



# King's Speech 2024: Constitution

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This research briefing sets out the Labour Party's commitments covering the constitution, drawing on its manifesto and other material in the public domain. It has been written in advance of the King's Speech to help members of the House of Lords prepare for the debate on the speech. It does not constitute official information about the government's intentions or provide a complete list of bills to be announced. Commitments relating to devolution are covered in a separate briefing, ['King's Speech 2024: Devolved affairs'](#).

## I. Reforming the House of Lords

Labour's manifesto said reform of the House of Lords was "long over-due and essential", although it recognised many members did "good work" in scrutinising the government and improving legislation.<sup>1</sup> The manifesto set out commitments for both "an immediate modernisation" and, in the longer term, replacing the House of Lords with an alternative second chamber.

### I.1 Hereditary peers

Labour said it would introduce legislation to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords. It described the current arrangements as "indefensible".<sup>2</sup> Amendments would be needed to the House of Lords Act 1999 which provided for 90 hereditary peers to be members of the House of Lords and for by-elections to be held to fill any vacancies that arise. Arrangements for those by-elections are set out in the standing orders of the House.<sup>3</sup> The 1999 act also enabled the holders of the offices of Earl Marshal and Lord Great Chamberlain to be members of the House. The 1999 act removed most hereditary peers from the House of Lords; allowing 92 'excepted' hereditary members to

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<sup>1</sup> Labour Party, ['Labour Party manifesto 2024'](#), June 2024, p 108.

<sup>2</sup> As above.

<sup>3</sup> For further information about hereditary by-elections, see House of Lords Library, ['Hereditary by-elections: Results'](#), 8 April 2024.





remain was a compromise agreed on as a transitional arrangement pending a later second stage of reform of the House of Lords.<sup>4</sup>

The Labour manifesto is not explicit as to whether the proposed legislation would phase out the membership of hereditary peers by ending by-elections or would remove them all at once.<sup>5</sup> However, the Financial Times reported in April 2024 that Labour intends to remove all hereditary peers “swiftly”.<sup>6</sup> It quoted an unnamed Labour official as saying that ending by-elections would take too long to reduce the size of the House.

Currently, more than one in ten members of the House of Lords are hereditary peers. Removing all hereditary peers in one go would reduce the overall size of the House by 90, from 819 to 729.<sup>7</sup> These figures are based on the size of the membership as at 5 July 2024, and do not include the 19 new life peers announced in the dissolution peerages list on 4 July 2024 and newly appointed ministers given life peerages since 5 July 2024, none of whom have yet taken their seats.<sup>8</sup> Removing hereditary peers would have differing effects on the various parties/groups within the House of Lords. The Conservative Party and the Crossbenchers have larger numbers of hereditary peers than other parties/groups, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the party/group’s size, whereas Labour and the Liberal Democrats have relatively few, as shown in Table I.

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<sup>4</sup> See House of Lords Library, ‘[Hereditary peers in the House of Lords since 1999](#)’, 27 March 2014; and ‘[The Weatherill amendment: Elected hereditary peers](#)’, 23 October 2009 for further background.

<sup>5</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 108.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Fisher, ‘[Labour plans to axe hereditary peers in UK House of Lords](#)’, Financial Times (£), 1 April 2024.

<sup>7</sup> House of Lords Library, ‘[House of Lords data dashboard: Current membership of the House](#)’, accessed 5 July 2024. The figure of 819 includes members currently on leave of absence, disqualified from sitting or suspended. The current number of excepted hereditary peers is 90 rather than the maximum possible 92. This is because no by-election has been held to replace the Earl of Sandwich, who retired in May 2024, and Lord Carrington was already sitting as an excepted hereditary peer when he was appointed as Lord Great Chamberlain in September 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Dissolution peerages 2024](#)’, 4 July 2024; and Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Ministerial appointments: July 2024](#)’, 5 July 2024.



**Table 1: Excepted hereditary peers by party/group, as at 5 July 2024<sup>9</sup>**

Party/Group	Number of excepted hereditary peers	Excepted hereditary peers as percentage of party/group
Conservatives	46	16.2%
Crossbench	33	17.5%
Labour	4	2.2%
Liberal Democrat	4	5.0%
Non-affiliated	3	6.4%
Whole House	90	11.0%

The proposal to remove hereditary peers prompted a call for another category of membership of the House of Lords to be brought to an end at the same time. Responding to Labour’s manifesto, the National Secular Society argued that the right of 26 lords spiritual (bishops and archbishops) to a seat in the House of Lords was “just as unjustifiable” as the presence of hereditary peers given the UK is “less religious and more diverse than ever before”.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Mandatory retirement age

Labour argued in its manifesto that “because appointments are for life, the second chamber of Parliament has got too big”.<sup>11</sup> It said it would introduce a mandatory retirement age, so that at the end of the Parliament in which a member reaches 80 years of age, they would be required to retire from the House of Lords. Keir Starmer has said that the “massive” size of the House is the “primary driver” for bringing in a retirement age.<sup>12</sup> Currently, there is a voluntary scheme for retiring from the House of Lords, introduced by the House of Lords

<sup>9</sup> Library calculations using ‘Members’ names information service’ data, as of 5 July 2024. Figures include members on leave of absence or currently disqualified from sitting.

<sup>10</sup> National Secular Society, [‘NSS: Labour plans to reform House of Lords must include bishops’](#), 13 June 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 108.

<sup>12</sup> Pippa Crerar, [‘Move to reduce Lords retirement age to 80 is not about Joe Biden, says Keir Starmer’](#), Guardian, 10 July 2024.



Reform Act 2014.<sup>13</sup> Bishops are required to retire at 70. They sit in the Lords on an ‘ex officio’ basis, so they vacate their seat when they retire as a bishop.<sup>14</sup>

At the start of the 2024–25 parliamentary session, there will be 181 life peers aged 80 or over.<sup>15</sup> This is just over a quarter (26%) of the total number of life peers (704). Labour’s proposal is for mandatory retirement to take place at the end of a parliament. If the next parliament were to last for a full five years with no early general election, dissolution would automatically take place on 17 July 2029.<sup>16</sup> By then 310, or 44%, of the current life peers would be 80 or over. Table 2 shows the impact on the size of different parties and groups within the House of the removal at the end of the parliament of all life peers aged 80 or over. Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Crossbenchers would all lose roughly half their life peers, whereas the Conservatives would lose only around one third.

**Table 2: Removal of life peers aged 80 or over as at 17 July 2029, by party/group<sup>17</sup>**

Party/Group	Number of life peers aged 80 or over	Number of life peers remaining	Reduction in party/group size (compared to start of the parliament)
Conservatives	75	163	32%
Crossbench	80	76	51%
Labour	94	80	54%

<sup>13</sup> For further information, see House of Lords Library, [‘Retirement from the House of Lords’](#), 23 July 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Bishops’ retirements do not generally have an effect on the overall size of the House as retired bishops are replaced by another bishop; see House of Lords Library, [‘Lords spiritual in the House of Lords explained’](#), 5 January 2024. However, retired bishops can return to the House as a life peer, and it is usual for former archbishops of Canterbury to do so. As at 5 July 2024, there is one vacancy on the bishops’ benches.

<sup>15</sup> This includes both life peers appointed under the Life Peerages Act 1958 and those appointed under the Appellate Jurisdiction Act 1876. Library calculations using ‘Members’ names information service’ data, based on the age on the day of state opening (17 July 2024) of everyone who was a member as at 5 July 2024. Figures in this section include members on leave of absence or currently disqualified from sitting, but do not include the 19 new life peers announced on 4 July 2024 and newly appointed ministers given life peerage since 5 July 2024.

<sup>16</sup> The [Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022](#) provides for Parliament to dissolve at the beginning of the day that is the fifth anniversary of the day on which it first met, if it has not dissolved earlier. State opening of the new Parliament is due to take place on 17 July 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Library calculations using ‘Members’ names information service’ data, based on membership as at 5 July 2024. Figures in this section include members on leave of absence or currently disqualified from sitting, but do not include the 19 new life peers announced on 4 July 2024 who have not yet taken their seat.



Party/Group	Number of life peers aged 80 or over	Number of life peers remaining	Reduction in party/group size (compared to start of the parliament)
Liberal Democrat	36	40	47%
Non-affiliated	15	29	34%
Other	10	6	63%
All life peers	310	394	44%

The cumulative effect of removing 90 hereditary peers and 310 life peers aged 80 or over would see the size of the House reduce from a total of 819 to 420 at the end of this parliament, a reduction of nearly half (49%).<sup>18</sup> However, these figures do not take account of the 19 new life peers announced in a dissolution list on 4 July 2024 who are due to take their seats in the new session.<sup>19</sup> Nor do they take account of other changes that could happen in the next five years, including voluntary retirements, deaths, departures due to non-attendance, changes of party allegiance, the appointment of more new life peers or dissolution happening earlier than 17 July 2029.

There has been speculation that an incoming Labour government might appoint significant numbers of new life peers to “refresh” its membership or rebalance the relative strengths of the parties in the Lords.<sup>20</sup> As of 5 July 2024, there were 274 Conservative members and 172 Labour members entitled to sit and vote.<sup>21</sup> The government has also announced that five incoming new ministers are to be given life peerages.<sup>22</sup> Baroness Smith of Basildon, Labour’s leader in the House of Lords, said in May 2024 that she did not “see any room for having a massive increase in the number of Labour peers” and did not want “to see the House of Lords much bigger than it is now”.<sup>23</sup> She said her “ideal [...] would be to have roughly equal

<sup>18</sup> The figure of 420 is assuming all 26 bishops’ places would be filled; currently there is one vacancy.

<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister’s Office

<sup>20</sup> Sienna Rodgers, ‘Baroness Smith: [‘We should be honest about what we can achieve on Lords reform’](#)’, The House, 19 December 2023; Eleni Courea, ‘[Labour to add dozens of peers to back its policies and improve gender balance](#)’, Guardian, 23 June 2024; Henry Zeffman and Patrick Maguire, ‘[Labour draws up plans to flood House of Lords with peers](#)’, Times (£), 20 June 2023.

<sup>21</sup> UK Parliament, ‘[Lords membership](#)’, accessed 5 July 2024. These figures include both life peers and excepted hereditary peers within each party.

<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Ministerial appointments: July 2024](#)’, 5 July 2024.

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, ‘[Oral evidence: Membership of the House of Lords](#)’, 14 May 2024, HC 199 of session 2023–24, Q64.



numbers between the government and the major opposition party” but she recognised that achieving this might not be easy.<sup>24</sup> She ruled out a Labour government appointing “hundreds of new peers”.

The Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House considered the merits of a compulsory retirement age in 2017. It concluded the advantages would be:

- bringing peers closer in line with judges and bishops, who have a retirement age (which in the case of bishops applies to both their ecclesiastical and parliamentary roles)<sup>25</sup>
- allowing members to plan their futures with certainty; and
- making a positive impact upon any public or media perception that the age profile of the House is too high<sup>26</sup>

However, it also observed that “society as a whole is moving away from retirement ages”, at least in part because they are “somewhat arbitrary”. It suggested a compulsory retirement age would have an “uneven impact” on different groups/parties within the House depending on their age profile and could create a “perverse incentive” for new members to be appointed at a young age. The committee recommended a fixed-term membership system rather than a compulsory retirement age for reducing the size of the existing House.<sup>27</sup>

Various commentators on Labour’s manifesto also referenced the point that an age cap could be potentially arbitrary or ageist and could lead to the exclusion of members who actively contribute to the House.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, ‘[Oral evidence: Membership of the House of Lords](#)’, 14 May 2024, HC 199 of session 2023–24, Q64..

<sup>25</sup> The retirement age for judges is 75 and for bishops it is 70.

<sup>26</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, p 30.

<sup>27</sup> As above, p 15.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: Electoral Reform Society, ‘[Labour manifesto: Encouraging first steps—but we need to address rock bottom trust in politics](#)’, 13 June 2024; Dominic Lawson, ‘[Why octogenarian peers still enhance the Lords](#)’, Times (£), 16 June 2024; Cameron Henderson and Nick Gutteridge, ‘[Labour peers denounce Starmer’s plan for House of Lords as ‘ageist’](#)’, Telegraph (£), 13 June 2024.



### 1.3 Standards and participation

The manifesto said Labour would “ensure all peers meet the high standards the public expect of them”.<sup>29</sup> Connected to this, it pledged to introduce a new participation requirement and to strengthen the circumstances in which “disgraced members” can be removed from the House.

In terms of participation, currently the House of Lords Reform Act 2014 requires that any peer who does not attend the House during a parliamentary session lasting six months or longer ceases to be a member at the start of the next session.<sup>30</sup> The House of Lords’ standing orders state that members “are to attend the sittings of the House” and if there are temporary circumstances that mean they cannot do so, they should obtain leave of absence.<sup>31</sup> A member who has no reasonable expectation of returning as an active member at some point in the future is expected to retire.<sup>32</sup> The House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC) lists willingness to “commit the time necessary to make an effective contribution to the work of the House of Lords” as one of its assessment criteria for nominations for new non party-political peers.<sup>33</sup> However, this is not one of the criteria when HOLAC vets party-political nominees.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of removing “disgraced members” from the House, existing legislation passed in the 2010s provides mechanisms for automatic removal and for the House to agree to expel a member in certain circumstances. Under the House of Lords Reform Act 2014, a member who is convicted of a serious offence ceases to be a member of the House.<sup>35</sup> The House of Lords (Expulsion and Suspension) Act 2015 empowered the House to make arrangements to expel members. Consequently, the standing orders allow the House to agree to expel a member for certain breaches of the code of conduct. In February 2024, the House also

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<sup>29</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 108.

<sup>30</sup> This does not apply to members who are disqualified from sitting or voting for the whole session, suspended from the House for the whole session, or take leave of absence for any part of the session. The House can also resolve that a peer should not cease to be a member by virtue of non-attendance by reason of special circumstance.

<sup>31</sup> House of Lords, [‘The standing orders of the House of Lords relating to public business’](#), updated February 2024 (standing order 21).

<sup>32</sup> House of Lords, [‘Companion to the standing orders and guide to the rules of proceedings’](#), 2022, p 10.

<sup>33</sup> House of Lords Appointments Commission, [‘Criteria guiding the assessment of nominations for non-party political life peers’](#), accessed 5 July 2024.

<sup>34</sup> House of Lords Appointments Commission, [‘Vetting’](#), accessed 5 July 2024.

<sup>35</sup> This applies to convictions outside the UK only if the House resolves that it should. Being convicted of a serious offence means being sentenced to imprisonment for more than 12 months, not suspended.



agreed arrangements for the temporary exclusion of any member charged with a serious violent or sexual offence pending the conclusion of criminal proceedings.<sup>36</sup>

#### 1.4 Appointments process

Labour said in its manifesto it would reform the House of Lords appointments process to “ensure the quality of new appointments”.<sup>37</sup> Currently the House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC) can recommend to the prime minister individuals to sit as non-party political members of the House of Lords.<sup>38</sup> As part of this process, it assesses candidates’ suitability and propriety. It also vets party-political nominees for their propriety (including looking at their tax residency status, potential conflicts of interest and financial links to political parties) but has no role in assessing their suitability.<sup>39</sup> The prime minister makes the final decision on whether to recommend to the King that someone be given a life peerage enabling them to sit in the Lords.

Some recent appointments to the House of Lords have highlighted the respective roles of HOLAC and the prime minister, such as Boris Johnson’s decision in 2020 to proceed with the appointment of Lord Cruddas without HOLAC’s support.<sup>40</sup> There have been calls to put HOLAC on a statutory basis and give it independence from the prime minister and to establish new suitability criteria nominees must meet for appointment to the House of Lords.<sup>41</sup>

HOLAC chair Baroness Deech (Crossbench) has said she would like to see every nominee to the House of Lords “assessed for suitability and not just propriety”.<sup>42</sup> The Lord Speaker has said there is “a case for examination of the appointments process, including a more robust vetting system and stronger powers for HOLAC, ensuring that new appointees are able to make a worthwhile contribution to the important work of the House”.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> House of Lords, ‘[Amendments agreed on 28 February 2024](#)’, 28 February 2024.

<sup>37</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 108.

<sup>38</sup> House of Lords Appointments Commission, ‘[Appointments Commission](#)’, accessed 5 July 2024.

<sup>39</sup> House of Lords Appointments Commission, ‘[Vetting](#)’, accessed 5 July 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Political peerages 2020](#)’, 22 December 2020.

<sup>41</sup> House of Lords Library, ‘[Vetting appointments to the House of Lords](#)’, 28 February 2022.

<sup>42</sup> House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, ‘[Oral evidence: Pre-appointment hearing—Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission](#)’, 24 October 2023, HC 1906 of session 2022–23, Q12.

<sup>43</sup> Hansard Society, ‘[Speech by the Lord Speaker on the future of the House of Lords: Parliamentary Affairs anniversary lecture](#)’, 7 December 2022.





Institute for Government, the Constitution Unit at University College London and the UK Governance Project recently made a joint call for reforms to the appointments process “to ensure that appointments to the House of Lords are made on merit, with the purpose of enhancing the work of Parliament”.<sup>44</sup>

## 1.5 National and regional balance

The manifesto said that Labour would “seek to improve the national and regional balance of the second chamber”. It was not specific about how it would do this, although the implication was that this would be in the context of making new appointments to the House of Lords.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike the House of Commons, where members are elected to represent a constituency, membership of the House of Lords brings with it no official role in representing a particular region of the UK. The work of bishops in the House of Lords is, according to the Church of England, “often closely informed by their diocesan role”<sup>46</sup> but they do not represent their diocese in the House of Lords in the same way an MP represents their constituency in the House of Commons. However, there are some sources of data available that provide an indicative picture of places to which members of the Lords have a connection. The main one that is regularly updated is address data from members’ claims for expenses and allowances under the financial support system.<sup>47</sup> Figure 1 below shows a breakdown by UK region of members’ registered addresses as at December 2023, recorded as part of the financial support system. However, it should be emphasised that this data is partial as it includes only those members who chose to include the county or equivalent location of their main residence. As of December 2023, 53% of members had registered their address; the proportion choosing to do so varied by party/group and by the length of time they had served in the House.

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<sup>44</sup> Constitution Unit, [‘Seven steps to restore trust in government ethics’](#), 24 June 2024.

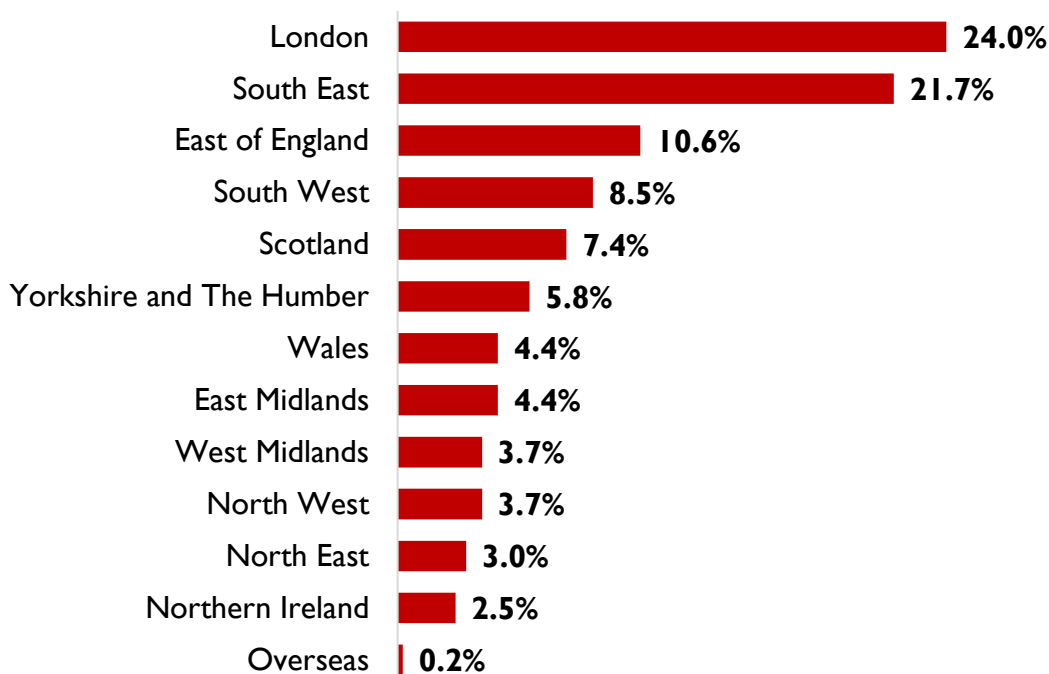
<sup>45</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 108.

<sup>46</sup> House of Lords Library, [‘House of Lords: Lords spiritual’](#), 4 September 2017, p 8.

<sup>47</sup> UK Parliament, [‘House of Lords expenses’](#), accessed 5 July 2024.



**Figure 1: Membership of the House of Lords by UK region, December 2023 (based on financial claims data)<sup>48</sup>**



Other sources of data that might indicate places to which members are connected include previously being an elected office-holder for an area (such as MP, MEP, member of a devolved assembly or a local councillor) or members' use of place names as part of their title.<sup>49</sup>

## 1.6 An alternative second chamber

The manifesto said that while the measures to modernise the House of Lords would be an improvement, Labour “is committed to replacing the House of Lords with an alternative second chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations”.<sup>50</sup> Labour said it

<sup>48</sup> House of Lords Library analysis of House of Lords financial claims data from December 2023 (House of Lords, [‘Expenses’](#), accessed 8 July 2024).

<sup>49</sup> For further information, see the following House of Lords Library briefings: [‘House of Lords data dashboard: Regional representation in the House of Lords’](#), 8 February 2023; [‘Who is in the House of Lords? Members with backgrounds and professional experience in public life’](#), 12 April 2024; [‘Regional representation in the House of Lords \(2020\)’](#), 8 January 2020. Additionally, the difficulties inherent in using peerage titles as a data source for regional representation are explored in section 3 of the House of Lords Library briefing, [‘Regional representation in the House of Lords \(2014\)’](#), 10 February 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 108.



would “consult on proposals, seeking the input of the British public on how politics can best serve them”.

Some commentators have suggested that the manifesto’s focus on plans for smaller-scale immediate reforms represents a watering down of earlier pledges to replace the House of Lords within the first term of a Labour government.<sup>51</sup> In December 2022, a Labour Party commission chaired by former prime minister Gordon Brown recommended replacing the House of Lords with a new second chamber, an ‘Assembly of the Nations and Regions’ that would “give voice explicitly to the different nations and regions of the UK”.<sup>52</sup> The commission said the new second chamber should have “electoral legitimacy”, be “markedly smaller” than the current House of Lords and chosen on a different electoral cycle to the House of Commons, with the precise composition and method of election to be subject to consultation. At the report’s launch, Keir Starmer spoke of rebuilding trust with the country by, among other things, “replacing the unelected House of Lords with a new, smaller, democratically elected second chamber”.<sup>53</sup> He said he was keen to carry out the report’s recommendations “as quickly as possible”, having asked Gordon Brown to come up with proposals that would be capable of being delivered within the first five years of a Labour government.<sup>54</sup> For further discussion of the Brown Commission proposals, see House of Lords Library, [‘Current Affairs Digest: Constitution’](#) (7 March 2023).

## 2. Ethics and integrity

Labour promised in its manifesto to establish a new independent Ethics and Integrity Commission with an independent chair.<sup>55</sup> Its purpose would be “to ensure probity in government”, but the manifesto did not give further details on its powers or remit, or how it would interact with existing standards and ethics bodies. Gordon Brown’s commission recommended in 2022 that an independent integrity and ethics commission should replace the prime minister’s independent advisor on ministerial interests and take over responsibility

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<sup>51</sup> BBC News, [‘What is the House of Lords and how does it work?’](#), 18 June 2024; Sally Dawson and Sienna Rodgers, [‘Labour’s ‘odd’ plans for Lords reform cast doubt over abolition’](#), Politics Home, 12 June 2024; and Rhiannon James, [‘Labour criticised for ‘U-turning’ on plans to abolish the House of Lords’](#), Standard, 8 June 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Labour Party, [‘A new Britain: Renewing our democracy and rebuilding our economy—Report of the Commission on the UK’s future’](#), December 2022, p 17.

<sup>53</sup> Labour Party, [“‘Together we will forge something bold’—Keir Starmer’s speech’](#), 5 December 2022.

<sup>54</sup> BBC News, [‘Labour promise biggest ever transfer of powers’](#), 5 December 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 107.



for investigating alleged breaches of the ministerial code.<sup>56</sup> However, this does not appear to be Labour's intention, as the manifesto said Labour would give the independent advisor on ministerial interests the powers to start investigations into misconduct and would ensure they have access to the evidence they need. Giving the independent adviser on ministers' interests the ability to initiate investigations and full investigatory powers is something that the Institute for Government, the Constitution Unit and the UK Governance Project have all recommended.<sup>57</sup> There have also been calls to establish the role on a statutory basis.<sup>58</sup>

Labour also said in its manifesto it would review and update post-government employment rules, including “enforcing restrictions on ministers lobbying for the companies they used to regulate, with meaningful sanctions for breaching the rules”.<sup>59</sup> The chairs of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA) all previously welcomed the Conservative government's plans, announced in July 2023, to make the business appointment rules more enforceable and explore the possibility of introducing financial penalties.<sup>60</sup> However, new rules had not been introduced by the time of the general election.

The Institute for Governance, Constitution Unit and UK Governance Project argued in their recent joint statement that legislation would be required to give ACOBA effective enforcement powers, including a legal requirement for ministers and senior public officials to comply with the business appointment rules, and financial penalties and injunctions should they fail to do so.<sup>61</sup>

### 3. Modernising the House of Commons

The Labour manifesto contained commitments relating to modernising the House of Commons' working practices and code of conduct. The manifesto said “most MPs work hard to serve their constituents but can be hamstrung by arcane procedures and outdated working practices”.<sup>62</sup> It promised to establish a new Modernisation Committee tasked with

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<sup>56</sup> Labour Party, '[A new Britain: Renewing our democracy and rebuilding our economy—Report of the Commission on the UK's future](#)', December 2022, pp 129 and 139–40.

<sup>57</sup> Constitution Unit, '[Seven steps to restore trust in government ethics](#)', 24 June 2024.

<sup>58</sup> House of Lords Library, '[King's Speech 2023: Constitution](#)', 1 November 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, p 107.

<sup>60</sup> House of Lords Library, '[King's Speech 2023: Constitution](#)', 1 November 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Constitution Unit, '[Seven steps to restore trust in government ethics](#)', 24 June 2024.

<sup>62</sup> Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)', June 2024, p 107.



“reforming House of Commons procedures, driving up standards, and improving working practices”. In a speech in May 2024, Lucy Powell, now leader of the House of Commons, suggested an incoming Labour government might look at matters such as how “opaque decision-making and arcane procedure” in Parliament (for instance on private members’ bills) damaged public trust; working with the House of Commons Standards Committee and the parliamentary commissioner for standards to “close down remaining loopholes”; and taking further action to make Parliament a “better and safer workplace”.<sup>63</sup>

Labour’s manifesto also said that as an “initial step” towards addressing the rules on MPs’ second jobs, Labour would support an immediate ban on MPs taking up paid advisory or consultancy roles. The Modernisation Committee would be tasked with taking forward “urgent work on the restrictions that need to be put in place to prevent MPs from taking up roles that stop them serving their constituents and the country”. The Brown Commission recommended in 2022 that the MPs’ code of conduct should be strengthened with “a general prohibition on second jobs by members of Parliament, with few exceptions for employment required to maintain professional memberships, such as medicine”.<sup>64</sup>

## 4. Elections and party funding

### 4.1 Voting age

The manifesto said Labour would increase the engagement of young people in democracy by giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in all elections.<sup>65</sup> Currently, 16- and 17-year-olds can vote in elections to the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru and in local government elections in Scotland and Wales, but the voting age for UK parliamentary elections and other local elections across the UK is 18.<sup>66</sup> Amendments would be needed to the Representation of the People Act 1983 to change the voting age for elections to the UK Parliament and local government elections in England and Northern Ireland. Lowering the voting age for local elections in Northern Ireland would also lower the voting age for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, as the franchise is the same for both.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Institute for Government, ‘[Keynote speech: Lucy Powell MP, shadow leader of the Commons](#)’, 14 May 2024.

<sup>64</sup> Labour Party, ‘[A new Britain: Renewing our democracy and rebuilding our economy—Report of the Commission on the UK’s future](#)’, December 2022, p 130.

<sup>65</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, pp 108–9.

<sup>66</sup> HM Government, ‘[Types of election, referendums and who can vote](#)’, accessed 5 July 2024.

<sup>67</sup> [Northern Ireland Assembly Elections Order 2001, SI 2001/2599](#), article 4.



The Electoral Reform Society said it strongly welcomed the commitment to extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds as it would end political inequality between Scotland and Wales and the rest of the UK and “renew our democracy by enfranchising younger people at a habit-forming age”.<sup>68</sup> Based on research in other countries with votes at 16, academics have suggested that voting for the first time at a lower age may create more democratically engaged voters.<sup>69</sup> However, recent polling suggests that the policy does not have public support. More in Common found that 47% of the public opposed lowering the voting age while 28% supported it.<sup>70</sup> Separate polling by Lord Ashcroft (a former Conservative member of the House of Lords) found 52% of people were against the policy and 38% in favour.<sup>71</sup>

There were 1.6 million 16- and 17-year-olds in the UK as of March 2024, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics.<sup>72</sup>

## 4.2 Voter registration and identification

The manifesto said to encourage participation in democracy, Labour would “improve voter registration”, although no further details on this were set out.<sup>73</sup> Research by the Electoral Commission on electoral registers as they stood in December 2022 found their accuracy and completeness across the UK was broadly stable, with recent improvements in Northern Ireland, but it estimated that as many as 8 million people were not correctly registered to vote.<sup>74</sup>

The Electoral Commission said the evidence from its research on the December 2022 registers highlighted “the need to develop new approaches to electoral registration that will

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<sup>68</sup> Electoral Reform Society, [‘Labour manifesto: Encouraging first steps—but we need to address rock bottom trust in politics’](#), 13 June 2024.

<sup>69</sup> See for instance Laura Serra, [‘The case for lowering the voting age to 16’](#), LSE Politics and Policy Blog, 7 June 2024; and University of Edinburgh, [‘Lower voting age boosts participation in elections’](#), 16 January 2023.

<sup>70</sup> More in Common, [‘What do voters make of proposals to lower the UK’s voting age?’](#), 3 June 2024.

<sup>71</sup> Harriet Line, [‘Blow for Starmer as poll finds majority of public oppose lowering the voting age to 16—in damning verdict on Labour’s flagship policy’](#), Mail Online, updated 6 June 2024.

<sup>72</sup> Office for National Statistics, [‘16-17 year old population: All persons’](#), 11 June 2024.

<sup>73</sup> Labour Party, [‘Labour Party manifesto 2024’](#), June 2024, p 108.

<sup>74</sup> Electoral Commission, [‘2023 report: Electoral registers in the UK’](#), updated 16 January 2024. However, registrations may see an increase in the run-up to an election: the Electoral Commission reported that 2.1 million applications to register were made between the date the 2024 general election was announced and the penultimate day for registering (Electoral Commission, [‘Last chance to register to vote ahead of the general election’](#), 17 June 2024).



bring sustained long-term improvements”.<sup>75</sup> It suggested this would require legislation to give electoral registration officers access to data from other public sector organisations so individuals could be registered directly or sent targeted invitations to register. The Sunday Times has suggested that a bill to introduce automatic voter registration will be included in the King’s Speech.<sup>76</sup>

The manifesto said Labour would “address the inconsistencies in voter ID rules that prevent legitimate voters from voting”, such as in the case of armed forces veteran cards.<sup>77</sup> New forms of ID can be added to the approved list by secondary legislation.<sup>78</sup> Documents can also be removed by secondary legislation, but only on the recommendation of the Electoral Commission.

### 4.3 Donations to political parties

The manifesto said Labour would “protect democracy by strengthening rules around donations to political parties”.<sup>79</sup> It did not provide further details. However, the previous paragraph accused the Conservatives of “doing nothing to strengthen protections against foreign interference” in the UK’s democracy, suggesting this could be an area where Labour might seek to tighten party funding rules. In opposition, Labour argued that by removing the previous 15-year cut-off on British citizens who live abroad having the right to be on the electoral register (and therefore to make political donations and loans), the Conservative government was creating a loophole that would allow donors who had not lived in the UK for a long time and who were potentially “vulnerable to manipulation by hostile actors” the ability to make political donations.<sup>80</sup> Labour proposed that registered overseas voters should not be able to donate to political parties in the UK.<sup>81</sup>

The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) sets controls on what donations and loans political parties can accept, and what must be recorded and reported to the Electoral Commission.<sup>82</sup> The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CPSL) reviewed the

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<sup>75</sup> Electoral Commission, ‘[2023 report: Electoral registers in the UK](#)’, updated 16 January 2024.

<sup>76</sup> Gabriel Pogrund, Caroline Wheeler and Harry Yorke, ‘[What first 100 days of Labour might look like: Budget, building and bills](#)’, Sunday Times (£), 30 June 2024.

<sup>77</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 108.

<sup>78</sup> House of Commons Library, ‘[Voter ID](#)’, 12 December 2023, p 11.

<sup>79</sup> Labour Party, ‘[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)’, June 2024, p 109.

<sup>80</sup> [HL Hansard, 25 April 2022, cols 78–9](#) and [HL Hansard, 12 December 2023, col 1853](#).

<sup>81</sup> House of Commons Library, ‘[Elections Bill 2021–2: Progress of the Bill](#)’, 4 May 2022, p 77.

<sup>82</sup> See Electoral Commission, ‘[Political party donations and loans in Great Britain](#)’ and ‘[Political party donations and loans in Northern Ireland](#)’ for further details.



regulation of election finance in 2021.<sup>83</sup> It recognised that the PPERA rules were intended to ensure foreign donations were not able to influence the political process, but it noted concerns about the scope for these rules to be circumvented. It recommended amending PPERA so donations could be made only from profits generated in the UK. The Electoral Commission supports this change.<sup>84</sup> The Electoral Commission has also called for registered political parties and non-party campaigners to be required to carry out risk assessments and enhanced due diligence checks to ensure they know where donations have come from.<sup>85</sup>

In 2023, the House of Lords voted in favour of an amendment to the National Security Bill that would have required UK-registered political parties to have a policy on how to identify donations from a foreign power, whether made directly or through an intermediary, and to report annually to the Electoral Commission on how they had managed risks relating to such donations.<sup>86</sup> Labour supported the amendment.<sup>87</sup> However, it did not survive parliamentary ping-pong and was not included in the final version of the bill that received royal assent.

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<sup>83</sup> Committee on Standards in Public Life, '[Regulating election finance](#)', July 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, '[Written evidence submitted by the Electoral Commission](#)', 20 March 2024.

<sup>85</sup> As above.

<sup>86</sup> [HL Hansard, 1 March 2023, cols 293–305](#) (amendment 51). See also: House of Commons Library, '[National Security Bill: Lords amendments](#)', 23 June 2023.

<sup>87</sup> [HL Hansard, 1 March 2023, col 297](#).



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