

HOUSE OF LORDS

Information Committee

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1st Report of Session 2008–09

**Are the Lords listening?  
Creating connections  
between people and  
Parliament**

Volume I: Report

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### *The Information Committee*

The Information Committee considers the House's information and communication services, including the Library and Parliamentary Archives, within the strategic framework and financial limits approved by the House Committee.

### *Membership*

The Members of the Committee were:

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Baroness Coussins  
Earl of Erroll  
Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen  
Lord Jones of Cheltenham  
Lord Kalms  
Lord Methuen  
Baroness Prosser  
Lord Puttnam  
Lord Renton of Mount Harry (Chairman)  
Lord St John of Blesto  
Lord Selsdon  
Lord Taylor of Warwick

Full lists of Members' interests are recorded in the Register of Lords' Interests

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NOTE: Reference in the text of the report are as follows:

(Q) refers to a question in oral evidence

(p) refers to a page of written evidence

The Report of the Committee is published in Volume I (HL Paper No. 138-I)

The Evidence of the Committee is published in Volume II (HL Paper No. 138-II)

## **SUMMARY**

Parliament's public reputation is at a low point, and parliamentarians have to respond to the public's legitimate expectations for greater openness and transparency. Reforms within Parliament and reforms to the way in which Parliament makes information available to the public are both desirable and unavoidable.

In this report, the House of Lords Information Committee examines what steps the Lords should take to engage with the public and to enable members of the public to communicate with it.

Four years ago, the Hansard Society Commission chaired by Lord Puttnam drew up a series of recommendations to reconnect Parliament with the people it exists to serve. We investigated how far those recommendations have been implemented, and in this report we point the way forward, suggesting what more the House of Lords should do. Our inquiry covered education, outreach, online communication and engagement, broadcasting, press and the media.

We consider that the House of Lords can and should do more to communicate our activity to the world outside and to make it easier for people to understand our work. Our recommendations aim to increase public engagement with our debates, to increase online engagement in how the House considers legislation, to make the legislative process more transparent, to make it easier to find information on the parliamentary website, and to make television footage of Lords proceedings more interesting for viewers. In particular, we recommend:

- an online debate to run in parallel with a debate in the Lords Chamber,
- greater access to the House of Lords for filming,
- information and documentation related to the core work of the House of Lords should be produced and made available online in an open standardised electronic format that enables people outside to analyse and re-use the data,
- better information about members' areas of expertise and interest, and
- a review of the parliamentary language used in the House of Lords to make it easier for people outside the House to understand our proceedings.



# Are the Lords Listening?

## Creating connections between people and Parliament

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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1. Parliament's public reputation is at a low point. Media coverage about Peers' allowances and MPs' expenses and the suspension of two members of the House of Lords have had a negative impact on people's perception of Parliament. There has been a lot of consequent talk about constitutional reform, but many of the changes under discussion bear little direct relation to the problems that have been revealed. What is needed are reforms within Parliament. The need for Parliament to be open and transparent was apparent before the recent revelations and the need will remain.
2. We have not produced this report as a consequence of the problems that have recently arisen. We decided in January 2009 to hold an inquiry into 'People and Parliament'. However, what we recommend in this report will contribute to making the House of Lords more open and transparent. We want to see better public appreciation of the role and work of the House of Lords. In our view, that can only be achieved once the House has taken further steps to increase public understanding of, and engagement with, the House.
3. Our remit is to consider the information services of the House of Lords, which includes information for members and information for the public. Accordingly, our report focuses on the need for reforms of the House's practices and how the House makes information available, rather than on electoral or constitutional change. In a debate in the House of Lords on constitutional renewal on 11 June, Lord Bach, speaking for the Ministry of Justice, said that democratic reform "must principally be led by our engagement with the public."<sup>1</sup> We agree, and in this report we explore what further steps the House of Lords should take to engage with the public.
4. In our inquiry, we set out to investigate how the House of Lords, could relate better to the public. The inquiry had two aims:
  - (1) to evaluate progress made since the reports of the House of Commons Modernisation Committee (*Connecting Parliament with the Public*, June 2004),<sup>2</sup> the 'Puttnam Commission' (*Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye*, Hansard Society Commission, May 2005),<sup>3</sup> and the consequent first business plan of Parliament's Group on Information for the Public (March 2006),<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Lords Hansard, 11 June 2009, column 792.

<sup>2</sup> 1st Report of Session 2003–04, HC 368.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard Society Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy, Chaired by Lord Puttnam.

<sup>4</sup> A full account of Parliament's public engagement work since 2006 can be found in the paper submitted to the Committee by the parliamentary Group on Information for the Public, a bicameral grouping of officials.

- (2) to consider improvements to how the House of Lords and Parliament as a whole can engage with the public and enable members of the public to communicate with it.
5. The Committee’s inquiry focused on three issues:<sup>5</sup>
    - outreach;
    - online communication and engagement, including [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) and channels such as social media sites; and
    - press, media and broadcasting.
  6. Alongside our recommendations, our report includes a series of actions, in order to help readers to see what needs to be done to implement our recommendations. None of our recommendations require legislation.
  7. We recognise that some of our recommendations have budgetary implications, although we understand that some of these could be implemented through existing programmes or by re-prioritising existing resources. Furthermore, where a recommendation calls for additional expenditure, we believe that any costs “must be regarded as an investment in modern democracy, not a charge against it” (QQ 22, 225).
  8. **We are keen to see our recommendations implemented. To this end, we call for changes to the governance arrangements for the House of Lords information services, with a view to increasing member involvement. We have asked the Director for Information Services to draw up an action plan against which progress implementing our recommendations can be measured, detailing the deliverable activities for each recommendation and showing who is responsible for delivering them and by what date.**
  9. We consider the House of Lords to be an effective, value-for-money second chamber. It makes a substantial contribution to the law-making process; its members’ expertise adds value to the process; and it complements the work of the House of Commons. However, it is not enough for the House to perform these functions. People must be able to see that the House performs this role, and our recommendations should help to achieve this end.

### **What would change if our recommendations were implemented?**

10. A common question when reading a committee report is ‘what happens next?’ To put it another way, ‘what will change as a result of this report?’ We would like to show at the start of our report what will change if our recommendations are implemented. We hope that seeing the following changes will make you want to read further.
11. If our recommendations were implemented:

#### *People would be able to:*

- watch House of Lords proceedings on YouTube;
- embed parliamentary proceedings on their websites;

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<sup>5</sup> Further details are set out in the Committee’s ‘Call for evidence’, which can be found in Appendix 3.

- watch video recordings of Lords proceedings and read Lords Hansard on the same screen and at the same time;
- watch Lords divisions from inside the division lobbies;
- participate in an online debate in parallel to a debate in the Lords Chamber;
- analyse and re-use parliamentary data;
- access more information online about Bills and see on the parliamentary website how a Bill has been amended by Parliament;
- sign up to receive electronic alerts and updates about particular Bills or portions of Bills relevant to their interests;
- access a list showing which Lords are expert on, or have a particular interest in, which subjects;
- access parliamentary information in formats that are user-friendly for people with disabilities (including learning disabilities and mental health issues);

*Members of the House of Lords would be able to:*

- inform people and the media about their areas of expertise and interest;
- access a more appropriate room for interviews;
- see more clearly how a Bill amends previous Acts.

*Journalists would be able to:*

- access a list of members who are willing to speak to the media on particular subjects;
- attend information sessions on the House of Lords.

*Broadcasters would be able to:*

- film in more areas within the House of Lords;
- show more engaging footage of Lords proceedings;
- access a list of members who are willing to speak to the media on particular subjects.

**12. We invite the House to debate this report.**

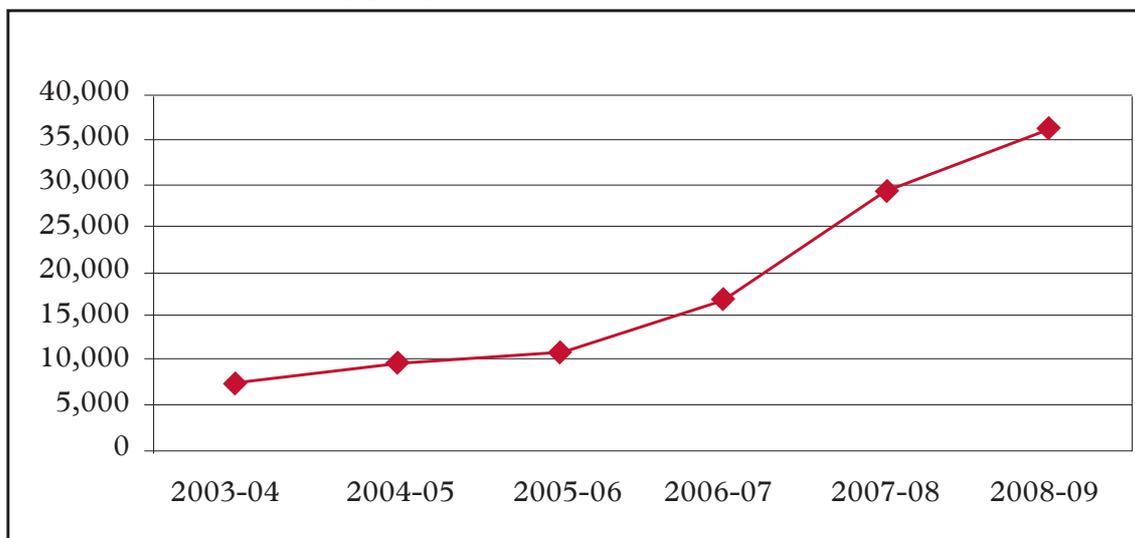
## CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

### Education

13. Since the reports of the Commons Modernisation Committee and the Puttnam Commission, Parliament's Education Service has developed very significantly and its reach has expanded rapidly. The number of educational visits to Parliament has increased from 11,000 in 2005–06 to 36,000 in 2008–09.

FIGURE 1

#### Young people on Education Service visits



14. Following joint work, our Committee and the House of Commons Administration Committee in 2007 published reports on *Improving Facilities for Educational Visitors to Parliament*.<sup>6</sup> We recommended the development of a dedicated space within the Parliamentary Estate for educational visitors that could accommodate 100,000 learners each year. Both Houses approved that recommendation,<sup>7</sup> and the Committees subsequently agreed a design for the refit of the identified space. The Parliamentary Education Centre is due to open in 2013.
15. **The Committee looks forward to the opening of the Parliamentary Education Centre, which is crucial to enable larger numbers of children to visit Parliament. The Committee will consider plans for the necessary ICT equipment to be installed in the Centre in order to ensure that Parliament provides a modern learning space for educational visitors and has appropriate facilities such as video conferencing for distance learning.**
16. The April 2007 House of Commons Administration Committee report on educational visitors to Parliament recommended further consideration of the case for subsidising school visits to Westminster from more distant parts of the UK.<sup>8</sup> In July 2007, we agreed that the Lords should support a trial

<sup>6</sup> 1st Report of Session 2006–07 (HC 434), published April 2007; 1st Report of Session 2006–07 (HL Paper 117), published June 2007.

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons, 12 June 2007 (Commons Hansard column 720); House of Lords, 16 October 2007 (Lords Hansard columns 675–90).

<sup>8</sup> See paragraph 99 of the report cited above.

educational subsidies scheme. A pilot scheme was launched in early 2009 offering a transport subsidy to state schools visiting Parliament through the Education Service from areas outside the South-East. In each of the first two terms covered by the scheme, the proportion of visits booked from areas outside London and the South-East rose from about one third to about two thirds. This balance reflects the distribution of schools across the UK. In addition, the proportion of visits from state schools has increased from about 80 per cent to 90 per cent, reflecting the percentage of state schools in the UK.

17. **The Committee welcomes the impact of the travel subsidy, which has increased the number of educational visitors from schools outside the South-East of England and from state schools. We recommend that the House Committee should continue the travel subsidy offered to state schools outside the South-East visiting Parliament through the Education Service.**
18. We received a number of very positive comments about the Education Service (QQ 4, 178). The Service is working to build links with teachers, schools and colleges and to tailor Parliament’s educational activities to those who learn about Parliament in the classroom away from Westminster. Five staff in the Education Service now focus on outreach to young people and liaison with local education authorities. The educational outreach officers work with schools to train and support teachers in delivering the political literacy elements of the curriculum as well as supporting members of both Houses in their own outreach work in schools. In each of the last two years they trained 1,000 teachers across the UK.

**TABLE 1**

**Number of teachers and pupils reached by educational outreach**

	Teachers and trainee teachers reached by the educational outreach service	Pupils reached by the educational outreach service
2006–07	481	
2007–08	1049	1537
2008–09	1076	5619

19. A number of sixth-form students told us how little education they had received in school on Parliament (QQ 176, 179, 184–85). This gap was reinforced by comments submitted to our [web forum](#):

*“I have a great interest in the Lords and I have researched this off my own back; however I feel that more should be taught in schools about our legislature, as I cannot remember ever being taught such a thing during my time in education.”*

*“I think that I know a fair amount about the purpose and work of the House of Lords, but I had to search out the information myself on the internet. There’s no real education about it in schools”*

*“I never had any school lessons of the structure of the parliamentary system until I actively selected that choice at A-Level.”*

*“The only way to get through to young people is by visiting schools and colleges, inform them, put it in the curriculum as part of Tutorial.”*

20. **The Committee commends the work of the Education Service and welcomes the work that the Service is undertaking in training teachers. We recommend that the Education Service should explore ways to encourage teachers and the relevant curriculum bodies to increase coverage of the House of Lords in the curriculum.**

### Outreach

21. The Puttnam Commission recommended in May 2005 that “more should be done to enhance the effectiveness of parliamentary outreach work” and called for “a greater emphasis on outreach work”.
22. Since the Puttnam Commission reported, there has been a transformation in the way in which Parliament as an institution engages with people outside Westminster. Four years ago, Parliament had no outreach service. Today, the bicameral outreach service operates across the United Kingdom to promote the work of Parliament. Outreach officers work outside Westminster with local networks and media, campaigners and non-governmental organisations to strengthen the connection between Parliament and the public. In addition, the House of Lords undertakes its own complementary outreach work: the [Lord Speaker](#) is active in promoting awareness of the House’s work, and many members visit schools and give talks to outside organisations.
23. We received great praise for the work of [Parliamentary Outreach](#). Novas Scarman, a social justice charity, said that the service had “shown itself to be responsive, flexible, informative and willing to engage with people on their own terms as citizens” (p 147, see also pp 33, 86 and QQ 4–5, 109, 111–114). The Fawcett Society shared with us feedback from ethnic minority women who had attended outreach events:

*“Very informative and interesting; I will now look on the Parliament website and give my opinion on issues. I didn’t know of this site before.”*

*“The workshop was great with a clear explanation of how Parliament works.”*

*“I’m encouraged to learn that Parliament has taken on the initiative of going out and engaging with the people.”*

24. People to whom we spoke about Parliamentary Outreach stressed that one of its key strengths was that it operated in the regions, rather than demanding that those wanting to know about Parliament come to Westminster (QQ 124, 150–51). Similarly, Novas Scarman stressed the importance of Parliamentary Outreach working through existing community groups and organisations: “By making contact with people through such networks, they can offer workshops to a wide range of people on their own terms, on their own ground” (p 147).
25. **The Committee commends the work of the Parliamentary Outreach service. The Committee is keen to see the completion of the national roll-out. We look forward to the formal review of the three-year programme and ask that this be presented to the Committee in time to allow for appropriate long-term planning.**
26. The Puttnam Commission also recommended that “Parliament should hold more meetings outside London. Select committees, for example, should hold more formal proceedings and public events beyond Westminster.” The outreach team has already arranged meetings for Commons Select

Committees outside Westminster and offers the same service to Lords Committees. **We welcome the support that the outreach service offers to select committees wishing to meet outside Westminster, and we draw this support to the attention of other Lords Select Committees.**

27. In 2006 the House of Lords elected Baroness Hayman as its first Lord Speaker, and she has played a key role in developing the House's outreach programme. The feedback we received about the many outreach and public engagement activities which the Lord Speaker has championed is excellent and stresses the value of members operating outside Westminster.<sup>9</sup> The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) reported how enjoyable they found it to have direct contact with members as it 'humanised' the House (p 144). Debatewise, a non-profit debating website, applauded the House's outreach work and called for it to be expanded to engage with universities (p 110, see also Q 208), and several comments submitted to our web forum called for "more of the Peers in Schools scheme":

*"the Peers in Schools programme is one of the best ideas in a while, and I'd love to see more of it"*

*"Go into the schools, the younger the better, how many schoolchildren have actually met a 'lord', especially one who has explained the work they do, interact with the public, and make it common knowledge that parliament is accessible to all, not just a few."*

*"One initiative that might work would be doing more of what I know some Lords are doing now—travelling around to schools and Sixth Form centres across the country and talking to students"*

28. **We welcome the House of Lords outreach and engagement programme, championed by the Lord Speaker. It is three years since the House elected its first Lord Speaker. If the House at some point reviews the role of the Lord Speaker, we recommend that outreach and education remain priorities for the role.**
29. **In our view, members are the greatest ambassadors for the House. The Committee calls on more members to participate in the 'Peers in Schools' programme and to talk to groups outside Parliament. The Committee also recommends that Lords members of All-Party Groups encourage those Groups to consider how they could contribute to the outreach and educational work of Parliament.**
30. The NFWI suggested that the House's outreach activities "could be expanded by offering participants at the regional sessions the opportunity to spend a day shadowing peers in their work." (p 144) Similarly, the Hansard Society suggested establishing "a bicameral Parliamentary mentoring scheme to encourage a range of people—from, for example, the education and health fields, business, third sector civil society groups—to spend some time in Westminster, shadowing MPs, Peers and parliamentary officials. The scheme would enable the participants to learn more about Parliament and its work and to be a 'goodwill ambassador' for Parliament in the future" (p 12).
31. The House of Lords administration already offers opportunities for young people to experience work in the House. The administration offers both a

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<sup>9</sup> A full account of the House of Lords Outreach and Engagement programme can be found in Volume II pp134–35.

‘Sandwich Student Scheme’ for University Students studying for a degree in public administration or a similar subject and week-long work experience placements for students aged between 15–18. However, there is at present no equivalent scheme for people to shadow the work of members.

32. **We recommend that the House of Lords administration should draw up options for a shadowing scheme to allow members who wish to participate to have a range of people shadow their work.**

### **BOX 1**

#### **Recommendations on Education and Outreach**

- **We recommend that the House Committee should continue the travel subsidy offered to state schools outside the South-East visiting Parliament through the Education Service (paragraph 17).**
- **We recommend that the Education Service should explore ways to encourage teachers and the relevant curriculum bodies to increase coverage of the House of Lords in the curriculum (paragraph 20).**
- **In our view, members are the greatest ambassadors for the House. The Committee calls on more members to participate in the ‘Peers in Schools’ programme and to talk to groups outside Parliament. The Committee also recommends that Lords members of All-Party Groups encourage those Groups to consider how they could contribute to the outreach and educational work of Parliament (paragraph 29).**
- **We recommend that the House of Lords administration should draw up options for a shadowing scheme to allow members who wish to participate to have a range of people shadow their work (paragraph 32).**

## CHAPTER 3: ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

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### The parliamentary website

33. In 2004, the House of Commons Modernisation Committee called for “a radical upgrading of the [parliamentary] website”, and in 2005 the Puttnam Commission recommended that the website “should be radically improved”. A full account of the many ways in which [the parliamentary website](#) has been developed since then is provided in the submission from Parliament’s Group on Information for the Public (pp 131–33).
34. The Committee received many positive comments about developments to the parliamentary website, including, in particular, the bill pages, the Education Service website and the new content-based architecture, which allows people to navigate more easily to content that is relevant to their specific interest (pp 101,148, 157–58; QQ 72, 76, 112, 197). **The Committee welcomes the many improvements to the parliamentary website and stresses the need for the improvement programme to continue.**

### The Lords of the Blog website

35. The Committee also received many positive comments about the [Lords of the Blog website](#) (pp 12, 103, 110, 121, 139; QQ 6 and 34), including comments made on our web forum:

*“The ‘Lords of the Blog’ website is doing extremely well in informing people of the work and aims of the House of Lords and its members.”*

*“For a younger audience (<30) in particular a blog about a particular matter before the Lords or topical political issue is far more likely to get read about there than any speech in the house itself. With suitable links to parliamentary sites, acts, consultations etc it gives a way to pull a wider audience into the process.”*

*“Lords of the Blog is a good idea and as an outreach initiative I think it’s very good.”*

36. Dr Nigel Jackson from Plymouth Business School suggested that the website would be even more effective at creating public engagement if others, such as Committee Chairmen, regularly used it to promote ideas and seek feedback. Tom Loosemore, Channel 4, Dr Jackson and Comment Technologies, an organisation that provides digital engagement solutions, suggested that members with a common interest in a particular policy area could set up other similar sites to create “discrete communities of interest and expertise” (pp 103, 106, 140; QQ 100–01).
37. **The Committee welcomes the Lords of the Blog website. We encourage members to contribute to the website and suggest that Committee Chairmen consider posting a blog at the launch of a new inquiry.**

### Parliament and YouTube

38. In May 2008 Parliament launched a YouTube channel, which it uses primarily to show short films promoting and explaining the work of Parliament. The Hansard Society praised the videos about the work of the

House of Lords (p 13). We used YouTube throughout our inquiry, to update people outside Westminster on what had happened during our meetings and to provide an insight into the views of witnesses and members of the Committee. In June 2009, the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee and the European Union Committee released [videos](#) on YouTube to mark the publication of their reports.

39. We also used Parliament's [YouTube channel](#) in our inquiry to allow people to contribute by submitting their views on [video](#). Dr Jackson said that this development was "very exciting": the fact that members of the public can upload videos gives the channel the potential to be "a powerful interactive instrument" (p 139). Parliament would benefit from the interactive nature of such websites, by treating them not simply as publishers and distributors but as places where user-generated content can be created and displayed.
40. Members of either House are allowed to post footage featuring the member on the member's own website. However, at present, the two Houses do not allow parliamentary proceedings to be posted on YouTube or any other third-party hosting website. This ban has attracted negative publicity; and Parliament has been criticised for not embracing new technology. Last November, we agreed that Lords be allowed to place on YouTube (and similar searchable video hosting websites) clips of their contributions to the House's proceedings. The final administrative and legal steps around copyright are being taken, and the Committee will inform members when they can start to upload their contributions to YouTube. Technical training will be provided for members who wish to take advantage of this new possibility.

### Parliament's use of other social media

41. Over the past year, Parliament has made considerable use of other social media tools, like [Facebook](#) (social networking), [Flickr](#) (photos) and [Twitter](#) (a cross between micro-blogging and social networking).<sup>10</sup> The latest development is the new [Yoosk Parliament](#) website, where people can ask questions to a group of MPs and Lords. Tom Watson MP, then Minister for Digital Engagement, emphasised the need for Parliament to use such communication channels, saying that young people "expect us to use these tools and technologies to communicate with them" (Q 245). Channel 4 emphasised the benefits that such tools had brought to Parliament, saying that they had helped "to demystify parliamentary processes as well as promoting an image of Parliament as open, accessible and transparent" (p 103). The Hansard Society suggested that the next step was for Committees to start using social media (p 14). This suggestion was also made on our web forum:

*"Although social media isn't the answer to everything, they allow direct communication with members of the public. The House of Lords should use these established tools regularly with, for example, inquiries."*

### Embedding

42. 'Embedding' is the process whereby a document or file of one type is inserted into a document or file of another type on the internet. Embedding is central

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<sup>10</sup> The webcentre posted an evaluation of Parliament's use of such tools on 'Parliamentlabs', the production blog of the webcentre, on 11 June 2009.

to much use of multimedia in web pages, which tend to embed video, animation, and audio files. In our *Annual Report 2007–08*,<sup>11</sup> we reported the growing number of people asking to embed parliamentary material (such as video footage of proceedings) into their own web sites. Such embedding would, for instance, allow other web sites to include windows within their web pages so that clips of parliamentary proceedings could play within their own pages instead of having to open a separate window and application to view the clips. Under the terms of the current licences, the Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Limited (PARBUL) cannot allow any of its licensees to offer embedding. Peter Lowe of Sky News found it “extraordinary” that Parliament did not allow embedding (Q 311).

43. The BBC asked Parliament to change this policy so that it could include footage from Westminster in its ‘Democracy Live’ website, which would also include footage from the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Parliament (QQ 308–09, 314; p84). Last year, we called for further research to be carried out on allowing embedding of footage of parliamentary proceedings. During our inquiry, it was made clear to us that embedding would allow wider access to parliamentary proceedings through websites and other channels (pp 16, 143). Peter Riddell, Political Commentator and Assistant Editor of *The Times*, said that it would be “a tremendous help” to journalists preparing articles online (Q 191). Channel 4 said that enabling users “to embed clips on their own sites, and then use social bookmarking tools to promote these clips to others, is an effective and low-cost way of expanding the reach of Parliament—as the easier it is to spread information the more people will see it” (p 104). Jo Swinson MP told the Committee: “we need to wake up and get into the twenty-first century on this. If we can actually get clips of Parliament out there, particularly in two or three-minute pieces which are easy to watch, easy to forward to friends, that is a much better way and a much easier way for people to understand what is going on in Parliament than having to watch the BBC Parliament channel for hours on end until something they might be interested in comes up.”
44. **People should be allowed to embed the House’s proceedings on their websites, so that our proceedings can have as wide a distribution as possible on the internet. We recommend that a trial start as soon as possible. We have invited the BBC and the House of Lords administration to bring forward proposals for how the House can maximise potential synergies with the BBC’s forthcoming ‘Democracy Live’ website.**

#### Parliament on other websites

45. A number of people stressed to the Committee that Parliament could not expect people to come to the parliamentary website. “Rightly or wrongly, government or institutional websites are not viewed as an interesting place to visit, especially by younger audiences”, explained Tim Hood, CEO of internet company Yoosk (p 34, see also QQ 75, 93 and pp 64, 143). Instead, the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) suggested that, Parliament should develop a presence within existing online communities such as Mumsnet, so that Parliament goes to the places on the internet

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<sup>11</sup> First report of Session 2007–08, HL Paper 202.

“where the people are as opposed to expecting people to be reading the parliamentary website” (Q 113). Mr Hood suggested that Parliament should create “a national register of online communities”, including specific demographic or geographic communities (p 34). Mr Hood also suggested that Parliament go further and “establish an independent body to manage engagement between people and Parliament.” The key benefit of such a body would be that it could set up “an independent place [on the internet] for engagement which is ‘owned’ as much by the public as by Parliament. It would invite fewer accusations of interaction being on Parliament’s own terms or of Parliament indulging in online propaganda on its own website” (p 33).

46. **There is a limit to the level of public engagement Parliament can generate on its own website, because some people may not be drawn to interact directly with the parliamentary website. To counteract that fact, we recommend that the administration work in partnership with already established websites catering for interest groups.**

### Increasing two-way online communication

47. The internet has moved on since the Puttnam Commission reported in 2005. As the Hansard Society explained, people now have “a different approach to the internet, one which stresses an architecture of participation, whereby users expect to have opportunities for their voice to be heard” (p 13). However, as the Society and others pointed out, the parliamentary website remains, “to a large degree, a traditional information delivery website” (pp 13, 10, 138–40, 158) that online communication should mean two-way communication and that Parliament should use the parliamentary website not just to provide information but also to listen to the public. Rufus Leonard, a brand and digital communications consultancy, said that the “dominant focus of the website is on pushing content (in a variety of different formats) to users and a real essence of ‘engagement’ is still not visible” (p 158). Involve, a non-governmental organisation specialising in public participation, agreed and suggested that Parliament needed to develop its approach to the internet by building upon its “highly improved ‘1-way’ information broadcast,” and committing “to a more engaging ‘2-way’ conversation between citizens and decision makers” (p 136).
48. **Whilst Parliament does well at using its website to inform people, it needs continually to develop the way in which it uses the internet actively to engage with people.** During our inquiry, we explored the question: how can the House of Lords use the internet to create opportunities both for the public to engage with the House and inform members about their views, and for the House and its members to demonstrate that it listens to those views?
49. People raised two fundamental issues. The first was the need for the House to be clear about the rationale for engaging online (p 158). As Dr Jackson, University of Plymouth, put it: “There needs to be a clear, defined and measurable purpose for adopting the internet ... Just because new technologies, such as social networking sites, exist is a poor reason alone for adopting them” (p 138). Dr Jackson said that online communication and engagement should support the House in performing its roles of scrutinising the Government and making legislation. Anything which does not support the House in this way “is window dressing. It will not help the House of

Lords, or individual Peers, function better and more importantly online users will come to recognise this and disengage” (p 138).

50. The second issue was how Parliament would manage “the potential risks associated with setting up discussion forums and participating in online group engagements ... that are by definition insecure and impossible to control”. As Comment Technologies, an organisation that provides digital community engagement solutions, put it: “How can Parliament begin to embrace more actively and in a genuinely engaging online environment the opportunities that social networking technology offers but without exposing the institution to unmanageable risk? Is it not reasonable to want to open up communications with and amongst interested citizens and Parliament but to do so in some structured, manageable and measurable way?” (pp 105–06; see also pp 13–14, 33–35). Although it might be inevitable that a degree of risk would be involved in Parliament increasing the way it uses the internet to communicate, Rufus Leonard and others were clear that such an increase was necessary:

“Like it or not Parliament and members of both Houses need to move towards two-way communication with the general public and with the specific interest groups who lobby and push for change in key areas of interest. Some of these discussions will still happen face-to-face, but online channels are uniquely well-placed to make these communications prompt, cost-effective and scalable. If you do not embrace this opportunity, then the discussion on key topics will simply take place elsewhere and Parliament will appear marginalized and out of touch” (p 159).

### **What can be done on the parliamentary website?**

51. We considered a number of options for how the House of Lords could use the parliamentary website to increase two-way communication with people. The Chair of the Brent Youth Parliament suggested that young people should have the opportunity to ask questions of members online (Q 60). [Debategraph.org](http://Debategraph.org), a project to increase the transparency and rigour of public debate, suggested collaborative, web-based visual policy mapping “to focus the collaborative process on identifying, mapping, distilling, refining, and evaluating the set of ideas being submitted in a visual and collaboratively editable form”. The Hansard Society argued for a system of e-petitioning (p 14). Two particular proposals attracted most interest and we explored those in more detail.

### *Online forums*

52. Rufus Leonard, a brand and digital communications consultancy, suggested that what was missing from the parliamentary website was “a forum for open debate—a medium through which members of the general public can actively converse with representatives of the House of Lords/ Parliament and actively ‘get involved’” (p 158). [Debatewise](http://Debatewise), a non-profit debating website, suggested that the House of Lords create “a designated part of the site” to host “debates on issues scheduled to be discussed in the House” (p 111). This proposal for the House to facilitate online debates attracted some support (Q 63). However, a number of people were sceptical about the potential for Parliament’s website to host constructive public policy debate. Some people cited the “comparatively low uptake of the online forums” on the parliamentary website (p 137; Q 95).

Others, such as Tom Watson MP, then Minister for Digital Engagement, were uncertain whether the benefits would justify the costs involved:

“When you have any conversation it has to be moderated, so if Parliament took the decision to have a kind of giant conversation with the nation there would be a very large resource issue there because if you are going to do it at scale you need people who will moderate the conversation and stop people doing the sorts of things they can get up to online. So the decision really would be a cost-benefit analysis and the truth is I do not know the answer about whether we would gain, as parliamentarians, great wisdom through that route.” (Q 255)

53. Tom Loosemore concluded that we should not “go anywhere near forums” on the parliamentary website; indeed, he said that Parliament should “avoid like the plague hosting conversations” on the parliamentary website (Q 97). Lord Norton of Louth drew a distinction between conversations and consultation. He advocated “online consultation for select committees”, whereby committees would invite input into their work (Q 241).
54. If Parliament is to use its website to invite input from people, it is essential that it is clear what will happen to such input. Dr Jackson, University of Plymouth, said that people needed to know that their points would not be ignored. He criticised the select committee forums on the website because “the process for how the information [from the public] will be fed in seems rather vague” (p 140). Lord Norton said that mechanisms inviting input “should not be put in place until there is a clear and transparent process for dealing with such communication” (p 64). Ivo Gormley, Thinkpublic, explained the questions to which clear answers needed to be given: “Where is that information [from the public] going to go and how much will it influence the debate? Who is going to read it and what will they do with it?” He suggested that if Parliament “can clearly demonstrate exactly what is going to happen with that information, where it will go, who will read it and then to what extent it has the potential to influence the decision-making, then people are going to participate and then you get a much more meaningful debate.” (Q 96)
55. Debatewise suggested a model which we consider may meet these criteria. They called for the House to set up “a system where debates created by schools ... will link with scheduled debates in the House. The issues would be debated online by young people before the event and the results could be cited by speakers. This would go a way towards de-mystifying the political process for the young people involved: the Lords would become infinitely more accessible and transparent to them, and there would be an obvious pathway from the voicing of their opinions, to the Lords’ consideration of their views” (pp 110–11). It is only by running a pilot exercise that we and the public will be able to judge whether such a model should be adopted.
56. **To increase public engagement with our debates, we recommend that there be a pilot exercise in which an online debate, promoted with a targeted section of the public, would be run in parallel with a debate in the Lords Chamber.**
57. **Given our view about the limits of what is possible on the parliamentary website (see above paragraph 46), we have also invited the administration to explore the possibility of working with partner organisations to develop online pupil parliaments and spaces for themed topic-based discussions for young people.**

*Commenting on legislation*

58. Rufus Leonard, a brand and digital communications consultancy, suggested that web technologies offer significant opportunities for the public to “comment on the wording” of legislation. This suggestion was also made on our web forum:

*“The world is so connected now by means such as the internet, so surely the House of Lords could embrace this by allowing people to comment on legislation and even recommend possible sensible amendments using an online facility.”*

59. Similarly, Channel 4 suggested that draft legislation should be made available online for the public to annotate (see also QQ 238–39). Whilst these two proposals are similar, we see an important distinction: bills are considered by the House; draft bills are considered by a committee. This distinction is important, because a committee can more easily put in place a transparent process for dealing with the comments it receives. As Lord Norton of Louth explained, if people were to comment on a draft bill being considered by a committee, there could be a clear process for the committee to consider those comments and take them into account in their report on the bill. People would thereby be able to see that their input was part of “a structured deliberation on the bill” (QQ 237–41). We note that in 2002 the Joint Committee on the Draft Communications Bill ran an online forum for participants to post messages and to respond to questions about the issues covered by the Bill.<sup>12</sup> That model could be developed as technology offers Parliament the opportunity to make the Bill available on line in a format so that allows comments to be made alongside the text of the Bill or amendments to be proposed to the Bill by the public.
60. **As a step to increase public online engagement in how Parliament considers legislation, we recommend that other pre-legislative scrutiny committees should invite the public to submit comments via the parliamentary website on the draft bill being scrutinised.**

**BOX 2****Recommendations on Online Communication and Engagement**

- **People should be allowed to embed the House’s proceedings on their websites, so that our proceedings can have as wide a distribution as possible on the internet. We recommend that a trial start as soon as possible. We have invited the BBC and the House of Lords administration to bring forward proposals for how the House can maximise potential synergies with the BBC’s forthcoming ‘Democracy Live’ website (paragraph 44).**
- **We recommend that the administration work in partnership with already established websites catering for interest groups (paragraph 46).**
- **We recommend that there be a pilot exercise in which an online debate, promoted with a targeted section of the public, would be run in parallel with a debate in the Lords Chamber (paragraph 56).**
- **We recommend that other pre-legislative scrutiny committees should invite the public to submit comments via the parliamentary website on the draft bill being scrutinised (paragraph 60).**

<sup>12</sup> *Draft Communications Bill*, Session 2001–02 (HL Paper 169-I, HC 876-I)

## CHAPTER 4: SETTING PARLIAMENTARY DATA FREE

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### Introduction

61. The Committee heard a powerful case that Parliament should make its data more easily available online. Ben Hammersley, Associate Editor of *Wired* magazine, argued that it was “morally and ethically wrong” for Parliament not to make its data available in a form which could be re-used and analysed by others (Q 79). Simon McManus, a web developer, explained that most parliamentary publications were published in Portable Document Format (PDF), which caused “a number of problems:
- (1) Individual pages and sections are not indexed by search engines.
  - (2) It is difficult to programmatically extract data from a PDF.
  - (3) It is not possible to reference particular sections of a document.”
62. Publishing information in a PDF document can give the author or publisher some control over how the document is accessed and used. However, it can limit people’s ability to use the data within the document. The effect of Parliament publishing information in PDF only was vividly seen recently in relation to MPs’ allowances. People told the Committee that the information which Parliament produces (for instance in relation to legislation or expenses) is essentially public information and so there needed to be much greater “data transparency” (Q 86). The Hansard Society said that “Parliament must get better at making digital content available” and do “a lot more” to make its data available in a form that “people can then choose to reproduce and access.” They suggested that the parliamentary website should become “a repository of information which the public can access on its own terms and in its own way” (QQ 4, 10). The Hansard Society and others emphasised that making digital content easily available online would be “a big step forward”. Moreover, it should be “viewed as a tool to enhance communication and engagement, rather than simply viewed in a technology-context.” As Simon McManus said, if Parliament were to make its data easily available online it would help people to “interact with both Houses” (p 143). Tom Watson MP, then Minister for Digital Engagement, agreed that people outside Parliament would be able to use Parliament’s data to “make the richness of what we do here come alive to a wider community of people ... our challenge is to provide all the data that we have got in a way whereby people can find their own value with it and their own ideas and innovation” (Q 265).

### Making public data available online for re-use

63. There is a general drive to make public data available online for re-use. On 21 January, his first full day in office, President Obama issued a ‘[Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government](#)’, in which he said that American executive departments and agencies “should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public.” Following that, the executive branch of the US Federal Government in May 2009 launched a [website](#) which allows the public easily to find, download, and use datasets that are generated and held by the Federal Government. In a [statement](#) to the House of Commons

on 10 June, the Prime Minister announced that he had asked Sir Tim Berners-Lee, who is credited with inventing the worldwide web, to help the Government “to drive the opening up of access to Government data on the web over the coming months”.<sup>13</sup> In a [speech](#) on 25 June David Cameron MP pledged to publish government data online in a standardised format and to “create a new ‘right to data’ so that further datasets can be requested by the public.”

64. What data should Parliament make more easily available online? The Hansard Society suggested a range of information from “transcripts of Hansard to digital video” (p 13). Others asked for information related to core parliamentary business, the “fundamental things” that Parliament does: legislation, expenses, Hansard, divisions, submissions to committees, and committee reports (pp 84, 104–05, 142; QQ 264–72). The “[Free our Bills](#)” campaign, run by mySociety, calls for Parliament to publish Bills in an electronic format that allows the public to access the underlying data so that they can build computer programmes and services around the Bills. The campaign has attracted some publicity and, as with the controversy around placing parliamentary proceedings on YouTube (see above paragraph 40), has led to criticism of Parliament. In a [speech](#) on 26 May David Cameron MP said that the way Bills were published online was “stifling innovation and blocking democratic engagement.” He said that a Conservative government would “publish all Parliamentary information online” in accordance with open standards. “This will help people easily access Bills and other legislation in order to create useful applications—like text alerts when something you’re interested in is debated. And it will mean many more expert eyes helping to explain laws as they’re formed, flagging up flaws and suggestions for improvement.” Jo Swinson MP supported mySociety’s proposal that Bills should include electronic ‘tags’. She told the Committee that “although being a slightly ‘techie’ solution” it would “really help people to connect with the progress of Bills so that they can make their views heard on the different amendments, the different issues that are being discussed”. Tom Watson MP agreed that if people could see in digital format “the whole journey a piece of legislation takes” through Parliament, it would give them “a greater ownership” of what Parliament does (Q 268).
65. How should Parliament publish data about parliamentary business? People asked that Parliament present its data on the website in accordance with “open standards”. They suggested that parliamentary data should be made available in “eXtensible Markup Language” (XML). This development could allow the maximum possible re-use and analysis of the data to meet the needs of the user (QQ 4, 10, 78, 86).<sup>14</sup> The Hansard Society pointed out that the Irish *Dáil* publishes its parliamentary Hansard in XML, and the Canadian House of Commons has developed a highly successful XML-based system for all internal information-processing, publication and broadcasting.
66. **Parliament must not be left behind as others set new standards for online publication and engagement with the public. We recommend that information and documentation related to the core work of the**

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<sup>13</sup> Commons Hansard, column 797.

<sup>14</sup> TSO already publish Bills in XML format, but the data is not fully open, structured or easily reusable.

**House of Lords (including Bills, Hansard, transcripts of public committee meetings, evidence submitted to committees, committee reports, records of divisions, expenses and the register of Lords' interests) should be produced and made available online in an open standardised electronic format that enables people outside Parliament to analyse and re-use the data.**

67. **The Committee welcomes the fact that officials in both Houses have agreed that parliamentary systems creating, holding or publishing data about the core work of the two Houses should be developed to deliver the information outputs required both internally, for the efficient working of members and officials, and externally for members of the public. The Committee stresses the high priority that should be given to this work and will periodically review its progress.**

**Progress so far on releasing parliamentary data**

68. There has already been some progress in this area. A new XML authoring tool for the *Votes and Proceedings* documents in the House of Commons has been creating data conforming to open standards since December 2008. The [Historic Hansard](#) digitised Parliamentary Debates from 1803 to 2004 are now available as XML files, which are downloadable from the parliamentary website. Parliament has also set up a [prototype site](#) to test and demonstrate user interfaces for the historic data, along with other functionality and to encourage user input into how these interfaces are developed in the future. The parliamentary website has a [trial version](#) of a new presentation of the online Hansard text. In the new presentation, each debate has a separate page, so that page breaks do not occur in the middle of a debate or the middle of a speech. The plan is to add further features, including indexes by member, direct links from a member's name to a list of other contributions that they have made, and better links to relevant documents (such as Bills). When the new pages are fully functional, they will replace the existing presentation. Tom Watson MP, then Minister for Digital Engagement praised the "great work" being done by [officials](#) within Parliament to make parliamentary data available online. He said that they were "amazingly pioneering in doing work which ... could be revolutionary in the future ... they are essentially digitising lots of data, voting data, speeches, biographies of previous Members, and codifying it in a way which people can use and crunch up and do things with. When their work is complete, I think it will be an incredible resource for psephologists, commentators and citizens to try and understand the history of Parliament and what we have done in greater depth." (QQ 265–66)
69. **The Committee is impressed with development in the printed Hansard and welcomes recent developments in the online presentation of Hansard. We stress the need for the online improvement programme to continue.**

### Integrated information

70. People raised with the Committee the difficulty of moving from one dataset to another on the parliamentary website. For example, it is not possible to move directly from a member's name appearing in the context of a debate to that member's committee contributions, voting record or entry in the register of interests (QQ 78–81). As Tom Loosemore said, information about members “is all over the place on the website. It is all there, but it is just scattered, and unless you know where to look, which nine times out of ten people do not, it might as well not be there” (Q 82).
71. To counteract this problem, people suggested that there should be links between text published in different formats and audio-visual material (e.g. between Hansard and the video of proceedings) (pp 13, 101). People also asked for links between different publications that refer to the same procedural event. For example, a division in the House of Lords is recorded in Hansard and in the House's minutes of proceedings and is analysed on the parliamentary website, but no link exists between the three (or to information about the members or to the subject of the division).
72. **During our inquiry, we looked at a pilot demonstrator integrating video of Lords proceedings with Lords Hansard, which would enable users to watch, listen to and read a past debate at the same time. The Committee welcomed this advance and decided that development should continue with a view to offering a full service to the public by summer 2010.**
73. **If people cannot readily find information on the parliamentary website, it might as well not be there. We recommend further integration of the various information sets (such as Bills, Hansard, records of divisions, the register of Lords' interests) on the parliamentary website. For example, in relation to information about members, we recommend that from each member's biographical page on the parliamentary website it should be possible to access directly a much greater range of information about that member's parliamentary activities (for instance, through links to the member's voting record, the questions and amendments the member has tabled, and the member's entry in the register of interests). Work is underway to facilitate such developments, and in December we will review progress towards the recommendations in this paragraph.**

### Online information about Bills

74. We noted above the criticism aimed at Parliament about the information available online about Bills (see paragraph 64). The Committee received several proposals about how the presentation of information about Bills could be improved, particularly online. These included providing documents to show how a Bill affects previous Acts, providing explanatory material about amendments, and creating the ability both to look back to track how a Bill has been amended and to look forward to show how a Bill would look if particular amendments were agreed to (pp 65, 100–02, 142, 163; QQ 78, 85, 86, 231–37). We note with interest the ‘compare versions’ of Bills available on the parliamentary website, highlighting the changes made to a Bill in a Public Bill Committee in the

House of Commons. Andrew Stott, the Government's Director of Digital Engagement, suggested that there could be an analogy with "Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, which tracks every amendment which is made to an Article. If you go to the history tab you get a whole list of the versions of that page and you can compare any two versions and [see] the differences, and for each change there is a link to who made that change, when they did it and on Wikipedia there is a space for a short comment on why they made it". He considered that such a system could be adapted to Parliament's consideration of a Bill, with "links to the supporting papers, and so on" (Q 270).

75. Tom Watson MP said that such improvements had the potential to bring Bills "alive" to people. He considered that such developments were "good" and probably "inevitable", and he suggested that Parliament "should go out and embrace those people who want to help us" to deliver them. He cautioned that it was "not an easy technical job" and that it would need resources, but "it would help people engage with legislation" (Q 268).
76. **We recommend that the presentation of Bills on the parliamentary website be developed so as to make the legislative process more transparent.** The Bill pages should be enhanced by the integration of information that we have called for above (see paragraph 73). For example, it should be possible on the parliamentary website to link between the following: each amendment tabled and the point in the Bill that it seeks to amend; the explanatory note on that portion of the Bill (where applicable); information about the member(s) who tabled the amendment; the Hansard record of the debate (if any) on the amendment; the audio-video recording of the relevant proceedings; an analysis of any division on the amendment; and a note of whether the amendment was moved, withdrawn, debated, agreed to or not. **We recommend that it be possible online to look back and see how a Bill has been amended as it moves through Parliament.** That is, it should be possible to see online how a Bill has been amended at each stage and also to compare any two versions of a Bill (for example, to compare the Bill as introduced in one House with the Bill introduced in the other House or to compare the Bill as introduced to Parliament with the Bill that receives Royal Assent). Such changes would help all those following a particular Bill: members, their staff, officials and outside organisations.
77. **We recommend that the House of Lords administration invite officials in the Commons and PICT to explore with them the feasibility of creating an online system where people can sign up to receive electronic alerts and updates about particular Bills or portions of Bills relevant to their interests.**

### **The role the Government should play**

78. In most cases, Parliament is the principal or sole creator of its data. However, there are a number of significant exceptions, where the data is shared or transferred to Parliament from the Government. For instance, European documents considered by the scrutiny committees of the two Houses, answers to parliamentary questions, written ministerial statements, papers deposited in the Library of either House by a Minister, and most Bills all come to Parliament from the Government. **The vision we have**

outlined above cannot be achieved without Government collaboration. The Government needs to share our commitment to use fully open standards for data. The Government should work with Parliament to implement common standards for the categories of information we mention in this paragraph, so as to improve the flow of information between Government and Parliament and to enhance the public's ability to re-use that information.

79. In order to enable the implementation of our recommendations in this Chapter, **we call on the Government to start producing Bills in an electronic format which both complies with “open standards” and is readily re-usable.**
80. **In relation to Bills, we also recommend that, for each Government Bill that significantly amends an earlier Act, the Government should produce an accompanying informal document to show the original legislation and how the Bill would change it.** Such documents, which would have no legal force, would contain the provisions of the earlier legislation and show the effect of the amendments embodied in the Bill. They would help people to understand the effects of Bills being debated in the House. We envisage that the Government and the House could agree to exempt certain Bills (such as the annual Finance Bill) from this requirement. The Government's ‘Guide to Making Legislation’ says that departments should make such documents available to members where they feel that they would be helpful to members. In their [response](#) to the Constitution Committee's [report](#) on *Parliament and the Legislative Process*, the Government said: “If in a particular case members believe they need such material, they should say so.” Those comments disregard the benefits that such documents could bring to people outside the House. **We recommend that the Government produce these documents as a matter of course before the Second Reading of a Bill in the House of Lords and that the House make them publicly available via the Bill pages of the parliamentary website.**
81. In a [debate](#) in the Chamber on 16 June 2009, the Leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, gave the House “an undertaking of support for its work” in this area. She pledged that the “director for digital engagement in the Cabinet Office will work with the officers of this House to share knowledge about best practice and best technologies. We will look to how the needs of the House can be incorporated into the work that Sir Tim Berners-Lee has agreed to lead for us and we will work with the House to ensure that where information passes from the Government to the House and vice versa—for instance, on Bills or in Questions—it does so smoothly and in ways that support the open information objectives of the House.”<sup>15</sup> **We welcome the Leader's undertaking to support the House's work in increasing access to parliamentary data, and we note that parliamentary officials have already started working with the director for digital engagement in the Cabinet Office. We ask the Government to explain how and within what timescale our recommendations will be incorporated into the work that Sir Tim Berners-Lee will lead on opening access to data.**

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<sup>15</sup> Lords Hansard, column 1035.

**BOX 3****Recommendations on Parliamentary Data**

- **We recommend that information and documentation related to the core work of the House of Lords (including Bills, Hansard, transcripts of public committee meetings, evidence submitted to committees, committee reports, records of divisions, expenses and the register of Lords' interests) should be produced and made available online in an open standardised electronic format that enables people outside Parliament to analyse and re-use the data (paragraph 66).**
- **We recommend further integration of the various information sets (such as Bills, Hansard, records of divisions, the register of Lords' interests) on the parliamentary website (paragraph 73).**
- **We recommend that the presentation of Bills on the parliamentary website be developed so as to make the legislative process more transparent (paragraph 76).**
- **We recommend that it be possible online to look back and see how a Bill has been amended as it moves through Parliament (paragraph 76).**
- **We recommend that the House of Lords administration invite officials in the Commons and PICT to explore with them the feasibility of creating an online system where people can sign up to receive electronic alerts and updates about particular Bills or portions of Bills relevant to their interests (paragraph 77).**
- **The Government should work with Parliament to implement common standards for the categories of information we mention in this paragraph, so as to improve the flow of information between Government and Parliament and to enhance the public's ability to re-use that information (paragraph 78).**
- **We call on the Government to start producing Bills in an electronic format which both complies with "open standards" and is readily re-usable (paragraph 79).**
- **In relation to Bills, we also recommend that, for each Government Bill that significantly amends an earlier Act, the Government should produce an accompanying informal document to show the original legislation and how the Bill would change it (paragraph 80).**
- **We recommend that the Government produce these documents as a matter of course before the Second Reading of a Bill in the House of Lords and that the House make them publicly available via the Bill pages of the parliamentary website (paragraph 80).**
- **We ask the Government to explain how and within what timescale our recommendations will be incorporated into the work that Sir Tim Berners-Lee will lead on opening access to data (paragraph 81).**

## CHAPTER 5: BROADCASTING

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### Filming of Lords proceedings

82. The House of Lords has always taken a more relaxed view of cameras in the Chamber than the House of Commons, and in 1985 the Lords was the first Chamber to begin a televising experiment. When the Commons began an experiment televising its proceedings in November 1989, it imposed rules of coverage to “protect the dignity of the House”. The rules were drawn up to give the House of Commons some control over how it is portrayed on television. They set out what shots may and may not be used, and what may and may not be shown. Broadcasting rules have never been formally adopted in the House of Lords, but in practice debates have been filmed within broadly the same parameters as in the House of Commons. The Puttnam Commission recommended that the rules of coverage be relaxed so as to interest and engage the viewer. We first considered this recommendation in December 2005, and our conclusions led to a new protocol governing filming in the Lords Chamber. The protocol relaxed the rules and conventions that govern what the broadcasters can film when the House is sitting.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the director filming proceedings can use a greater variety of shots, such as panning shots, close ups and reaction shots. The House of Commons adopted a similar change to its rules on broadcasting later in 2006.<sup>17</sup> All the broadcasters we spoke to welcomed these developments and explained how they had helped to make parliamentary proceedings more watchable. The BBC said that the result is that “more people are now watching and they are watching for longer” (p 85). Nonetheless, the broadcasters said that further changes were warranted. They asked for lower camera angles in the Lords Chamber, permission to film divisions and unrestricted access to the wide shot of the Chamber (pp 85, 89; QQ 304–07).
83. **The Committee welcomes the effect that the 2006 protocol governing filming in the Chamber has had on coverage of Lords proceedings. Nonetheless, we consider that more could be done to make footage of parliamentary proceedings interesting for viewers. Later this year, we will review the arrangements for broadcasting Lords proceedings to make the footage more engaging. As a first step, we recommend that there should be a trial period in the 2009–10 parliamentary session during which divisions in the Lords are recorded from within the division lobbies. The images could be broadcast accompanied by the atmospheric sound feed from the Chamber which broadcasters currently use when covering a division, so that specific conversations are not picked up.**

### Access to the House for filming

84. The Puttnam Commission recommended “a relaxation of the rules for filming in the precincts of Parliament”. We considered this recommendation in December 2005 and agreed that broadcasters should be offered access to a point in Peers Lobby for filming interviews. A recorded interview was installed

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<sup>16</sup> The protocol can be found in a [Written Statement](#) by the Chairman of Committees (Lords Hansard, 13 February 2006, WS 54).

<sup>17</sup> See the answers by Frank Doran MP, Chairman of the House of Commons Administration Committee to written questions on [20 June 2006](#) (Commons Hansard, column 1725W) and [19 December 2006](#) (column 1795W).

in 2006, and this was upgraded to a live facility in 2007. The broadcasters said that this development had been “a great step forward” (Q 299).<sup>18</sup>

85. Despite that advance, all of the broadcasters called for wider access to film in the Palace. For instance, they asked for permission to film interviews in rooms other than the official interview rooms, such as in members’ offices or the Royal Gallery (pp 85–90; QQ 298–303). ITV Regions said that there seemed to be “a presumption against filming in many parts of the Palace” which was “inhibiting coverage”. They said that the current arrangements were “frustrating” and “confusing”, and complained that there is “no obvious comprehensive list of rules which is easily available for broadcast journalists” (p 89). We note that the leaflet setting out the regulations governing photography, filming, sound recording, painting, sketching, mobile telephones and pagers was last published in 2002.
86. **It is clear to us that there is some confusion about access to the House for filming, and we would like to clarify two points. First, members may be interviewed for radio, TV or filming purposes in their own offices without a permit. Second, filming may take place at certain times on the Terrace without a permit.** On sitting days members can be interviewed on the Terrace either before noon or before either House sits, whichever is earlier. On non-sitting days filming on the Terrace may take place up to 17.30. **The member who arranged the filming is responsible for security; the member should meet the film crew and escort them around the House at all times.**
87. The broadcasters suggested that “there should be a presumption in favour of filming throughout the parliamentary estate except where it is specifically banned. That would make the rules clearer and easier to understand for everyone and would improve coverage especially if there were a wider range of interview points (in addition to Central Lobby and Portcullis House) available throughout the Palace” (p 89). The BBC agreed that if Parliament were to move from having “a very complicated inherited set of rules, which is where we are now,” to a “presumption of access”, including “access to public events for cameras” and “access to public areas to do sit-down interviews ... then that would be huge progress.” (Q 297)
88. Peter Knowles, Controller of BBC Parliament, explained the consequence of the current rules of access: “There is a gap at the moment. We get coverage of the ceremonial and the art and architecture, and there is wall to wall coverage of the Chamber and of certain [committee] hearings, but in between the two there is hardly a glimpse of what this place is like.” He drew our attention to the system in place for filming in the Scottish Parliament, where “the broadcasters and the journalists operate under rules, it is not a free-for-all, but you all the time have a sense of meetings going on, of people moving around and doing work.” In contrast, the public “rarely” gets to see the House of Lords “as a place of work” (Q 302).
89. **We recommend that there should be greater access to the House of Lords for factual filming. We suggest that there should be a presumption in favour of factual filming throughout the House of Lords, except in specific areas (such as, the Library and refreshment outlets) where filming would not normally be permitted. The**

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<sup>18</sup> The Administration and Works Committee considers requests for permission to make programmes about the House and approved these regulations.

**presumption should be that meetings and events to which the public are admitted without invitation can be filmed and that members can be interviewed in public areas. Once the rules of access for filming have been reviewed, we recommend that the administration revise the leaflet setting out the regulations governing photography, filming, sound recording, painting, sketching, mobile telephones and pagers so that the regulations can be readily understood. We recommend that a more appropriate room be assigned for interviews.**

### **Webcasting**

90. Since the Puttnam Commission, there has been a major upgrading of the facilities for webcasting parliamentary proceedings. The webcasting [site](#) was redesigned in 2006, and since 2007 there has been a programme to install unattended webcams in committee rooms, which is still ongoing.
91. ITV Regions welcomed the expansion of webcasting (p 90), and the BBC said that the video webcasting of committees was “especially helpful to specialist researchers and to journalists.” It had enabled *Today in Parliament* to cover “a wider range of hearings” than had previously been possible (p 85). ITN suggested that the House should contextualise coverage of its proceedings on the web (e.g. by providing further information on the member speaking and the subject of the debate) “to help the viewer understand what they are watching” (p 88). The Hansard Society suggested providing links alongside the footage to “Order Papers, bills, biographical information about speakers, etc” (p 16). ITV Regions said that contextualisation of proceedings would “assist public understanding of the proceedings of the House” (p 90). The BBC website already shows the live proceedings of the Lords with captions giving names, designations and other contextual information (p 85).
92. **The Committee welcomes the expansion of webcasting. We recommend that all public meetings of Lords committees be webcast with video as well as audio, in order to make the meetings easier to follow online. We recommend that, once Parliament has changed the way in which it generates the underlying data (see above, paragraph 66), the next development for webcasting should be for the parliamentary website to provide contextual information alongside House of Lords proceedings.**

#### **BOX 4**

##### **Recommendations on Broadcasting**

- **We recommend that there should be a trial period in the Lords in the 2009–10 parliamentary session during which divisions are recorded (paragraph 83).**
- **We recommend that there should be greater access to the House of Lords for factual filming (paragraph 89).**
- **We recommend that the administration revise the leaflet setting out the regulations governing filming (paragraph 89).**
- **We recommend that a more appropriate room be assigned for interviews (paragraph 89).**
- **We recommend that all public meetings of Lords committees be webcast with video as well as audio (paragraph 92).**
- **We recommend that the parliamentary website provide contextual information alongside webcast House of Lords proceedings (paragraph 92).**

## CHAPTER 6: PRESS AND MEDIA

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93. The House of Lords press office (currently staffed by the Head of Press and Media and one assistant) focuses on publicising the functions and work of select committees, the Chamber and the House more broadly. The office also handles media enquiries and works with officials across both Houses to improve public information and access. Journalists and broadcasters praised the “pro-active” approach of the current Head of Press and Media (QQ 193, 208; ITV regions), and Peter Riddell, Political Commentator and Assistant Editor of *The Times*, singled out how journalists were now kept informed about committee reports and hearings, saying that that was an area where the House had improved “enormously” (Q 189).
94. However, the Hansard Society considered that the press office did not have “sufficient resource capacity to convey the full scope and nature of the work of the House of Lords, the depth of its scrutiny of legislation, and the changes it secures through debate and committee work. More often than not, a limited staff such as [in the Lords press office] is going to be working on a reactive rather than a proactive basis.” Specifically, the Society argued that the House “should invest in more media officers to promote the work of its committees. If the House of Lords wants to engage more widely with the public then it needs better resourcing in this area of work.” Furthermore, the Society said that, in addition to promoting the work of the Chamber and the House’s committees, there was also “scope for covering the interests and work of Peers more widely as well. The House of Commons media and communications service has recently established a new post to focus on features and factual programming. The House of Lords should consider doing the same” (pp 11–12, 15).
95. Lord Cameron of Dillington, Lord Feldman and Lord Norton of Louth also argued for more press officers in the Lords: “There is a marked disparity in the employment of press officers in the Lords compared to the Commons and, indeed, the Scottish Parliament (see *Lords Hansard*, 25 February 2009, col. WA89.) There is a compelling case for extending the resources of the Information Office, not least to double the number of press officers” (pp 65, 102–03, 116).
96. One question which arose during our inquiry was how to balance the demands of different media. Ralph Negrine, Professor of Political Communication at the University of Sheffield, suggested that the House’s committees should not focus on the mainstream media but should employ staff to target and communicate proactively with specialist audiences via specialist media and online media (pp 144–47). ITV Regions suggested that the House should do more with regional broadcast journalists “to highlight debates, issues and peers that are relevant to the regions they cover” (p 90). Lord Cameron of Dillington suggested that members could be encouraged to notify the Information Office of their local publications, and the Office could then notify those papers when the members made “meaningful” interventions (p 103). The Hansard Society went further, suggesting that the House should establish a regional press system “with each member invited to sign up, indicating their willingness to actively engage with local/regional media in a specified region. Each region should have an assigned press officer who co-ordinates the press/media work with the Peers” (pp 15; Q 23). Lord Norton of Louth suggested that the parliamentary outreach officers, who are already established and based in the regions, could provide briefings to local media (p 65). Lord Hunt of Chesterton suggested that members could be more proactive by informing Information Office of

significant speeches they intended to give, and the Information Office could offer advice (p 136). Lord Lipsey suggested that members should proactively engage with the press by “promoting specific causes” in which they were involved (p 141). John Hipwood, Political Editor of the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, agreed that it was members themselves “who should be providing the links” and should be “more proactive in contacting members of the [press] gallery”, and that position was shared by other journalists and broadcasters (QQ 188–89, 193–95, 213, 291–92, 294, 316–17).

97. There is a limit to the amount that the press office can do. During the course of our inquiry, a modest increase in the staffing level of the office was agreed, and an additional press officer will be recruited. There is also a limit to what the office can do for individual members whilst maintaining its political neutrality. **We recommend that the administration continue to build relations with regional and local media as well as national media. We recommend greater use of online media.**
98. The Puttnam Commission recommended that Parliament provide a formal induction for journalists joining the press gallery. The Hansard Society suggested to us that the induction should be formal as that would be “beneficial for the House” (Q 26). Furthermore, they proposed that such induction should be “enforced perhaps, for example, by linking the taking of an induction course to the provision of a parliamentary pass” (p 15). ITN, on the other hand, unsurprisingly said that a formal induction was “not necessary”, but a voluntary, informal session might be useful “for those that wish to attend” (p 88). Lord Lipsey, Lord Norton of Louth and Baroness Thomas of Winchester thought that the House should help new members of the lobby to understand more about how the House operates (pp 65, 141, 163), and John Hipwood agreed that introductory sessions would be “a good idea”. He suggested that we follow up the proposal with the Chairman of the Press Gallery (Q 192).
99. **We recommend that the House experiment with offering information sessions to members of the press gallery, and our Chairman will write to the Chairman of the Press Gallery to take forward this recommendation.**
100. The Hansard Society suggested that the House should explore what support it “might provide to accredited journalism training providers across the country” The objective would be to “ensure that journalism training schemes across the country are offered support in covering the House of Lords effectively as part of their training programme ... This will have long-term benefits in educating the next generation of journalists about the role and work of the House of Lords” (pp 11, 15–16).
101. **We recommend that the administration explore possible links with journalism courses.**

#### BOX 5

##### Recommendations on Press and Media

- **We recommend that the administration continue to build relations with regional and local media as well as national media (paragraph 97).**
- **We recommend greater use of online media (paragraph 97).**
- **We recommend that the House experiment with offering information sessions to members of the press gallery (paragraph 99).**
- **We recommend that the administration explore possible links with journalism courses (paragraph 101).**

## CHAPTER 7: LANGUAGE

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102. The Puttnam Commission called for “a thorough review of the language and terminology Parliament uses”. No such review has been carried out. The subject of parliamentary language came up repeatedly in the Committee’s public meetings and on the Committee’s web forum. It was raised as being a barrier to engagement by the Hansard Society, the UK Youth Parliament, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and sixth-form students (pp 144; QQ 3, 47, 65–66, 132, 163–64, and 176). Whilst views on the web forum were split, the language used in and about Parliament clearly puts some people off:

*“One of the ways that the House of Lords could improve public understanding of what it does is by making the information available on the webpages accessible. At the present time, all information is available in “Political Speak”—it is not difficult to put out information in Plain English”*

*“I think a lot of people feel intimidated by the language ... A lot of people feel they are being looked down on and patronised.”*

*“I don’t have any trouble with the language when I’ve been watching a debate, and I appreciate that some of the more arcane language has been phased out (e.g. starred/unstarred questions).”*

*“Simplify the language”*

*“I’m not sure whether the language is as serious a barrier as some have suggested”*

*“Parliamentary language and processes are tough for a first-timer. You may not wish to lose it, for good reasons, though transcripts should have a quickie hyperlink to such items.”*

*“you still use esoteric language to describe the work of the Lords. This is exclusive to people who aren’t familiar with the terms”*

103. In a recent debate on people and Parliament, Lord Soley made a [plea](#) for the House to change some of the historical terms it uses, so that people can “understand and relate to us better”.<sup>19</sup> The link between language and engagement was repeatedly stressed to the Committee. Involve, a non-governmental organisation specialising in public participation, said that “information should be provided for citizens in plain English” (p 137). ITV Regions suggested that the House modify language that acts “as a barrier to understanding for the average viewer” (p 90). For Optimum Communications, it was “self evident” that “to promote understanding, Parliament must speak to people in language they are familiar with” (p 155).
104. **We recommend a review of the parliamentary language used in the House of Lords to make it easier for people outside the House to understand our proceedings. As a start, we have asked the Head of Online Services to examine whether the parliamentary website could include more links between parliamentary terms and the [glossary](#). Our Chairman will, after our report has been considered by the House, seek to initiate a separate debate in the Chamber on the language and terminology used in the House.**

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<sup>19</sup> Lords Hansard, 16 June 2009, columns 1026–27.

## CHAPTER 8: CEREMONIAL ASPECTS OF PARLIAMENT

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105. Not surprisingly, the Committee received contradictory submissions on the ceremonial aspects of Parliament and in particular the State Opening of Parliament. As with parliamentary language, a number of people said that the ceremonies in the Chamber were a barrier to them understanding the work of the House of Lords:

*“The House of Lords has a lot of interesting conventions which have historical significance but can often be a barrier to some people seeing and understanding the place the House of Lords has to play in today’s society.”*

106. Not everyone shared this view, however, and a number of people used the Committee’s web forum to say that the Parliament should retain its ceremonies:

*“I think Parliament’s language and ceremony are marvellous and should be retained.”*

*“The pomp and pageantry of this nation is one that I admire greatly and one that the world envies us for. No other country does it quite like us Brits and watching the processions on days such as the state opening gives me even more of a sense of national identity. This also applies to other Parliamentary traditions and in my opinion all should be maintained and honoured.”*

*“I think ceremonies and the pageantry every so often is a brilliant spectacle ... the pageantry and ceremony won’t harm [the House] ... they are a bit of fun that reminds us just how much history our parliament has.”*

107. Whatever sense of spectacle the ceremonies create, the Committee heard that they lead to an image problem for the House of Lords. Dr Meg Russell, Reader in British and Comparative Politics at University College London’s Constitution Unit, pointed out that it is was difficult to find a picture accompanying a House of Lords story, in the print or broadcast media or online, which did not show peers in ermine-trimmed robes gathered for the Queen’s speech. “This remains the ubiquitous and enduring image of the Lords, but it portrays an event which happens only once a year.” Dr Russell argued that this image perpetuated the impression of “an ancient institution, out of step with modern times.” The House of Lords had “an ‘ermine clad’ image” which was “an obstacle to communicating its role as a modern, functioning institution.” She concluded that until this image was “consigned to history,” the House would “struggle to convince the wider world of the important work that it does.” Indeed it would be “impossible” for the House to move on from this image “unless the reality of peers gathered in their robes actually ends” (pp 160–63; see also QQ 229, 298). Her analysis was shared by a contributor to our web forum:

*“Perhaps the lords needs to do more to review these ceremonial traditions ... Lords sat on benches in red furry capes is not an image that many people would think sits comfortably with the idea of a modern democracy.”*

108. Dr Russell did suggest a solution to this problem: members of the Lords (like MPs) should “start wearing everyday clothing for the Queen’s speech” (p 162). She stressed that this “small change need have no implications for any other aspect of the ceremony.” She thought that this change would be “symbolically extremely important” and considered that “there could be disproportionate, and essential, benefit from making this small symbolic

change” (p 163). Lord Lipsey agreed: “we should abolish ermine. While we wear it, editors and broadcasters will choose pictures of us in it as if it was our daily garb. This makes us look pompous and ridiculous” (p 141). However, Journalists we spoke to questioned what the impact would be of this change (QQ 206–08). An alternative solution we considered was whether it would be possible for the State Opening of Parliament to take place in Westminster Hall (with or without robes), in order to separate the symbolic ceremonial event of the Queen in Parliament from the work that members do in the House of Lords Chamber.

109. **Parliament’s ceremonies raise a number of issues which are complicated, contentious and go well beyond the remit of this Committee. Furthermore, any recommendation on State Opening in this report could detract from our other recommendations, which are practical and should lead to changes which make the House of Lords more open and transparent. We decided therefore that our Chairman should, after our report has been considered by the House, seek to initiate a separate debate in the Chamber on the impact of the ceremonial aspects of the House on public understanding of its work.**

## CHAPTER 9: INFORMING PEOPLE ABOUT THE WORK OF THE HOUSE

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110. Lord Lipsey suggested to the Committee that the Information Office should circulate “to all peers once a year—and more widely if desired—a ‘top 5’ or ‘top 10’ of lordly achievements” in influencing or changing government policy in general and/or legislation in particular” (p 141). Lord Howe of Aberavon advocated a similar development. He proposed that the House should issue a press release after it passes a bill or after a stage during which the House significantly amends a bill. The press release would identify “the quality of the participants” and “the impact of the work of the House on that particular bill—identifying not the negative sounding ‘defeats’ of the Government but the quality and number of changes made in a bill” (p 136). Similarly, Lord Hunt of Chesterton recommended that the House should follow the example of the Scottish Parliament, which provides a “running commentary for MSPs and the public about the progress of a Bill. Nothing like that happens at Westminster, and we and the public are mostly in the dark” (p 136). In a recent debate on people and Parliament, Lord Soley called for the House to produce an edited version of Hansard with pictures in order to make the House more accessible to the public.<sup>20</sup>
111. **There is a case for these developments, and we agree that they could increase public understanding of the work of the House of Lords. But how would they work and what would they cost? The Committee will later this year examine how the House might best inform the public accurately and impartially about how the House amends particular items of legislation (whether by press release or by other means). The Committee will at the same time examine the case for the House producing an accessible accurate and impartial summary of debates and consider the various issues involved. We have asked the administration to provide information on whether other parliaments produce such press releases or summaries and to prepare samples to show what such documents might look like for the Lords.**

### Information and access for people with disabilities

112. The Committee is keen to ensure that the House relates better to people—and we want all groups of people to feel included. When our Chairman put a [video](#) on YouTube to launch the inquiry, people noticed that we had not made the video accessible to people with a hearing impairment, and we rectified that omission by providing a transcript. Similarly, contributors to our web forum raised the need to make the parliamentary website accessible to those who are visually impaired. The Committee is publishing a summary of its report in Easy-Read.
113. Pointing out that there was not a Parliament-wide strategy for improving access for people disabilities, Andrew Dismore MP, Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, asked “whether palantypists and British Sign Language translators could be made available at Committee public meetings, and whether and how people could access parliamentary information in formats such as Braille, audio, British Sign Language and Easy Read” (pp 113–14).
114. **We recommend that the House of Lords administration invite officials in the Commons to work with them to develop a Parliament-wide strategy for improving access for people with disabilities (including learning disabilities and mental health issues) both to Parliament and to parliamentary information.**

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<sup>20</sup> Lords Hansard, 16 June 2009, columns 1026–27.

## CHAPTER 10: INCREASING AWARENESS OF MEMBERS' EXPERTISE

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115. The Committee received a large number of requests asking for the same thing. People, outside organisations, journalists and broadcasters asked for the House to provide better information about members' areas of expertise. A contributor to our web forum explained the problem and suggested the solution:<sup>21</sup>

“One obvious barrier to interaction is the bewildering number of peers to select from if any private individual wishes to raise a matter ... The parliament site could do with a ‘Find a peer’ search tool to allow people to find peers by defined criteria. The public needs something to identify as the right peer to raise a matter with.”

116. Peter Lowe, Assistant Political Editor at Sky News, explained why information about members' expertise would benefit broadcasters: “There are certain members of the House of Lords who are the most eminent people available to speak on certain subjects but, with exceptions, we rarely get them on the air. I think it is probable quite often that our own journalists do not know enough about who those people are” (Q 292). He regretted this, because those members “would add to viewers' understanding of news stories and current events”. His suggestion was that the House “should be pro-active in setting up a list of Peers and their areas of expertise who are prepared to use their background knowledge in interviews on TV and radio” (p 86). David Hencke, Chairman of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, said that such a list would be “very useful” to journalists (Q 189), and Peter Ridell said that the House needed to provide information about “where the expertise lies” because it cannot be assumed that everyone knows who the Lords experts are in a particular subject (Q 209).

117. We note that the [website](#) of the Crossbench members contains a list of Crossbenchers who have special interests in various subjects (e.g. business, education, transport). We note too that *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* contains a list of “Peers' political interests”, but that publication is not freely available. Moreover, as it is a printed list, it is static and cannot be searched by more than one category (e.g. to find a member who lists special interest in both agriculture and tourism).

118. It would be possible for the administration to create a database of members' expertise to which interested members could contribute on a voluntary basis. The database could fulfil two distinct purposes. First, it could be used to provide the media, press and broadcasters with a list of those members who are ready to be contacted by the media and asked to speak on particular subjects. Second, people outside Parliament would be able more easily to identify which members were interested in particular subjects. Members who wanted to feature on the database could specify topics on which they were happy to be contacted by people outside Parliament, topics on which they would be ready to speak to the media, or both.

119. **Increasing awareness of members' expertise would help to demonstrate one way in which the House of Lords adds value to the**

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<sup>21</sup> Written evidence: BBC, Five News, Sky News, Lord Lipsey, Community Service Volunteers, Novas Scarman; QQ 25, 139–40, 188–89, 242, 292–96.

**law-making process and complements the work of the Commons. The need for better information about members' areas of expertise and interest came up more than any other in our inquiry. Providing such information coincides with one of the key messages in the House's public information strategy, and we hope that it can be implemented as a priority. We have invited the Director of Information Services to bring forward proposals by the end of the year for establishing a database of members' areas of expertise and interest.**

## CHAPTER 11: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

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120. We recommend that the House Committee should continue the travel subsidy offered to state schools outside the South-East visiting Parliament through the Education Service (paragraph 17).
121. We recommend that the Education Service should explore ways to encourage teachers and the relevant curriculum bodies to increase coverage of the House of Lords in the curriculum (paragraph 20).
122. In our view, members are the greatest ambassadors for the House. The Committee calls on more members to participate in the 'Peers in Schools' programme and to talk to groups outside Parliament. The Committee also recommends that Lords members of All-Party Groups encourage those Groups to consider how they could contribute to the outreach and educational work of Parliament (paragraph 29).
123. We recommend that the House of Lords administration should draw up options for a shadowing scheme to allow members who wish to participate to have a range of people shadow their work (paragraph 32).
124. People should be allowed to embed the House's proceedings on their websites, so that our proceedings can have as wide a distribution as possible on the internet. We recommend that a trial start as soon as possible. We have invited the BBC and the House of Lords administration to bring forward proposals for how the House can maximise potential synergies with the BBC's forthcoming 'Democracy Live' website (paragraph 44).
125. We recommend that the administration work in partnership with already established websites catering for interest groups (paragraph 46).
126. We recommend that there be a pilot exercise in which an online debate, promoted with a targeted section of the public, would be run in parallel with a debate in the Lords Chamber (paragraph 56).
127. We recommend that other pre-legislative scrutiny committees should invite the public to submit comments via the parliamentary website on the draft bill being scrutinised (paragraph 60).
128. We recommend that information and documentation related to the core work of the House of Lords (including Bills, Hansard, transcripts of public committee meetings, evidence submitted to committees, committee reports, records of divisions, expenses and the register of Lords' interests) should be produced and made available online in an open standardised electronic format that enables people outside Parliament to analyse and re-use the data (paragraph 66).
129. We recommend further integration of the various information sets (such as Bills, Hansard, records of divisions, the register of Lords' interests) on the parliamentary website (paragraph 73).
130. We recommend that the presentation of Bills on the parliamentary website be developed so as to make the legislative process more transparent (paragraph 76).
131. We recommend that it be possible online to look back and see how a Bill has been amended as it moves through Parliament (paragraph 76).

132. We recommend that the House of Lords administration invite officials in the Commons and PICT to explore with them the feasibility of creating an online system where people can sign up to receive electronic alerts and updates about particular Bills or portions of Bills relevant to their interests (paragraph 77).
133. The Government should work with Parliament to implement common standards for the categories of information we mention in this paragraph, so as to improve the flow of information between Government and Parliament and to enhance the public's ability to re-use that information (paragraph 78).
134. We call on the Government to start producing Bills in an electronic format which both complies with "open standards" and is readily re-usable (paragraph 79).
135. In relation to Bills, we also recommend that, for each Government Bill that significantly amends an earlier Act, the Government should produce an accompanying informal document to show the original legislation and how the Bill would change it (paragraph 80).
136. We recommend that the Government produce these documents as a matter of course before the Second Reading of a Bill in the House of Lords and that the House make them publicly available via the Bill pages of the parliamentary website (paragraph 80).
137. We ask the Government to explain how and within what timescale our recommendations will be incorporated into the work that Sir Tim Berners-Lee will lead on opening access to data (paragraph 81).
138. We recommend that there should be a trial period in the Lords in the 2009–10 parliamentary session during which divisions are recorded (paragraph 83).
139. We recommend that there should be greater access to the House of Lords for factual filming (paragraph 89).
140. We recommend that the administration revise the leaflet setting out the regulations governing filming (paragraph 89).
141. We recommend that a more appropriate room be assigned for interviews (paragraph 89).
142. We recommend that all public meetings of Lords committees be webcast with video as well as audio (paragraph 92).
143. We recommend that the parliamentary website provide contextual information alongside webcast House of Lords proceedings (paragraph 92).
144. We recommend a review of the parliamentary language used in the House of Lords to make it easier for people outside the House to understand our proceedings (paragraph 104).
145. We recommend that the House of Lords administration invite officials in the Commons to work with them to develop a Parliament-wide strategy for improving access for people with disabilities (including learning disabilities and mental health issues) both to Parliament and to parliamentary information (paragraph 114).

### **Actions arising from our recommendations**

146. Of course, recommendations alone don't change anything. What is needed is action. To this end, we call for changes to the governance arrangements for

the House of Lords information services, with a view to increasing member involvement. We have asked the Director for Information Services to draw up an action plan against which progress implementing our recommendations can be measured, detailing the deliverable activities for each recommendation and showing who is responsible for delivering them and by what date.

147. We have already started to act to make the House of Lords more open and transparent and we will do more in this direction over the coming year, as we show below. The Committee cannot, however, implement all of its recommendations. The ability to implement some of our recommendations lies with other committees within the House or with the Government. What follows explains who can act to realise our recommendations.

#### **Actions the Committee has already taken:**

- We have approved members uploading their contributions to the House's proceedings onto YouTube.
- We have looked at a pilot demonstrator integrating video and Lords Hansard, which would enable users to watch, listen to and read a past debate on the same screen at the same time, and decided that development should continue with a view to offering a full service to the public by summer 2010.
- We have invited the Director of Information Services to bring forward proposals by the end of the year for establishing a database of members' areas of expertise and interest.

#### **Actions the Committee will take:**

- We will consider the practicalities of running a pilot exercise in which an online debate for the public would run in parallel with a debate in the Lords Chamber.
- We will consider options for working with partner organisations to develop online pupil parliaments and spaces for themed topic-based discussions for young people.
- We will periodically review progress towards information and documentation related to the core work of the House of Lords being produced and made available online in an open standardised electronic format that enables people outside Parliament to analyse and re-use the data.
- In December 2009, we will review progress towards the integration of the various information sets (such as Bills, Hansard, records of divisions, the register of Lords' interests) on the parliamentary website.
- Later this year, we will review the arrangements for broadcasting Lords proceedings to make the footage more engaging.
- We will invite the House to agree that there should be a trial period in the 2009–10 parliamentary session during which divisions in the Lords are recorded from within the division lobbies.

- We will write to the Chairman of the Press Gallery to propose that the House of Lords offers information sessions to members of the press gallery.
- We will later this year examine how the House might best inform the public accurately and impartially about how the House amends particular items of legislation. We will at the same time examine the case for the House producing an accurate and impartial summary of debates and consider the various issues involved.
- We will consider proposals for a strategy to improve access for people with disabilities (including learning disabilities and mental health issues) to parliamentary information.
- We will, within two years, review the implementation of our recommendations in this report.

#### **Actions the Committee recommends the House Committee should take:**

- We recommend that the House Committee continue the travel subsidy offered to state schools outside the South-East visiting Parliament through the Education Service.

#### **Actions the Committee recommends the Administration and Works Committee should take:**

- We recommend that the Administration and Works Committee allow greater access to the House of Lords for factual filming.
- We recommend that the Administration and Works Committee review the leaflet setting out the regulations governing photography, filming, sound recording, painting, sketching, mobile telephones and pagers and produce a revised version.
- We recommend that the Administration and Works Committee assign a more appropriate room for interviews.

#### **Actions the Committee recommends the Government should take:**

- We recommend that the Government should work with Parliament to implement common information standards so as to improve the flow of information between Government and Parliament and to enhance the public's ability to re-use that information.
- We recommend that the Government produce its bills in an electronic format which both complies with "open standards" and is readily re-usable.
- We recommend that, for each Government Bill that significantly amends an earlier Act, the Government produce as a matter of course an accompanying informal document to show the original legislation and how the Bill would change it.

## **APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION COMMITTEE**

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The members of the Committee which conducted this inquiry were:

Baroness Billingham  
Baroness Coussins  
Earl of Erroll  
Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen  
Lord Jones of Cheltenham  
Lord Kalms  
Lord Methuen  
Baroness Prosser  
Lord Puttnam  
Lord Renton of Mount Harry (Chairman)  
Lord St John of Blesto  
Lord Selsdon  
Lord Taylor of Warwick

### **Declarations of Interest**

A Full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords Interests:  
<http://pubs1.tso.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg/reg01.htm>

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Those marked \*\* gave both oral and written evidence; those marked \* gave oral evidence only; those without an asterisk gave written evidence only.

- Lord Avebury
- \*\* BBC
- \* Bede Sixth Form
- Bevan Brittan LLP
- \* David Bowen, Bowen Craggs
- \* The Cabinet Office
- Lord Cameron of Dillington
- Channel 4
- Comment Technologies
- Community Service Volunteers
- Debategraph
- Debatewise
- Andrew Dismore MP
- Lord Elton
- \* Essex Library Service, Essex County Council
- Fawcett Society
- Lord Feldman
- Five News
- \* Ivor Gormley
- Group on Information for the Public
- \* The Guardian
- \* Ben Hammersley, Wired UK
- \*\* Hansard Society
- \* Tim Hood, Yoosk
- House of Lords Outreach and Engagement Programme
- Lord Howe of Aberavon
- Lord Hunt of Chesterton
- Involve
- \*\* ITN
- \*\* ITV Regions
- Dr Nigel Jackson
- Lord Leach of Fairford
- Lord Lipsey

- ★ Tom Loosemore, 4iP  
Simon McManus
- ★ The Mirror
- ★ National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)  
National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI)  
Professor Ralph Negrine
- ★★ Lord Norton of Louth  
Novas Scarman  
Optimum Communications Development Ltd  
Parliamentary Information and Communications Department (PICT)
- ★ Quintin Kynaston School
- ★ Rethink  
Rufus Leonard  
Dr Meg Russell
- ★ Skinners' Company's School for Girls
- ★★ Sky News  
Baroness Thomas of Winchester
- ★ The Times
- ★ UK Youth Parliament  
Lord Vinson
- ★ Wolverhampton Express and Star

### APPENDIX 3: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

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The House of Lords Information Committee is conducting an inquiry to investigate how the House of Lords, in the context of Parliament, could relate better to the public.

The inquiry has two aims:

- to evaluate progress made since the reports of the House of Commons Modernisation Committee (*Connecting Parliament with the public*, June 2004), the ‘Puttnam Commission’ (*Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye*, Hansard Society Commission, May 2005), and the consequent first business plan of Parliament’s Group on Information for the Public (2006); and
- to consider improvements to how the House of Lords / Parliament can engage with the public and enable members of the public to communicate with it.

The Committee’s inquiry will focus on three issues, on which it is inviting written submissions:

- (1) outreach;
- (2) online communication and engagement, including [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) and channels such as social media sites; and
- (3) press, media and broadcasting.

The Committee would, in particular, welcome responses to the following questions:

#### Outreach

What more could be done to enhance the effectiveness of the outreach work of the House of Lords / Parliament?

What outreach activities would be most successful in engaging people with the work and Members of the House of Lords?

What are the strengths of the outreach programmes of the House of Lords/Parliament? Is there anything we should be doing differently?

The Parliamentary outreach service launched its programme of regional workshops and information sessions in July 2008. What has been the impact of this new service? As Parliament’s outreach programme expands, are there any additional activities that you think should be considered? Where or by what can the service most add value?

Are there sufficient routes for the public to make their views known to Members of the House of Lords?

#### Online communication and engagement

Over the past four years, Parliament has made considerable investment in the use of online communication channels, including the parliamentary website and social media tools. The website has been redesigned, services such as bills online have been enhanced, and other new services like Twitter and Flickr have been introduced alongside initiatives like [www.lordsoftheblog.net](http://www.lordsoftheblog.net).

What has worked well and enabled better engagement between Parliament and the public?

What else should we be doing to deliver further improvements?

How would you like to be able to interact online with Members of the House?

What more should the House of Lords / Parliament do to embrace social media and Web 2.0 technologies?

### **Press**

How can we best encourage media reporting of the work of the House of Lords?

What does the press and media need from the House to support a goal of fuller coverage of its work?

What measures could the House take to help journalists to report the work of the House in a fresh and engaging fashion?

Is there demand for a formal induction about the House of Lords for journalists joining the press gallery?

Is there demand for further easing of restrictions on the number of parliamentary passes for media outlets?

Is there demand for the House of Lords to provide a 24-hour media service? How is such an operation provided in comparable organisations?

### **Broadcasting**

What has been the effect of changes to the rules of coverage on broadcasting proceedings of the House?

What has been the effect of changes to the rules on filming within the precincts of Parliament?

How could the House of Lords work with broadcasters to make footage of parliamentary proceeding more accessible and engaging for the public?

What do broadcasters need from the House to support a goal of fuller coverage of its work?

What has been the effect of the expansion of webcasting?

Should the House be contextualising coverage of its proceedings on the web (e.g. by providing further information on the Member speaking and the subject of the debate)?