



Cabinet Office

# Guide to Parliamentary Work

November 2024

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## Foreword

The Government places great importance on effective scrutiny and accountability to Parliament. As Parliament's representatives in government, we aim to ensure that the democratic rights of MPs and Peers to hold the Government to account are preserved.

It is important for the Civil Service as a whole to be knowledgeable and engaged with Parliament throughout its work. In particular, understanding the operation of Parliament as an institution will greatly assist departments in ensuring effective parliamentary handling and engagement.

This guide is intended to ensure you are well equipped to provide accurate advice to Ministers when performing their parliamentary duties. It will also assist when advising Parliamentary Private Secretaries, Special Advisers and other civil servants on the Government's overall responsibilities when working with Parliament.

This guide is just one of many resources available to assist you in your understanding of Parliament, and we would strongly recommend that you take advantage of the wide range of training available from the Parliamentary Capability Team in the Cabinet Office and on Civil Service Learning. In addition, the Business Managers' offices are able to provide advice and guidance to departments on best practice when working with Parliament.

As new Leaders of both Houses, in a new Government and with a new Parliament, we are determined to ensure that the Executive holds a positive and constructive relationship with Parliament, and we are grateful to every one of you who contributes to this work.

**The Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP**  
**Leader of the House of Commons**

**The Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Basildon**  
**Leader of the House of Lords**

## Introduction

The guidance has been produced by the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons, working closely with colleagues across government and in the service of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

The guidance is for civil servants who work with Parliament, and in particular parliamentary teams across Whitehall. It is meant to help them in their task of providing accurate advice to Ministers and the Civil Service in its dealings with Parliament. The Guide to Parliamentary Work is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to parliamentary practice and procedure.

The Guide to Parliamentary Work is updated periodically. If departmental parliamentary teams have any suggestions or comments to make on the guidance, please send them to [commonsleader@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:commonsleader@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

## Parliamentary Calendar

1. The time between one general election and the next is known as a Parliament. A new Parliament starts after each general election. A Parliament is normally divided into sessions that last roughly a year, often beginning in May or June and continuing until the following April or May.
2. Parliamentary sessions begin with the State Opening of Parliament (which includes the King's Speech) and end at prorogation, both usually in the Spring. The King's Speech is an opportunity for the Government to set out their legislative programme for the year, namely, which bills they intend to bring to Parliament.
3. Parliaments are separated by a period known as dissolution. At dissolution all the business in both Houses comes to an end and all MPs lose their seats in the House of Commons. Further details on dissolution are provided at paragraph 18.
4. The rules governing how each House should be run are set out in the Standing Orders<sup>1</sup> of each House.

### **Annual calendar**

5. In the House of Commons, the business for each week is usually announced the week before, by the Leader of the House at Business Questions on Thursdays. Where possible, two weeks' worth of business is announced, the second week of which is always provisional. It is then set out in the Order Paper, which is the House's agenda for each day's sitting.
6. The sitting calendar is set by the Government, although individual recess periods are agreed by the House following motions tabled by the Government. Usually, the House of Commons meets Monday to Thursday, but it will also sit for 13 Fridays in the session to consider Private Member's Bills (PMBs). The 13 Fridays are also proposed by the Government and then agreed by the House, through the tabling of a motion.
7. The calendar setting out the sitting days of the House of Commons in each parliamentary session is announced and issued by the Leader of the House of Commons as far in advance as is practicable. This helps Parliament and the Government with their long-term planning but the calendar is always issued on the understanding that dates are subject to the progress of the scheduled parliamentary business.
8. In the House of Lords, the business for around three weeks ahead tends to be announced each Wednesday through Forthcoming Business (issued by the Government Whips Office). The last two weeks are usually provisional, and subject to change. Business is only confirmed once it appears on the House of Lords Greens (order paper), managed by the House but the Whips Office table business for Government.
9. Recess dates in the Lords are set by the Government Chief Whip, in consultation with the Commons and wider Usual Channels (informal contact with Business Managers from the other political parties). No motion is needed in the House. The

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<sup>1</sup> The [Standing Orders \(relating to Public Business\)](#) in the House of Commons

dates tend to be similar to the Commons, but can vary - usually only by a few days. They are also subject to the progress of business, and can change.

10. Whether the House sits on a Friday is also a decision for the Chief Whip, in consultation with the Usual Channels. Fridays are announced as far as possible in advance, and listed in the forthcoming business document.

## Recess

11. Recess dates are agreed by the House and can vary between the Commons and Lords. The usual calendar for the periods during which both Houses do not sit is as follows:

<b>February recess</b>	Usually one week
<b>Easter recess</b>	Usually two weeks to include Good Friday and Easter Monday
<b>May recess</b>	Early May Bank Holiday
<b>Whitsun recess</b>	Usually one week in May to include the Spring Bank Holiday
<b>Summer recess</b>	Mid-late July to early September
<b>Conference recess</b>	Mid-September to early October
<b>November recess</b>	Usually a short recess of less than a week
<b>Christmas recess</b>	Mid-late December to early January

12. In general, parliamentary business is not conducted during recess periods, although there are a few exceptions such as the nominated day during the conference recess when it is possible to table written questions in the Lords and the Printing Day in the Commons (usually the last working day before the House returns) when all questions received during the recess period are processed and published. Each year, the Table Offices in each House issue guidance to departments on the way in which they work during recess periods.

## Prorogation

13. Prorogation is the formal end of each session, prior to the King's Speech which marks the beginning of the next parliamentary session. Prorogation is a prerogative act of the Crown, exercised on the advice of the Prime Minister. The date is chosen by the Business Managers (the Leader of the House and Chief Whip in both Houses) shortly before the session ends. This allows flexibility in planning the legislative programme. During the period of prorogation neither House nor any Committee may meet.
14. It is possible to lay certain documents before Parliament during prorogation (e.g. Secondary Legislation and Command Papers), but not during a dissolution (i.e. not in the run up to a general election). It is also important for parliamentary clerks, as it marks the period when parliamentary business is suspended and Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs) / Questions for Written Answers (QWAs), Early Day Motions (EDMs) and Private Members bills (PMBs) fall. Government bills also

fall if they have not received Royal Assent, unless they are the subject of a carry-over motion.

15. It might be possible to answer Lords QWAs in certain periods, as members of the House never cease to be members. The Lords Offices can provide further guidance during these periods.

### **Recalls of Parliament**

16. When the House is not sitting, the Government can ask the Speaker to recall the House of Commons because of events of major national importance. The request for a recall is coordinated by No. 10, although the request is on behalf of the Government as a whole. Standing Orders<sup>2</sup> provide for similar arrangements to operate in the House of Lords through the Lord Speaker consulting the Government. The procedure for a recall of Parliament is set out in Commons Standing Order No. 13 and Lords Standing Order No. 16.

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<sup>2</sup> The [Standing Orders \(relating to Public Business\)](#) in the House of Lords

## General Elections

### Maximum term

17. The Government can decide when to call a general election. The Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022 revived the power of the monarch to dissolve Parliament, at the request of the Prime Minister of the day. The maximum term of a Parliament is five years from the day on which it first met.

### Dissolution procedure

18. The dissolution of Parliament takes place 25 working days before the date of the scheduled general election. When Parliament is dissolved, all business in the House comes to an end. MPs stop representing their constituencies and there are no MPs until after the general election.

19. Ministers continue to hold office throughout the election period, and resign with the Prime Minister (if the Prime Minister resigns as a result of the election outcome). As Peers are appointed, rather than elected, members of the House of Lords retain their positions. While Peers can continue to access Parliament during a dissolution period, only limited facilities and services are available to them.

### Pre-election period

20. There are rules in relation to the conduct of government business during the pre-election period. This means that activities, such as making announcements, may need to be restricted or paused. Guidance is issued to departments by the Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service and this is available to all staff.

### Outstanding business

21. In the lead up to the dissolution of Parliament, steps are taken to deliver all outstanding government parliamentary business:

- **Bills** – Discussions are held with the Business Managers in Parliament about the action required to get outstanding bills through their remaining stages and to Royal Assent ahead of dissolution. The Government usually needs the agreement of the Opposition to get bills through in a much reduced timescale, and so concessions may need to be made (e.g. a controversial clause in a bill may be removed).
- **Statutory Instruments (SI)** – Where affirmative instruments<sup>3</sup> have been laid in draft but not debated, action is taken to seek to get them debated and approved before the dissolution of Parliament. Where negative instruments<sup>4</sup> have been laid and made before the dissolution, the coming into force date is not affected by the dissolution but the time during which Parliament is dissolved is excluded from the 40-day praying period. Parliamentary teams should make careful reference to the [Statutory Instruments Practice guidance](#), produced by the National Archives, in

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<sup>3</sup> Affirmative procedures mean that each House has to approve the SI. If an SI requires affirmative procedure, this is set out in the parent Act. It normally means that it is seen as more significant or sensitive, therefore requiring a higher level of scrutiny.

<sup>4</sup> Negative procedures mean that the SI will remain in force, or may be made following the laying of the instrument in draft, unless a Member introduces a negative resolution (known as a 'prayer') and the resolution is agreed to by means of a vote.



order to prepare handling plans for any SIs being taken forward ahead of dissolution.

22. This is often referred to as the wash-up period.

- In addition, departments should make every effort to provide substantive answers to Parliamentary Questions (WPQs) and Questions for Written Answer (QWAs) ahead of the dissolution. Further guidance on this can be found at paragraphs 237 and 245.

### **Outcome of the general election**

23. Chapter two of [The Cabinet Manual](#), which is on Elections and Government formation, contains information relating to the formation of the Government after a general election.

### **The new Parliament**

24. The date when the new Parliament is first to meet will have been announced when the previous Parliament was dissolved. The first business of the new Parliament is the election of the Commons Speaker. This is followed by the swearing in of members of both Houses. This process takes several days and is followed by the State Opening of Parliament by the Sovereign.

## The Parliamentary day in the Commons

25. Parliamentary days differ depending on the business. This section will explain some key events that may occur during the day. [Part 3 of Erskine May](#) details the Conduct of Business in the Commons Chamber; and the [MPs Guide to Procedure](#) is a useful companion guide.<sup>5</sup>
26. Each day the Speaker holds 'Speaker's conference', where they meet with the Deputy Speakers and House officials to consider the day's business and whether to allow any applications for '[Urgent Questions](#)' (UQs). At this point the Speaker will be notified of any government statements and will also, if necessary, consider whether a Member should be allowed to make an application for an [emergency debate](#) under Standing Order No. 24 (SO24).
27. Following the [Speaker's procession to the Chamber](#), the House sits for [Prayers](#). Prayers are held in private (so are not broadcast) and last for three minutes.
28. The outset of business is an opportunity during a sitting day for a number of occasional procedures to take place, for example:
- Any report (from a Government whip) of the Sovereign's answer to an address
  - The Speaker may make formal communications, for example the death of a sitting MP
  - A new writ, the device triggering a by-election, may be moved, normally by the Chief Whip of the relevant party
  - Unopposed private business motions, which are not debatable, may be moved
  - A motion for an unopposed return may be made, providing protection for publication of the material by the House.
29. An hour of the day is then set aside for '[question time](#)', also known as oral questions. There is a rota, and each Government department answers questions once every five sitting weeks. The Prime Minister answers questions every Wednesday at midday.
30. Following question time, if any Member of the House is newly elected, they are introduced and swear the oath or make the affirmation.
31. Following question time/introduction of new Members, any UQs that have been granted take place. They normally last about 30-60 minutes each, though this can be extended or curtailed at the discretion of the Speaker, depending on the level of interest in the Chamber and the level of interest in the rest of the day's business. Parliamentary teams should pay close attention to the number of MPs seeking to speak (known as 'bobbing' - or more formally 'seeking to catch the Speaker's eye'), which will give an indication of the duration of the particular question. Not all Members who are bobbing will necessarily be called, but the occupant of the Chair tries to call as many Members as possible from both sides of the House. The order in which UQs are answered is determined by the Speaker's office.

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<sup>5</sup> The following refers to usual business from Monday to Thursday. Sitting Fridays are different, as they are generally devoted to Private Members' Bills - although Government business can take place on Fridays if required.

32. On every sitting Thursday, under Standing Order No. 21(2), the Leader of the House of Commons announces forthcoming business of the House in response to an Urgent Question, typically from the Shadow Leader of the House of Commons. Although this appears as an 'Urgent Question', in reality '[Business Questions](#)' happen as standard every week and the UQ is just the method to trigger this. Business Questions can be moved to take place after ministerial statements, in which case it would become a '*Business Statement*'. This occasionally happens if there are ministerial statements on a Thursday that are deemed more urgent than Business Questions.
33. Oral statements by a Government Minister follow any UQs. There may be multiple statements on one day. Further information on oral statements can be found at paragraphs 121-149.
34. At this time, the House may also hear an application for an emergency debate under Standing Order No. 24 (SO24). If an application is being heard, the Member who has applied has three minutes to make their case. If the House agrees to the application, then the Speaker will set down a time when the issue will be debated and specify the length of debate. Debates can last for up to three hours and generally occur within 24 hours of the application.
35. At this point in the Parliamentary day, Members may raise Points of Order with the Speaker.
36. There follows, if needed, an opportunity for ceremonial speeches, or for personal statements by either Members or Ministers. These may be to make apologies, for instance following a Committee on Standards recommendation, or are sometimes used by former Ministers who are resigning, as an opportunity to explain their reasons for leaving their Government position. These are in the gift of the Speaker and are not subject to any questioning or debate.
37. The House then moves on to 'public business'. Almost all business conducted in the Chamber is public business. Public business can be categorised as Government business, opposition business or backbench business. Items of public business include Bills, motions (a self-contained proposal submitted for the approval of the House), Statutory Instruments, and financial business (e.g. Estimates).
38. Public business usually starts, where necessary, with presentation of bills by a Member under Standing Order No. 57, or by a Minister under Standing Order No. 50 or 57.
39. On a Tuesday or Wednesday, a Member may move a motion for leave to bring in a Bill - the ten-minute rule motion - where they will make the case for their Bill in a speech lasting up to ten minutes. A ten minute speech opposing the introduction of the Bill may also take place, followed, if necessary, by a division (vote). There is an expectation that the Minister responsible for the area will be present, but not speak.
40. The House will then move on to the main business, which can be any of the types listed in paragraph 37. The length of debate on a Bill or a motion will depend on the type of business it is. For example, a report stage of a Bill might have four hours of protected time, as specified in the [programme motion](#). There may be divisions on the business, although not all business can be voted on.
41. The '[moment of interruption](#)', signalling the cut-off or conclusion of the main business, occurs at 22:00 on Monday, 19:00 on Tuesday and Wednesday and

17:00 on Thursday, unless the business is exempt or a programme motion has extended the sitting hours. Some business is automatically exempt and may be proceeded with at any hour (Standing Order No. 15), including Statutory Instruments (SIs). Following any votes (divisions)<sup>6</sup> at the end of the day, public petitions may be presented. The Government will also, on occasion, table business of the House motions to make changes to the standard running order of the sitting day and allow the House to sit later. The main business can finish earlier than the moment of interruption.

42. To conclude the day, there is a 30 minute adjournment debate to allow backbenchers to raise matters. This differs to other debates, as it is a debate on the technical motion “That this House do now adjourn”, but it can be led by any backbencher speaking on any topic. The motion is unamendable. If the debate starts early it may continue until the moment of interruption and then be renewed for a further 30 minutes. If the Member is not in their place at the start of the debate, the motion will be moved and the House adjourned without debate. Further information on adjournment debates can be found at paragraph 171.

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<sup>6</sup> When any items of business not exempted are opposed beyond the moment of interruption, a division is ‘deferred’ and will take place between 11:30 and 14:00 on the next sitting wednesday. This allows MPs to vote on motions using ballot papers at a convenient time instead of holding live divisions immediately at the end of a debate.

## Sitting times

43. The rules relating to sittings of the House of Commons are set out in Standing Orders No. 9-13.

44. Timings in the Chamber can be unpredictable, therefore you should keep an eye on the Chamber if you are expecting yourself or your Minister to be involved in business.

45. The timings of the parliamentary week are shown below:

	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tues</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>
<b>Deadline for Urgent Question (UQ) applications</b>	11:30	10:00	10:00	8:15	8:30
<b>Speaker's Conference - Deadline for UQ briefing</b>	12:00	10:30	10:30	8:45	9:00
<b>House sits</b>	14:30	11:30	11:30	9:30	9:30
<b>UQs, Oral Statements, presentation of bills</b>	15:30	12:30	12:30	10:30 (Business Questions at 10:30, or after any UQs)	11:00 (Business interrupted for UQs or Statements)
<b>Moment of Interruption (30 minute Daily Adjournment Debate)</b>	22:00	19:00	19:00	17:00	14:30
<b>House rises</b>	22:30	19:30	19:30	17:30	15:00
<b>Westminster Hall</b>	16:30 - 19:30 (debates on e-petitions)	09:30 - 11:30 and 14:30 - 17:30	09:30 - 11:30 and 14:30 - 17:30	13:30 - 16:30  (Backbench Business Committee debates)	N/A

## Other Regular Business

46. [Public Bill Committees](#) typically sit at:

- Tuesdays - 9.25am-11.25am and 2pm onwards (typically finishing by 5pm)
- Thursdays - 11.30am-1pm (approx) and 2pm onwards (typically finishing by 5pm)

47. [Delegated Legislation Committees](#) typically sit at:

- Mondays - 4.30pm and or 6pm
- Tuesdays and Wednesdays - 9.25am and 2.30pm
- Thursdays - 11.30am

The times above are the earliest that committees can be scheduled on respective days.

## Useful contacts and links

Person/office	Purpose
Leader of the House of Commons	Arrangement of business, including oral statements
Government Chief Whip	Arrangement of business
Government Whips Admin Unit	Voting arrangements
Speaker of the House of Commons	Chair during debates in the Commons Chamber - responsibilities include decisions on UQs
Table Office	Oral Questions and shuffles, Motions, WPQs, EDMs, business papers, advice to Speaker on sub judice, notification of written statements
Vote Office	Provision of Parliamentary and other papers to Members
Hansard	The official report of all parliamentary debates

- **For more information on House of Commons Business and Proceedings** - <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/>
- **For more information on the daily running of the House of Commons** - <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/>
- **For more information on bills** - [guide to making legislation](#) and desk aids
- **For more information on SIs** - [Statutory Instruments Practice](#) and desk aids

## The Parliamentary day in the Lords

48. The full running of a day in the Lords can be found on page 42 of [The Companion](#). But a typical day will run as follows:
49. Following the [Lord Speaker's procession](#) to the Chamber, the House hears [Prayers](#). Prayers are held in private and usually last for about five minutes.
50. Upon their conclusion, there is a section of time allocated for preliminary business. This usually takes less than 10 minutes but can take much longer, although this is rare. This can include any of the following procedures, although many of these do not take place frequently: ceremony of introduction and oaths of allegiance of new Peers (this can also take place at the end of business); Lord Speaker's Leave of Absence; messages and answers from the Crown; Royal Assent for a bill (although this can be done at any convenient time during sitting); addresses of congratulation or sympathy to the Crown; tributes; formal statements from the Lord Speaker and any personal statements from members.
51. The main business starts with 40 minutes of [Oral Questions](#). The subject matter of these is not restricted. They are selected roughly four weeks in advance and Departments will receive an email from the House of Lords Whips' Office confirming the question. The fourth question on each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is a 'Topical Question' chosen by ballot two working days before it is taken.
52. This would then be followed by any [Private Notice Questions](#) (PNQs), which are urgent oral questions. The Lord Speaker decides on their admissibility and, if accepted, they are taken immediately after oral questions.
53. The substantive business then begins. Discussion of private legislation comes first, followed by 'Business of the House' motions which signify a change in the order of business. When required, the Senior Deputy Speaker's business follows. Discussion of public bills (usually government bills), delegated legislation (SIs), other debates scheduled by the Government, followed by other motions. The order of proceedings can be varied by the previously mentioned 'Business of the House' motion.
54. Further, the Lords are able to repeat Statements and Urgent Questions that are made in the House of Commons. These are scheduled in discussions between the Usual Channels and the Government Whips' Office (GWO), and can be taken at any convenient point after the Commons Minister has begun the statement, unless the Secretary of State is a member of the House of Lords. The GWO will confirm with the relevant department's parliamentary branch and private office whether a repeat will be taken and the time of the repeat.
55. The finalised proceedings are published on Today's List an hour before the House sits.



## Sitting times

56. Advance sitting times can be seen in the [House of Lords Business document](#).

57. The [Grand Committee](#) in the Lords is only permitted to sit for four hours unless agreement is sought from the Usual Channels.

58. The timings of the parliamentary week are shown below:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
<b>Deadline for Private Notice Question (PNQ) applications</b>	12 noon	12 noon	12 noon	9:30am	9:30am
<b>Deadline for PNQ briefing</b>	45 mins from the point of notification			20 mins (30 mins where possible)	
<b>Lord Speaker's decision deadline</b>	13:00			10:00	
<b>House Sits</b>	14:30 Prayers (Introductions ; oaths; notifications of deaths or retirements)  Oral questions	14:30 Prayers (Introductions ; oaths; notifications of deaths or retirements)  Oral questions	15:00 Prayers (Introductions ; oaths; notifications of deaths or retirements)  Oral questions	11:00 Prayers (Introductions ; oaths; notifications of deaths or retirements)  Oral questions	10:00 Prayers (Introductions ; oaths; notifications of deaths or retirements)
<b>Private Notice Questions</b>	15 mins  15:15 (approx)	15 mins  15:15 (approx)	15 mins  15:45 (approx)	15 mins  11:45 (Approx)	15 mins  At a time agreed by the Lord Speaker, the questioner and the usual channels.

<p><b>Public business</b> - including Oral Statements, presentation of bills, business of the House motions, public bills, delegated legislation, debates and other motions</p>	<p>The timing of statements are agreed through the usual channels. Statements can be taken at any convenient point after the Commons Minister has begun the statement, unless the Secretary of State is a member of the House of Lords</p> <p>Statements repeats occurring immediately after oral questions usually follow any first reading of bills. Bills can also be introduced at the end of public business.</p> <p>Questions for short debate may be taken in the Chamber during a lunch break, dinner break or as last business at the discretion of the Government Whips' Office.</p> <p>The order of proceedings can be varied by a 'Business of the House' motion.</p>				
<p><b>House aims to rise by</b></p>	22:00	22:00	22:00	19:00	15:00
<p><b>The <a href="#">Grand Committee</a></b></p>	15:45 - 19:45	15:45 - 19:45	16:15 - 19:15	13:00 -17:00	N/A

## **Useful contacts and links**

<b>Person/office</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Lords Chief Whip Office	Arrangement of business
Lords Speaker	Responsibilities include decisions on PNQs
Table Office	QWAs, QSDs, oral questions and motions for debate. Order and business papers
Public Bill Office	Amendments to bills, advice on procedure
Hansard	The official report of all parliamentary debates

- **For more information on House of Lords Business and Proceedings** - <http://lordsbusiness.parliament.uk/>
- **For more information on the daily running of the House of Lords** - <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/>
- **For more information on the Lords Government Whip's Office:** <http://www.lordswhips.org.uk/>
- **For more information on bills** - [guide to making legislation](#) and desk aids
- **For more information on SIs** - [Statutory Instruments Practice](#) and desk aids

## Oral Questions

### Top tips:

- Commons oral questions are tabled by MPs at least three sitting days in advance of the question time the relevant government department is due to answer.
- Commons questions asked must relate to the responsibilities of the government department concerned. If they do not, there is an option for the department to transfer known oral questions to other government departments as written questions.
- In the Lords, four questions are posed to His Majesty's Government as a whole, rather than to particular Government departments. Therefore, each question can be for a different department.
- Normal oral questions are published in the House of Lords Business four weeks in advance of the date that the question is due to be asked. They can be amended up to 24 hours in advance.
- Topical oral questions take the fourth oral question slot on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and are published two working days in advance

59. Oral parliamentary questions are questions put to a government minister in person by a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons Chamber or a member of the House of Lords in the House of Lords Chamber.

60. Oral questions are asked during question time at the start of business in both Houses.

### Sub judice matters and parliamentary handling

61. Parliamentary teams should be familiar with Parliament's sub judice rule<sup>7</sup>. This is a resolution of each House that MPs and Peers do not refer to active court cases to avoid potentially influencing the outcome of those cases. These rules do not apply to the legislative process, so not to proceedings on Bills, but do apply to Urgent Questions, Oral Questions, Written Questions, Early Day Motions and debates when the Houses are not legislating.

62. Parliamentary teams should consider the sub judice rule when commissioning briefing on forthcoming business from policy teams and ensure any sub judice concerns are brought to the attention of Ministers ahead of their contributions to debates.

63. In the Commons, the Table Office is responsible for identifying where there are potential sub judice issues in any of the business mentioned above or anything appearing on the Order Paper. The Table Office provides advice to Members on sub judice in relation to proceedings which they have initiated. It also provides similar advice, in consultation with Speakers Counsel, to the Speaker's office and Clerks at

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<sup>7</sup> The sub judice rule is set out within the [Standing Orders](#) in the House Commons, and within the [Companion to the Standing Orders](#) in the House of Lords.

the Table. In doing so, the Table Office will normally need to request information from Departments via the parliamentary clerk.

64. Such requests are often made at short notice reflecting the pace at which the House's proceedings can unfold, for example, as decisions on Urgent Questions are made. It has been a long-standing practice that Departments treat these requests with high priority and that they are forthcoming when passing on information to the clerks in both Houses.
65. It should be remembered that it is the House authorities themselves that determine whether a matter falls within the sub judice resolution once they have obtained information on any legal proceedings that are taking place. In certain cases, for instance, if a matter concerns issues of national importance, the Commons Speaker can decide to grant a waiver to the rule allowing the matter to be raised in proceedings. When doing so they will usually make a short statement in the House immediately preceding the business to which it relates.

## Oral questions in the House of Commons

### House of Commons Oral questions

66. Oral questions take place for an hour, Monday to Thursday.
67. Each government department answers questions once every four to five weeks according to the [order of oral questions rota](#).
68. The length of each session of questions varies, depending on the department. Some departments have a full hour of questions, whereas some will have shorter sessions.
69. Most departments are also subject to topical questions, where the department does not know the specific question in advance.
70. It is expected that all Commons Ministers within the Department attend oral questions. Where a Minister's absence is unavoidable, the Department should notify the Government Whips Office in the first instance.

### Notice of questions

71. Questions asked must relate to the responsibilities of the government department concerned. If they do not, there is an option for the department to transfer known oral questions to other government departments as written questions. Commons oral questions are tabled by MPs at least three days in advance of the question time the relevant government department is due to answer. The tabling deadlines for questions are set out on the order of oral questions rota.
72. The order in which questions are asked is determined by the 'shuffle', carried out randomly by a computer, run by the Table Office.

### Proceedings in the Chamber

73. On the day questions are due to be asked they are printed under 'Business Today' in the Order Paper.
74. MPs who are called by the Speaker to ask their question do not read it out, but simply call out its number. When the government minister has replied, the MP can ask one further question which is not printed in advance, known as a supplementary.
75. Other MPs, who must 'bob' to indicate they wish to speak, may also be called to ask supplementary questions at the discretion of the Speaker. The same Minister who answered the first substantive tabled question must reply to each supplementary question in turn. Supplementary questions must be on the same subject as the original question.

### Topical questions

76. Topical questions are asked by Members during the last 15 minutes of most Ministerial question sessions. The names of Members asking a topical question will appear on the Order Paper, but their questions are not printed.
77. There is a strong expectation that the Secretary of State will answer the first question (i.e. a brief answer addressing the major issues of the day), but it is

ultimately for the Department to decide. It should be brief and certainly not exceed one minute. The substance is a matter for Departments. Ministers and their Departments are reminded that where a policy announcement is being given, they should first consider either a Written Ministerial Statement or Oral Statement. However, it may be acceptable to use the opportunity in the opening statement (by the Secretary of State) to bring to the attention of the House, a Written Ministerial Statement issued earlier on in the day.

78. It is for the Secretary of State to decide who will answer subsequent questions. There may be practical and presentational reasons why it may be difficult to decide on the spot which minister should answer questions with no prior notice.

79. Although we expect Members to use the opportunity to raise topical issues, there is no definition or procedural requirement for topicality. These are simply classed as open questions. The opening statement by the Secretary of State could influence other Members to ask questions on this topic.

### **Grouped questions**

80. Very similar or identical oral questions may sometimes be put down by two or more Members. Where this happens the questions may be grouped together with the Minister giving a single answer to all of them. This may benefit the Minister and save some time in the House.

81. It is the Minister (advised where appropriate by their officials) who decides which questions will be taken together, and from how far down the list they will select questions for grouping, subject to the agreement of the Speaker. For example, similar or identical questions may appear say as Nos. 2, 7, 11 and 24, but unless your department normally reaches 24 that should not be grouped with the other three. Instead the oral response to No. 24 would be:

*"I refer the Hon. Member to the reply I gave some moments ago."*

82. The usual formula for grouped oral questions is:

*"I shall, with permission, Mr Speaker, answer this question and question(s) No(s) (...) together"*.

83. The Minister then gives a single answer to all the questions in the group. Following the answer the Speaker usually calls first and successively for supplementaries those Members whose questions have been answered together.

84. Early warning of any proposed grouping should be given to the Speakers Office, the Table Office and the Government Whips' Office by 3pm the day before. In addition, departments must also notify the MPs whose questions are being grouped.

85. Officials should remember that grouping answers increases the chances of those further down the list being reached and they will need to ensure that adequate briefing is provided for all answers that might be reached.

86. A written question may not be grouped with an oral question. Additionally, oral questions to the Prime Minister are not grouped for answer.

## **Transfers**

87. Guidance given by the then Leader of the House in response to a Parliamentary Question (16 Feb 2006) states that an “oral question(s) should be transferred within 24 hours of it appearing in the Notice Paper and not on the day for answer.”
88. Departments must ensure they act sensitively to the transfer of an oral question to another department if that question would otherwise have been answered orally. When a question is transferred, formal notice should be sent by the Department to the Member concerned and to the Table Office. When an oral question is transferred, the question will lose the chance of getting an oral answer and instead will receive a written reply.

## **Prime Minister’s Questions**

89. The Prime Minister answers questions from MPs in the Commons every sitting Wednesday from 12pm to 12:30pm.
90. The session normally starts with a routine question from an MP about the Prime Minister's engagements. This is known as an 'open question' and means that the MP can then ask a supplementary question on any subject.
91. The Leader of the Official Opposition is then called, being permitted to ask a total of six questions. The leader of the third largest party is permitted to ask two questions. They do not have to table these questions in advance.
92. Most MPs will table the same question about engagements and if they do, only their names will appear on the question book. After the first engagement's question has been asked, any other MPs who have tabled the same question are simply called to ask an unspecified, supplementary question. Sometimes MPs table a substantive question for the Prime Minister; if successful in the ballot, the procedure is the same as for a substantive Departmental question.
93. The Prime Minister will be extensively briefed by government departments in anticipation of likely subjects they could be asked about.



## Oral questions in the House of Lords

### House of Lords oral questions

94. Question time takes place at the beginning of the day's business for up to 40 minutes on Mondays to Thursdays.
95. Four questions are posed to His Majesty's Government as a whole, rather than to particular Government departments. Therefore, each question can be for a different department.
96. Normal oral questions are published in the House of Lords Business four weeks in advance of the date that the question is due to be asked. They can be amended up to 24 hours in advance.
97. Topical oral questions take the fourth oral question slot on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and are published two working days in advance.

### Notice of questions

98. Lords oral questions can be tabled anywhere between one month and 24 hours in advance. The questions are printed in the House of Lords Business and on the Order Paper
99. The fourth question slot on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays are reserved for 'topical questions', tabled two days in advance.

### Proceedings in the Chamber

100. Oral questions are asked by leave of the House and proceedings on each question may last for up to 10 minutes. The wording of the oral question is not read aloud, the member asking the oral question rises and says "*My Lords, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name on the order paper*". The minister then responds. Ministers' replies should be succinct. Their initial replies should not exceed 75 words.
101. Supplementary questions are first asked by the member in whose name the question stands and then by other members of the House. Members decide amongst themselves who may ask these supplementaries. Supplementaries should be relevant, short and not include more than two points, if a supplementary goes beyond this the minister is required to answer only the two main points.

## Urgent and Private Notice Questions

### Top tips:

- Urgent Questions (UQs) in the House of Commons are asked straight after oral questions on Monday to Thursday, or at 11am on a sitting Friday and may be repeated in the House of Lords.
- The Minister responding to an UQ has up to three minutes for the response.
- On average 30-60 minutes is allowed for an UQ.
- Urgent questions may be repeated in the House of Lords, on the same or subsequent day. Whether and when they are taken is a decision for the Lords Chief Whip with the Usual Channels. They last only 10 minutes, with quick fire Q+A (like Lords oral questions).
- Private Notice Questions (PNQs) in the House of Lords are taken immediately after oral questions, or on Friday at a time agreed by the Lord Speaker, the Lord asking the question and the Usual Channels.
- Proceedings on a PNQ are limited to 15 minutes.

102. For information on **sub judice matters and parliamentary handling**, please refer to paragraphs 61-65.

## Urgent Questions in the House of Commons

103. If an urgent or important matter arises which an MP believes requires an immediate answer from a government minister, they may apply to ask an Urgent Question (UQ).

104. MPs may request that the Speaker considers their application for an UQ each day. Applications for UQ must be submitted to the Speaker to receive an oral answer on the same day. The deadlines are as follows:

	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tues</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>
<b>Deadline for UQ applications</b>	11:30	10:00	10:00	08:15	08:30
<b>Speaker's Conference – Deadline for UQ briefing</b>	12:00	10:30	10:30	08:45	09:00

105. The Speaker will consider the merits of a UQ request following a short consultation with departments. A department's parliamentary clerk will have until the time of the Speaker's Conference to provide a briefing before they make a decision on whether or not to allow a question. The briefing template is supplied by the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons. As part of this briefing, it is important that Departments notify the Speaker's Office of any matters relating to UQs that raise sub judice concerns at this point.

106. If the Speaker is satisfied that the question is urgent and of public importance it is then granted; the Speaker does not have to explain decisions behind granting an UQ or not. Neither the submission of an UQ nor its subsequent rejection by the Speaker should be publicly referred to and Ministers should be reminded of this ahead of any relevant business.

107. UQs are asked straight after question time on Monday to Thursday, or at 11am on a sitting Friday and may be repeated in the House of Lords.

108. In practice UQs invariably take the form of a question asking a Minister to make a statement on whatever matter has arisen. UQs can be asked of any department on any sitting day, except for the first sitting day of a new session.

109. The Member concerned asks the UQ by reading out the text of the question. It is a matter for the Government to decide which Minister replies to an UQ. The Minister responding to an UQ has up to three minutes for the response, and the questioner up to two minutes for their supplementary question. The Opposition spokesperson, where this is not the questioner, also has up to two minutes to speak, and the third party spokesperson has one minute. The Speaker has been clear that these timings must be adhered to.

110. The Speaker allows supplementary questions, as with normal oral parliamentary questions. On average 30-60 minutes is allowed for an UQ. This will depend on the

number of Members who wish to speak, the number of UQs granted that day, the number of statements and the nature of the main business for the remainder of the day, amongst other factors.

111. On sitting Fridays (and indeed on every day that the House is sitting), it is important that each Department has a duty Minister available at the House in case an UQ arises.

### **Speaker's Briefing**

112. In preparing the background briefing note, departments should not attempt to argue that the question is not urgent - that is for the Speaker to decide – but may point out relevant facts which may assist in making that judgement. It is imperative that briefing is provided as soon as possible and in good time before the start of the Speaker's meeting to consider business of the day. Any briefing provided late may not be considered and the opportunity to influence the decision will be lost. Any details of relevant live legal proceedings need to be included in the briefing and the briefing must be copied to [tableoffice@parliament.uk](mailto:tableoffice@parliament.uk).
113. The parliamentary Clerk will need to alert the Secretary of State, other Ministers, SpAds and appropriate officials who need to be prepared in case the question is allowed. Ministers and officials will also need to start thinking about the speech and briefing if the question was to go ahead.
114. In certain circumstances, such as when an application for an UQ has been prompted by a new development or media reporting, the Secretary of State may be considering making an oral statement. If this is the case, the Business Managers should be consulted immediately. When preparing the briefing note for such a UQ, departments must not make reference to bids for an oral statement without first consulting the Business Managers, as set out in paragraph 9.4 of the [Ministerial Code](#). The Leader's Office will inform the Speaker's Office of any Oral Statements ahead of the decision on UQs being taken.

## **Private Notice Questions in the House of Lords**

115. A Private Notice Question (PNQ) gives members of the House of Lords the opportunity to raise urgent matters on any sitting day. A PNQ should be submitted in writing to the Lord Speaker by 12 noon on the day on which it is proposed to ask it, or by 9:30am on Thursdays, Fridays and any other days when oral questions are taken before 1pm. The decision whether the question is of sufficient urgency and importance to justify an immediate reply rests with the Lord Speaker, after consultation.

	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thu</b>	<b>Fri</b>
<b>Peers' Tabling Deadlines</b>	12:00	12:00	12:00	09:30	09:30
<b>Department Briefing Deadlines</b>	45 Mins (from point of notification)			20 Mins (30 Mins where possible)	
<b>Lord Speaker's Decision Deadlines</b>	13:00			10:00	

116. PNQs are taken immediately after oral questions, or on Friday at a time agreed by the Lord Speaker, the Lord asking the question and the Usual Channels.

117. The Lord Speaker will consider the merits of a PNQ request following receipt of briefing from departments. The briefing will be commissioned by the Government Whips Office using a standard template.

118. The Lord Speaker will consider the urgency, public importance and other opportunities to debate the issue in thinking about whether to grant it. The Lord Speaker does not have to explain decisions behind granting a PNQ. Neither the submission of a PNQ nor its subsequent rejection by the Speaker should be publicly referred to and Ministers should be reminded of this ahead of any relevant business.

119. Proceedings on PNQs follow the rules for oral questions (see paragraphs 94-101). In particular, supplementary questions should be short and confined to not more than two points. Proceedings on a PNQ are limited to 15 minutes. PNQs are not taken on the day of State Opening.

## Oral Statements

### Top tips:

- In order to make a statement, departments should send a completed bid form to the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons with as much notice as possible. Requests should not be made through the Speaker's Office.
- The length of time allocated by the Speaker/Deputy Speaker can vary considerably.
- Advanced copies of statements must be made available to the Opposition spokespersons, via the Government Whips office, at least 45 minutes before the statement is made.
- Departments bidding for an oral statement are encouraged to also table a written ministerial statement for the same day. The Business Managers are unable to confirm oral statements in advance and this will therefore allow departments to fulfil their obligations to Parliament.

120. For information on **sub judice matters and parliamentary handling**, please refer to paragraphs 61-65.

## Oral Statements in the Commons

121. The [Ministerial Code](#) sets out that the most important announcements of government policy should be made in the first instance in Parliament. The rights of Parliament are guarded and ministers are likely to face criticism if announcements are made to the media ahead of Parliament. If a Minister chooses not to attend the House to announce a significant change in policy or speak on an important issue, they may well be called to the House to respond to an urgent question.
122. Ministers can make important announcements to the House by either an oral or written statement. Oral statements are preferable for high-profile policy developments.
123. There is no explicit provision in Standing Orders for the procedure for making an oral statement, but it is a regular feature of the parliamentary day. Statements usually cover announcements of major Government policy or set out the Government's response to topical events.
124. Generally, oral statements are made in the House of Commons first and can be repeated in the House of Lords with the agreement of the Usual Channels. Where a Secretary of State is a Member of the Lords, the statement can be made in the Lords first and repeated in the Commons.
125. Statements may relate to any area of a minister's responsibilities. It is down to the Government to decide which minister makes any particular statement. Within Government, it is the role of the House of Commons Business Managers to manage which statements are made, their timing and, where necessary, the order in which they will be made. Normally, the most senior minister or department takes precedence.
126. The prepared statements must last no longer than 10 minutes (approximately 1,200 words depending on the minister's speaking speed). The time allowed for [supplementary questions](#) is a matter for the Chair, but generally up to one hour is allowed, depending on the number of Members who wish to ask supplementary questions and the other business of that day.
127. In order to make a statement, departments should send a completed bid form to the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons. Departments should give as much notice as possible of the intention to make a statement. The Business Managers meet regularly so that statements can be considered alongside the business to be announced during the Business Statement. The decision on whether to allow a ministerial statement is taken in consultation with No.10.
128. When bidding for an oral statement, requests should not be made through the Speaker's Office. The right to make a statement is the prerogative of Ministers and, though statements are often introduced with the words "with permission" out of courtesy to the Chair, neither the permission of the Speaker nor the leave of the House is required if a statement is made during the normal order of business.

### **Sharing the statement in advance**

129. The Ministerial Code specifies that departments must make advanced copies of statements available to the Opposition spokespersons, via the Government Whips

office, at least 45 minutes before the statement is made. A copy must also be provided in advance to the Speaker.

130. It is the responsibility of the relevant department to ensure that copies of statements are made available to the Opposition, Speaker's Office, the Press Gallery and Members.
131. When a statement is delivered to the Speaker's Office, it is important to consider that the Speaker will need to be apprised of those Members who have a specific interest in the issue. If the department has considered which Members are most affected by the statement, this should be notified to the Speaker's Office, as should details of any areas or constituencies affected by, for example, pilot projects.
132. Copies of statements should be made available to Members in the Chamber as soon as the Minister sits down. A PDF should be emailed to the Vote Office at least 30 minutes in advance so that copies can be printed for distribution immediately following the statement. Statements will also appear on the HousePapers app.
133. When producing a PDF copy to be sent to the Vote Office, to support Members with visual impairments, please ensure you also produce a large size version (i.e. Arial size 20) and email this with your original PDF.
134. Copies of any documents referred to in the statement, such as a White Paper or consultation paper, must be made available to MPs in the Vote Office ahead of the start of the statement (and note that Command Papers must be available in the Vote Office prior to laying so that they can be distributed to Members immediately they are laid). Departments should consider carefully whether MPs would benefit from being able to read the accompanying document for a period of time before the statement begins and should factor this into their handling.<sup>8</sup>
135. Copies are also made available to the Press Gallery when the minister sits down. Successive Speakers have deprecated the practice of informing the media about the content of statements before they have been made to the House.

### **Notice of oral statements**

136. On the morning of the statement, the Private Secretary to the Leader of the House of Commons lets the Speaker's Office know both the title of, and the name of the minister delivering, the statement.
137. An oral statement will be listed on the front page of the Order Paper if notice has been given the previous day. Often the Government does not announce that they are going to make an oral statement until the day itself. On the day, oral statements are listed on the annunciators (the monitors around the parliamentary estate), on Parliament's website and on the Leader's Office Twitter account. Notices are also placed in Members' Lobby.
138. It is important that the title of a statement is not political or in the form of a slogan. It must not be ambiguous or vague. If referring to a document it is normally better to give notice of "Publication of [xxx]" to help avoid this problem. The Table Office can advise departments on acceptable titles.

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<sup>8</sup> Further guidance can be found in the Journal Office's [Guide to laying papers](#) (February 2024)



## Timing of oral statements

139. The timing of a statement will be planned through discussions between the relevant department, No.10 and the Business Managers. It is sometimes necessary, however, to arrange for a statement to be made at short notice. This is usually in response to a specific incident or event.
140. Statements take place at a set time during the parliamentary week. Statements would normally be made at 15.30 on a Monday and 12.30 on a Tuesday and a Wednesday and 11.30 on a Thursday (following the business question). Statements on Fridays are less common. If any UQs have been allowed, these will take place before statements.
141. Where it is necessary for more than one statement to be made on the same day the Business Managers take a decision on the order in which they will be made, taking the significance of the statement and Ministerial ranking into consideration. When statements are planned for Thursdays, these will come after Business Questions to the Leader of the House. The Leader may, on occasion, decide to allow a statement to take precedence over business questions at the request of the relevant Secretary of State.
142. On Fridays, statements are made at 11.00am, when the debate taking place is interrupted to allow for the statement and resumed on its conclusion.
143. Occasionally, the Speaker will allow a Minister to make a statement at another time. This is usually at the end of the day's main business. If there is real urgency, the business could be interrupted to hear the statement between, or even during, other debates, but this is very rare. Ministers have a right to make statements in the normal slot after Question Time, or 11am on Fridays. The Speaker has discretion over whether to allow statements at other times.

## Oral Statements process

144. As set out in paragraph 9.4 of the Ministerial Code: "Ministers should not give undertakings, either in or outside the House of Commons, that an oral statement will be made to the House until the agreement has been given by the private secretaries to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the House of Commons and the Chief Whip."
145. Departments should bid for an oral statement using the form provided by the Leader's Office. This should be emailed to the Leader's Office for consideration by the Business Managers and No. 10.
146. The department needs to confirm with the Leader's Office the final title of the statement and the Minister making the statement at the earliest opportunity, and before the Speaker's Conference takes place on the day the statement is to be made. The Leader's Office will advise all Government departments by email once the Speaker's Office has been notified.
147. The statement should be provided to the following stakeholders, in advance, by the department's parliamentary branch:
- Government Chief Whip
  - Lords Chief Whip

- Leader
- Speaker
- The Vote Office
- Table Office
- Hansard
- Opposition spokespeople (via the Chief Whips' office)

### **The Vote Office**

148. It is essential that parliamentary teams ensure that the Vote Office has enough time to produce copies of the statement, and that accompanying papers have been delivered for distribution to Members. These should be provided in embargoed form ahead of the statement taking place. Copies of the statement should be sent by e-mail to No.10, Leader's Office, Whips' Office and Speaker's Office. You must ensure that you provide a large format version of the statement (in 20 point Arial) at the same time.

### **Statements on Opposition Days/other events**

149. By convention, statements are avoided where possible on Opposition days. It is also generally not appropriate to make planned oral statements at certain times. For example, during the debate which follows the King's Speech at the start of each session.

## Oral Statements in the Lords

150. Oral statements in the Lords can be made with the leave of the House without notice. Usually, the responsible minister is a member of the Commons, in which case the statement is repeated in the Lords (if taken on the same day as the Commons), or questions are taken on the statement (if it is taken the day after or later). The timing of any repeated statement is agreed through the Usual Channels in the Lords, and the timing of it is announced through Today's List.
151. Any repeat of a Commons statement cannot start until after the statement has begun in the Commons. The formulation for starting any repeated statement is "*My Lords, with the leave of the House I will now repeat a statement made in the Other Place earlier today by [xxx]*". The text of the statement is then repeated verbatim from the Commons if it is repeated on the same day, followed by 40 minutes of questions. If it is repeated on a different day it will be 'questions on an Oral Statement' and the Minister will not read out the statement but skip straight to questions. The 40 minutes comprises:
- 20 minutes for speeches from the Labour and Liberal Democrat front benchers (who usually speak for around 6 minutes), and the response from the Minister to both interventions;
  - 20 minutes for backbench questions - these should be short (similar in style to oral questions) and the Minister responds with a short answer after each question.
152. Oral statements are generally made in the House of Commons first and can be repeated in the House of Lords with the agreement of the Usual Channels. Where a Secretary of State is a Member of the Lords, the statement can be made in the Lords first and repeated in the Commons. The Speaker on the Woolsack will call on a statement and any Lords Statement should begin "*My Lords, with the leave of the House I will now make a statement on [xxx].*"
153. Statements made or repeated in the Lords should be made available in the Printed Paper Office. All statements in the Commons should be shared with the Government Whips Office who will share them with the Lords Usual Channels.
154. If a UQ has been allowed in the Commons, it can be repeated in the House of Lords in a similar way to statements and subject to Usual Channel agreement. If it is a same day repeat, the Minister will read out the answer given in the Commons in the form of a statement, before taking 10 minutes of questions, which mirrors oral questions. If it is repeated on a different day, the Minister will not need to read out the statement and will just take 10 minutes of questions.

## Debates

### **Top tips in the Commons:**

- It is the department's responsibility to provide a Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) or PPS-support to provide in Chamber support for the Minister.
- Departments should consider the full length of debate when deciding the appropriate length of the Minister's speech.
- During a debate, a commitment to write may have been made. This letter should be sent as soon after the debate as possible, and include the phrase "A copy of this letter is being placed in the Library of the House", in order that it can be made available to other Parliamentarians who took part in the debate.
- For opposition day debates, there will usually be only a day or two's notice of the topic to be debated, so departments will likely need to prepare briefing quickly, including opening and closing speeches and detailed Q&A.

155. As well as scrutinising legislation and questioning Ministers, much of the parliamentary timetable is taken up with debates. Debates are an important way for MPs and Peers to hold the Government to account.

156. There are a variety of different types of debate in each House. In all forms, a Minister will set out the Government's position.

157. Debates can be in the form of general debates, on which the House debates an issue on the basis of a 'take note' motion, i.e. "that this House has considered the matter of...." Alternatively, debates can take place on a substantive motion, which sets out a position and the House votes to agree or disagree with it (also known as a 'resolution'). Debates are also a part of the legislative process which enables MPs and Peers to debate bills before they are voted on and may become law.

158. Ministers will require briefings and opening and/or closing speeches as necessary in accordance with the length and type of debate.

159. When closing a debate, ministers should seek to give as full a response as possible, addressing all substantive points raised by MPs or Peers during the debate. Responses will need to be weaved into the closing speech. Officials will be expected to support the Minister for the duration of the debate in the Officials Box in the Commons, in the areas reserved for officials in Westminster Hall or the House of Lords.

160. Officials will need to pay close attention to the points being raised and provide lines for the minister if needed. If the point cannot be addressed in the closing final speech, the minister may say that they will write to the Hon. member or the noble Lord. Where there is a commitment to write, a letter will need to be drafted and sent as soon as possible after the debate. The letter should include the phrase "A copy of this letter is being placed in the Library of the House", in order that it can be made available to other Parliamentarians who took part in the debate.

161. For information on **sub judice matters and parliamentary handling**, please refer to paragraphs 61-65.

## Debates in the House of Commons

162. The table below sets out the general position on timing of debates in the Commons Chamber and Westminster Hall (subject to change depending on the particular circumstances of the day's business):

	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tue</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thu</b>	<b>Fri</b>
<b>Commons Chamber</b>  (Ministerial statements or Urgent Questions may delay start)	Starting between 15:30 and 17:00  16:00 – end of half day debates	Starting between 12:30 and 14:00  16:00 – end of half day debates	Starting Between 12:30 and 14:00  16:00 – end of half day debates	Starting between 11:15 and 12:45  14:00 – end of half day debates	Starting 09:30  Private Members' bills
<b>Moment of Interruption and Adjournment Debate starts</b>	10:00	19:00	19:00	17:00	14:30
<b>House rises</b>	22:30	19:30	19:30	17:30	15:00
<b>Westminster Hall</b>	16:30-19:30  (for debates on e-petitions)	Debates take place at: 09:30-11:00 11:00-11:30 14:30-16:00 16:00-16:30 16:30-17:30	Debates take place at: 09:30-11:00 11:00-11:30 14:30-16:00 16:00-16:30 16:30-17:30	13:30-16:30  (Backbench Business Committee debates)	

### **Debates in government time**

163. The Government will occasionally find time to debate matters in government time. This may be where a major issue requires debate and decision (such as ahead of a vote to take military action) or where the Government has decided to schedule a debate following representations from members.

164. For these debates, in most cases the relevant Secretary of State would be expected to open the debate and a junior minister would close the debate. Debates may be general debates, on the basis of a motion "that this House has considered..." or on votable substantive motions, the wording of which will be agreed by relevant ministers.

165. The debate may last a full day or the length of the debate may be governed by a business motion.

#### **166. King's Speech debates**

- Following the King's Speech to Parliament, each House debates its content.
- This is known as the Debate on the Address and lasts for about five days. Each day, the debate will usually last for a full day.
- The subjects for debate are selected in advance by the Official Opposition. They are usually thematic, for example a day's debate on 'foreign affairs' or 'justice and home affairs'. Each day is therefore likely to require ministerial and briefing inputs from more than one department.
- Ministers will speak at the beginning and end of each day's debate. A separate Minister will be needed to open and close each day of debate. There are usually votes on the penultimate and final days of the debates.

#### **167. Budget and Estimates debates**

- Days of debate also take place following the Budget (usually around four days) and three days are allocated each session for consideration of the Estimates. The Government Whips' Office works closely with HM Treasury to set the subjects for debates on the Budget. The subjects for debates on the Estimates are selected by the Backbench Business Committee following applications from MPs.

### **Non-government-sponsored debates**

#### **168. Opposition Day Debates**

- The main opposition parties are given an allocated number of parliamentary days to debate subjects of interest to their party. Under Standing Orders, the Official Opposition are entitled to 17 days each session and the remaining three days are allocated to the third largest party. These are usually high profile and likely to generate media and other interest.
- There will usually be only a day or two's notice of the topic to be debated, so departments will likely need to prepare briefing quickly, including opening and closing speeches and detailed Q&A. The Government Chief Whips' Office will work with departments in order to establish the approach to the debate, including whether to seek to amend the motion, and who will speak on behalf of the Government.
- At the start of the debate, the Opposition will speak first, and the Secretary of State or a junior minister will then respond.
- At the end of the debate, an opposition spokesperson will provide the penultimate speech and a Minister will close the debate.
- There may be a vote at the end of the debate, depending on the position the Government is taking to the opposition's motion.

## **169. Backbench Business Committee debates**

- The Backbench Business Committee was established in 2010 and is allocated 35 days each session to schedule debates (27 in the chamber).
- The Backbench Business Committee meets weekly to hear representations from MPs wishing to secure a debate.
- The Committee can consider any subject for debate, including those raised in petitions or national campaigns.
- Debates take place either in the Commons Chamber, usually on a Thursday afternoon, or in Westminster Hall on Thursdays.
- The MP sponsoring the debate will make the opening speech, and a Minister will speak once at the end of the debate. A typical ministerial speech will last for ten minutes. Ministers must leave at least two minutes at the end of the debate to allow the sponsoring MP to make a short closing speech.
- Backbench Business Committee debates may be on either a take note or a substantive motion. Departments will be notified in the Business Statement or separately by the Whips' Office when a subject has been selected for debate.

## **170. Pre-Recess Adjournment Debate (PRAD) or the 'Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment debate'**

- Following the establishment in the House of Commons of the Backbench Business Committee in June 2010, the business on the last sitting day before a recess period is now usually subject to a decision of that Committee.
- The Committee has usually chosen to follow the tradition of 'Pre-recess Adjournment Debates' at which Members can raise a variety of issues, before a response is provided by the Government.
- This is either a full day's debate or a half day's debate. The debate covers matters pertaining to all government departments, with ministerial support and briefing provided by the Leader's Office.
- There is no vote.

## **171. End of day adjournment debate**

- There is a half-hour adjournment debate at the end of each day's sitting in the House of Commons Chamber. This will be on a single topic proposed by one MP. Other MPs may only make short speeches with the prior permission of the Member in charge and the Minister. Opposition frontbenchers may not intervene or make a speech in these debates.
- MPs are selected by ballot, which is run by the Speaker's Office.
- MPs often use adjournment debates to raise national or international matters, issues of importance to them or their constituencies.
- The debate may start earlier and last for longer if the preceding business finishes earlier than the moment of interruption. Parliamentary Clerks should therefore pay close attention to the preceding business. In these



circumstances the Speaker may call MPs to speak who have not sought permission as above.

- A Minister will close the debate with a speech of about 10-15 minutes.
- There is no vote.

## **172. Westminster Hall debates**

- Debates take place in Westminster Hall on Monday to Thursday. On a Monday afternoon, the Petitions Committee can schedule a debate on one or more petition or e-petition, including any e-petitions that have reached 100,000 signatures for debate. Five debates can take place each day on Tuesday and Wednesday. There is also a three hour slot for debates from 13.30 on a Thursday afternoon that is sometimes divided between two 90 minute debates. Departments answer debates in Westminster Hall according to a published rota.
- MPs often use Westminster Hall debates to raise national or international matters, or other issues of importance to them or to their constituencies.
- MPs choose the length of time and can bid for either a 30, 60 or 90 minute debate.
- A Minister's closing speech has an advisory limit of 10 minutes for debates of 60 or 90 minutes. In these debates the Minister should leave two minutes for the mover of the motion to reply to the debate at the end. The 30 minute debates mirror adjournment debates in the Chamber, and the Minister has 15 minutes to respond. There is no right of reply for the mover in these debates.
- The timing of debates in Westminster Hall can be impacted by divisions as sittings are suspended to allow Members to vote in the Chamber and injury time subsequently applied.
- The Chamber in Westminster Hall should replicate the propriety of the Commons Chamber. Officials sitting behind should adhere to the behaviours and dress code expected in the Officials Box in the Commons, further details of which are provided in this guidance (paragraph 342).
- The use of laptops or tablets with keyboards by officials is not permitted in Westminster Hall.
- Notes cannot be passed directly to ministers despite their proximity. A Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) should be on hand to pass notes to the Minister.
- It is the department's responsibility to provide a PPS or PPS-support.
- There is no vote.

## **173. Standing Order No. 24 (SO24) debates**

- Standing Order No. 24 allows MPs to seek an emergency debate in the House of Commons Chamber if they think there is a "specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration".

- An MP makes an SO24 application to the Speaker, who decides whether the application may be heard.
- The MP then has three minutes on the floor of the House in which to make the case for an urgent debate. This takes place after question time and any UQs or oral statements.
- The Speaker will then decide whether to submit the application to the House. The Speaker is not required to provide justification for their decision and any debate on the floor of the House regarding this would be disorderly.
- If the application is successful and agreed by the House, the Speaker will specify when the debate will take place (often the next sitting day) and for how long (up to three hours) the debate will take place.
- The debate may be held on the same day if the matter is deemed significantly urgent (see para 18 for details on timings).

### **Tagging of documents and reports**

174. Tagging documents to a motion for debate on the Order Paper is a useful and well established way of ensuring that members are aware of select committee reports, evidence and petitions that are relevant to the subject of that debate. Erskine May states that tagging takes place “with the agreement of the Member in charge of the debate”. Tagging is common in debates on the legislative stages of bills and in other types of debate.

175. In order to request a tag, the relevant Select Committee Clerk will contact the departmental parliamentary team (copying the Government Whips’ Office) seeking the department’s agreement. The House of Commons Business Managers have been clear that requests for tags should be agreed to, unless there is a good reason why the request is to be declined. In those infrequent instances in which a tag is not agreed, it will be for the departmental minister to account for that decision. Further advice can be sought from the Government Whips’ Office if needed.

## Debates in the House of Lords

176. [Debates](#) can be scheduled to take place in the House of Lords Chamber or in the Grand Committee in the Moses Room. The Government Whips Office will commission the relevant departments when a debate has been agreed. The time and location of each will then be included in the [House of Lords Business](#) pages and in [forthcoming business](#). The House cannot hold divisions on business in Grand Committee, so all debates in the Moses Room will be 'take note' debates.
177. A minister or government whip must respond to each debate involving government policy - in government led debates they will also need to open.
178. Some debates are time limited, others are not - the Government Whips office will provide further advice as debates are commissioned, but the general principles are below. [Today's List](#) also sets out the order of speakers for all the debates on a given day, and also includes the predicted time the Chamber and Grand Committee will rise.
179. Members must sign up to speak in any of these debates and can do so through the Government Whips Office (in person or the website) up to two working days before the debate (the lists close at 6pm Monday - Thursday, 4pm on a Friday). Departments can access the latest lists on the Whips Office Website. Once closed, the Government Whips Office work with the Usual Channels to order the Speakers List and the final ordered list is made available on Today's List published on the day of the debate. Peers who haven't signed up to the Speakers' list may still speak 'in the gap' (before the winding-up speeches provided they speak for no longer than four minutes) if there is time (in time-limited debates) and if the whips are content.
180. There are two main types of debates that departments are likely to see most frequently:
- Questions for short debate;
  - Longer debates on motions / resolutions (most commonly 'take note' party led, balloted debates or debates on Select Committee reports).

### **Questions for short debate (QSD)s**

181. QSDs are an important means by which backbenchers secure debates in the House of Lords Chamber or in Grand Committee. They are time limited to 60 or 90 minutes (the latter time applies if the QSD is taken as last business). The Minister will respond at the end of the debate and there is no right of reply for the Member asking the question.
182. There are three routes through which a QSD can be asked:
- Every five sitting weeks, up to **four QSDs are taken in Grand Committee** (each lasting up to an hour). These are drawn from a ballot run by the Table Office. Entries for the ballot may be submitted at any time and are published in House of Lords Business.
  - The same ballot generates a supplementary list of QSDs, published in House of Lords Business. These can be **taken during a lunch break, dinner break or as last business** at the discretion of the Government Whips' Office. There is no guarantee that time will be found for every question on the

supplementary list and questions that have not been asked will be removed when the next ballot is drawn.

- In a normal session, on every Thursday from the beginning of the session until the end of January, there is a **topical QSD** between the general debates. This is also chosen by ballot. The test of topicality is whether the subject has received news coverage in at least two mainstream media outlets on either of the two days that the ballot was open or over the preceding weekend. The ballot is drawn at 12 noon on Tuesday for Thursday of the following week.

183. Regardless of how QSDs are chosen, the Government Whips' Office will commission departments to confirm the lead responding Minister.

184. Procedure:

- The questioner opens the debate, and is guaranteed 10 minutes to speak.
- The minister responding to the question for short debate speaks last, and is guaranteed 12 minutes to speak.
- The member who asks the question has no right of reply since no motion has been moved.
- The length of time other members can speak, including opposition frontbenchers, is divided up equally according to the time limit.

## Longer Debates

185. Thursdays in the Chamber in the first half of a session are set aside for general debates. The topics for debate are chosen by the three main parties and the Convenor of the Crossbench Peers on a rotating basis. One of these Thursdays in each calendar month is set aside for debates chosen by ballot. These debates are always initiated by a backbencher. Take note debates can also be arranged in Grand Committee.

186. Ministers or government whips can also initiate debates. These tend to take place on days other than a Thursday or on a Thursday in the second half of a session.

187. The mover of the motion for the debate opens the debate, and is entitled to a short reply at the end. At the end of their short speech in reply, the mover may either withdraw the motion or press it to a vote.

188. In backbench debates the minister or government whip is the penultimate speaker, and is preceded by an Opposition frontbencher.

189. There are two types of motion in these circumstances; resolutions and motions to take note:

- **Resolutions** are less common, and are put down in cases where a member wishes the House to come to a definite decision on a subject, if necessary on a vote. A resolution, if passed, constitutes the formal opinion or decision of the House on the matter.
- Most debates take place on a **take note motion**: "That this House takes note of ...". This formula enables the House to debate a subject without coming to any

positive decision. Such motions are usually agreed to, since they are neutral in wording, and there is neither advantage nor significance in opposing them. The opinion of the House is expressed in the speeches made in the debate rather than on a division. The formula is regularly used for debates on the general debate day and on select committee reports. These can take place in the Chamber or Grand Committee.

190. The House may time limit debates; in the Chamber or in Grand Committee, to a specific number of hours. Time limits are automatically applied to general party debates and balloted debates, with the time allocations agreed in the Usual Channels and with the members moving the motions based on the number of speakers signed up to each debate. There is a maximum of five hours for both debates, and the Government Whips Office will advise departments on how the time is divided between the two debates once speakers lists have closed.

191. For other debates, there are no automatic time limits and a business of the House motion in the name of the Leader of the House (of which notice is required) must be moved before the start of the debate if a time limit is to be applied. Alternatively, the Government Whips Office will provide advisory time limits for individual speeches in place for formal limits.

192. For formally time limited debates, there are guaranteed minimum allocations of time for speeches depending on the length of debate (in minutes):

	Length of debate		
	Over 4 hours	2 - 4 hours	Under 2 hours
<b><i>Mover</i></b>	20	15	12
<b><i>Opposition Front Benchers</i></b>	12	10	8
<b><i>Minister replying</i></b>	25	20	15

193. If the debate is interrupted by other business (such as a statement or a division in the Chamber) the time limit is extended correspondingly.

## Written Ministerial Statements (WMSs)

### Top tips:

- Written statements should be issued at 9:30am where possible. Every effort should be made to issue written statements as early in the day as possible and normally by 12:30pm.
- On Thursdays, the Leader's Office should be provided with all WMSs to be made that day in preparation for the Leader's Business Questions.
- Once on the Order Paper, it is not possible to choose not to make the statement – a statement of some kind must be made, even if simply to note that no statement will be made (see paragraph 203).
- Departments bidding for an oral statement are encouraged to also table a written ministerial statement for the same day. The Business Managers are unable to confirm oral statements in advance and this will therefore allow departments to fulfil their obligations to Parliament.

194. For information on **sub judice matters and parliamentary handling**, please refer to paragraphs 61-65.

## WMSs in the House of Commons

### **Giving Notice of a WMS**

195. Under Standing Order No. 22A a minister may give notice of their intention to make a written statement in the House of Commons.
196. Notice is given using the Table Office portal to which all government departments have access. At the latest, the title must be uploaded before the House rises; the latest this can be done is the day before the statement is to be made while the House is still sitting. On Fridays, the deadline is 3pm whether the House is sitting or not.
197. The Table Office will acknowledge receipt via an email and through the online system by changing the status of the WMS notification to 'Tabled' on the portal.
198. The title of the statement should indicate the subject matter and not be vague or ambiguous. It should also not be a slogan or overtly political. Generic titles such as 'Health Update' are regarded as unhelpful by Members and have given rise to [Points of Order](#) in the Chamber. The Table Office will reject any 'Update' or similarly uninformative title unless pre-cleared. Once notice of a WMS has been given, the title and department will appear in the Order Paper and the department must make a statement on that day, even if simply to note that no statement will be made (see paragraph 203). A notified WMS title goes public when the order paper goes live, which is usually late the night before the sitting day.
199. If giving notice earlier than the day before a WMS is to be issued, departments should be aware that the title appears on the Order Paper and in the public domain, and may therefore attract press speculation and inquiries. It may be wise to provide briefing for Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) and/or Business Questions if the statement title is published before these events.

### **Issuing a WMS**

200. Written statements should be issued at 9:30am where possible. Where this is not likely to be possible Parliamentary teams must call the Table Office [tel. 0207 219 3302] to inform the clerks that the WMS will be late and when they expect it to be sent for publication. In every case, every effort should be made to issue written statements as early in the day as possible and normally by 12:30pm. If the statement cannot be issued by 12:30pm, the department must endeavour to notify the Chair of the relevant select committee and/or any other Member with an interest. Where it is necessary to delay the issue of a statement the Opposition front bench spokespersons should be informed. In instances where a WMS is due to be issued before 9:30am, arrangements must be agreed with the Vote Office [tel: 0207 219 3631] the day before. They will then process them.
201. On Thursdays, the Leader's Office should be provided with all WMSs to be made that day in preparation for the Leader's Business Questions.
202. Written statements should be uploaded onto the Q&A online system for the Commons and the Lords. Separate guidance is available on the Q&A website.
  - The Commons Gatekeeper will check the statement before accepting it and releasing it onto the Parliament website at [www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements](http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements)

- Once the statement has been accepted by the Commons Gatekeeper it will be made available to members in the Vote Office and on the HousePapers app. At this point, it may therefore be shared more widely – departments do not have to wait for it to appear on the Parliament website
- Statements are usually published online a short time after the Gatekeeper has accepted them. In the Commons, they are also printed in the next edition of Hansard and in the Daily Report. In the Lords, they are printed in the Daily Report

### **Withdrawing notice of a statement**

203. Notice of a written statement may be withdrawn through the Order Paper portal but, once on the Order Paper, it is not possible to choose not to make the statement – a statement of some kind must be made. The department could make a short statement advising that the planned statement will not be made or will be made in due course.



## **WMSs in the House of Lords**

204. In the House of Lords, written statements may be made when the House is sitting by Ministers or the Senior Deputy Speaker. Notice is not required.
205. The statement is uploaded to the Q&A website. The online system will change the status of the WMS notification to 'Tabled' on the portal.
206. The title of the statement should indicate the subject matter and not be vague or ambiguous. It should also not be a slogan or overtly political. Once notice of a WMS has been given, the department must make a statement on that day.

## Written Parliamentary Questions and Questions for Written Answer

### Top tips:

- Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs) for ordinary written answer should be answered within five working days of the question being tabled. Ordinary WPQs answered beyond 10 working days are considered to be late.
- WPQs for answer on a named day should be answered on the specified date. WPQs answered beyond the date for answer are considered to be late. When an answer cannot be provided on the date for answer, a holding answer should be provided and the substantive answer provided as soon as possible afterwards.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that a response to a Question for Written Answer (QWA) is provided through the Q&A system within five working days of the date on which the QWA is tabled, although the formal time-limit for answering questions is 10 working days. You cannot have a Named Day QWAs.
- Departments should act promptly in transferring questions, ideally on the day it is received. Departments should not refuse to accept a transfer if it rightly lies within their responsibilities, even if the delay in transfer leads to the answer being late.

207. Written questions allow MPs and Peers to ask government ministers for information on the work, policy and activities of government departments. Parliament has a right to hold ministers to account and it is a recognised right of Parliament that Members receive full and timely responses.

208. In responding to questions, Ministers should follow the principles of the [Ministerial Code](#), making the utmost effort to give accurate and helpful answers and correcting any inadvertent errors as soon as they are identified.

209. For information on **sub judice matters and parliamentary handling**, please refer to paragraphs 61-65.

### Ministerial Code 1.6(c-d)

210. “It is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister.

211. “Ministerial office requires candour and openness. Ministers should demand and welcome candid advice. They should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest which should be decided in accordance with the relevant statutes and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Ministers should be open and candid with public inquiries.”

## Process for answering questions

212. Departments and both Houses manage written questions via Parliament's online Q&A system. There is separate guidance for departments on its operation, including deadlines, transfers and holding responses available on the Q&A website itself. In this guide, written questions in the House of Commons are referred to as Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs). In the House of Lords written questions are referred to as Questions for Written Answer (QWAs).

## General rules for answering a WPQ/QWA

213. As advised in the [Guidance on drafting answers to parliamentary questions](#):

- Answer the question that has been asked, rather than rehearsing existing policy lines which may be relevant.
- Keep responses as concise as possible, but do not omit information which would be helpful to the Member.
- Check responses for accuracy. Incorrect answers will need to be corrected with a ministerial correction.
- Set answers in context when it is important to avoid misinterpretation of the information provided to parliamentarians, the press or the public. The context should be factual and not political.
- Answering a WPQ/QWA may well involve the release of information which is not already in the public domain. Information should not be withheld from a WPQ/QWA answer simply because it has not already been published.

## Transfers

214. The Table Office allocates each question to a department for the purposes of producing a response. If a question does not fall within the responsibilities of Ministers in the department to which it has been tabled, it should be transferred to the correct department. Parliamentary branches of the relevant departments should agree the transfer between themselves. The Q&A system guidance explains the process through the system.

215. Departments should act promptly in transferring questions, ideally on the day it is received. Departments should not refuse to accept a transfer if it rightly lies within their responsibilities, even if the delay in transfer leads to the answer being late.

## 'Round robin' questions

216. A question is classified as a 'round robin' when it has been tabled to three or more departments in the same or very similar format. These questions will often, although not always, be on corporate issues (e.g. staff absence, expenditure on certain items). Although individual Ministers are ultimately responsible and accountable for their answers, it may be helpful to seek advice from the department with lead responsibility for the topic in question.

217. The Cabinet Office takes the lead in identifying which department drafts the round robin guidance for a particular question. Departments should not delay preparing an answer until round robin advice is provided and should not miss the deadlines for answer. Departments will be advised if they should not answer a

round robin question until central guidance has been issued. Departments who have been asked to provide 'round robin' guidance to other departments should do this within 24 hours.

### **Disproportionate cost**

218. There is an advisory cost limit known as the disproportionate cost threshold which is the level above which departments can decide not to answer a written question. The current disproportionate cost threshold is £850; the limit does not apply to oral questions.
219. The threshold is pegged at 140% of the Freedom of Information Act cost limit, currently £600, to the nearest £50. Where a change in the FOI cost limit occurs, the Cabinet Office will make a written statement to advise Parliament of the new disproportionate cost threshold. The Procedure Committee recommended that the threshold "be calculated only with regard to policy team time—it should not account for any central processing in parliamentary branches or WPQ teams, or the time taken by Ministers or their advisers".
220. Where information is being refused on the grounds of disproportionate cost, there should be a presumption that any of the requested information which is readily available should be provided. Information should not be omitted merely because disclosure could lead to political embarrassment or administrative inconvenience. If there are grounds to withhold information from the answer and the WPQ cannot be fully answered as a result, draft an answer which makes this clear and explains the reasons.

### **Relationship to FOI**

221. Every question should be approached with a predisposition to give relevant information fully. There should be no inconsistencies between the provision of information in answers to written questions and information given under the FOI Act, therefore, if information would be released under FOI, it would also be released in response to a WPQ/QWA. There may sometimes be cases where Ministers decide that the importance of parliamentary accountability means that information which might otherwise be subject to a FOI exemption is given in a WPQ response. If there appears to be a conflict between the requirement to be as open as possible and the requirement to protect information whose disclosure would not be in the public interest, you should consult your FOI liaison officer if necessary.
222. Ministers should be advised of any relevant FOI cases under consideration when answering written questions, and it should be revealed if information being released is of a sort not normally disclosed.
223. If information is not disclosed, or fully disclosed, the draft answer should make this clear and explain the reasons in terms similar to those in the FOI Act (without resorting to explicit reference to the Act itself). For example:

*"The release of information would prejudice commercial interests"*

### **Holding replies**

224. If it is not possible to answer a named-day written question in full on the specified date, a holding answer must be given. A holding answer follows a standard format and is given by the department ticking the checkbox on the Q&A

system. Guidance on using the Q&A system is available on the Q&A website. Where a holding answer is given, the standard text of the answer is:

*“The [department] has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.”*

### **Arm’s-length bodies**

225. There are three types of arm’s-length body (ALB):

- **a non-departmental public body (NDPB)** is a “body which has a role in the processes of national government, but is not a government department or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm’s length from ministers”. NDPBs have different roles, including those that advise ministers and others which carry out executive or regulatory functions, and they work within a strategic framework set by ministers.
- **executive agencies (EA)** are clearly designated units of a central government department, administratively distinct, but remaining legally part of the department. An EA has a clear focus on delivering specific outputs within a framework of accountability to ministers.
- **a non-ministerial department** is a government department in its own right, but does not have its own minister. However, it is accountable to Parliament through its sponsoring ministers. A non-ministerial department is staffed by civil servants and usually has its own estimate and accounts.

226. There is no provision for ALBs to answer WPQs/QWAs directly in either House. Ministers from sponsoring departments answer questions on ALBs’ behalf, which may include information provided by the Chief Executive (or equivalent) of the ALB in question. It is normal practice for a department receiving a WPQ/QWA relating entirely to the operations of an arm’s length body to provide an answer on behalf of that body.

227. Letters from the arm’s length body should either be pasted into the answer box in full, preceded by a suitable introduction explaining the relationship between the body and the department, or uploaded as attachments *provided* that a suitable introduction has been pasted into the answer box. The text in the answer box should be as self-contained as possible.

## Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs) in the House of Commons

228. A Member can ask a question on any matter falling within the responsibility of a minister. Questions can be ruled out of order by the Table Office because the Government does not have responsibility for that particular issue, such as spending by Local Authorities and Foundation Trusts, court decisions or operational police matters.
229. Questions may not relate to devolved matters unless they:
- seek information that the UK Government is empowered to require of the devolved executive
  - relate to matters covered or to be covered by legislation introduced in the UK Parliament
  - concern the operation of a concordat between the UK Government and the devolved executive
  - concern matters in which UK ministers have taken an official interest
  - press for action in areas where UK ministers retain administrative powers
230. MPs can table WPQs for answer on any day on which the House of Commons is sitting. Written questions take two forms:
- Questions for ordinary written answer: MPs may table an unlimited number of ordinary written questions when the House is sitting. Departments should aim to provide an answer within five working days of the question being tabled. Questions answered beyond 10 working days are considered to be late.
  - Questions for answer on a named day: MPs may table a maximum of five named day questions each day when the House is sitting. Departments should provide an answer on the specified date. Please note, named day WPQs can't be answered early or during recess.
231. Whilst there is no limit to the number of ordinary WPQs a Member may put down, the House has resolved to limit the number of questions tabled via Memberhub, the e-tabling system, to 20 per sitting day per Member. Members can table a maximum of five named day questions each sitting day.
232. A question is withdrawn only if:
- the Member is appointed to the Government or is elected as Speaker. If a Member is appointed to a Parliamentary Private Secretary post their question will not be automatically removed and they may have to withdraw it themselves.
  - the subject matter of the question becomes subject to the sub-judice rule.
  - a suspension of the Member in question is effective on the day which the question is set down for answer. Where questions have been tabled for ordinary written answer before a Member's suspension but have not yet been answered, Departments are asked not to answer them until the suspension is over.

## Referring to other published material

233. If the information requested is already in the public domain, answers should refer to this and inform the Member where they can find it. However, the information referred to should be easily comprehensible and those asking a question should not be expected to analyse and interpret detailed statistical information to work out the answer to their question.

234. If referring to documents in the public domain, you should include the relevant extracts in your written response as well as the relevant hyperlink.

## Referring to a previous answer

235. A written question may be answered by referring to a previous answer if it is the same question or if the original answer fully answers the new question. Where it is appropriate to refer back to an earlier answer, the formula used is:

*“I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on [insert (date)] to question UIN [xxx]”*

236. When providing a response as above, the link to the previous answer found at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/> should also be included.

## Prorogation answers

237. In the House of Commons, when questions are tabled in the run-up to prorogation, ministers should strive to answer them substantively before prorogation. However, if this is not possible, ministers should answer the question with the following form of words:

*“It has not proved possible to respond to the [Rt] Hon Member in the time available before Prorogation”.*

238. It would be open to the Member concerned to re-table the question in the new session if they wish.

## **Questions for Written Answer (QWAs) in the House of Lords**

239. Procedures for dealing with Lords' QWAs follow a broadly similar pattern to those in the Commons, although there are differences in their form, and in the way in which they are answered. Named day questions are not possible in the House of Lords.
240. Most questions tabled in the Lords are addressed to His Majesty's Government and not to any particular Minister or department. However, certain questions may be addressed to the holders of specific official positions: those concerning procedure or the conduct of government business in the House are addressed to the Leader of the House, and those concerning the services and administration of the House to the Senior Deputy Speaker.
241. Peers may each table up to six QWAs on each sitting day, and no more than 12 per sitting week.
242. Every effort should be made to ensure that a response to a QWA appears in Hansard within five working days of the date on which the QWA is tabled, although the formal time-limit for answering questions is 10 working days. Departments which fail to answer questions by this deadline are listed in the House of Lords Business, which the Lords Leader's Private Office monitors regularly at the request of the Leader.

### **Referring to websites or other published material**

243. In the House of Lords, answers 'should be complete and comprehensible and should not rely on references to external documents or web pages'.

### **Referring to a previous answer**

244. A written question may be answered by referring to a previous answer if it is the same question or if the original answer fully answers the new question. Where it is appropriate to refer back to an earlier answer, the formula used is:

*"I refer the noble Baroness/Lord to the answer I gave to question (insert UIN) to Baroness/Lord (Insert Peer) on (date)"*

### **Prorogation answers**

245. In the House of Lords, when questions are tabled in the run-up to prorogation, the answer should still be prepared and sent to the Peer before prorogation. The following wording is used in the recorded response:

*"It has not proved possible to respond to this question in the time available before Prorogation. Ministers will correspond directly with the Member".*



## Ministerial Corrections

### Top tips:

- The obligation on Ministers to ensure that the information they provide to Parliament is accurate is set out in paragraph 1.6(c) of the Ministerial Code. If an inadvertent error in an answer is discovered it must be corrected as soon as possible.
- Before (or at the same time as) writing to Hansard, the department must write to the Member concerned (if the correction involves a statement directly made to a particular Member).
- To allow time for this checking process, Hansard have the following daily cut-off points for delivery by departments to them:
  - 4pm Monday, Tuesday
  - 2pm Wednesday, Thursday
  - 12pm Friday

## Ministerial Corrections in the House of Commons

246. Corrections should be made in a way that is transparent and open, not only for the Member but also for others, including the general public. This means that it will not normally be appropriate simply to write to the Member concerned and place a copy in the Library.
247. Where a correction is deemed necessary — in the name of the Minister — a letter should be sent to Hansard at the earliest opportunity indicating the error. These corrections are printed in the Official Report in a separate section. This process is available for corrections only and should not be an occasion to provide new information, however closely related to the original proceeding. In such circumstances, a Written Ministerial Statement is likely to be more appropriate.
248. The procedure is available for errors by Ministers made in or during the course of:
- Anything said in the Chamber or Westminster Hall
  - Written Ministerial Statements (WMS)
  - Evidence to, and other proceedings in, public bill committees where the consideration of the bill is completed before the error is noticed
  - Other general committee proceedings
249. Note that, while the procedure applies to evidence submitted to public bill committees, it does not apply to evidence to select committees.
250. The correction should be free-standing and the correction letter should:
- be headed by the name of the Minister in whose name the correction is being made
  - make clear the proceedings in which the original error occurred, with accurate date, column number, and volume number
  - set out the original passage
  - set out the terms of the error.
251. In addition to writing to Hansard, the department must write to the Member concerned (if the correction involves a statement directly made to a particular Member) to alert them to the correction that has been agreed with Hansard Managing Editors and that will be published.
252. If a department wishes to clear the terms of a correction in advance with the Table Office (for adherence to the House's requirements) the Table Office will be happy to assist. Otherwise, this clearance stage will take place after the correction is sent to Hansard.
253. To allow time for this checking process, Hansard have the following daily cut-off points for delivery by departments to them:
- 4pm Monday, Tuesday

- 2pm Wednesday, Thursday
- 12pm Friday.

### Other options

254. Where very minor corrections are required, which do not alter the meaning of the original text, these can be made editorially by Hansard. Departments should contact the Editor of Hansard<sup>9</sup>.
255. Where an error is deemed to be not within the scope of the usual procedure, then departments will have to consider whether a WMS — or even conceivably an oral statement — is required. However, most circumstances should be covered by the procedures above and it is expected that a WMS would only rarely be used for corrections.

### Corrections to Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs)

256. Full guidance on ministerial corrections is available in the [Q&A User Guide](#).
257. **House of Commons:** Corrections to written answers must be submitted through the Q&A system. There are two types of correction in the House of Commons. The category of correction is decided by the House of Commons Gatekeeper. ‘Editorial corrections’ include, for example, minor typing errors or small changes that do not alter the substance or meaning of the answer in any way. ‘Ministerial corrections’ are necessary when the meaning of an answer has changed, when figures given in the original answer have been found to be incorrect, or where any other significant addition to an answer or removal of text has taken place. Once a correction has been accepted as a Ministerial Correction by the Gatekeeper, the Q&A system will automatically send the corrected answer to the Member via email. The correction will appear on the web pages about 45-90 minutes later. Editorial corrections are permitted to written statements. Substantial corrections to statements should be made by issuing a new statement.

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<sup>9</sup> House of Commons Hansard can be contacted at [hansardmes@parliament.uk](mailto:hansardmes@parliament.uk)

## **Ministerial Corrections in the House of Lords**

258. Corrections should be made in a way that is transparent and open, not only for the Peer but also for others, including the general public. This means that it will not normally be appropriate simply to write to the Peer concerned and place a copy in the Library.
259. In the first instance, House of Lords Hansard should be emailed<sup>10</sup> to see whether the correction is something their team can take forward. HoL Hansard does not have a Ministerial Corrections facility, so only minor changes can be made via this route.
260. If HoL Hansard cannot make the change, a letter is drafted from the Minister directly to the relevant Peer. The letter must include a line to authorise the library deposit. The letter will then be issued to the relevant Peer and other Peers who attended the debate. It will then be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses with the library deposit form.
261. The procedure is available for errors by Ministers made in or during the course of:
- Anything said in the Main Chamber or the Grand Committee
  - WMSs
  - Evidence to, and other proceedings in, public bill committees where the consideration of the bill is completed before the error is noticed
  - Other general committee proceedings

### **Other options**

262. Lords Corrections can also be made through a Written Ministerial Statement, verbally by the Minister in their next appearance or through a Personal Statement.

### **Corrections to Questions for Written Answer (QWAs)**

263. Full guidance on ministerial corrections is available in the [Q&A User Guide](#).
264. Corrections to written answers in the Lords must also be submitted through the Q&A system. All corrections, if accepted by the House of Lords Gatekeeper, will be published on the Q&A web pages. Editorial corrections are not permitted in the House of Lords to written statements. Substantial corrections to statements should be made by issuing a new statement.

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<sup>10</sup> House of Lords Hansard can be contacted at [HOLHANSARD@parliament.uk](mailto:HOLHANSARD@parliament.uk)

## Petitions to Parliament

### Top tips:

- A petition is a formal written request from one or more people to the Sovereign, the Government or Parliament.
- There are two types of Parliamentary petitions: e-petitions and public (paper) petitions.
- E-Petitions may be created by members of the public on the Parliament website. If an e-petition receives 10,000 signatures it is entitled to a written response from the Government within 14 days and no later than 21 days. If an e-petition receives 100,000 signatures it is automatically considered for debate by the Petitions Committee.
- A public (paper) petition is a petition to the House of Commons presented by an MP. Public (paper) petitions are printed in Hansard and receive a written response (an 'observation') from the Government within two months.
- The Petitions Committee oversees both e-petitions and public (paper) petitions submitted through the Government e-petitions website and the House of Commons.

## Petitions in the House of Commons

### **E-Petitions**

265. The e-petitions system was jointly established by the Government and Parliament in 2014.
266. E-petitions may be created by members of the public on the Parliament website. The House of Commons Petitions Committee monitors e-petitions and decides which should be debated. Information about the work of the Petitions Committee is available [here](#).
- The Committee Clerks advise the relevant government department when a petition reaches 10,000 signatures, at which point a government response should be provided within 14 days. Government responses are published on the e-petitions website.
  - If a petition reaches 100,000 signatures, the petition is automatically considered for a debate and the Petitions Committee has the power to schedule it for debate in Westminster Hall on a Monday from 4:30pm, for up to three hours.

### **Public (Paper) Petitions**

267. A public petition is one made to the House of Commons and is a formal process involving sending a written appeal to an MP, following a set format, which is then presented to the Commons by the MP.
268. Only Members may present public petitions to the House.
- Generally, MPs will present all public petitions they receive from their constituents.
  - However, MPs are not obliged to present petitions and doing so does not imply that they support the action specified by the petition.
269. Petitions to the House, also known as 'public petitions', must be prepared in accordance with the House's rules concerning form and content, which are available from the Journal Office.

### **Informal and formal presentation**

270. Presentation of public petitions can be informal or formal.
271. A Member can make an informal presentation any time when the House is sitting by placing them in a green bag on the back of the Speaker's Chair.
272. Alternatively, Members can present a petition on the Floor of the House.
- The presentation takes place immediately before the end-of-day adjournment debate or, on Fridays, at the start of the day's business and is listed on that day's Order Paper.
  - The Member is called and may make a brief statement (not a speech) outlining who the petition is from, what it concerns and the number of signatories. They conclude by reading out the 'prayer', which sets out what the petitioners are requesting

- No other Member may speak

## **Publication**

273. The text of a petition which has been formally presented is set out in full in the next edition of Hansard immediately after the Member's remarks.
274. The texts of petitions presented informally appear in Hansard after the day's proceedings, in a section before written statements.
275. Under Standing Order No. 156, a copy of the petition, once printed, is sent to the appropriate government department. All substantive petitions should receive a response from the relevant minister, in the form of an observation (or a notification that the Government does not have responsibility) within two months.
- Any observations made by a minister in reply are printed in Hansard after written statements and a copy is sent to the Member who presented the petition by the Journal Office
  - Copies of petitions and observations are also sent to the relevant select committee of the House, to decide whether to put the petition onto its formal agenda, although that committee has discretion as to whether to take action, and will not usually consider individual cases

## **Further information**

- The petitions process - <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/sign-a-petition/>
- To start or sign an e-petition - <https://petition.parliament.uk/>
- The work of the Petitions Committee - <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/petitions-committee/>

## Petitions in the House of Lords

276. A member of the Lords may present a petition to the House of Lords—reading out who the petition is from and what action the petitioner(s) wish the House to take. To start a petition to the House of Lords, contact should first be made with a member of the House of Lords to find out if they would be willing to present the petition.
277. Petitions to the House, also known as ‘public petitions’, must be prepared in accordance with the House’s rules concerning form and content, which are available from the Journal Office.
278. The presentation of a petition is recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings, and the petition is retained in the Parliamentary Archives for one year. However, no order is made for the petition to be published unless a member of the House puts down a motion to debate it for a designated day; otherwise no action follows.
279. Petitions relating to a public bill may be presented at any time during its passage through the House. A petition relating to a bill which has not been before the House, or which has already been rejected by it, cannot be presented.
280. A member proposing to present a petition should consult the Journal Office at an early stage.
281. Petitions to the House of Lords begin: “To the Right Honourable the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, The humble Petition of [names or designation of petitioners] sheweth”.
282. The general allegations of the petition follow. The petition ends with what is called a ‘prayer’, setting out what the petitioners desire the House to do. After the prayer are added the words “And your Petitioners will ever pray &c.” followed by the signatures. The petition may be written or printed on paper. At least one signature must be on the same sheet as the petition. The signatures must not be stuck on to the paper. The petition of a corporation should be under its common seal, which must be affixed to the first sheet.
283. Members of the House presenting petitions should sign them, and either send them to the Clerk of the Parliaments or hand them in at the Table. In either case, having notified the Table in advance, they rise in their place after oral questions and say: “*My Lords, I beg to present a petition from [names or designation], which prays that this House will [the prayer is read out].*”
284. They may add: “*The petition bears X signatures*”. No speech may be made and no debate follows.
285. Petitions in the Lords are **incredibly rare** and members use other devices to challenge and scrutinise government.



## Parliamentary Papers

### Top tips:

- UQs or oral ministerial statements that are made with no prior notification will not appear on the printed copy of the Order Paper, but will be available on the online Order Paper and on the annunciators.
- Timings in the Chamber and votes can be unpredictable, therefore you should keep an eye on the Chamber if you are expecting yourself or your Minister to be involved in business.

286. The term [parliamentary papers](#) can include:

- The working papers of Parliament (such as bills, Hansard and the daily business papers for each House);
- Other papers produced by Parliament and its committees;
- Papers presented to Parliament by outside bodies.

287. For the purposes of this section, there are five main classes of parliamentary papers:

- House of Commons bills
- House of Lords bills
- House of Commons papers
- House of Lords papers
- Command Papers

### **Papers Produced by Parliament and its Committees - HoC or HoL papers**

288. Both Houses of Parliament publish documents that result from their work and that of their committees, such as:

- Votes and Proceedings (Commons) and the Minute (Lords) - the formal, authoritative record of the decisions taken by each House.
- Select Committee reports and evidence.
- Standing Orders - the rules for conducting business in both Houses.
- Registers of Members' financial interests.
- Sessional Returns (Commons) and Business Statistics (Lords) - which present statistics for the work of each House at the end of a session (parliamentary year).

289. These papers are published as House of Commons or House of Lords Papers

## **Papers presented to Parliament**

290. Many different types of papers are presented to Parliament by outside bodies - some are then published under Parliament's authority. Most are presented because the bodies are required to do so either by law or by a decision of Parliament. Many, but not all, of these papers are published as 'House of Commons Papers' or 'House of Lords Papers'. See further information on this [here](#).

## House of Commons arrangements

291. The Vote Office publishes the papers required for each day's business in hard copy, on Parliament's website and on the HousePapers app (search for 'HousePapers' in the app store). In general, papers printed on white paper deal with past and current business and papers printed on blue paper deal with business that is 'provisional'. Bills are printed on green paper. On Wednesdays, where a deferred division is due to take place under Standing Order No. 41A, a pink ballot paper is also made available in hard copy. It is essential that the papers are scrutinised carefully every morning so that all items of relevant parliamentary business are identified and actioned as appropriate. Ministers should be informed of relevant changes.

292. Papers printed on white paper on a sitting day include (see further details on page 19 of this guide):

- Order Paper: Business Today (business in the Chamber and Westminster Hall)
- Order Paper: Future Business
- Votes and Proceedings
- Hansard
- Explanatory note for bills and amendment papers for consideration that day
- Committee papers (amendment lists, Order Papers for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Grand Committees; proceedings of yesterday's public bill committee meetings)

293. Papers published on blue paper include:

- Notices of questions tabled for written and oral answer
- Private business
- Notices of motions for which no date is fixed (i.e. Early Day Motions)
- Notices of new amendments tabled for future days.

294. The Order Paper is published on [this page](#) of Parliament's website.

### **Order of Business**

295. The **Order Paper: Business Today** contains the House's main business for the day and is the House's agenda.

296. UQs or oral ministerial statements that are made with no prior notification are published in the online version of the Order Paper following the Speaker's Conference, and also appear on the annunciators. The main categories of business in the Chamber are:

- **Private Business after Prayers** - Proceedings on private bills, often initiated by local authorities or private companies. For business to proceed at this stage it must be unopposed. If objected to, the Chairman of Ways and Means nominates time for the proceeding to be debated and it will appear on the Order Paper as

‘Opposed Private Business’ when it is scheduled to take place. Private Business has now become rare.

- **Questions** - These appear every day except sitting Fridays, based on the five week departmental rota. Questions appear in the order in which they were first printed in blue’ following the questions shuffle procedure. There is also a separate list of those Members who have been successful in the ballot to ask the department a ‘Topical Question’
- **UQs, Business Question to the Leader of the House (if a Thursday) and notice of ministerial statements** - This may include a provisional title of ministerial statements where prior notice has been given by the Leader of the House of Commons
- **Preliminary Business** – This may include presentation of government bills or Private Members’ bills (PMB), and [Ten-Minute Rule Motions](#) (on Tuesdays and Wednesdays).
- **Main Business** – This contains the orders of the day and notices of motions. The main items of business for that day’s sitting are listed and may include government bills, government motions, Opposition day debates, backbench business, business of the House motions and, on sitting Fridays, Private Members’ Bills. The names of the Members sponsoring a motion appear beneath the title. Any time limits or other rules for the business being considered, as previously agreed by the House, are noted below the title of the business (however the Speaker may impose time limits on the day of debate without prior notification on the Order Paper). At the end of business are any petitions due to be presented to the House and finally the name of the Member selected to raise the topic of the adjournment debate.

297. The **Order Paper: Business Today** also includes information on the following areas. Please see an example order paper [here](#).

- [Westminster Hall](#) - information about the day’s business in Westminster Hall
- [Written Statements](#) (formally known as a **Written Ministerial Statement or WMS**) to be made today – a list of Written Statements being issued that day, with the names of the issuing departments and the subject as notified to the Table Office by the specific department
- [Committees](#) – listing all the parliamentary committee meetings taking place that day, including the timing and venue, the business being considered, whether the meeting is public or private and the names of any witnesses
- **Publication of [select committee reports](#)** – listing all select committee reports or government responses being published that day. It includes the name of the committee and the report, together with the publication time and House of Commons paper number
- **Announcements** – information on any upcoming deadlines for tabling business
- **Further Information** - Provides additional information for Members including links to ‘A Guide for Members to Chamber Proceedings’, Written Ministerial Statements, Committees, Standing Orders and Chamber Engagement

webpages and advertises the availability of business papers on the HousePapers App.

- **Order Paper: Future Business** – this comprises two sections:
  - A. Calendar of Business - this lists the business for future days and will also include which department is answering oral questions, ten-minute rule motions and the subjects of adjournment debates. It includes information on timings and an indication of the 'Member in charge'. Section A will set out the subject of the debate and in some cases set out the motion that will be debated
  - B. Remaining Orders and Notices - this lists the business not yet scheduled for a specific date, including government bills awaiting second reading or report stage, motions to approve Statutory Instruments subject to the affirmative resolution procedure and other government motions

## Votes and Proceedings

298. These are the minutes of the previous day's business but, unlike normal minutes, they record only the outcomes. The record is compiled by the Journal Office from the entries in the minute books of the Clerk at the Table and accumulated annually into the published journal of the House of Commons.

299. The [Votes and Proceedings](#) consists of four main parts:

- Chamber Business - the record of proceedings in the Chamber itself, in the order in which they happened. The main body of the Vote also records proceedings which do not require anything to happen on the floor of the House, such as the receipt of a message from the House of Lords
- Other Proceedings - including any reports from general committees which have completed consideration of a bill or statutory instrument at that day's sitting, followed by a list of Members and Chairs appointed to general committees that day (usually for meetings on a future date). This may also include reports of that day's select committee meetings, which include a note of any reports agreed to and evidence taken that day (though these may not be published for some time after they are reported to the House)
- Westminster Hall - the record of proceedings in Westminster Hall, in the order in which they happened
- Papers Laid - an appendix lists all the papers which were laid before the House, such as statutory instruments, Command Papers and annual reports and accounts

## Committees

300. Any further papers will consist of [amendment](#) lists for consideration during committee stage of a bill, details of the proceedings in any of the public bill committees meeting the previous day and order papers for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Grand Committees. The paper detailing proceedings set out the full text of any amendment being considered and the fate of that amendment.

## Notices of questions

301. This contains notice of questions tabled the previous day, arranged by date for answer, and within each day in alphabetical order by department. At the end of each question is listed its Unique Identifying Number (UIN). The section includes those questions previously appearing but transferred for answer to another department. Questions marked with 'N' are named-day questions for answer on a specific day. It is also the first notice of questions tabled for oral answer, these being denoted by an asterisk. It is important to remember that corrections to questions may be made and the wording should be checked later to ensure the Member tabling the question has not amended it. Any question withdrawn by a Member is marked [withdrawn] and if a Member wishes to change an oral question to a written question it is marked [unstarred].

## Private Business

302. A list of all private bills to be taken in the House or in committee, and notices of motions regarding future private business which are to appear on the Order Paper on future days.

## Notices of Motions

303. [Early Day Motions \(EDMs\)](#) are listed in sequential order from the start of each session (with all EDMs falling at prorogation). These motions for debate at an unspecified time in the near future are mainly tabled by backbench Members to raise awareness. However, this is also the method used for motions of no confidence in the Government, and for 'prayers' against statutory instruments subject to the negative procedure in order to seek a debate. In practice, EDMs are rarely debated. The [EDM Database](#) provides a list of all EDMs and those Members who have signed up to each.

## Notices of amendments

304. Notices of new amendments tabled for public bill committees (and committee of the whole House) on future days are listed in blue.

## Standing Orders (and parliamentary procedure)

305. Parliamentary procedure regulates the proceedings of the House and can be divided up into four main sections:

- 'Practice' is the general understanding established over the centuries and does not need to be formally written down.
- The Standing Orders<sup>11</sup> are the rules under which Parliament conducts its business and they regulate the way Members behave and debates are organised. Some Standing Orders are temporary and only last until the end of a session or a Parliament.
- In the House of Commons, rulings from the Chair relate to decisions on procedure which have been referred to the Speaker for clarification. These rulings are later included in newer editions of the [Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament](#).

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<sup>11</sup> The [Standing Orders \(relating to Public Business\)](#)

- Other proceedings are controlled by Acts of Parliament. These cover things such as Taking the Oath or specific procedural requirements specified in the relevant Act of Parliament.

## **Register of Members' Financial Interests**

306. The [Register of Members' Financial Interests](#) is published shortly after the beginning of a new Parliament, and annually thereafter. Since 1974, the Register has contained payments, financial relationships, paid employment, gifts or benefits in kind, to provide information of any financial interest a Member receives which might reasonably be thought by others to influence his or her actions as a Member of Parliament.
307. At the start of a new Parliament, MPs have one month in which to make their first registration. After that, MPs must register any further interests within 28 days. The Register is updated fortnightly online when the House is sitting, and once a month at other times.
308. Members are required to notify the House of any relevant interest they have (known as 'declaration') when debating and also in written proceedings in the House. Where a Member declares an interest in these situations, their name is followed by the letter 'R' in square brackets. The thresholds set for registration are normally linked to one percent of salary or to a statutory limit.
309. The Register is maintained by the [Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards](#). The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is responsible for investigating complaints that a Member has breached these rules. The Commissioner reports findings to the Committee on Standards, which may then report to the House, and, if necessary, the House may decide on any penalties.
310. Ministers must also comply with the [Ministerial Code](#) and any reporting regime managed by the Cabinet Secretary, as well as with the rules of the House in their capacity as MPs.

## **Sessional Returns (House Returns)**

311. The [Sessional Returns](#) summarise the business conducted by the House and its committees. This includes: figures for the number and length of all sittings and the time spent on different types of business in the Chamber and Westminster Hall as well as comprehensive data on bills, parliamentary questions, divisions, early day motions and the meetings and reports of Commons committees. Sessional Returns are published by the House shortly after the end of each parliamentary year.

## House of Lords arrangements

### House of Lords Papers

312. A system similar to that operating in the House of Commons exists so that documents, such as [select committee reports](#), the [Roll of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal](#), and the [House of Lords Annual Report and Accounts](#) can be published. To do this the authority of the House is needed which is given by means of a silent minute entry – the document being published ‘by order of the House’. Similar to the House of Commons, papers are given a prefix (in this case ‘HL Paper’) and are numbered beginning at one from the start of each session.
313. Along with [House of Lords Hansard](#), the House produces two other documents providing information about House of Lords Business; the white order paper, agenda for the day’s business and the green ‘House of Lords Business’ document, which provides an overview of upcoming Lords business.
314. The Government Whips’ Office produces two documents to add business; Today’s List and Forthcoming Business - they are listed below.

### House of Lords Business

315. House of Lords Business ([example](#)) is printed after each day’s business and includes [future business](#), and the [Minutes of Proceedings](#). It also includes:
- [Business of which notice has been given but for which no day has been named](#). This is grouped into five main headings, motions for balloted debate; select committee reports; other motions for debate; motions relating to Statutory Instruments(Delegated Legislation) and questions for short debate.
  - [List of Questions for Written Answer \(QWA\) tabled that day](#), together with a list of questions which remain unanswered after 10 working days. These are listed by the date they were tabled and include details of the Peer tabling the question, the reference number, the date it was due for answer and the responsible government department.
  - [Committee Reports](#) – a list of outstanding government responses to select committee reports (if not received within two months of the relevant committee report being published).
  - [Legislation](#) – a list of bills in progress, measures, affirmative and hybrid instruments, regulatory reform orders, human rights remedial orders, Legislative Consent Motions and special procedure orders in progress, showing the stage reached by each and the next date for consideration where known; and meetings of committees.
  - There is also a list of treaties before the House - both those not yet considered, and those that have been considered by a Select Committee; and a list of Peers who have given notice that they intend to retire.
316. The Minutes of Proceedings are similar to those of the Commons in that it is the actions and decisions that are listed rather than what is said in any debate. It is set out in the following order:
- Preliminary matters, such as prayers, Peers taking the oath etc.



- Select committee report printing orders
- Private business
- Public business, in the order in which it is taken in the House
- Minutes of proceedings of any grand committees and public bill committees
- Papers laid before the House
- Lists of members voting in any divisions

### **Standing Orders**

317. In the House of Lords, procedure is developed by the House itself through the Procedure Committee which considers any proposals for changes to procedure, including that set out under Standing Orders<sup>12</sup>. In the House of Lords the Procedure Committee authorises the revision of the Companion to the Standing Orders<sup>13</sup> of the House of Lords.

### **Other documents**

318. The Government Whips' Office in the House of Lords produce two other documents to aid the smooth running of business:

- [Today's List](#) - Today's List contains the order of business for the day, including any statements or private notice questions. Today's List also contains the groupings for amendments to public bills being considered that day. Today's List is usually published at least an hour before the House sits.
- [Forthcoming Business](#) - Forthcoming Business informally advertises the 'main business' which the Government anticipates the House will take in the coming two to three weeks. It nearly always goes further ahead than House of Lords Business in terms of 'main business'. Although other business may be added or changes may be made, it provides a helpful indication of when Ministers and departments can expect their business to be taken.

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<sup>12</sup> The [Standing Orders \(relating to Public Business\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [The Companion](#) to help understand the Standing Orders

## Papers presented to Parliament by outside bodies

### Command Papers

319. A [Command Paper](#) is a document published by the Government and laid before Parliament. White papers, green papers, treaties, reports from Royal Commissions and various other publications, including some select committee responses, can all be released as Command Papers, so called because they are presented to Parliament formally 'By His Majesty's Command'.
320. Guidance on producing a Command Paper is available on the [National Archives website](#). The Journal Office has also produced [guidance for laying papers before the House of Commons](#).
321. Published Command Papers are available on [gov.uk](#). Parliamentary teams should liaise with their departmental communications teams in order to publish Command Papers on gov.uk at the appropriate time. They must also be available in the Vote Office to distribute to Members immediately on laying.

### Deposited Papers

322. These are more commonly referred to as Library Deposits. Deposited Papers are those placed in the Library of either or both Houses which are not laid before the House. The Library will not accept papers that have been laid.
323. [Guidance on the rules for depositing papers](#) is regularly published by the House of Commons Library and should be read alongside this guidance.
324. A document must have the commitment of a minister in order for it to be deposited.
- Without this it will be refused by the Library.
  - This commitment is usually in the form of a response made in a debate, a written or oral statement, a written or oral parliamentary question answer or a letter from a minister.
  - The wording of the commitment must be “placed in the Library” or “deposited in the Library” – it should not use the word “laid”.
  - Deposited papers are accepted throughout recesses. Papers to be deposited should be e-mailed to the library with a [completed coversheet](#).
  - Once deposited, no item can be withdrawn, although a replacement document can be deposited as well as the original.
  - All documents are considered in the public domain once deposited and can be supplied to members of the public in response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. The list of deposited papers, and the full text of electronically sent papers, can also be found online at <https://depositedpapers.parliament.uk/>.

## Useful contacts and links

Person/office	Purpose
Table Office	HoC Motions, WPQs, EDMs, business papers
Lords Table Office	HL Business, Order Paper, Minutes of Proceedings
Printed Paper Office	Laying papers in the HoL. Where to access hard copies of all business documents
Lords Government Whips Office	Today's Lists, Forthcoming Business
Vote Office voteoffice@parliament.uk 020 7219 3631	To discuss provision of papers and statements to Members, including large format versions

- **National Archives guidance** - <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/producing-official-publications/parliamentary-papers-guidance/>
- **Guide to laying papers** - <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/laying-papers.pdf>
- **Erskine May** - <https://erskinemay.parliament.uk/>

## Parliamentary passes and access to the estate

### Top tips:

- Government departments (usually via the parliamentary Clerk) liaise with Parliament (via the Pass Office) regarding departmental officials who require access to the Palace of Westminster to conduct official business.
- Please note, day passes can **only** be collected between 8am-6pm Monday to Thursday and 8am-4pm on Fridays.
- Officials are subject to strict rules of etiquette in the Chamber. Please see paragraph 342 for information on this.

### Public access to the Houses of Parliament

325. Many areas that civil servants need to access in Parliament are public areas. Civil servants without parliamentary passes can, therefore, enter through public entrances, submitting to security searches. Officials should always allow plenty of time to reach their destination but they are able to use 'fast track' lanes at the busier security points on production of witness letters (for select committees) or departmental passes (for other business). Parliamentary security is run by the House authorities and civil servants should always show understanding of their rules and systems.
326. Government departments (usually via the parliamentary Clerk) liaise with Parliament (via the Pass Office) regarding departmental officials who require access to the Palace of Westminster to conduct official business.
327. Any disputes or queries should be referred to the Serjeant at Arms (House of Commons) or Black Rod's Office (House of Lords) in the first instance.
328. Whitehall-wide issues are usually raised with the Leader's Office (House of Commons) who will address issues with the House Authorities as appropriate
329. Parliamentary branches also provide advice to officials on the rules governing access to the Palace, and rules and conventions when attending.

### Day Passes

330. Civil servants who need to attend restricted areas of Parliament on official business, and who are cleared to at least CTC level, can apply for an unescorted day pass. A day pass is required for unescorted access to restricted areas of the parliamentary estate, for example:
- Ministerial and Members' offices (both Houses)
  - Large Ministerial Conference Room.
  - Journal Office
  - Library corridor

- West Front Corridor and Ministerial offices (Lords)
- Public bill offices
- Vote Office (Commons) and
- Printed Paper Office (Lords)

331. Parliamentary branches should contact the Pass Office ([passoffice@parliament.uk](mailto:passoffice@parliament.uk)) to request a day pass, stating:

- Name of official
- Level of security clearance
- Date of visit (and time if outside pass office hours of 8am to 6pm)
- Where on the estate they are required to attend

332. To collect a day pass, officials should present their departmental pass or another form of official photo ID (eg. passport or driving licence) at the pass office (located at Canon Row, Black Rod's Garden and 1 Parliament Street). The opening hours for these pass offices are:

Canon Row pass office:

Monday to Thursday – 8am to 6pm  
Friday – 8am to 4pm

Black Rod's Garden pass office:

Monday to Thursday – 8am to 6pm  
Friday – 8am to 4pm

1 Parliament Street:

Monday to Thursday – 8am to 6pm  
Friday – 8am to 4pm

Times during recess for pass offices: 8am – 4pm

### **Box permits**

333. Procedures have been put in place to allow officials without CTC clearance access to the officials' box in the House of Commons so that they can support ministers on the floor of the House. The parliamentary branch should put the officials' names on to the box list (see below for details) and these officials will be able to collect a box permit from the Admissions Order Office (off Central Lobby). This permit should be shown to doorkeepers and/or police officers between the public area and the back of the Speaker's chair, who will watch officials walk to their destination.

### **Photo passes**

334. An official who needs to access the estate frequently (i.e. more than once a week) may be able to obtain a photo pass which allows full and unmoderated access to the parliamentary estate for business purposes. In order to apply for a

photo pass, officials must be security cleared to CTC level. Passes are issued for a period of no longer than 12 months and only for the amount of time the pass is required (which may be less).

335. To request a pass, the official should complete an SQ8 form, available from their departmental sponsor (each department should have separate guidance for officials about who this is) and return this form to the sponsor for their completion. The sponsor will certify the form and provide evidence of security clearance.
336. A photo pass with escort status can be issued to a limited number of Private Office staff on the basis that the holder will regularly be escorting guests within the palace precincts for ministers. Escort pass holders must remain with the person being escorted at all times and are responsible for their behaviour. The person being escorted must be escorted off the estate or to a public area once business is concluded. The Pass Office keeps a record of who has an escort pass and will not issue more than the allowed number in each government department. (Sponsors may request to see this list.)

## Sponsors

337. The departmental sponsor is often, but not always, the parliamentary Clerk. New sponsors should contact the Pass Office when taking up their post so that pass office records can be updated.

## Chambers

338. To attend the Officials Box in either House, the individual must be on the box list for the relevant item of business and, where necessary, be in possession of a day pass/box permit. The parliamentary team is responsible for supplying the list of officials providing Ministerial support to the Doorkeepers in the Commons or the Lords.
339. There is a maximum of 7 places available in the **House of Commons** – more names may be put on the list (e.g. a rota for a longer debate) and officials may wait in the corridor until a space becomes available. A separate email/letter should be submitted for each individual piece of business.
340. Officials attending the **House of Lords** on business are accommodated in space to the right of the Throne. There is a box here with four places, although additional chairs are available. Seats here should be reserved no less than an hour before the start of business by emailing a list of names to Black Rod's Office and [holchamberbookings@parliament.uk](mailto:holchamberbookings@parliament.uk).
341. The Officials' Boxes are in effect part of the Chambers of each House, and as such, are subject to the jurisdiction of the Speaker in the Commons and answerable to Black Rod in the Lords. The Leaders of both Houses take any complaints against officials very seriously.
342. Officials are subject to strict rules of etiquette. The following points should be remembered:
- Officials should respect the same dress code as Members and wear business attire in and around the Chamber. For men, a jacket and tie must be worn; for women, the equivalent level of formality should be observed. Smart/business shoes are expected to be worn - casual shoes and trainers are not appropriate

- Electronic devices may be used with care and discreetly. These must be switched to silent and integrated devices such as cameras must not be used
- Officials should enter and leave the box as quickly and quietly as possible and should only enter the box at the direction of the doorkeepers, whose instructions must be followed at all times
- Officials must not react to anything said in debate
- Officials may not make telephone calls in the Officials Box
- Officials may not take photographs nor clap
- Officials may not take the following items into the Officials Box:
  - Baggage (including handbags and plastic carrier bags)
  - Newspapers and magazines
  - Coats
  - Umbrellas
  - Food or water (Water is available to officials in Officials Corridor on request.)
- Members who are not Ministers or Parliamentary Private Secretaries (PPS) to ministers may not seek information from officials in the box unless asked to do so by a Minister. Government Whips in the Lords may communicate with officials in the Lords Chamber and notes can be passed to the Front Bench via Doorkeepers in the Lords' Chamber.

### Westminster Hall

343. For debates in Westminster Hall, names of officials who are supporting ministers should be submitted to the Principal Doorkeeper before the morning of the debate.
344. The Chamber in Westminster Hall should replicate the propriety of the Commons Chamber. Officials sitting behind should adhere to the behaviours and dress code expected in the Officials Box in the Commons.
345. The use of laptops or tablets with keyboards by officials is not permitted in Westminster Hall.
346. Notes cannot be passed directly to ministers despite their proximity. A Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) should be on hand to pass notes to the Minister.

### Committee Rooms

347. During public bill and delegated legislation committees, officials sit to the right of the Chairman. No special permission is needed for these seats. During select committee appearances officials sit behind the minister giving evidence.
348. Doorkeepers are responsible for keeping order in the Committee. They are distinctively dressed in white tie, tails and a large gold badge. Officials should follow any instructions they give.

349. In Committee, the following should be noted:

- Always go to your seats in the room by passing behind, not in front, of the Chair, watching out for obstructions
- Never walk behind the Chair while he or she is addressing the Committee i.e. when he or she is standing
- Ensure that there is enough space for you to sit down before walking behind the Chair. In any doubt, the Doorkeeper will be able to tell you if there is room
- There are usually three seats available for officials on the dais to the right of the Chair plus a couple more in the corner behind the dais. If there is a shortage of space, officials can sit in the public gallery, but will not be able to assist the Minister from there
- Officials should respect the same dress code as Members.
- Electronic devices may be used discreetly, and laptops are permitted in the box
- Officials pass advice to Ministers by way of notes - passed discreetly via the Minister's PPS. If no PPS is present, the Minister should ask another Member to undertake this role
- Never enter the body of the committee room

### **Grand Committee (aka 'The Moses Room') in the Lords**

350. The parliamentary branch should send the list of officials who need to attend Grand Committee (no more than five names) to [holchamberbookings@parliament.uk](mailto:holchamberbookings@parliament.uk), no less than an hour before the main Chamber sits.

351. As for the Lords Chamber, officials are expected to enter and leave the officials area quickly and quietly whilst observing the same dress code already mentioned above. There are five seats directly behind the Minister where officials can sit and pass notes/whisper quietly to the Minister sitting in front. There is no need to communicate via a Whip or Doorkeeper. You should also note that hand-held electronic devices (but not laptops) may be used on silent mode.

### **Booking meeting rooms**

352. The rules on the use of House of Commons meeting rooms specify that they cannot be booked for government ministry meetings. Ministers can book meeting rooms on the Estate in relation only to their parliamentary duties. Ministers do have particular use of the Large Ministerial Conference Room in the Palace of Westminster which can be booked for departmental only. Meetings must be attended throughout by the Minister making the booking.

### **Catering facilities**

353. There are limited catering facilities available to staff who are working in Parliament a whole day.

- The Jubilee Cafeteria (off Westminster Hall) is the only restaurant facility available to day pass holders and is not open in the evenings



- Debate (Portcullis House) open 8:30am to 5:30pm to pass holders
- Terrace Cafeteria – (only restaurant available in the evening). Non-pass holders may not eat here between 12:00pm and 2:00pm
- House of Lords cafeteria (the River Restaurant) - any pass holder can access the restaurant

354. Officials with passes are not allowed access to the Commons Terrace at any time. Similar rules apply for access to the House of Lords Terrace.

### **Further information**

355. The Pass Office (Derby Gate) may be contacted on 0207 219 5920. The Serjeant at Arms can be contacted on 0207 219 3030. Black Rod's Gate pass office can be contacted on 0207 219 6990. Lists for the Officials Box in the House of Commons should be e-mailed to the Speaker's Office or to the Principal Doorkeeper for Westminster Hall business. The list for the Lords should be emailed to: [holchamberbookings@parliament.uk](mailto:holchamberbookings@parliament.uk).

356. Any late list after the following times should first be notified to the HOL Doorkeepers on 0207 219 3189: Monday, Tuesday after 2:00pm; Wednesday after 2:30pm; Thursday after 10:30am and Friday after 9:30am.

## Accessibility

### Steps and step-free access

#### 357. HoC and HoL Chambers.

- There are 37 steps from Westminster Hall to Central Lobby, the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
- If you need step-free access, a Visitor Assistant will escort you to an alternative route with a lift. The lift is 105 x 150 cm.
- *House of Commons Chamber:* Wheelchair access to the Officials' Box is accessed via the back of Speaker's chair. There is no designated space but doorkeepers will guide you to an area alongside (though outside) the box. Officials are asked to leave one or two minutes before the end of the relevant business to ensure the route from the Chamber is not blocked.
- *House of Lords Chamber:* There is a recess to the left of the throne that wheelchair users can access.

#### 358. Westminster Hall debates in Grand Committee Room

- There is a lift available to the Grand Committee Room from Westminster Hall by the gift shop.
- The officials 'box' in the Grand Committee Room is at the same level as the entrance and accessible from the entrance door.

#### 359. General Committees

- Lifts are available to access the committee rooms in the Palace.
- Visitor Assistants and Doorkeepers can guide you.
- The daises in all General Committee rooms used for Bill Committees are raised by either one or two steps. A ramp will therefore be required, which the House can arrange for you. You will need to alert the Clerk in advance of the committee meeting.

#### 360. Portcullis House

- PCH has a ramp which leads to the visitor entrance; and doors can be opened by security to allow wheelchair access prior to search and screen.
- The lifts to committee rooms are accessible via lifts which are wheelchair compatible.

## Hearing aid users

361. There are no built-in hearing loops in the officials' boxes in the Chambers or Westminster Hall Grand Committee Room but service delivery colleagues can supply them on request.
362. An infra-red system is in place in the committee rooms. To access it, you should depress the T setting on your hearing aid.
363. A neck loop can be collected from the reception area outside Committee Room 10 in the Commons, Committee Room 1 in the Lords, and the Boothroyd Room in Portcullis House.

## Neurodiverse conditions

364. Some visitors may find Parliament noisy and over stimulating. If you have alternative access requirements, these can be accommodated. You should ask one of the Visitor Assistants if you want to borrow a pair of ear defenders or need a quiet space.
365. There are patterned carpets, wallpaper and decoration throughout the building. At times you may hear the division bell ringing. This is not a fire alarm. The fire alarm is the spoken words; 'Fire has been reported in the building'.

## Contacts

366. If you are attending Parliament as part of a Bill team and you have accessibility requirements, you should contact the Public Office Clerk in charge of the Bill in the first instance.
367. If you are attending a debate in Westminster Hall, you should contact the Office of the Chairman of Ways and Means - [waysandmeans@parliament.uk](mailto:waysandmeans@parliament.uk).

## [Additional Guidance](#)

368. The Guide to Parliamentary Work should be read alongside the many other sources of guidance made available by the Government and the parliamentary authorities.
369. Every parliamentary Clerk should have access to the latest edition of Erskine May, the definitive guide to parliamentary practice and procedure. In addition, the [MP's Guide to Procedure](#) and *How Parliament Works*, by Nicolas Besly, Tom Goldsmith, Robert Rogers, Rhodri H. Walters, are authoritative and readable guides to the day-to-day workings of Parliament.
370. For guidance on legislation, correspondence or select committees please refer to the following documents:

### **Guide to Making Legislation**

371. This [guidance](#) sets out what bill teams need to do at each stage of preparing primary legislation and taking it through Parliament, from bidding for a slot in the legislative programme to gaining Royal Assent. This guide has been prepared by the Secretariat to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee of Cabinet, with the advice of Parliamentary Counsel and the Offices of the Chief Whips, Leader of the House of Commons, Leader of the House of Lords and the public bill offices of both Houses.

### **Statutory Instruments Practice (SIP)**

372. [SIP](#) is a practice guide for those involved in preparing and making SIs. It is produced by the Legislation Services team at the National Archives.

### **Guide to Handling Correspondence**

373. This [guidance](#) explains how to handle correspondence from MPs, Peers, members of the devolved legislatures and members of the public.

### **Giving Evidence to Select Committees: Guidance for Civil Servants (the Osmotherly Rules)**

374. This [guidance](#) is for officials from departments and their agencies who may be called upon to give evidence before, or prepare memoranda for submission to, parliamentary Select Committee.

### **Parliamentary Capability Team**

375. In addition to the above guidance, the Parliamentary Capability Team in the Cabinet Office provides training for civil servants of all grades and departments on the work of the UK Parliament, and how they can support their Ministers to deliver their department's parliamentary business. For further information, the team can be contacted at [parliamentarycapability@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:parliamentarycapability@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).