

Research Briefing

15 October 2024

By Neil Johnston

Speakers' conferences



Summary

- 1 Procedure and membership
 - 2 Previous conferences
- Appendix

Image Credits

Chamber-086 by [UK Parliament image](#). Licensed under [CC BY 2.0CC BY 2.0](#) / image cropped

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk or visit commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources for more information.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Contents

Summary	4
1 Procedure and membership	7
1.1 20 th century conferences	7
1.2 21 st century conferences	9
2 Previous conferences	11
2.1 1916-17 - on electoral law	14
2.2 1919-20 - on devolution	17
2.3 1929-30 - on electoral law	17
2.4 1944 - on electoral law	19
2.5 1965-68 - on electoral reform	21
2.6 1973-74 - on electoral law	24
2.7 1977-78 - on representation in Northern Ireland	25
2.8 2008-10 - on representation in the House of Commons	26
2.9 2022-23 - on working arrangements for MP's staff	29
2.10 2024 - on level of threats to candidates and MPs	30
Appendix	32

Summary

Speakers' conferences have been used in the past to find cross-party agreement on a subject. Most were on electoral reform and the Speaker's conference was a way of upholding the constitutional convention that changes to the electoral system should be agreed as far as possible on an all-party basis. The advent of the Electoral Commission in 2001 created a permanent mechanism for providing independent advice to the UK Government on electoral reform.

2024 conference

The latest Speaker's conference has been established to examine the threat levels against candidates and MPs and the effectiveness of the response to such threats. The House of Commons [approved the motion](#) to establish the conference on 14 October 2024 without a vote. There was no debate on the motion.

It has been asked to make recommendations about “the arrangements necessary to secure free and fair elections and the appropriate protection of candidates.” The conference is due to operate for the whole of the current parliament.

Procedures

There are no fixed or statutory rules governing the creation or operation of a Speaker's conference. Previous conferences have generally been established at the request of the Prime Minister with the Speaker's chairmanship seen as a model of impartiality.

Meetings were generally in private and reports were issued as letters to the Prime Minister from the Speaker, which have been presented to Parliament as [Command Papers](#).

The most recent Speakers' conferences, in 2008-10, June of 2022, and 2024 have been established on agreement by resolution of the House of Commons, with powers similar to [select committees](#) to send for persons, papers and records (the power to require documents to be sent to them or summon people to give oral evidence). They have had the power to deviate from select committee procedures as they see fit under the direction of the Speaker.

The [reports of the Conference](#) of 2008-10, appointed to consider the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons, including interim reports, were published as House of Commons papers on the Parliamentary website. The conference on [the employment of Members' staff](#), followed the same format.

Previous conferences

Speakers' conferences have only been used rarely. There have been nine previous conferences.

The first was established in 1916 to find a solution to the problems of war time electoral registration and the franchise, particularly the question of women's suffrage.

Conferences have had mixed success. The original conference of 1916 led to the Representation of the People Act 1918, a significant piece of electoral reform covering the franchise, registration, administration of general elections and the redistribution of seats. The next two conferences, on voting methods for the House of Commons and on devolution in the UK, reported but little came of their deliberations.

The next, in 1944, was more successful and led to cross-party agreement on legislation creating a permanent machinery for the redistribution of seats. Other measures of electoral reform were agreed but legislation brought forward in 1947-8 led to partisan disagreements, as the detail differed from those agreed by the conference.

Subsequent conferences have led to fewer wholesale reforms, although some have nonetheless been significant, such as the reduction of the voting age in 1969, and the increase of the number of MPs representing Northern Ireland in the 1970s.

The table below summarises the subject matter of conferences held. Membership of each conference is included in the appendix to this briefing.

1916-17	War-time registration, redistribution of seats, voting systems, votes for women
1919-20	Devolution within the UK
1929-30	Proportional representation
1944	War-time registration, redistribution of seats, conduct of elections and voting systems
1965-68	Conduct of elections, voting age, election expenses and petitions, voting systems
1973-74	Electoral registration, minimum voting age and timings of by-elections
1977-78	Number of seats in the House of Commons for Northern Ireland
2008-10	Representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons
2022-23	Employment conditions of MPs' staff
2024	Level of threats to candidates and MPs

1 Procedure and membership

There are no fixed or statutory rules governing the creation of a Speaker's conference.

Conferences in the twentieth century generally deliberated in private and produced a single set of recommendations at the end of their proceedings. The most recent conferences have been established with the same powers as select committees.

Erskine May, the authoritative guide to parliamentary practice, notes:

In the past, they did not enjoy the powers and privileges of select committees. They sat in private and did not publish their proceedings. The most recent conference, however, the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, was established in November 2008 as a select committee by resolution of the House. It heard evidence in public and published its proceedings.¹

Historically, a Speaker's conference was a way to reach cross-party agreement on electoral issues. The chairmanship of the Speaker was seen as a model of impartiality.

1.1 20th century conferences

Establishment

In the twentieth century, conferences were established by the Prime Minister issuing an invitation to the Speaker to preside over an all-party conference. The terms of reference were usually specified in the invitation, but not membership or procedure.

There was no need for a formal approval or otherwise by the House of Commons. The Conference on devolution in 1919, as noted above, originated from the approval of a backbench motion in the House of Commons for a parliamentary body to examine devolution. This led to the Prime Minister inviting the Speaker to conduct a conference on matter.

In 1944 there was a two-day debate on a motion for the House to welcome the proposal to set up the conference. It was agreed without a division.²

¹ Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 25th edition, 2019, [para 4.30](#)

² [HC Deb 1 February 1944, c1154-1237](#) and [HC Deb 2 February 1944, c1288-369](#)

Membership

The early conferences were comprised of members of both Houses of Parliament.

The Speaker would usually select the membership from party nominees, although the members of the 1919 conference were selected by the Prime Minister. The membership usually reflected the balance of parties in the House of Commons.

The first Conference in 1916 was comprised of 5 peers and 27 MPs and the 1944 Conference was comprised of 3 Peers and 29 MPs. Thereafter peers were not included and the 1965-68, the 1973-74 and the 1977-78 conferences were each comprised of 29 MPs.

Members of each conference are listed in the Appendix to this paper.

Terms of reference

There is no set method of agreeing terms of reference. They have been established in a variety of ways.

The 1944 conference was given its terms by the Prime Minister. In others, the terms of reference have emerged after discussions after the desirability of a conference had been established.

The terms of reference for the 1919 Conference were derived from the backbench motion debated in the House of Commons that eventually led to the conference.

The 1929 conference, chaired by a former Speaker rather than a sitting Speaker, chose its own terms of reference following discussions with conference members based on the suggestions from the political parties involved.

Final reports

The reports of the conferences were usually in the form of letters from the Speaker to the Prime Minister, published as command papers. The table in section 2 notes the previous paper numbers.

Deliberations were meant to be in private. The 1929-30 conference chaired by former Speaker, Lord Ullswater, on voting systems was widely known to be making little progress before the Speaker wrote to the Prime Minister formally terminating the conference.³

³ D Butler, *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918*, 1963, p59

1.2

21st century conferences

Establishment

The idea for the 2008-10 conference was similar to previous conferences. The Prime Minister of the day suggested the conference to consider constitutional issues around elections and representation.

The conference established in June 2022 differed and came about on the initiative of the Speaker himself, in the wake of concerns about bullying and harassment in Parliament.⁴

Both conferences were set up in a similar way, with a motion of the House agreed to establish the conferences as committees of the House. This gives them the ability to appoint staff and to call for papers and people to gather evidence in the same way as a select committee.

The explanatory memorandum to the motion establishing the 2022 conference highlighted the new conference would operate with the powers of a select committee of the House of Commons, as in 2008. It also clarified that the Speaker was ultimately in charge of the conference's procedure:

The Speaker's Conference will conduct its business in a way determined by the Speaker, and so may, if it is considered useful, depart from the normal rules by which the House and its Committees conduct their business.⁵

Membership

The Speaker selects the membership of the conference from sitting MPs. This reflects the party balance in the House of Commons at the time.

Terms of reference

When Speaker Michael Martin announced the terms of reference for the conference established in 2008, he told the House the terms of reference had been agreed through 'the usual channels'.⁶ The term refers to arrangements and compromises about the running of parliamentary business that are agreed behind the scenes between the whips from the different parties.

The terms of reference for the 2022 conference came from the Speaker's initiative to hold the conference. In introducing the motion to create the conference, the Leader of the House said:

I pay tribute to Mr Speaker for bringing this matter to the forefront of our attention today. I commend him for working across parties and across the

⁴ Library briefing (CBP 9572), [Speaker's Conference on the employment of Members' staff](#)

⁵ [Financial consequences memoranda, Speaker's Conference further Explanatory Memorandum](#) (PDF), 21 June 2022

⁶ HC Deb 22 July 2008 c659

House to make sure that this motion was brought before us in the House today.⁷

Reports

Like select committees, the recent conferences have been free to publish reports, including interim reports, and evidence received. These are House of Commons publications and are made available on the UK Parliament website.

⁷ [HC Deb 22 June 2022, c925](#)

2

Previous conferences

The idea for the first Speaker's conference originated in 1916 to deal with divisions in government and in Parliament about how to deal with wartime electoral registration and other pressing concerns of electoral reform, namely redistribution of parliamentary seats and votes for women.

Other forms of inquiry have also been used historically. Royal Commissions have become rare but were ad hoc inquiries established by Governments on broad policy areas.⁸ Royal Commissions were used in 1910 and in 1918 to examine electoral systems and proportional representation for the House of Commons.⁹

The table below gives the dates and terms of references for previous conferences.

The rest of this chapter summarises each previous conference.

Membership for each conference is summarised in the appendix to this briefing.

⁸ Library briefing (CBP 2599), [Public Inquiries: non-statutory public inquiries](#)

⁹ House of Commons Library, Reference sheet 65/28, July 1965

Table 1 – Previous Speakers' Conferences

Date	Chair	Report	Terms of reference
October 1916 to January 1917	Speaker Lowther	Cd 8463	To examine and, if possible, submit, agreed resolutions on the following matters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Reform of the franchise (b) Basis for redistribution of seats (c) Reform of the system of the registration of electors and (d) Method of elections and the manner in which the costs of elections should be borne.
October 1919 to April 1920	Speaker Lowther	Cmd 692	To consider and report upon a scheme of Legislative and Administrative Devolution within the United Kingdom having regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The need of reserving to the Imperial Parliament the exclusive consideration of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Foreign and Imperial Affairs and (b) Subjects affecting the United Kingdom as a whole (2) The allocation of financial powers as between the Imperial Parliament and the subordinate legislatures, special consideration being given to the need of providing for the effective administration of the allocated power's and (3) The special needs and characteristics of the component portions of the United Kingdom in which subordinate legislatures are set up.
November 1929 to July 1930	Ex-Speaker Lowther	Cmd 3636	No formal terms of reference but most discussion was on proportional representation for the House of Commons
February to July 1944	Speaker Clifton-Brown	Cmd 6534 and Cmd 6543	To examine and, if possible, submit agreed resolutions on the following matters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Redistribution of seats (b) Reform of franchise (both parliamentary and local government)

			<p>(c) Conduct and costs of parliamentary elections, and expenses falling on candidates and Members of Parliament and</p> <p>(d) Methods of election.</p>
June 1965 to February 1968	Speaker Hylton-Foster followed by Speaker King	Cmnds 2880, 2917, 2932, 3202, 3275 and 3550	<p>To examine and, if possible, to submit agreed resolutions on the following matters relating to parliamentary elections:</p> <p>(a) Reform of the franchise, with particular reference to the minimum age for voting and registration procedure generally</p> <p>(b) Methods of election, with particular reference to preferential voting</p> <p>(c) Conduct of elections</p> <p>(d) Election expenses generally</p> <p>(e) Use of broadcasting and</p> <p>(f) Cost of election petitions and applications for relief.</p>
March 1973 to February 1974	Speaker Selwyn Lloyd	Cmnds 5363, 5469, 5500 and 5547	<p>To submit representations on electoral registration, particularly</p> <p>(a) The registration timetable, and the frequency of publishing the register</p> <p>(b) Multiple registration and the definition of 'residence'</p> <p>(c) Registration of service men and</p> <p>(d) The minimum age for election and the timing of by-elections</p>
July 1977 to February 1978	Speaker Thomas	Cmnd 7110	To consider, and make recommendations on, the number of parliamentary constituencies that there should be in Northern Ireland.
December 2008 to January 2010	Speaker Martin followed by Speaker Bercow	HC 239 2009-10	To consider, and make recommendations for rectifying, the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and

			their representation in the UK population at large. It may also consider other associated matters.
June 2022 to June 2023	Speaker Hoyle	HC 692 2022-23 and HC 1714 2022-23	<p>The conference examined the contractual arrangements through which Members employ their staff, and present recommendations as to whether there is sufficient evidence in favour of changing the current arrangements.</p> <p>It will seek to establish the challenges arising from the existing provisions for employment of Members' staff. It will consider whether changes to the contractual arrangements for staff, and/ or other practicable changes to the support provided to Members and Members' staff by the House authorities, could deliver improved support for Members and Members' staff, and in doing so promote a more inclusive and respectful working environment.</p> <p>It will also consider the benefits of the current arrangements for both Members and Members' staff and explore how these can be maintained in any future arrangements.</p>

2.1

1916-17 - on electoral law

The idea for the first Speaker's conference originated in 1916. It stemmed from the problems of suspending electoral registration during the Great War and the extension of the life of the parliament elected in 1910, which in normal circumstances should have come to an end in 1915.

As the life of the parliament was extended, the problem of how to update old electoral registers and to include service personnel in any post-conflict general election needed solving. There were some that considered the redistribution of seats, which had not occurred since the last major electoral reforms of 1884-85, also needed addressing.¹⁰ The question of the franchise also prompted debate as there was no universal male suffrage and the question of votes for women had not been resolved before war broke out. Although many campaigners for women's suffrage had suspended violent

¹⁰ David Rolf, *Origins of Mr Speaker's Conference during the First World War*, *History* (London), 02/1979, Volume 64, Issue 210, p37

campaigning and campaigning altogether, some continued to actively campaign for votes for women.¹¹

The coalition government of Herbert Asquith attempted to make progress on the issue of registration via cabinet but failed. It then attempted to create a select committee.¹² The motion put to the House called for the creation of a select committee to consider whether:

it is practicable and desirable to prepare a new Electoral Register which would include adequate representation for those engaged in the War or in war work, and to conduct an Election upon such Register during the War; and, if this is found practicable and desirable, to recommend the changes in the electoral laws which would be necessary or expedient for the purpose.¹³

The debate was not favourable for the government and Asquith, who closed the debate, withdrew the motion and promised to consider how to proceed. He noted that the electoral registers at the time only included 50% of eligible votes and told the House:

under the existing law the present Parliament must come to an end in the month of September unless its existence is prolonged. Secondly, if it is to be prolonged, it cannot be prolonged indefinitely, and therefore some form of register must be devised for the election of its successor.¹⁴

The cabinet remained divided and in August 1916 it produced a compromise. A bill was brought forward to prolong the life of the UK Parliament for a further eight months and a Special Register Bill would consider the issues of registration, but without addressing any question of extending the franchise. The Special Register Bill, however, was given a poor reception in the House. The Times reported, "Member after member rose from the backbenches to criticise the Bill", until Walter Long, the President of the Board of Local Government, told the House, "during the war and until Parliament was able to face the question of reform, it would not get a better scheme."¹⁵

It was during the debate that Long suggested a conference of "earnest men, holding strong views, bitterly opposed to each other" to debate and reach agreement on electoral matters.¹⁶ He went on to say:

I believe that a conference such as I have suggested would have a great result. I hope that in the short time during which Parliament is released from its duties we shall all turn our attention to this question. If my hon. Friends in any quarter of this House, or outside of this House, were to invite me to help to get together such a conference I would do it with the utmost pleasure. I believe that is the

¹¹ Mari Takayangi et al, *Vote 100: Voice & Vote, Celebrating 1200 Years of Votes for Women*, p76

¹² David Rolf, *Origins of Mr Speaker's Conference during the First World War*, History (London), 02/1979, Volume 64, Issue 210, p39

¹³ [HC Deb 19 July 1969, c1039-75](#)

¹⁴ As above, c1073

¹⁵ Times, Register Bill postponed, 17 August 1916, p7

¹⁶ [HC Deb 16 August 1916, c1949](#)

way in which we are more likely to find a solution to these problems than any other plan of which I have yet heard.¹⁷

The Speaker of the House, James Lowther agreed to help with the preliminary work of establishing the conference. He agreed to the position of chairing the conference and with some reluctance and only after the Lord Chancellor opposed the appointment of a judge. He wrote to Asquith that he feared finding consensus on the issues it had been asked to consider would be “almost impossible”.¹⁸

Lowther was responsible for selecting members of both Houses of Parliament to sit as conference participants.

The conference met for the first time on 12 October 1916 and met through the winter. All but one of its meetings were held in committee room 15 in the House of Commons.¹⁹

Its final report, in the form of a letter from the Speaker to the Prime Minister,²⁰ was delivered on 27 January 1917 and the full recommendations were published in the press on 31 January 1917.²¹

Its recommendations included universal suffrage for men, some measure of women’s suffrage, a new registration system that included registering service men overseas, a scheme for redistribution of parliamentary seats, and reform of general elections costs and administration. It also recommended unanimously that in a single-Member constituency where there were more than two candidates, the election should be conducted on the alternative vote (AV) system.

The conference’s recommendations formed the basis of the [Representation of the People Act 1918](#), although not all the recommendations were incorporated.

Philip Laundy commented in his 1964 book about the Speaker:

The comparative smoothness with which [the recommendations] were carried into effect spoke favourably for the method whereby the ground was prepared, namely, the convening of a representative conference presided over by the very personification of aloof impartiality, Mr Speaker.²²

¹⁷ As above, c1949-50

¹⁸ David Rolf, *Origins of Mr Speaker’s Conference during the First World War*, History (London), 02/1979, Volume 64, Issue 210, p43

¹⁹ Conference on Electoral Reform. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister, Cd 8463

²⁰ As above

²¹ Times, Electoral Reform, 31 January 1917, p9

²² The Office of Speaker, by Philip Laundy. Cassell, 1964 p131

2.2

1919-20 - on devolution

Despite Speaker Lowther's reluctance to conduct the first conference, he chaired another similar conference in 1919. This conference, however, came initially from a motion moved by two backbench MPs. The motion was debated on 3 and 4 June and the government allowed a free vote.²³

On 4 June 1919 the House of Commons resolved to appoint a parliamentary body to examine the issue of devolution to what it called "subordinate legislatures" in the UK, to allow the Westminster Parliament to devote more time to interests relating to the UK and its empire.²⁴

In October 1919 a conference was established with 32 members from both Houses of Parliament, this time selected by the Prime Minister. By this time the Prime Minister was David Lloyd George. Like the previous conference the recommendations were delivered to the Prime Minister in the form of a letter.²⁵

The conference ultimately only considered devolution to England, Scotland and Wales. The Speaker's letter to the Prime Minister noted the government's proposals on the future of Ireland during the [War of Independence](#) (1919-21) and the Speaker wrote, "we felt justified, in the first instance at any rate, in restricting the scope of our inquiry to Great Britain alone" although he noted Irish members of the Conference continued to contribute to the deliberations.²⁶ The Library briefing (CBP 8439), [Devolution in Northern Ireland](#), explains the background to the establishment of Northern Ireland in 1922.

The Speaker reported that the conference was "substantially agreed" on which powers and the financial arrangements for a scheme of devolution could operate for England, Scotland and Wales but could not agree on the "character and composition of the local legislative bodies themselves".²⁷

The recommendations were not acted upon.

2.3

1929-30 - on electoral law

A conference was established by the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in November 1929. This was not technically a Speaker's conference, but more of

²³ Times, Devolution, 4 June 1919, p13

²⁴ [HC Deb 3 June 1919, c1873-1935](#) and [HC Deb 4 June 1919, c2063-129](#)

²⁵ Conference on devolution. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister (with appendices), Cmd 692, April 1920

²⁶ As above, p3

²⁷ As above, p6

an ex-Speaker's conference. It was presided over by James Lowther, the former Speaker who had presided over the original conferences.

MacDonald's minority government had promised an examination of "working of the law relating to parliamentary elections" in its first King's Speech.²⁸ The 1929 general election was the first where women had been able to vote on the same basis as men. After votes for women were introduced in 1918 only women over 30 were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections. The [Equal Franchise Act 1928](#) removed separate franchises for men and women.

The conference, following the format of the previous Speaker's conference, was announced on 10 June and Lowther, by now Viscount Ullswater, agreed to chair as the current Speaker and their immediate predecessor were unavailable.²⁹

The membership was selected by Lord Ullswater in November and the first meeting was in December 1929.³⁰ There were no formal terms of references and the conference itself decided what to consider based on suggestions from the parties involved. The bulk of the deliberations were on the Liberal suggestion that the House of Commons should be elected using some form of proportional representation or the alternative vote, but no consensus was reached.

After 15 meetings the conference was wound up by Lord Ullswater without making recommendations. He commented that the conference could only submit a few recommendations that were split on party lines and would therefore not fulfil the purpose of the conference. In his final letter to the Prime Minister, he wrote:

It was obvious to me at the conclusion of our fifteenth meeting that those discussions might still be very prolonged, whilst the chances of agreement either upon those items, or any of the others of any substantial importance, were very remote.

...

I have therefore to inform you, with regret, that our proceedings have been discontinued.³¹

When the next conference was established, in 1944 (see below) the then Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, reflected on the 1929 Conference by saying:

In 1929 there was another Speaker's Conference, which arose out of the Parliamentary situation of that day, with a minority Labour Government. ...The main issue was whether there should be Proportional Representation or the alternative vote, but that Conference was abortive and no agreed conclusions arose out of it. There were other matters under consideration...and as far as I

²⁸ [HL Deb 2 July 1929, c6-8](#)

²⁹ D Butler, *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918*, 1963, p59

³⁰ National Archives catalogue, [Conference on Electoral Reform \(1929-1930\): Papers](#)

³¹ Conference on Electoral Reform. Letter from Viscount Ullswater to the Prime Minister, Cmd 3636, July 1930

can tell there was disagreement about nearly everything. This was a conference which agreed about nothing, and consequently no action arose out of it.³²

2.4 1944 - on electoral law

The 1944 conference stemmed from similar circumstances to the 1916 Conference. The suspension of wartime electoral registration, the movement of large numbers of people, this time around both civilians and troops, and the knowledge that the life of the wartime Parliament could not be extended indefinitely.

In January 1942 a committee was appointed to inquire into various electoral matters. This committee was chaired by the Registrar General, Sir Sylvanus Vivian.³³ Its two main concerns were electoral registration once hostilities were over and the redistribution of parliamentary seats. Local elections and electoral registration had been suspended at the outbreak of war and the largescale movement of people during war time meant registers were increasingly inaccurate.

The redistribution issue got caught up in wider calls for a more comprehensive inquiry on electoral matters with a possible Speaker's conference being suggested.³⁴

The Vivian report attracted little attention on publication but in 1943 the government decided to take action to improve the poor state of electoral registration. It planned to introduce two Bills, one dealing with registration and one dealing with redistribution of seats.³⁵ Registration was dealt with by the Parliament (Elections and Meeting) Bill,³⁶ which went on to [become an act](#).

The bill on redistribution was paused and in October 1943 the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, told the House a Speaker's conference on electoral reform matters would be, "the best method of securing a full examination of these problems".³⁷

On 1 February 1944 the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, introduced a debate on the motion 'that this House welcomes the proposal of His Majesty's Government to set up a Conference on Electoral reform and Redistribution of

³² HC Deb 1 Feb 1944 c1156-7

³³ Report of the Committee on Electoral Machinery, Cmd 6408, 1942

³⁴ D Butler, *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918*, 1963, p89

³⁵ As above, 1963, p88

³⁶ [Second reading of the Bill](#) was on 26 October 1943, HC Deb 58-108

³⁷ [HC Deb 14 October 1943, c1047](#)

Seats and to invite Mr Speaker to preside.³⁸ The motion was agreed on 2 February without a vote.³⁹

The Home Secretary explained the Prime Minister would write to the Speaker to asking him to preside over the conference and would ask for early reports on the first two of the four draft terms of refence, on redistribution and reform of the franchise. The other two matters were the conduct and costs, and method of parliamentary elections.⁴⁰

When asked about membership, Morrison said it would be a matter for Mr Speaker but that 'it would be appropriate that their Lordships' house should have representation upon the Conference.'⁴¹

The Speaker subsequently announced the membership of the conference two weeks later on 15 February 1944.⁴² There were 3 peers and 29 MPs.

The conference decided that the redistribution could not be considered until the method of election had been determined. The first letter from the Speaker, in May 1944, dealt with method of election to the House of Commons, redistribution of seats and the franchise.

A resolution on proportional representation using single transferable vote was rejected by 25 to 4. Another resolution calling for an experiment with proportional representation was rejected 24 votes to 5 and a resolution on introducing the alternative vote (AV) system was rejected 20 votes to 5.⁴³

Once these had been resolved the Conference then came to a unanimous decision on a permanent structure for the redistribution of constituency boundaries on a regular basis. These were taken forward by the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1944.⁴⁴

Not all the conference's recommendations were taken forward. For example, it had recommended retaining business premises voter registration and university seats, both of which were subsequently abolished by the [Representation of the People Act 1948](#).

Although not unanimous, the Conference also recommended someone could only appear on one electoral register for a residential address (ruling out second homes) and one business address if they qualified for both.

The conference rejected resolutions to reduce the voting age to 18, reducing the number of MPs for the City of London from two to one, and to prevent dual

³⁸ [HC Deb 1 Feb 1944 c 1154](#)

³⁹ [HC Deb 2 February 1944 c1288-236](#)

⁴⁰ [HC Deb 1 February 1944, c1163](#)

⁴¹ As above, c1166

⁴² [HC Deb 15 Feb 1944 c32](#)

⁴³ Conference on electoral reform and redistribution of seats. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister. Letter dated 24 May 1944, Cmd 6534

⁴⁴ See Library briefing (CBP 5929), [Constituency boundary reviews and the number of MPs](#)

voting for people who had business and residential voting qualifications.⁴⁵ A second letter from the Speaker followed in July 1944 with detailed recommendations on various aspects of electoral administration and the costs of elections.⁴⁶

The Conservative Party had a majority on the Speaker's Conference but it was the post-War Labour Government that introduced the bill that went on to become the [Representation of the People Act 1948](#). This led to disagreement on elements of the conference that were overturned by the new bill. As the bill progressed through Parliament, discussion was:

focused less upon the rightness or wrongness of its provisions than on the propriety of their introduction in view of the findings of the Speaker's Conference.⁴⁷

This was particularly the case in the more partisan measures in the act on abolishing the business vote and university seats, and the reduction in the representation of the City of London.

2.5

1965-68 - on electoral reform

The next conference came about following informal party talks on electoral reform. When asked about the talks, the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, told the House:

I think that it is the general view of the House that with your good will, Mr. Speaker, there should be consideration of these matters through a Speaker's Conference? There have been some discussions on this question, but we have to have further discussions with right hon. Members opposite before we are in a position to make a proposal to the House.⁴⁸

The establishment of the conference was announced in May 1965.⁴⁹ It was set up to consider the minimum voting age; methods and conduct of election; election expenses generally; the use of broadcasting at elections and the cost of election petitions.

On 23 June 1965 the Speaker, Sir Harry Hylton-Foster, announced the names of the 29 Members who had accepted his invitation to serve on the conference. He told the House he had not followed the previous practice of including members of the House of Lords.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Conference on electoral reform and redistribution of seats. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister. Letter dated 24 May 1944, Cmd 6534

⁴⁶ Conference on electoral reform and redistribution of seats. Letter dated 20th July, 1944 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmd 6543

⁴⁷ D Butler, *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918*, 1963, p109

⁴⁸ [HC Deb 2 February 1965 c886](#)

⁴⁹ [HC Deb 12 May 1965 c520](#)

⁵⁰ [HC Deb 23 June 1965 c1761](#)

At the same time a separate electoral advisory conference of government departments, registration officers and representatives of the political parties was established.

A Times article questioned how successful a conference might be, it was likely:

..to produce more confusion and controversy than significant legislation, given the keen competition between the parties at present and the great mixture of items included in its terms of reference.⁵¹

The terms of reference were wide ranging and included:

- Franchise reform including lowering the voting age
- Methods of voting in particular preferential voting systems
- Administration of elections, including absent votes (postal and proxy voting), polling hours and whether polling day should be a holiday, official marking of ballot papers and undue influence
- Election expenses
- Broadcasting and
- Election petition costs

Speaker Sir Harry Hylton-Foster died suddenly in September 1965 and his successor Horace King, accepted the invitation to continue the work of the conference.⁵²

The general election of March 1966 interrupted the work of the conference. Following the election Prime Minister Wilson asked the Speaker to reconvene the conference.⁵³ The Speaker selected 29 MPs, some of which were re-appointed.⁵⁴

Speaker King wrote six letters to the Prime Minister outlining the progress of the conference, with the final letter, in February 1968 detailing a consolidated list of all the recommendations.⁵⁵

The conference made recommendations on a wide range of matters. These included:

⁵¹ Times, Electoral Changes to Increase Votes, 19 May 1965, p13

⁵² [HC Deb 17 November 1965, c1154](#)

⁵³ [HC Deb 25 April 1966, c365](#)

⁵⁴ Conference on electoral law. Letter dated 31st January, 1967 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 3202

⁵⁵ Conference on electoral law. Final report. Letter dated 9th February, 1968 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 3550

- Reducing the voting age to 20 (a resolution to reduce the age to 18 was rejected 22 votes to 3)
- Administrative arrangements for absent voting, including extending absent voting to allow Crown servants and British Council staff to vote on similar terms to armed forces personnel, and extending absent voting to their spouses
- Changes to election expenses and rules on political broadcasting and
- Banning opinion polls and betting odds in the three days before polling day for a general election.

Subjects it rejected included:

- Compulsory voting
- Overseas votes for expats
- Proportional representation
- Absent votes for holiday makers
- Reporting of party-political expenditure and income outside of election periods and
- Altering candidate deposit arrangements and whether candidates should receive public funding.

The Home Secretary, James Callaghan, made a statement on 24 July 1968 about the government's conclusions on the final report of the conference.⁵⁶

At the same time the government published a white paper on the conclusions reached by the Speaker's conference and the electoral advisory conference set up by the government at the same time.⁵⁷

These formed the basis of the Representation of the People Act 1969. The bill was given a second reading in the House of Commons on 18 November 1968. The Home Secretary told the House:

I can claim that every item in the Bill has been the subject of very careful scrutiny... the Government have accepted 60 of the 71 recommendations that came from your conference, Mr. Speaker, and that, in the case of the Electoral Advisory Conference, the Government have accepted 42 of the 45 recommendations therefrom.⁵⁸

The main provision was the reduction of the voting age to 18. The Speaker's conference had rejected 18 as the voting age, instead choosing 20 as the

⁵⁶ [HC Deb 24 July 1968 c576](#)

⁵⁷ Home Office. Scottish Home and Health Department. Conclusions on review of the law relating to parliamentary elections, Cmnd 3717

⁵⁸ [HC Deb 18 November 1968. c914](#)

appropriate age. The Family Law Reform Act 1969 had since been passed, reducing the age of majority from 21 to 18. The Family Law Reform Act expressly exempted voting age from its provisions.⁵⁹ The then Leader of the House is recorded as noting in his diary, “it was obvious that if you reduced the age for everything else it was impossible to keep voting at 20 so...we now had to recommend votes at 18”.⁶⁰

2.6

1973-74 - on electoral law

In August 1972 the Speaker, John Selwyn Lloyd, informed the House of Commons he had been invited to preside of a new Speaker's conference on electoral law by Prime Minister Edward Heath.⁶¹

The terms of reference covered similar themes to recent conferences, including voting age, overseas voters, polling hours, multiple registration and residence, and campaign issues such as candidate descriptions and expenses.

The Speaker invited 29 MPs to serve on the conference and they met first on 18 March 1972. Recommendations from the conference were spread across four letters from the Speaker to the Prime Minister.

Recommendations covered service voters, electoral registration (including on second homes), and reducing the minimum age for candidates at a Parliamentary election to 18 from 21.

Speaker Selwyn-Lloyd wrote later of his dissatisfaction with the process and his relief that he was not asked to preside over another:

I was glad that no attempt was made to set up another conference while I was Speaker. I think there is advantage occasionally in a body presided over by the speaker with his 'aloof impartiality'. But its methods of working need re-examination⁶²

He considered the number of participants was too large to consider some of the more detailed matters. He “found it a very time-consuming and cumbersome operation” even though he noted average attendance was about half the members.⁶³

He also wrote of how he thought the process could be improved by considering topics in smaller groups of three or four experienced MPs and calling for papers and oral evidence. He then suggested:

⁵⁹ [Schedule 2 of the Act as enacted](#)

⁶⁰ Diaries of a Cabinet Minister vol III, 1977, quoted in the Electoral System in Britain by Robert Blackburn, 1995, p168,

⁶¹ [HC Deb 2 August 1972, c560-1](#)

⁶² Mr Speaker, Sir, by Selwyn Lloyd. Jonathan Cape, 1976. p117

⁶³ As above

When that has been done, and the papers received, a conference with a larger membership, but not exceeding twenty, should be convened, and the material already assembled put before it. Of course other papers could be called for and other witnesses summoned as proved necessary. I believe that this method would save a lot of time, both for the Speaker and for the members of the conference.⁶⁴

He did note the conference's main success:

In February 1974, a general election suddenly became imminent. The Conference had not yet dealt with election expenses. Owing to inflation, the rates then allowed meant that many candidates could not have conducted an election campaign even on a modest basis without breaking the law. I told the Conference on 6 February that if we could agree unanimously on increased rates within one hour, there was a sporting chance that the Government would legislate to implement our findings before Parliament was dissolved.

We reached agreement, with one or two grumbles, and reported that day. The Government accepted our recommendation. The Representation of the People Act 1974 was passed the following day, and most candidates were saved from almost inevitable breaches of the law.⁶⁵

2.7

1977-78 - on representation in Northern Ireland

In March 1977, the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, told the House of Commons that it was the UK Government's intention to establish a Speaker's conference to consider the representation of Northern Ireland in the House of Commons.⁶⁶

This was confirmed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason, on 30 June 1977, when he told the House, "Agreement in principle has been reached with the party leaders, and the details will now have to be settled through the usual channels."⁶⁷

The Speaker formally announced the terms of reference for the conference and its membership on 19 July 1977, which included MPs from Northern Ireland.⁶⁸

The terms of reference were "to consider and make recommendations on the number of parliamentary constituencies that there should be in Northern Ireland."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ As above, p166

⁶⁵ As above, p117

⁶⁶ [HC Deb 23 March 1977, c1303](#)

⁶⁷ [HC Deb 30 June 1977, c642](#)

⁶⁸ [HC Deb 19 July 1977, c1379-80](#)

⁶⁹ As above

Attempts to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland, which had been suspended in 1972 during The Troubles, failed in 1973-74.⁷⁰ The number of seats in the House of Commons for Northern Ireland was fixed at 12 by legislation.⁷¹ At the time it had generally been accepted that reduced representation at Westminster was the logical consequence of a devolved parliament in Northern Ireland. In the 1970s proposals to establish devolved government in Scotland and Wales did not include corresponding reductions of Welsh and Scottish MPs. This led to questions about the ongoing relative underrepresentation of Northern Ireland in Westminster resulting from direct rule.⁷²

The conference agreed by 18 votes to 4 that there should be an increase in the number of parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. It agreed the final recommendation by 22 votes to 1:

That the number of parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland should be seventeen but that the Boundary Commission should be given power to vary that number, subject to a minimum of sixteen and a maximum of eighteen.⁷³

This change was implemented by the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1979. The number of seats was increased to 17 at the next general election, in 1983, following the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's third general review of parliamentary constituencies.

2.8

2008-10 - on representation in the House of Commons

In September 2007 Prime Minister Gordon Brown gave a speech to the National Council of Voluntary Organisations. In it he said he wanted to revive the idea of a Speaker's conference to bring together Westminster parties to consider the decline in election turnout and important issues such as registration, weekend voting, and the representation of women and ethnic minorities in the House of Commons:

I propose a Speaker's Conference to unite the parties in search of solutions to the disengagement of the people from the electoral process.⁷⁴

This followed on from the Prime Minister's Green Paper, published in July 2007, on revitalising engagement and trust in politics and parliament.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Library briefing (CBP 8439), [Devolution in Northern Ireland, p21](#)

⁷¹ Redistribution of Seats Act of 1949, as amended

⁷² Library Reference sheet 78/13, The House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Bill 1978-79, 14 November 1978

⁷³ Conference on Electoral Law. Letter dated 13th February, 1978 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 7110

⁷⁴ Speech to the NCVO, 3 September 2007, see BBC News, [Brown speech in full](#)

⁷⁵ Ministry of Justice, [The Governance of Britain](#) (PDF), July 2007, Cm 7170

The Conservative Party broadly welcomed the idea but also expressed a desire for the conference to look at other issues. Shadow Justice Secretary Nick Herbert said he hoped for “overdue action against electoral fraud” and “it cannot ignore the fundamental question of the imbalance created by Scottish MPs continuing to vote on devolved issues that only affect England and Wales”, the so called [West Lothian question](#).⁷⁶

On 22 July 2008 the Speaker announced that the new conference, unlike previous conferences, would be set up as a committee of the House. He also announced the terms of reference:

To consider and make recommendations for rectifying the disparity between the representation of women and ethnic minorities in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large; and to consider such other matters as might, by agreement, be referred to for consideration.⁷⁷

A resolution establishing the new committee was moved by the government in November 2008. The resolution gave the committee the power to operate in a similar way to a select committee under the direction of the Speaker:

Notwithstanding any Standing Order of this House, the Conference shall conduct its proceedings in such manner, and have such of those powers which the House may delegate to select committees, as the Speaker shall determine.⁷⁸

The membership of 16 MPs plus the Speaker as chair was announced in the Votes and Proceedings for 10 December 2008.⁷⁹

The conference's reports were published as House of Commons papers on the UK Parliament website.⁸⁰

The final report was published in January 2010, in the wake of the MPs' expenses scandal. The committee noted the “slump in public trust” that followed the disclosure of MPs' expenses claims and the “widespread perception that MPs, and Parliament itself, are divorced from reality.” The conference agreed:

Restoring public faith in Parliament is of crucial importance to the future of our democracy. Ensuring a diverse representation within Parliament is one way to rebuild trust and restore a dialogue between Parliament and those whom it represents.⁸¹

Many of the recommendations fell beyond the remit of Government. The report made recommendations aimed at political parties to broaden their selection processes and support underrepresented groups to stand for elections. Other recommendations were aimed at Parliament and the House

⁷⁶ Press Association Mediapoint, Speaker's conference – rarely used inquiry device, 3 September 2007

⁷⁷ HC Deb 22 July 2008 c659

⁷⁸ [HC Deb 12 November 2008, c896-912](#)

⁷⁹ Commons Journal, [10 December 2008](#), p19

⁸⁰ Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [reports and memoranda](#)

⁸¹ Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [Final report](#) (PDF), p19

of Commons. The report noted the “culture and procedures of the House of Commons themselves deter some individuals from standing.”⁸²

The Conference welcomed proposals to include provisions in the Equalities Bill 2009-10 to extend the provision of all-women shortlists for candidate selections to 2030.⁸³ The Conference also noted the bill’s provisions to give political parties the choice to create selection groups which gave greater weight to underrepresented groups, while not permitting fully exclusive shortlists for disabled people or people from minority ethnic groups or LGBT+ communities.

The conference called on the legislation to also require political parties to publish monitoring data on the diversity of candidates. The leaders of the three largest parties in the Commons at the time (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat) had all expressed openness to the idea of monitoring data being published.⁸⁴

The government response to the final report, published in March, shortly before the general election of that year, identified 17 of the 71 recommendations of the conference requiring a direct response from Government in the first instance.

The government tabled an amendment to the Equalities Bill to give a minister the power to require political parties to publish diversity data, which became [section 106](#) of the Equalities Act 2010. The section has not been brought into force. The previous Government said it had no current plans to commence the provisions, saying:

political parties should lead the way in increasing diverse electoral representation through their own approaches to the selection of candidates.⁸⁵

Although the Speaker’s conference did not lead to large legislative change it contributed to the conversation about a representative UK Parliament. Other work, such as the Good Parliament,⁸⁶ and that of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee have taken the issue forward.⁸⁷ The Women and Equalities Committee published a report in March 2022, [Gender Sensitive Parliament](#), examining how the House of Commons has progressed in implementing changes set out in previous reports, and how far there is still to go in making it more gender sensitive.

⁸² As above,

⁸³ See Library briefing (CBP 5057), [All-women shortlists](#)

⁸⁴ Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [Final report](#) (PDF), p60-1

⁸⁵ Written question HL5232, [Equality Act 2010](#), 19 January 2022

⁸⁶ Professor Sarah Childs, [The Good Parliament](#), July 2016

⁸⁷ Women and Equalities Committee, [Equality in the heart of democracy: A gender sensitive House of Commons](#), HC 131 2021-2, March 2022 and [Equality in the heart of democracy: A gender sensitive House of Commons: responses to the Committee’s fifth report of session 2021-22](#)

2.9

2022-23 - on working arrangements for MP's staff

As noted in section 1, the conference established in June 2022 came about on the initiative of the Speaker himself.

In the wake of concerns about bullying and harassment in the UK Parliament, the Speaker said, "I believe it is time we reviewed our working practices, and particularly whether it is right that MPs are the employers of their staff."⁸⁸

The motion establishing the 2022 conference was introduced by the leader of the House of Commons, a government minister, following work by the Speaker.

The explanatory memorandum accompanying the motion highlighted the new Conference would operate with the powers of a select committee of the House of Commons, as in 2008. It also clarified that the Speaker was ultimately in charge of the conference's procedure:

The Speaker's Conference will conduct its business in a way determined by the Speaker, and so may, if it is considered useful, depart from the normal rules by which the House and its Committees conduct their business.⁸⁹

The conference was appointed for the remainder of the Parliament. It published its first report, as required, describing the principles underpinning its work on 31 October 2022.⁹⁰

The report noted that the MPs were appointed to the conference by the Speaker on 14 October 2022. This was later than anticipated because of the change in Prime Minister in September 2022 and the death of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.⁹¹

The conference's terms of reference set out it would examine the contractual arrangements through which MPs employ their staff, and present recommendations as to whether there is sufficient evidence in favour of changing the arrangements.

The terms of reference also set out the conference would consider whether changes to the contractual arrangements for staff, and/ or other practicable changes to the support provided to MPs and their staff by the House authorities, could deliver improved support for Members and Members' staff,

⁸⁸ Library briefing (CBP 9572), [Speaker's Conference on the employment of Members' staff](#)

⁸⁹ [Financial consequences memoranda, Speaker's Conference further Explanatory Memorandum \(PDF\)](#), 21 June 2022

⁹⁰ [Speaker's Conference report outlines the principles for its work and publishes call for evidence](#), 31 October 2022

⁹¹ [Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff: first report](#), HC 692 2022-23, 31 October 2022

and in doing so promote a more inclusive and respectful working environment.

It also considered the benefits of the current arrangements for both MPs and their staff and explore how these can be maintained in any future arrangements.⁹²

On 20 July 2023, the Speaker's conference's second report was published.⁹³ It set out the conference's findings, conclusions and recommendations. Its key recommendation was that MPs should continue to be the employers of their staff.

It said that Parliament should champion the work undertaken by MPs' staff. The failure to do this was demoralising and had a debilitating impact on staff. It said the situation would "only be improved in any meaningful sense by creating a culture which recognises and values the work that they do and makes these staff feel part of the wider Parliamentary community".

It proposed an expansion of the Members' Services Team to better support MPs in their human resource functions and to provide guidance for MPs' staff. The Speaker's conference recommended creating a new restorative practice service for staff to resolve workplace disputes with their employer. To reflect these changes, the team should be renamed the Members' and Members' Staff Services Team.

The conference also called on IPSA, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, to make changes to its Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses. The Speaker's conference highlighted concerns that when a member of staff moves jobs from one MP's office to another, there is no continuity of employment.

Library briefing (CBP 9572), [Speaker's Conference on the employment of Members' staff](#), provides more information on the background to the establishment of the conference.

2.10

2024 - on level of threats to candidates and MPs

On 14 October 2024 the House of Commons approved a motion to establish a committee known as a Speaker's conference to examine the increase in security threats to MPs and other elected officials. It has been asked to:

⁹² Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff: first report, [Annex A](#), HC 692 2022-23, October 2022

⁹³ Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, [Second Report](#) (PDF), 20 July 2023, HC 1714 2022-23

Consider the factors influencing the threat levels against candidates and MPs and the effectiveness of the response to such threats, and make recommendations about the arrangements necessary to secure free and fair elections and the appropriate protection of candidates at future UK-wide parliamentary elections and of elected representatives thereafter.⁹⁴

The motion was tabled by the Leader of the House, Lucy Powell. The conference will operate “in such manner as the Speaker shall determine, notwithstanding any Standing Order or practice of this House” and shall have the power to:

- (a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House and to adjourn from place to place
- (b) to report from time to time
- (c) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee’s order of reference.⁹⁵

The conference was appointed for the remainder of the Parliament. Further details will be issued in due course.

⁹⁴ [HC Deb 14 October 2024, c666](#)

⁹⁵ As above

Appendix

The following tables show the membership of previous conferences.

Table 2 – 1916-17 conference membership	
Member	Party
Marquess of Salisbury (Fourth)*	Conservative
Earl Grey (Fourth)	Liberal Unionist
Viscount Gladstone	Liberal
Lord Burnham	Liberal Unionist
Lord Southwark**	Liberal
Sir William Ryland Adkins	Liberal
Sir Frederick Banbury*	Conservative
Sir John Bethell	Liberal
Sir William Bull	Conservative
James Craig*	Ulster Unionist
Colonel Henry Page Croft	Conservative
Ellis Davies	Liberal
Willoughby Dickinson	Liberal
Sir Robert Finlay‡	Unionist
Frank Goldstone	Labour
Maurice Healy	Irish Nationalist
George Lambert	Liberal
Sir Joseph Larmor	Unionist
Donald Macmaster	Unionist
T P O'Connor	Irish Nationalist
Basil Peto	Conservative
William Pringle	Liberal
Sir Harry Samuel	Unionist
Thomas Scanlan	Irish Nationalist

MacCallum Scott	Liberal
Sir John Simon	Liberal
Edmund Turton	Unionist
Stephan Walsh	Labour
George Wardle	Labour
Aneurin Williams	Liberal
Sir Robert Williams**	Unionist
Patrick Brady**	Irish Nationalist
Charles Stuart-Wortley (later Baron Stuart of Wortley)	Unionist
George Touche	Unionist
Edward Archdale	Unionist

Source:

Conference on Electoral Reform. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister, Cd 8463

Notes:

* Lord Salisbury, Sir Frederick Banbury and Colonel Craig resigned in December 1916. They were replaced by Charles Stuart-Wortley, George Touche and Edward Archdale.

**Replacement members. Viscount Bryce and Laurence Hardy were obliged through illness to withdraw before proceedings began, and Joseph Mooney was also unable to take part in proceedings.

‡ Finlay withdrew from the Conference on his appointment to Lord Chancellor on 11 December 1916

Unionist politicians were generally Conservatives from seats in Great Britain. Following the split in the Liberal Party over Home Rule for Ireland separate Liberal Unionist associations were created in Scotland and Ireland. The Liberal Unionists merged with the Conservative Party in 1912. After 1895 many associations had already formed a single constituency association and there was some confusion over whether election candidates stood as Liberal Unionists or Conservative Unionists. The umbrella term of 'Unionist' was used by media and reference books.

Table 3 - 1919 conference membership

Member	Party
Lord Aberdare	Liberal
Earl Brassey *	Liberal
Duke of Buccleuch	Conservative
Lord Inchcape **	Liberal
Lord Charnwood	Liberal
Lord Denman	Liberal
Marquis of Dufferin and Ava ***	Unionist
Lord Emmott	Liberal
Lord Faringdon	Liberal Unionist
Viscount Gladstone	Liberal
Lord Gorell	Liberal
Viscount Hambledon **	Conservative
Viscount Harcourt **	Liberal
Lord Oranmore and Browne	Conservative
Lord Southborough	No affiliation
Lord Stuart of Wortley	Unionist
Lord Stafford *	Liberal Unionist
Lord Chalmers **	No affiliation
Lord Elgin **	No affiliation
Lord Selborne **	Liberal Unionist
Sir William Ryland Adkins	Liberal
Henry Cowan	Liberal
James Craig	Ulster Unionist
Charles Edwards	Labour
John Hugh Edwards	Liberal
Charles Forestier-Walker	Conservative
Edward Goulding	Conservative
William Graham	Labour
James Hogge	Liberal
Murray Macdonald	Liberal

Donald Macmaster	Unionist
Ronald McNeill	Conservative
Thomas Moles	Conservative
Gideon Murray	Unionist
Tyson Wilson	Labour
Sir Frederick Young	Unionist

Source:

Conference on devolution. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister (with appendices), Cmd 692

Notes:

*Lord Brassey, who died shortly after the first meeting, was replaced by Lord Stafford.

**Lords Inchcape, Hambledon and Harcourt were all replaced at various stages for personal reasons and replaced by Lord Chalmers, Lord Elgin, and Lord Selborne.

***Lord Dufferin resigned towards the end of proceedings and was not replaced

Table 4 – 1929-30 conference membership

Member	Party
William M Adamson	Labour
Lord Arnold	Labour
Lord Bayford	Conservative
Sir Ernest Bennett	Labour
Robert Bourne	Conservative
Lord Hugh Cecil	Conservative
John Clarke	Labour
Lord Craigmyle	Liberal
George Dallas	Labour
Ben Gardner	Labour
Sir Samuel Hoare	Conservative
Megan Lloyd George	Liberal
Sir Donald Maclean	Liberal
Sir Hugh O'Neill	Conservative
Sir Basil Peto	Conservative
Marion Phillips	Labour
Sir Herbert Samuel	Liberal
Sir Archibald Sinclair	Liberal
Archibald Skelton	Conservative
Oliver Stanley	Conservative
Joseph Westwood	Labour

Source:

Conference on Electoral Reform. Letter from Viscount Ullswater to the Prime Minister Cmd 3636

Table 5 -1944 conference membership

Member	Party
Viscount Margesson	Conservative
Lord Rea	Liberal
Lord Ammon	Labour
Janet ['Jennie'] Adamson	Labour
Patrick Buchan-Hepburn	Conservative
Alexander Erskine-Hill	Conservative
Colonel Arthur Evans	Conservative
William Foster	Labour
Megan Lloyd George	Liberal
Walter Green	Labour
James Griffiths	Labour
Sir Douglas Hacking	Conservative
Glenvil Hall	Labour
Edmund Harvey	Independent Progressive [formerly Liberal]
Sir Austin Hudson	Conservative
Geoffrey Hutchinson	Conservative
Hamilton Kerr	Conservative
Sir Joseph Lamb	Conservative
Major Duncan McCallum	Conservative
Thomas Magnay	Liberal National
James Maxton	Independent Labour
Sir Joseph Nall	Conservative
Sir Hugh O'Neill	Ulster Unionist
John Parker	Labour
Maurice Petherick	Conservative
Frederick Pethick-Lawrence	Labour
Kenneth Pickthorn	Conservative
Denis Pritt	Labour ⁺
Donald Scott	Conservative
Robert ['Robin'] Turton	Conservative

Sir Herbert Williams	Conservative
Arthur Woodburn	Labour

Source:

Conference on electoral reform and redistribution of seats. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister. Letter dated 24 May 1944, Cmd 6534

Notes:

+ Pritt was expelled from the Labour Party in March 1940, after defending the Russian invasion of Finland. He stood as an Independent Labour candidate at Hammersmith North in 1945 and won.

Table 6 - 1965-68 conference membership

Original conference appointees	
Member	Party
Sir William Anstruther-Gray	Conservative [Defeated at 1966 election]
Terence Boston	Labour
Paul Channon	Conservative
Donald Chapman	Labour
Robert ['Robin'] Chichester-Clark	Ulster Unionist
David Gibson-Watt	Conservative
Sir Douglas Glover	Conservative
Sir Richard Glyn	Conservative
William Hamling	Labour
John Harvey	Conservative [Defeated at 1966 election]
Lena Jeger	Labour
Carol Johnson	Labour
James Idwal Jones	Labour
Sir Donald Kaberry	Conservative
Eric Lubbock	Liberal
Gregor Mackenzie	Labour
Ian Mikardo	Labour
Edward Milne	Labour
George Pargiter	Labour [Retired in 1966]
John Parker	Labour
Irene Mervyn Pike	Conservative
Sir David Renton	Conservative
Samuel Silkin	Labour
George Strauss	Labour
Frank Tomney	Labour
Robert ['Robin'] Turton	Conservative
George Wallace	Labour
David Webster	Conservative
Roy Wise	Conservative [Defeated at 1966 election]

Conference appointees following 1966 general election	
Member	Party
Mr. Jack Ashley *	Labour
Terence Boston ‡	Labour
Mr Robert Brown	Labour
Donald Chapman ‡	Labour
Robert ['Robin'] Chichester-Clark ‡	Ulster Unionist
Gwyneth Dunwoody *	Labour
David Gibson-Watt ‡*	Conservative
Sir Douglas Glover ‡	Conservative
Sir Richard Glyn ‡	Conservative
Harold Gurden	Conservative
Betty Harvie Anderson	Conservative
Sir Harwood Harrison *	Conservative
Lena Jeger ‡	Labour
Carol Johnson ‡	Labour
James Idwal Jones ‡	Labour
Sir Donald Kaberry ‡	Conservative
Eric Lubbock ‡	Liberal
Gregor Mackenzie ‡	Labour
John Mendelson	Labour
Mr Cranley Onslow	Conservative
John Parker ‡	Labour
Joan Quennell	Conservative
Edward Rowlands *	Labour
Sir David Renton ‡	Conservative
Samuel Silkin ‡*	Labour
George Strauss ‡	Labour
Frank Tomney ‡	Labour
Robert ['Robin'] Turton ‡	Conservative
George Wallace ‡	Labour

‡ Members reappointed who had served since 1965

*Members who were subsequently replaced

*** Replacement Members during 1967-8**

Member	Party
Raymond Gower	Conservative [replaced Gibson-Watt]
Charles Pannell	Labour [replaced Silkin]
Douglas Houghton	Labour [replaced Ashley]
Stratton Mills *	Ulster Unionist [replaced Chichester-Clark]
John [E.B.] Hill	Conservative [replaced Harrison]
Kenneth Lomas	Labour [replaced Dunwoody]
Walter Loveys	Conservative [replaced Mills]
Robert Maclennan	Labour [replaced Rowlands]

Sources:

Conference on electoral law. Letter dated 28th December, 1965 from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister, Cmnd 2880

Conference on electoral law. Letter dated 31st January, 1967 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 3202

Conference on electoral law. Letter dated 24th April, 1967 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 3275

Conference on electoral law. Final report. Letter dated 9th February, 1968 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 3550

Table 7 – 1973-74 conference membership

Member	Party
David Crouch	Conservative
Major-General Jack d'Avigdor-Goldsmid	Conservative
William Deedes	Conservative
Raymond Gower	Conservative
John Selwyn Gummer	Conservative
Harold Gurden *	Conservative
John Hall	Conservative
Stephen Hastings *	Conservative
Brynmor John	Labour
Sir Donald Kaberry	Conservative
Elaine Kellett-Bowman	Conservative
David Knox	Conservative
Richard Leonard	Labour
Ian MacArthur	Conservative
Robert Maclennan	Labour
John Mendelson	Labour
Richard ['Bob'] Mitchell	Labour
Elystan Morgan	Labour
John Parker	Labour
Thomas Pendry	Labour
Peter Rees	Conservative
William Ross	Labour
Neville Sandelson	Labour
Edward Short	Labour
Iain Sproat	Conservative
David Steel	Liberal
George Strauss	Labour
Sir Robert ['Robin'] Turton	Conservative
George Wallace	Labour

* Replacement Members	
Alan Green	Conservative [replaced Hastings]
Toby Jessel	Conservative [replaced Gurden]

Source:

Conference on electoral law. Letter dated 20th June, 1973 from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister, Cmnd 5363

Table 8 – 1977-78 conference membership

Member	Party
John Cartwright	Labour
William Clark	Conservative
Stanley Cohen	Labour
Gerard Fitt	Social Democratic and Labour Party
Hugh Fraser	Conservative
Clement Freud	Liberal
Philip Goodhart	Conservative
Ian Gow	Conservative
Peter Hardy	Labour
Cledwyn Hughes	Labour
Sydney Irving	Labour/Co-op
Jill Knight	Conservative
Michael McNair-Wilson	Conservative
Edmund Marshall	Labour
Carol Mather *	Conservative
Peter Mills	Conservative
Norman Miscampbell	Conservative
James Molyneaux	Ulster Unionist Party
Arthur Palmer	Labour/Co-op
Laurie Pavitt	Labour/Co-op
J Enoch Powell	Ulster Unionist Party
Giles Radice	Labour
Sir David Renton	Conservative
William Small**	Labour
Michael Stewart	Labour
William van Straubenzee	Conservative
Edwin Wainwright	Labour
John Watkinson	Labour
Replacement Member:	

William Benyon

Conservative

Source:

Conference on Electoral Law. Letter dated 13th February, 1978 from Mr. Speaker to the prime minister, Cmnd 7110

Note:

** Small died in January 1978 and was not replaced

Table 9 – 2008-10 conference membership

Member	Party
Diane Abbott	Labour
Anne Begg (Vice-Chairman)	Labour
John Bercow *	Conservative
David Blunkett	Labour
Angela Browning	Conservative
Ronnie Campbell	Labour
Ann Cryer	Labour
Parmjit Dhanda	Labour
Andrew George	Liberal Democrat
Julie Kirkbride	Conservative
Dr William McCrea	Democratic Unionist Party
David Maclean	Conservative
Fiona Mactaggart	Labour
Anne Main	Conservative
Jo Swinson	Liberal Democrat
Betty Williams	Labour
Khalid Mahmood	Labour

Source:

House of Commons Journal Vol 265, page 19, Wednesday 10 December 2008 and Commons Journal Vol 265, page 48, Monday 12 January 2009

Note:

* John Bercow was a member of the Conference under Speaker Michael Martin's chairmanship. Following Speaker Martin's resignation as Speaker and replacement by John Bercow, Speaker Bercow took over as chair.

Table 10 – 2022-23 conference membership

Member	Party
Sir Graham Brady	Conservative
Wendy Chamberlain	Liberal Democrat
Tracey Crouch MP	Conservative
Wayne David MP	Labour
Clive Efford MP	Labour
Julie Elliot MP	Labour
Florence Eshalomi MP	Labour
Laura Farris MP	Conservative
Marion Fellows MP	SNP
Mark Harper MP (14.10.22 – 25.10.22)*	Conservative
Andrew Jones MP	Conservative
Paul Maynard MP	Conservative
Dame Maria Miller MP	Conservative
Wendy Morton (from 19.01.23)	Conservative
Mary Robinson MP	Conservative

Source:

[Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff: first report](#), HC 692 2022-23, 31 October 2022

Note:

Mark Harper was appointed a Minister on 25 October 2022

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)