in an earlier House of Lords Library briefing on this subject: [Size of the House of Lords](#), 29 January 2016.

² [Memorandum submitted by David Beamish, \[then\] Clerk of the Parliaments](#), to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, June 2013, para 4.

the passing of the House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015.

The ‘actual’ membership of the House excludes Members who have taken leave of absence, or who are currently disqualified from sitting. In most cases, Members are disqualified from sitting due to holding a particular post (such as a senior judicial post).³

Although these exclusions preclude a Member from immediately participating in sittings of the House, they are (in theory) only temporary exclusions. For example, Members on leave of absence may apply to return to the House following a three month notice period, and those disqualified from holding a particular office may be able to participate in proceedings of the House once their disqualifying position has been relinquished.⁴

In terms of joining the House, there are four main avenues to becoming a Member in the House of Lords:

- Through recommendation by the House of Lords Appointments Commission to sit on the crossbenches.⁵
- Prime Ministerial appointments (including non-party political appointments, resignation honours, dissolution honours, ministerial appointments and lists of new working peers).⁶
- Appointment to the House as an archbishop or bishop of the Church of England.⁷
- Election (through a by-election process) to replace an excepted hereditary peer who has left the House through either death, retirement or expulsion.⁸

However, the latter two have little practical effect on the size of the House, as all such arrivals are replacing a Member who has left. For example, there are currently 26 seats available in the House for archbishops or bishops of the Church of England. These consist of five seats automatically granted to

³ See the current list of ineligible Members: Parliament website, ‘[Ineligible Members of the House of Lords](#)’, accessed 18 January 2019.

⁴ However, on 16 December 2015, the House agreed to a recommendation by the Procedure Committee Sub-committee on Leave of Absence that Members should be encouraged to retire rather than go on leave of absence if they were unsure they would return: [HL Hansard, 16 December 2015, cols 2079–81](#). See also: House of Lords Procedure Committee, [Changes to the Leave of Absence Scheme, Ballot for Oral Question Slots During Recesses, Status of Interpreted or Translated Evidence to Select Committees](#), 30 November 2015, HL Paper 62 of session 2015–16, pp 4–5.

⁵ Although, in practice, new Members recommended by the Appointments Commission then need to be put forward by the Prime Minister for appointment by the Queen. See: House of Lords Library, [House of Lords Appointments Commission](#), 9 May 2012.

⁶ House of Lords Library, [Life Peerages Created Since 1958](#), 11 October 2018.

⁷ House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Lords Spiritual](#), 4 September 2017.

⁸ House of Lords Library, [Hereditary Peers in the House of Lords Since 1999](#), 27 March 2014.

the archbishops of Canterbury and York and the bishops of London, Durham and Winchester.⁹ When a vacancy arises in one of the remaining 21 seats (eg through retirement or death) it was practice for the most senior bishop from outside the House to take the vacant seat (bishops are required to retire at 70). However, following the enactment of the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015, eligible women bishops are now given preference for these seats up until May 2025.

In addition, following the House of Lords Act 1999, 92 hereditary peers are also granted a seat in the House of Lords and sit by virtue of their hereditary peerages.¹⁰ Two of these seats are for the holders of the offices of the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain. When one of the remaining 90 seats becomes available (through the death of an incumbent), the Member is replaced following a by-election.

2. Lord Speaker's Committee

2.1 Establishment

On 5 December 2016, the House of Lords debated a motion, tabled by Lord Cormack (Conservative), that “this House believes that its size should be reduced, and methods should be explored by which this could be achieved”.¹¹ This followed a number of debates and reports expressing concerns over the size of the House in preceding years.¹² The motion was agreed by the House without division, with Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal, recognising on behalf of the Government that there was a broad consensus among Members to address the issue:

Following today's constructive debate, we have an opportunity to make progress. It is clear that there is strong feeling across all benches that the size of the House is an issue of concern and that noble Lords want to continue discussions about how we might address this, although I think it is also fair to say that there is not currently clear agreement on what a solution might be [...] I will reflect on the comments made this evening and consider how best to take matters forward. I will of course want to speak with my fellow leaders, the Convenor and the Lord Speaker to consider the best approach.¹³

Among the options that Baroness Evans suggested was the possibility of a “back bench-led consultative group whose work could be overseen, for

⁹ House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Lords Spiritual](#), 4 September 2017.

¹⁰ House of Lords Library, [Hereditary Peers in the House of Lords Since 1999](#), 27 March 2014.

¹¹ [HL Hansard, 5 December 2016, cols 500–92](#).

¹² See: House of Lords Library, [Size of the House of Lords](#), 29 January 2016.

¹³ [HL Hansard, 5 December 2016, col 590](#).

instance, by the Lord Speaker”.¹⁴ She suggested such a group could be “well placed early on to look at pragmatic options for progress on this issue, analyse their implications and identify the important questions that need to be resolved so that we can go further”.

Subsequently, on 20 December 2016, the Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, announced the establishment of a “cross-party Lord Speaker’s committee of backbench peers to explore methods by which the size of the House can be reduced, commensurate with its current role and functions”.¹⁵ To achieve this, the committee was asked to:

- examine practical and politically viable options that might lead to progress on this issue;
- analyse their implications; and
- set out any outstanding questions that may need to be answered in order for any proposals to command broad consensus across the House.¹⁶

The Lord Speaker announced that the committee would be chaired by Lord Burns (Crossbench), with the rest of the membership consisting of: Lord Beith (Liberal Democrat), Baroness Browning (Conservative), Baroness Crawley (Labour), Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Labour) and Lord Wakeham (Conservative).

2.2 Report and Recommendations

The committee met 21 times over the months following its formation.¹⁷ It considered written evidence submitted to the committee, having sought views in a consultation paper published in January 2017, and ran private oral evidence sessions with a selection of Members from across the House and other interested individuals. The committee also consulted specialist advisors, namely:

- Dr Chris Ballinger (Exeter College, Oxford);
- Sir David Beamish KCB (former Clerk of the Parliaments);
- Peter Milledge CB (former Counsel to the Chairman of Committees); and
- Professor Meg Russell (Director, Constitution Unit, University College London).¹⁸

¹⁴ [HL Hansard, 5 December 2016, col 591](#).

¹⁵ House of Lords, ‘[Written Statement: Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House](#)’, HLWS386, 20 December 2016.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ 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, p 5.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

The committee's report was published on 31 October 2018. It spoke of the concerns over the increasing size of the House, noting that, with the exception of the reduction in membership brought about by the House of Lords Act 1999 (which removed a large proportion of the hereditary peers), the House had demonstrated a trend over time to increase in size.¹⁹ The committee highlighted the appointment rate as one of the reasons for this increase, stressing that—in recent years—prime ministerial appointments to rebalance the House after general elections (particularly when there was a change in Government) was putting “upward pressure” on its size. For example, it stated:

The effect on the political balance of the House is only really visible over the last 18 years, as the Conservatives greatly outnumbered Labour before the House of Lords Act 1999. Appointments after Labour came to power in 1997 gradually rebalanced the House, but they did not become the largest party until 2006. The Conservatives regained that position in 2014.²⁰

The committee noted that the absolute membership on 1 October 2017 was 824, consisting of 800 peers and 24 bishops (two of the bishops' places were vacant at that time).²¹ It estimated that if appointments were to carry on at the rate demonstrated in recent years then membership could soon settle at a rate of around 1,000.²² However, it also recognised that, in reality, the membership would be likely to increase further, principally due to the needs of future governments to continue to rebalance the House and due to increasing life expectancies. It stated “this would be unacceptable to Members of the House and the general public alike, and result in an increasingly costly and inefficient chamber”.²³

To address this issue, the report recommended that:

- the House move towards a cap of 600 Members (including 26 Bishops);²⁴
- until the House is reduced to that number, it operate a “two-out, one-in” principle”, whereby one half of all departures (through retirement or death) would be reserved for reducing its size, and the other half of departures allocated to new appointments to the House;²⁵

¹⁹ 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, p 8.

²⁰ *ibid*, p 9.

²¹ The actual, or eligible, membership was 799.

²² 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, p 9.

²³ *ibid*.

²⁴ *ibid*, p 2.

²⁵ *ibid*, p 1.

- once the cap had been reached, it operate a “one-out, one-in” principle;²⁶
- new appointments to the House be “distributed between the groups on a fair basis”, with the proportion of party appointments determined by the previous general election result and with Crossbench Members ring-fenced at a minimum of 20 percent of the House or at their current proportion (this was calculated at around 23 percent at the time of the report’s publication (or 134 out of 574 Members within the cap));²⁷ and
- all new Members sign an undertaking to serve only 15 years and then retire.²⁸

The committee stressed that it was calling on the parties and groups within the House to work together to achieve the recommendations, as it intended the changes to be brought about without legislation:

Recognising the difficulties normally faced by bills relating to the House of Lords, we are proposing a system which can be implemented without legislation. This will require a working agreement between the parties and a willingness by existing members voluntarily to take the steps needed to achieve the target reduction in the size of the House: we do not propose term limits or compulsory retirement for existing members.²⁹

Based on this principle, the committee did not make any recommendations related to the number of Bishops that could sit in the House (26) or the number of excepted hereditary peers (92).³⁰ However, regarding the latter, it did state that the House and the Government may wish to consider:

Whether it would be sustainable for hereditary by-elections to continue in a smaller House, as it would lead to hereditary Members making up a greater proportion of the House and in particular of the Conservative and Crossbench groups.³¹

²⁶ 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, p 1.

²⁷ *ibid*, pp 21–2.

²⁸ *ibid*, p 2.

²⁹ *ibid*, p 1.

³⁰ *ibid*, p 2. It recognised that measures to alter the number of Bishops or excepted hereditaries that could sit in the House may require legislation (see the following Lords Library briefings for further background: [House of Lords: Lords Spiritual](#), 4 September 2017; and [Hereditary Peers in the House of Lords Since 1999](#), 27 March 2014).

³¹ Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House, [‘Reduce House of Lords to 600 Members, Says Committee’](#), 31 October 2017.

The committee also left it up to the House and the parties to decide the rate and distribution of reduction to reach the cap of 600.³² However, it did suggest possible targets, which it believed would enable the cap to be reached in around 11 years from the report's publication. For example, it suggested a target of 150 Members leaving in the first five years, which (taken together with half of these then being allocated to new appointments) would result in a net reduction of 75 across this period. The committee suggested that the groups within the House could reduce their numbers by the same proportions and at the same rate, which would have required the following number of departures in the four main groups across the five-year period from 2017 to 2022:³³

- Conservative: 48.
- Labour: 38.
- Liberal Democrats: 18.
- Crossbench: 35.

The committee also stated that it was not prescribing how parties should meet any reduction targets, but did again outline some possible options:

We do not propose to prescribe how the groups should meet their targets, because that is a matter for them. We do however suggest that there is merit in considering relative length of service and age of Members within the group, or a combination of the two, when deciding which of them might be encouraged to retire each year. Another factor which might be kept in mind is the contribution levels of Members. Although we do not support the use of age limits or contribution levels for new Members, they may have a part to play for existing Members during the reduction phase.³⁴

To highlight these possibilities further, in appendix 4 of the report the committee set out the numbers of Members who would be required to retire across five-year periods if it was based on 20-year term limits or on age plus term served reaching 100 years.³⁵

In its conclusion, the report stated:

If our proposals are accepted, they will reduce the size of the House of Lords and maintain a cap of 600 Members into the future. In doing so, they will provide sufficient turnover of Members to refresh the House and rebalance it in line with general elections over time, while also

³² 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, p 5.

³³ *ibid*, p 27.

³⁴ *ibid*, p 28.

³⁵ *ibid*, p 36.

guaranteeing a sizeable fixed proportion of independent Crossbench peers. We hope that Members will unite around our scheme and thereby secure a fair and streamlined House for as long as it remains an appointed body.³⁶

The report was welcomed by the Lord Speaker, who 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 in checking bills before they become law and in reviewing policy through their hard working select committees.³⁷

However, he stressed that the recommendations could only succeed if backed by a political agreement involving the main parties and with the support of the Prime Minister. He hoped such support would be forthcoming.

2.3 Debate on the Report

The report was debated by the House on 19 December 2017.³⁸ The report's recommendations were supported by a majority of Members speaking in the debate, with many welcoming the opportunity to take action by agreement within the House itself. Lord Hope of Craighead, Convenor of the Crossbench Peers, described it as an "excellent report, which deserves to be supported", also stating it was his "impression" that other crossbenchers were in favour of it.³⁹ The Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, Lord Newby, stated that, although it did not change his party's view that the House should be elected, the Liberal Democrats supported the principal features of the report:

From these benches, as I say, we support their principal features: a significantly reduced size of your Lordships' House, party membership based on electoral performance, and a gradual phasing in of the new arrangements. We do not of course resile from our policy of having elections for the political Members of your Lordships' House, but we are realistic enough to know that this is not going to happen any time

³⁶ 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, p 29

³⁷ Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House, [Reduce House of Lords to 600 Members. Says Committee](#), 31 October 2017.

³⁸ [HL Hansard, 19 December 2017, cols 1965–2001, 2011–58 and 2070–108.](#)

³⁹ *ibid*, cols 1974–5.

soon. In the meantime, it is highly desirable that something is done to reduce our size.⁴⁰

However, he did raise some concerns about the proposals, including the fact that the scheme would bring about an increase in the proportion of hereditary peers within the House membership, and the need for there to be a “cast-iron assurance” from any government that it would continue to abide by the principles (eg a government would not simply increase appointments at any stage to gain a majority within the House).⁴¹

A small number of concerns were also raised about how the changes may impact the House and its future membership; for example, Lord Strathclyde (Conservative and a former Leader of the House) believed fixed terms for new Members would limit the experience within the House and make it more like the House of Commons.⁴² Indeed, he questioned whether overcrowding was really an issue within the House (noting that average attendance was around 480), and instead recommended that—if the House was to be reduced—it should simply be done through prime ministers showing restraint in the number of appointments made:

In the last year for which figures are available, eight peers were created and 31 left. If I extrapolate that over five years, we would drop by 115 and get to 650 in seven years. It is that responsibility and restraint that we should encourage, and we should do that starting today.⁴³

Although acknowledging some of the concerns raised during the debate (including the proposed term limits for new Members and the fact the report did not address the number of Bishops or hereditary peers), the Leader of the Opposition, Baroness Smith of Basildon, nevertheless believed the House had indicated its “clear support” for the report:

This report does not have all the answers to the various issues and concerns that Members of your Lordships’ House and others have about the role and composition of our second chamber. It was never able to provide that, and it was never intended that it would [...]

The focus of the changes and of any reform, the guiding principle, should always be what enables us better to fulfil our responsibilities. The large number of speakers and the quality of the debate today reflects our concerns about our reputation and our ability to fulfil those responsibilities and our constitutional obligations. Tonight’s debate has been more than a broad welcome. With very few

⁴⁰ [HL Hansard, 19 December 2017, cols 1972–3.](#)

⁴¹ *ibid*, col 1973

⁴² *ibid*, col 2000.

⁴³ *ibid*, col 2001.

exceptions there has been clear support for this report around the House.⁴⁴

She believed none of the concerns were “insurmountable”, except the need for a strong signal of support from the Government and Prime Minister:

This will work only if the Government play their part. It is not about giving up patronage or appointments but about showing some restraint, as it used to be. I really believe that if this Prime Minister made that point, it would be very difficult for future Prime Ministers to renege on that.⁴⁵

The Leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, thanked the committee for its “valuable” report.⁴⁶ She indicated that the Government would be listening to the points made in the debate, and stated that the Prime Minister (and other party leaders) would be carefully considering its recommendations:

For the Prime Minister and the other party leaders, the committee has recommended a cap on the number of appointments made each year and a set formula when allocating those numbers to political groupings. This recommendation requires detailed consideration of the constitutional and political issues it raises. I know that the Prime Minister will consider carefully her response, as I am sure will the other party leaders.⁴⁷

She also called on the House to work together to achieve the goals set out in the report (for example, by promoting voluntary retirement), stating:

We must show our commitment as a House to reducing our size if we are to expect party leaders now or in future to agree to the restrictions that the report seeks to place on them. There are indeed two sides to achieving the outcome that the report seeks to achieve [...] The way forward will not be for the Government to lead on and deliver alone.⁴⁸

Concluding, the chair of the committee, Lord Burns (Crossbench), again addressed some of the concerns raised by Members during the debate, and stressed his belief that these could be overcome:

A lot of good points have been made which would need to be

⁴⁴ [HL Hansard, 19 December 2017, cols 2100–1.](#)

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, col 2104.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, col 1970.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

considered in any implementation. We set out a number of these in the report. We could not solve all the problems. We are reasonably confident that they are not severe problems and that they can be coped with, with a certain amount of goodwill.⁴⁹

Despite this, he stated that his “interpretation of today—and I feel very encouraged by it—is that there is a substantial consensus about the need for reform and that there is a lot of support for the proposals”.⁵⁰ He urged the Leader of the House to convey the House’s support for the report to the Prime Minister, stating that her backing would be essential to its progress:

I hope that our Leader will be able to exercise her powers of persuasion and to explain what has happened in this House today and the amount of support for this, so that we can possibly move forward to a next stage where we look at implementation in a great deal more detail, come together to try to form an agreement between the parties and clear up some of the other issues that have been raised.⁵¹

2.4 Follow-up Report

The committee published a follow-up report on 24 October 2018, detailing the progress and discussions over the year following its first report.⁵² In this second report, the committee stated that the House was already reducing in size and that more Members had left the House in the first year than the committee had proposed in its recommendations.⁵³ It also welcomed the Prime Minister, Theresa May’s, response to the report, indicating it was “encouraged” by the communications with her. In particular, the committee highlighted the Prime Minister’s commitment to continue to exercise restraint over appointments, and to appoint Members with reference to election results:

I would like to use this letter to make a statement of intent on further appointments over the remainder of this Parliament. I intend to continue with the restraint I have exercised to date and, when making appointments, to allocate them fairly, bearing in mind the results of the last general election and the leadership shown by each party in terms of retirements.⁵⁴

The committee noted that the Prime Minister had not committed to a cap or to fixed-term appointments, stating that, without these, it was “difficult to

⁴⁹ [HL Hansard, 19 December 2017, cols 2105.](#)

⁵⁰ *ibid*, col 2107.

⁵¹ *ibid*, col 2108.

⁵² Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House, [Second Report of the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House](#), 24 October 2018.

⁵³ *ibid*.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 1.

envisage how the size of the House can achieve the steady state which is necessary to provide stability and give confidence to Members and the wider public”.⁵⁵ However, it welcomed the suggestion from the Prime Minister that these aspects may be revisited at a later date and that the overall scheme may be “formalised” accepting that such changes may be viewed as “constitutionally significant”:

The committee’s proposals are predicated on capping the membership of the House at an agreed number, which we proposed should be 600, and the need for such a cap will become increasingly apparent as the scheme proceeds. We welcome the Prime Minister’s suggestion that these arrangements might be formalised after a period of restraint in appointments and increased cross-party departures, and the priority for the coming period must be to build the necessary trust on all sides of the House to allow this to happen.

We accept that our proposals for the “steady state”, particularly the introduction of fixed terms, would be constitutionally significant, and we agree with the Prime Minister that they would benefit from “further careful thought and wider engagement”. We have robust advice from leading experts in constitutional law and parliamentary practice that the proposals are constitutionally and legally sound, but we accept that the proposals need to be tested at the political level. It is important, however, that this process should not be used to postpone addressing the issue indefinitely. We look forward to revisiting and discussing this element of our proposals.⁵⁶

The progress report was welcomed by the Lord Speaker, who believed it showed that the House had “taken an important step forward this year in moving toward a smaller, more effective House”.⁵⁷

2.5 House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

On 19 November 2018, the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee published a report on the size of the House of Lords and the work of the Lord Speaker’s committee. Although believing that wider reforms to the House of Lords should continue to be discussed, it described reaching agreement on these as “difficult”.⁵⁸ Instead, it believed smaller measures to tackle the increasing size of the House should

⁵⁵ Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House, [Second Report of the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House](#), 24 October 2018, p 2.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House, [‘Reduction in the Size of the Lords is on Track’](#), 24 October 2018.

⁵⁸ House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [A Smaller House of Lords: The Report of the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House](#), 19 November 2018, HC 662 of session 2017–19, p 22.

be an “urgent political priority which must not be delayed”, stating there were “serious concerns that the House of Lords’ growing size and cost has a direct impact on the chamber’s ability to conduct its important functions”. It welcomed the report of the Lord Speaker’s committee on this basis, stating the “effect of implementing the Burns Report recommendations is the very minimum reform which should be contemplated”.⁵⁹

The committee expressed support for the proposed cap set out in the report, although it believed the House of Lords should seek to reach the cap more quickly than the Lord Speaker’s committee had proposed. It did recognise that “gaining consent for this reform depends upon avoiding unreasonable pressure on existing members to retire”, but urged the leaders of groups in the House to agree “strict retirement targets”.⁶⁰ Indeed, it believed the positive figures set out in the follow-up report of the Lord Speaker’s committee supported its view that the “rate of reduction could be increased through cooperation of the party groups”.⁶¹

It also supported the formula for appointments recommended in the report, and stressed the importance of the Prime Minister committing to the proposals:

It is important that the Prime Minister commits to the proposed cap and to limiting appointments in line with the proposed appointment formula. The adoption of this formula is a vital aspect of the proposals to reduce the size of the House. This system would make appointment of peers more transparent and set out clearly, as called for by our predecessor committees over many years, a constitutional convention that appointments to the House of Lords should reflect the results of the most recent general election.⁶²

In conclusion, the committee stated it was pleased with how the report of the Lord Speaker’s committee had been welcomed in the House of Lords and that Members had shown a “willingness to act”.⁶³ It believed the report had produced “an achievable system for reducing the size of the House of Lords without need for legislation”, and that the early indications showed that, as long as there was continuing commitment from all parties, the reforms could succeed.

⁵⁹ House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [A Smaller House of Lords: The Report of the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House](#), 19 November 2018, HC 662 of session 2017–19, p 22.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p 24.

⁶² *ibid.*, pp 22–3.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p 24.

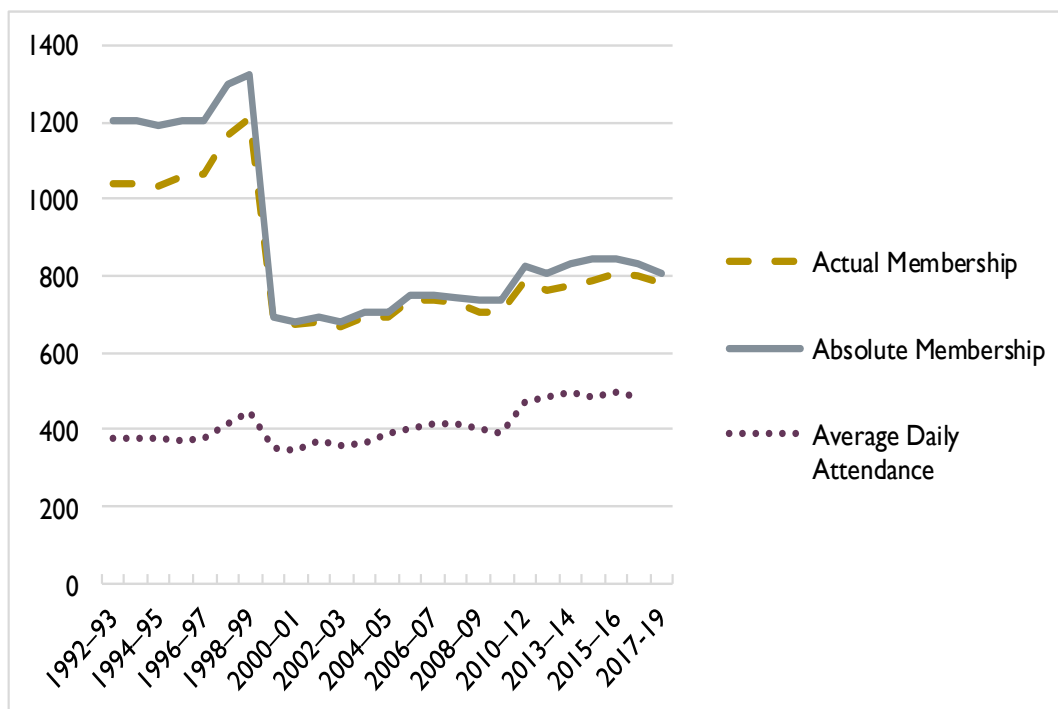
3. Statistics

3.1 Changes in the Size of the House

As at 18 January 2019, the absolute membership of the House was 807. This represented a reduction of 17 Members from the 1 October 2017 figures recorded in the first size of the House report,⁶⁴ and was a reduction of 28 from the number recorded at the end of the 2016–17 session.⁶⁵ The actual membership (eg excluding those on leave of absence) was 785 on 18 January 2019; again, this was 14 Members lower than the figures in the first Lord Speaker’s committee report and 17 lower than the figures recorded at the end of the last session.

A graph setting out changes in absolute membership, actual membership, and average daily attendance between the end of the 1992–93 session and 18 January 2019 is set out below:

Figure 1: Absolute Membership, Actual Membership and Average Daily Attendance Since 1992–93⁶⁶



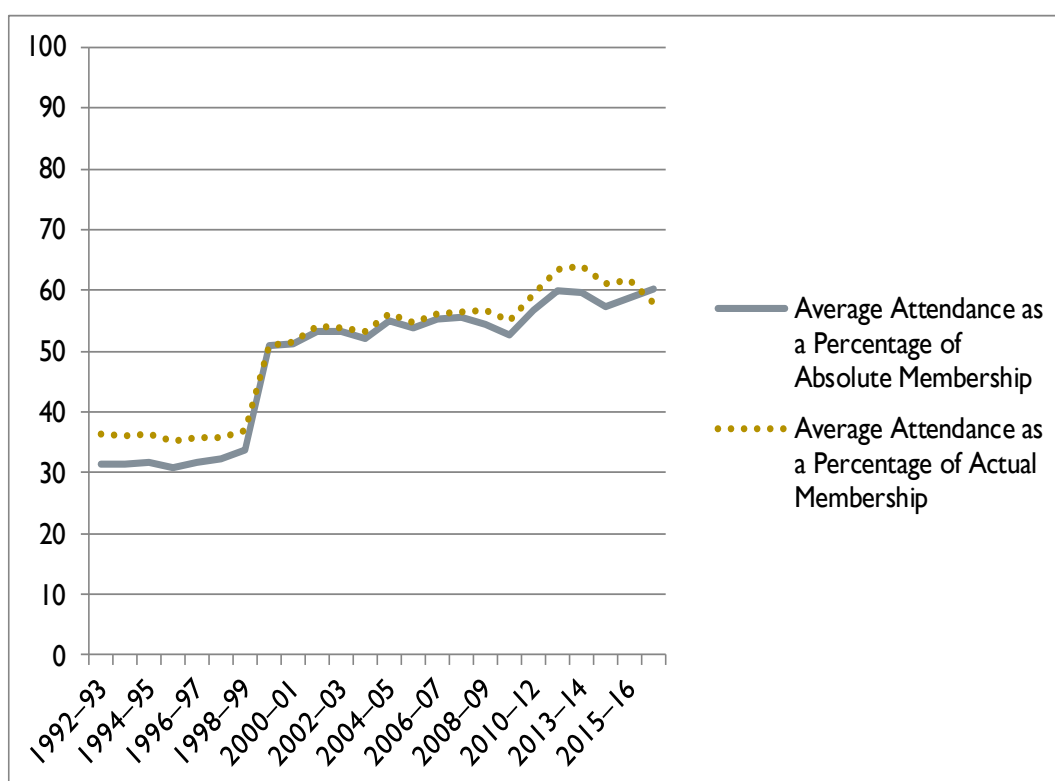
⁶⁴ Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House, [Report of the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House](#), 31 October 2017, p 5.

⁶⁵ House of Lords, [Statistics on Business and Membership: Session 2016–17](#), 2017, p 8.

⁶⁶ Source: House of Lords Library. Note: With the exception of the figures for the current session (which were recorded as at 18 January 2019), the figures represent the membership and average daily attendance recorded at the end of each session in the House’s Business and Membership statistics: House of Lords, [‘Business Statistics’](#), accessed 18 January 2018.

The graph shows that, with the exception of the large reduction in membership brought about by the House of Lords Act 1999, the membership has tended to increase in size over time. However, it also shows a small decline in recent years, with the absolute membership reducing since the end of the 2015–16 session. Average daily attendance has also seen increases, rising from an average of 377 in the first five sessions recorded in the graph, to an average of 489 for the last five sessions.⁶⁷ The graph below shows the average attendance each session as a proportion of absolute membership and of actual membership:

Figure 2: Average Daily Attendance as a Proportion of Actual and of Absolute Membership⁶⁸



The graph shows that the proportion of those attending the House has increased over time, with a particularly large increase visible immediately following the House of Lords Act 1999. For example, average daily attendance as a proportion of the actual (or eligible) membership has increased from around 36% in the sessions up to and including 1998–99, to around 58–62% in recent years.

A breakdown of the current actual membership by group, alongside the actual membership figures recorded for the end of the 2016–17 session, is

⁶⁷ Figures are only available for the end of the session; therefore, there are currently no published average daily attendance figures available for the current session.

⁶⁸ Source: House of Lords Library.

set out in the following table:

Table 1: Actual Membership by Groups⁶⁹

Party/Group	End of 2016–17 Session	18 January 2019
Bishops	25	26
Conservatives	253	247
Crossbench	177	183
Labour	201	187
Liberal Democrats	102	97
Non-Affiliated/Other ⁷⁰	44	45
Total	802	785

3.2 Members Joining and Leaving the House in Recent Years

As at 18 January 2019, five Members had left the House in the current year (three through retirement and two through death), and no new Members had joined.⁷¹ The following table shows figures for each complete year since 2015:

Table 2: Number of Members Joining and Leaving Each Full Year Since 2015⁷²

Year	Joined	Left	Deaths	Retirements ⁷³	Net
2015	63	51	18	33	+12
2016	18	35	13	22	-17
2017	11	32	9	23	-21
2018	19	29	16	13	-10
Total	111	147	56	91	-36

The table shows that in each year after 2015 more Members have left the House of Lords than have joined. The following table provides a further breakdown of these figures for 2018, the first full calendar year since the publication of the Lord Speaker's committee report, showing distributions across the four main groups in the House:

⁶⁹ House of Lords, [Statistics on Business And Membership: Session 2016–17](#), 2017, p 8; and Parliament website, '[Members of the House of Lords](#)', accessed 18 January 2019.

⁷⁰ Includes the Lord Speaker.

⁷¹ Source: House of Lords Library.

⁷² Source: House of Lords Library. Note: The figures do not include Bishops.

⁷³ This includes those leaving the House under the zero attendance provisions of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014.

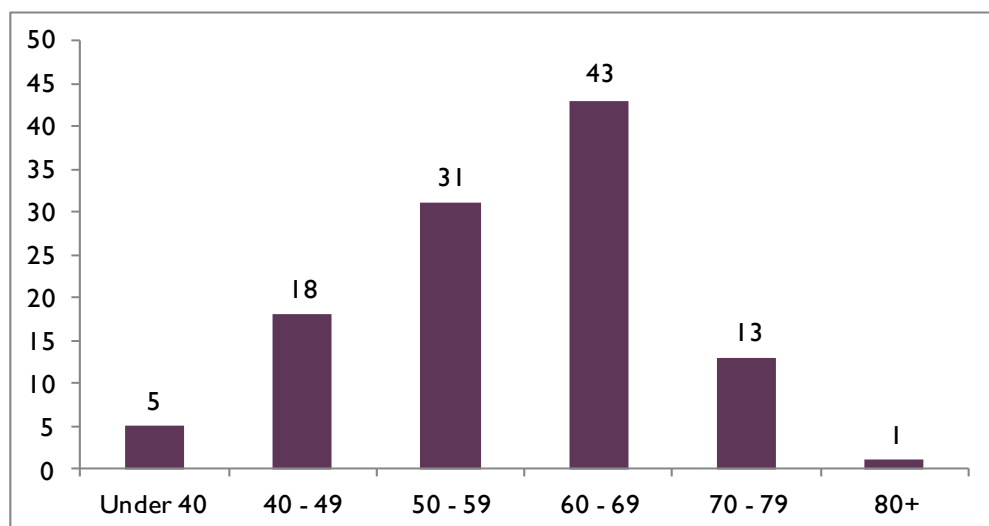
Table 3: Number of Members Joining and Leaving the House by Group⁷⁴

Party/Group	Joining	Deaths	Retirements	Total Leaving
Conservative	9 ⁷⁵	3	3	6
Labour	3	9	3	12
Liberal Democrat	0	1	1	2
Crossbench	5 ⁷⁶	2	5	7

3.3 Data Relating to Ages and Length of Service

This section contains brief information on the ages and length of service of those joining and leaving the House since 2015, and the same for those in the current membership. This is in light of the options for reducing the House set out by the Lord Speaker's committee.⁷⁷

As at 18 January 2019, the average age of Members joining the House of Lords since the beginning of 2015 is 58. The following graph shows a breakdown of new Members by age band:

Figure 3: Members Joining Since 2015 By Age Band⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Source: House of Lords Library.

⁷⁵ One of these appointments was to replace an excepted hereditary peer who had left the House. In addition, the number excludes Lord Tyrie, who although initially announced as a Conservative appointment, officially joined the House as a non-affiliated Member.

⁷⁶ Two of these appointments were to replace excepted hereditary peers who had left the House.

⁷⁷ See section 2.2 of this briefing.

⁷⁸ Source: House of Lords Library.

The table shows that around three quarters of the new Members joining since 2015 were aged between 50 and 69 when they entered the House.

Regarding those leaving the House, the average age of those departing since the beginning of 2015 was 84, and the average tenure served by those Members was 24 years. The following two tables show breakdowns by age and tenure range of those leaving the House across this period:

Figure 4: Years Served by Those Leaving the House Since 2015⁷⁹

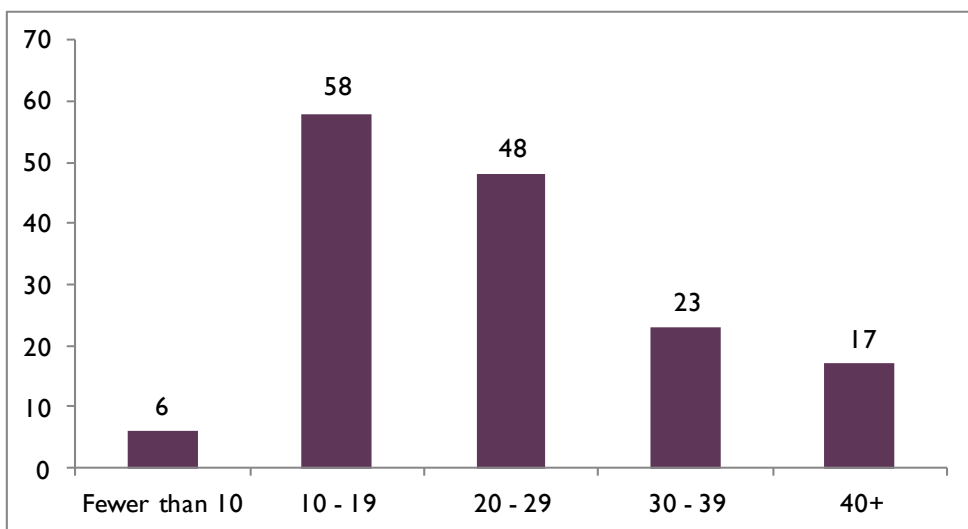
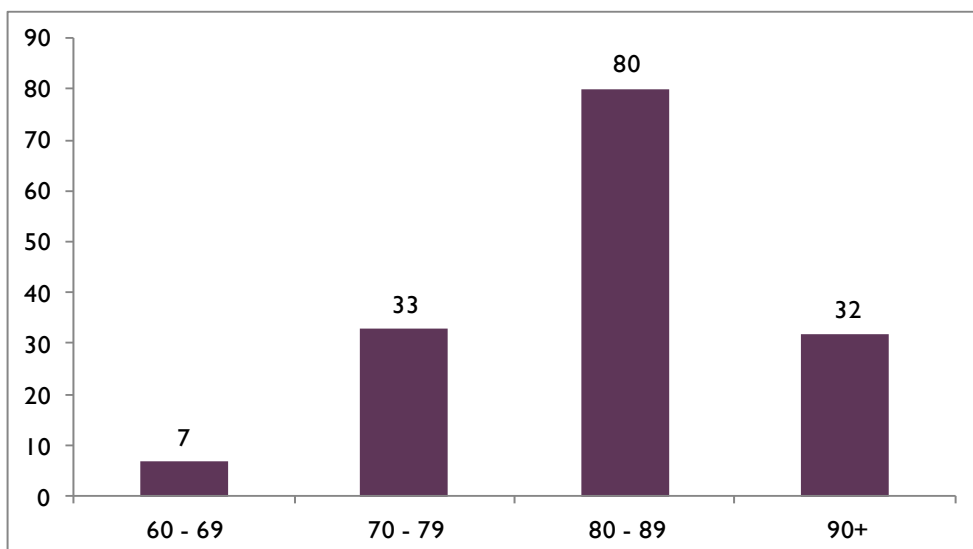


Figure 5: Age Ranges of Those Leaving the House Since 2015⁸⁰



The first table showed that a majority of Members left the House having served between 10 and 29 years, with this equating to 70% of those

⁷⁹ Source: House of Lords Library.

⁸⁰ Source: House of Lords Library.

departing. The majority of these left having served between 10 and 19 years. In terms of the ages of those leaving, the majority left while aged between 80 and 89, with this making up 53% of those leaving since the beginning of 2015.

The average age of the current absolute membership, as at 18 January 2019, was 70, and the average tenure was 14 years. The following table shows the number of Members in each age and tenure bracket:

Table 4: Tenure and Age Ranges of the House Membership (as at 18 January 2019)⁸¹

Tenure of Current Membership (Years)		Age Range of Current Membership	
0 – 9	339	40 – 49	29
10 – 19	249	50 – 59	98
20 – 29	162	60 – 69	233
30 – 39	31	70 – 79	300
40 – 49	20	80 – 89	135
50+	6	90+	12

The table shows that the vast majority of Members had served less than 20 years, with this making up 73% of the total. In addition, the majority of Members were aged between 60 and 79, with this representing 66% of the total. Of those remaining, 147 were aged over 80 (18%), and 127 were aged under 50 (16%).

⁸¹ Source: House of Lords Library.