

Draft House of Lords Bill Committee report

The Electoral Reform Society welcomes the Committee's report on the Draft House of Lords Bill as an important step forward in securing long awaited reform of the Upper Chamber.

Between 54-82% of the public have supported an elected upper house since 2000.

A recent poll shows 69% of people support the principle of an elected second chamber.

The House of Lords of course cannot be viewed in isolation. An effective second chamber is part and parcel of an effective parliament and effective government, and that remains our chief concern. Reform is a chance to preserve the chamber's vital scrutiny role and to actively enhance it with the legitimacy conferred by public election.

Lords reform has been 'unfinished business' for just over a century. There is now a historic opportunity to finally finish the job.

The Electoral Reform Society welcomes the following:

- The Committee's majority support for the principle that the Lords should be elected.

"The Committee, on a majority, agrees that the reformed second chamber of legislature should have an electoral mandate provided it has commensurate powers."

- The Committee's acknowledgement that Commons primacy would remain but that conventions would need to be kept under review.

"A majority, while acknowledging that the balance of power would shift, consider that the remaining pillars on which Commons primacy rests would suffice to ensure its continuation."

"We agree with the weight of the evidence we have received which suggests that the conventions governing the relationship between the two Houses will evolve further once the House of Lords is reformed and would need to be re-defined."

The principle of Commons primacy is secured in the Parliament Acts – Lords Reform does not change this.

- The Committee has taken a sensible approach to some of the logistics i.e. the size of an elected upper house and that senators will be elected on non-renewable and 15 year terms. International experience suggests that longer terms and larger constituencies do have an effect on the behaviour of elected upper chamber members, ensuring complementary roles and relations between the Houses.

The Electoral Reform Society is concerned that

- The Committee is recommending a type of closed list system which brings appointments in through the back door on the patronising assumption that voters would not be able to cope with the original proportional representation system proposed: Single Transferable Vote (STV).

“In the Committee's view, the voting system chosen should give voters the widest choice possible of where to cast their preferences, whether that is within a single party or across candidates from multiple parties and yet be as intelligible as possible to the voter. We also believe that voters who wish to simply vote for a political party, rather than individual candidates, should be free to do so.”

This is despite the committee saying:

“We do not support the introduction of a closed list system for the sort of regional elections proposed in the draft Bill.”

- The Committee proposes giving the parties complete control over who of the unelected Lords should remain until 2025, instead of basing this on their record and attendance.
- The Committee has recommended that reserved seats for Bishops are retained.

Minority report

Despite the Joint Committee's report specifically stating that no minority reports can be published, 12 members of the 26-strong committee (nine peers, 3 MPs) who disagree with the report have produced one. The report recommends establishing yet another committee to discuss Lords Reform.

Why reform?

British governments have been trying to reform the House of Lords for over a century – with all three parties committed to it we finally have an opportunity to get the job done.

- Since 1999 over 140 hours have been spent in both chambers debating Lords reform
- In the period 2001 to 2010 debates on reforming the House of Lords have seen turnout double the average in the upper chamber. Appointed Lords have consistently voted in favour of an appointed House
- Yet the British public supports election to the House of Lords. Public preference for some form of election has ranged from 54% to 82% since 2000

MPs from all three parties were elected on a manifesto which committed them to supporting Lords reform. After a hundred years we finally have an opportunity to get the job done. Let's not waste it.

A copy of the Society's evidence to the Joint Committee is available [here](#)

For further information, please contact Jess Garland on Jessica.Garland@electoral-reform.org.uk or 020 7928 1622.