



# SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS: THE ROLE OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS IN CLIMATE ACTION



Peers for the Planet was launched in the House of Lords in January 2020 with the support of Sir David Attenborough. The Group was the idea of its Co-Chairs, Baroness Helene Hayman, who used to oversee proceedings in the Lords as the ‘Lord Speaker’, and Baroness Bryony Worthington, who was the lead author of the UK Climate Change Act. Both Peers felt that there was more that Parliamentarians could be doing to tackle climate change and could see the potential for Peers to overcome party divides to work collaboratively on a cross-party basis. Peers for the Planet now brings together over a hundred

Members of the House of Lords from across the political parties who are concerned about the twin threats of climate change and bio-diversity loss and agree that there must be urgent action this decade to meet the targets laid out in the Paris Agreement and the Climate Change Act.

## The House of Lords

Members of the Lords have professional experience and expertise in their fields. They put this knowledge to good use when looking at issues in the Chamber or in committee work.

There are several key differences between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. A couple of these are:

- Unlike the House of Commons, where Members are elected as MPs, most Members of the House of Lords (Peers) are appointed for life. This gives them a longevity of view, as most have transcended many different Governments and know from experience what is likely to work, and what is not.
- In the Lords no one party has a majority, and the second largest group is the Crossbenchers, who have no party affiliation - i.e. are ‘independent’ from any one party’s view. This means that for bills (and amendments) to pass there needs to be a cross-party consensus. This makes the Lords a good place to find agreement around difficult issues like climate change. Most of the work in Parliament is related to legislation. Legislation is a term that applies to work that goes into making a law. Each law in the UK starts life as a bill. A bill can start in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords and it must be agreed by both Houses before it can become an Act of Parliament – another term for a law.

### Government

These benches are made up of members who represent the governing party or parties.

### Government Front Bench

This is where ministers and government spokespeople sit.

### Lord Speaker

The Lord Speaker chairs business in the chamber, is elected by members and is politically impartial. The House is self-regulating, all its members are responsible for ensuring the rules are followed: the Lord Speaker cannot call members to order, decide who speaks next or select which amendments are debated.



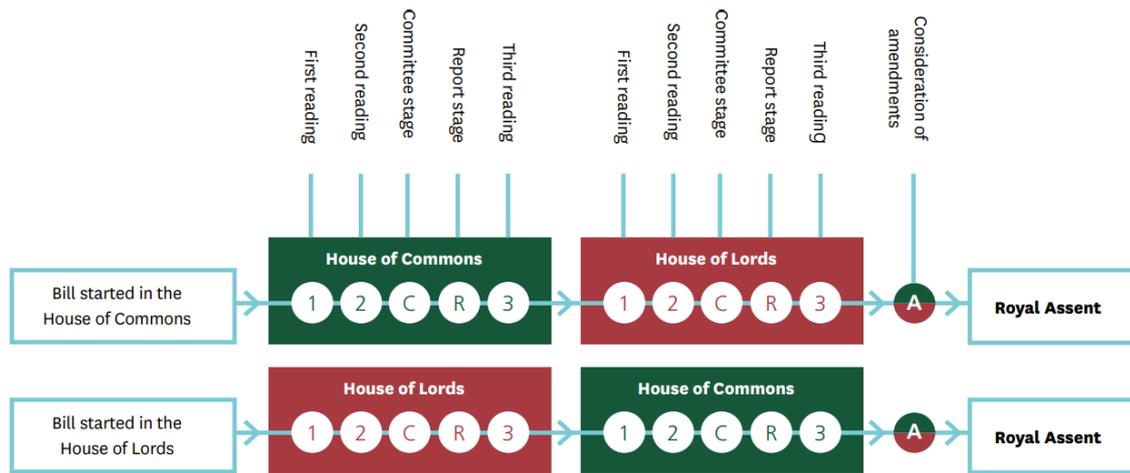
### Crossbenchers

Crossbench members are independent of the main political parties.

### Opposition

Members from the main Opposition party and other parties sit on the benches opposite the government.

**This graphic outlines the different stages of a bill.**



**Stages of a bill - explanation**

- 1 Bill is published
- 2 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Main principles of a bill are debated
- C Committee: Bill is considered in detail (some voting on amendments)
- R Report: Amendments and votes
- 3 3<sup>rd</sup> Reading: Mainly ‘tidying’ amendments
- A Ping Pong: Bill goes between Lords and Commons until the contents are agreed
- Royal Assent Bill becomes an Act - it is now law

The best way to ensure a change becomes permanent is to make it part of a law. If something is part of the law it means the Government must carry out what the law says. An example of this is the independent Committee on Climate Change (CCC) which advises Government and Parliament on how the UK can reach net-zero emissions. The CCC was only established as it, and the job it does, was made part of the law in the 2008 Climate Change Act.

Peers for the Planet tries to get cross party support for amendments to bills to make them more climate friendly. Although there are obvious ones like the Environment Bill or Agriculture Bill, which are directly related to the environment, legislation on many issues, for example on finance, pensions, health, education, defence, transport or trade, can often be made more climate friendly. As well as taking part in debates, Peers often have private meetings with the Government to voice their concerns and to try and convince them to change their draft laws.

**Questions, debates and committees**

Legislation is not the only tool that Peers have to make change happen. They also scrutinise Government policy and hold Government to account by asking questions and setting out arguments in debates. Peers also work in committees to look at social, economic and environmental challenges in details and make recommendations to the Government on how policies and laws need to change. Finally, Peers can draw on evidence and arguments from experts and civic groups, including scientists, academics, and NGOs. Climate change is an area where hearing a wide range of views is especially important, in order to ensure that laws and policies are fair for everyone.

To find out more about Parliament, [click here](#).