

House of Lords Appointments Commission

Annual Report 2024/25

HOUSE OF LORDS

APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

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Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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Dear Prime Minister,

I enclose the twelfth report from the House of Lords Appointments Commission, covering the Commission's work during 2024 up until 31 March 2025, with the intention that these reports will span a single financial year going forward.

This has been a particularly busy period for the Commission, spanning a general election and the increased volume of peerage appointments typically associated with it. This has included three political peerage lists, including the dissolution of parliament list, as well as a number of ministerial peerage appointments to support your incoming government.

The Commission has continued to vet, for propriety, individuals nominated by the political parties and by you, as Prime Minister, for appointment to the House of Lords. During the reporting period, the Commission has vetted a total of 76 individuals who were subsequently appointed as peers on the political benches in the House of Lords, as well as a further 4 crossbench nominations; 2 Prime Ministerial public service crossbench exceptions (nominated by your predecessor) and 2 HOLAC non-party political appointments. With the current reform measures affecting the composition of the House, the Commission would welcome any opportunities to be involved in conversations relating to the future of the crossbenches.

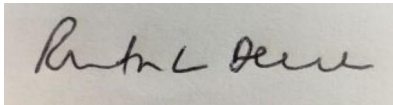
As with previous iterations, this report sets out how the primary functions of the Commission have been delivered during the reporting period, as well as providing important policy updates and transparency information. Specifically, we would like highlight the following key achievements:

- Recommended for appointment Lord Tarassenko and Baroness Freeman, providing valuable expertise to the House in machine learning and the communication of science.
- Pushed for the provision of further information about individuals being put forward for party political peerages, including greater assurances from

nominating parties before a name is submitted for vetting. This has led to the welcome decision by your government to publish nominee citations.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues for their diligence, wisdom and commitment in carrying out this vital work under increasing public scrutiny. I would like to particularly thank Lord Chartres and Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, who have gone beyond their original terms to support the Commission and continue to offer their expert guidance and insight.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ruth L. O'Connell', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Chair, House of Lords Appointments Commission

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Composition of the Commission

Since 2000, the Commission has been majority independent, with representation from three political parties, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat. The independent members, including the Chair, are appointed following fair and transparent competition under the Cabinet Office Governance Code on Public Appointments. Since the appointment of Wayne Reynolds and Sir Hugh Robertson in December 2023, the Commission has operated with eight members.

In anticipation of the end of the five year terms of Lord Chartres and Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, the Commission began recruiting for two new independent members. This campaign was subsequently paused and re-run following the general election, and it is expected that this will conclude in 2025, with the two current members agreeing to extend their terms in the interim. The Commission has been disappointed in the length of time that this process has taken, and that these two members will be asked to continue in post over a year beyond their original terms. The Commission will also be seeking a new Liberal Democrat member following the conclusion of Baroness Parminter's term on 31 May 2025.

Biographies for all Commission members can be found at **Annex A**.

Appointments

Political appointments

During the reporting period, the Commission carried out vetting for three peerage lists. This included a political list in February 2024 and a dissolution peerage list in July 2024, both at the request of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, as well as an additional political list in December 2024 at the request of Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer. As part of the dissolution peerage list, Prime Minister Sunak also put forward two Prime Ministerial public service crossbench exceptions.

While the Commission does not comment on the details of vetting advice it provides to the Prime Minister, we are transparent about the number of individuals vetted, including how many individuals were not supported. For the lists highlighted above, the following table outlines the number of individuals supported/not supported by the Commission:

| Peerage List | Number of Individuals supported (and subsequently appointed) | Number of individuals not supported | Number of individuals withdrawn or for whom vetting could not be completed ¹ |
|---------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| February 2024 | 13 | 1 | <5 |
| July 2024 | 19* | 2 | <5 |
| December 2024 | 38 | 1 | <5 |

*Including two Prime Ministerial public service crossbench exceptions

In addition to the 70 appointments included in the above three lists, the Prime Minister has made a further 8 ministerial peerage appointments (1 by PM Sunak, 7 by PM Starmer). Of the total number of political appointments, 49 were made by the Labour Party, 22 by the Conservative Party, 3 by the Liberal Democrat Party, 1 by the Ulster Unionist Party and 1 by Plaid Cymru. All the appointments made during the reporting period can be found at **Annex B**.

Crossbench appointments

During the reporting period, the commission made two HOLAC non-party-political (crossbench) recommendations, who were subsequently appointed. These were:

- **Dr Alexandra Freeman**, a filmmaker, and expert in the communication of science, evidence and risk; and
- **Professor Lionel Tarassenko CBE**, a British engineer and academic, who is an expert in the application of signal processing and machine learning to healthcare.

Further details on the relevant experience of these two individuals was published² on the Commission's website as part of the press release announcing their appointments.

The Commission continues to receive a high volume of highly qualified applicants, and takes great pride in being able to recommend exceptional individuals to serve on the crossbenches. The Commission is mindful of the size of the House, but would also welcome the opportunity to make further appointments through this

¹ Given the low numbers involved, specific figures have not been provided to ensure individuals cannot be identified.

²<https://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-05-07-HOLAC-N-on-party-peers-press-release.pdf>

process. During the reporting period, an additional 379 applications were received, on top of the backlog of applications that has built up due to the limited number of recommendations the Commission has been invited to make in recent years.

There is an intense level of competition in the non party political application process which unfortunately results in a number of outstanding applicants the Commission cannot take forward. Since the beginning of 2020, there have been 166 political appointments and 22 crossbench life peerage appointments; 16 of these have been Prime Ministerial exceptions, with only 6 being recommended by HOLAC.

Policy Updates

Revised political forms

In March 2024, Baroness Deech wrote³ to the Party leaders to reiterate the importance of considering the Principles of Public Life when putting forward peerage nominations, as the Commission is only able to make an assessment on the propriety, not suitability, of political nominees. Alongside this, revised forms were provided to lay out more clearly the requirements and declarations needed from both new nominees and the political parties. This provides greater assurance of the checks carried out by the parties prior to HOLAC receiving any nominations, and hence greater accountability for the nominating party.

Citations

In December 2024, it was agreed that the nominating party for all political nominations would now be required to provide a citation for each individual put forward, to be published alongside their announcement. This was intended to provide greater transparency around the reasons for an individual's ennoblement, and provide the public with a summary of why an individual has been nominated. A document was provided to outline the expectations for these citations, which was subsequently published⁴ on the Commission's website. This brings the process more in line with that of higher awards within the honours system, as well as with that of the HOLAC crossbench recommendations.

³<https://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-03-26-Chair-of-HOLAC-to-party-leaders-new-forms-and-propriety.pdf>

⁴<https://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-12-05-Citation-guidance-for-political-parties.docx.pdf>

Recusal policy

As highlighted above, HOLAC includes members from across the political spectrum, meaning many of the political nominations put forward may be known to some of the members. To ensure there is no perceived conflict of interests during the vetting process, the Commission published⁵ its recusal policy clearly outlining how members are expected to handle the vetting of friends and colleagues, and ensuring that these are all appropriately declared during Commission meetings.

⁵ <https://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/declaration-and-recusal-policy>

Openness and transparency

Expenditure

As the Commission aims to report on an annual basis, expenditure will be reported for the financial year ending on 31 March 2025, coinciding with the publication of the report. Hence, the below information refers to the Commission's expenditure for the financial year 24/25:

- The Commission's total expenditure during the financial year 24/25 was £61,736.98 .
- Commission members' remuneration throughout this period was fixed at £8,000 for the Chair and £3,000 for the other members. The total members' remuneration was £29,000.
- Expenditure figures also included independent press officer fees, as the Commission continues to see considerable interest in its work, both from the media and members of the public.
- Other expenses included IT work, including the general maintenance of the Commission's website, and fees charged for the completion of vetting checks.

Freedom of information

The Commission continues to publish⁶ the Freedom of Information requests it receives as well as the Commission's responses on its website. During the reporting period the Commission responded to 25 requests. These covered queries relating to information about the vetting of various individuals, requests for the citations of previously appointed peers (following the First Tier Tribunal decision highlighted below) and several procurement and staffing questions.

A common issue raised is the public interest in understanding the specific details around vetting of peerage appointments. The Commission is clear that any information it obtains during this vetting process is for the sole purpose of providing confidential advice on the propriety of a nominee to the Prime Minister. There are a number of exemptions in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 that protect or may restrict disclosure of such information on the grounds of data protection, confidentiality, or other factors. It is vital to the integrity of the process that such information is held in strict confidence.

⁶ <https://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/freedomofinformation>

It should also be noted that while the Commission is an independent body, information relating to its staffing and financial data is held by our sponsoring department, the Cabinet Office. For this reason, any requests of this nature are redirected to the sponsor department.

First Tier Tribunal decision

In 2023, the Commission was asked to provide all of the information held on two individuals who had been appointed as peers, Ross Kempsey and Charlotte Owen. In line with previous responses, the Commission argued that the information held was exempt under section 37(1)(b) of FOIA 2000, and maintained this position in the subsequent internal review. The decision was referred to the Information Commissioner, where again the Commission's position was upheld, at which point it was appealed to the First Tier Tribunal.

Following a hearing in October 2024, the Tribunal published⁷ its Decision Notice in December 2024, determining that the appeal was allowed in part and dismissed in part. It instructed the Commission to release the citations for the two individuals in question, but that all other documents in scope should remain exempt. HOLAC had argued that this information was provided in confidence, and that this was not their data to give out, but broadly supports the position that the reasons for an individual being put forward should be made public (as the Commission does for all HOLAC crossbenchers). As the government has now agreed to publish citations, and in line with the tribunal decision, the Commission has agreed to release a number of other citations that have been requested through separate FOI requests. It is also our view that this decision notice supported our longstanding position that the confidential vetting information of individuals (beyond the reason for their nomination) is exempt under FOIA.

⁷ <https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukftt/grc/2024/1132>

Annexes

Annex A - Commissioner Biographies

Independent members

Baroness (Ruth) Deech (Chair, independent)

Baroness Deech taught law for many years at Oxford University and elsewhere, has written extensively about family law, and was appointed an honorary King's Counsel. She was Principal of St Anne's College Oxford and a Pro Vice-Chancellor. She took on extensive regulatory roles including Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which oversees assisted reproduction; Chair of the Bar Standards Board, which sets standards of conduct for barristers and their training; and was the first Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, dealing with student complaints. She has also been a Governor of the BBC, a trustee of the Rhodes Scholarships and the Mandela-Rhodes Foundation and a Bencher of the Inner Temple. She was appointed DBE in 2003 and as a life peer in 2005. She sits on the crossbenches as an independent legislator and has chaired committees reporting on the retention of women doctors and on equality and disability.

Rt Rev and Rt Hon the Lord (Richard) Chartres GCVO (Independent)

Lord Chartres is a Crossbench Peer. He is the former Bishop of London and held a number of wider roles during that time, including as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners.

Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle DBE (Independent)

Dame Fionnuala is the current Lord-Lieutenant of the County Borough of Belfast, the Vice Chair of Northern Ireland Opera and she founded The Belfast Buildings Trust, Northern Ireland's leading Regeneration charity. She has been involved in public and voluntary service for many years.

Wayne Reynolds (Independent)

Mr Reynolds is the Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Taylor Birchwood, an executive search company specialising in corporate affairs, investor relations and adjacent disciplines. He helps a wide range of organisations across the public and private sectors to run fair and thorough recruitment processes which promote equity, diversity and inclusion.

The Rt Hon Sir Hugh Robertson KCMG DL (Independent)

Sir Hugh is Chair of Birmingham International Airport, Chair of the British Olympic Association and an Independent Non Executive at Deloitte. A former soldier, who subsequently worked at Schroders, he was a government minister from 2010 –

2015. He has just completed two full terms as Chair of the Sports Honours Committee and is a member of the Gentlemen at Arms in The Royal Household.

Political members

The Baroness (Sheila) Noakes DBE (Conservative)

Baroness Noakes DBE was made a life peer in 2000. In 2001, she served as the Opposition Spokesperson for Work and Pension and Health, in 2003 serving as the Opposition Spokesperson for The Treasury, before working on a number of Lords Committees. Prior to becoming a peer she served as a Partner at KPMG, Director of Finance of the NHS Management Executive and a member of the Court of the Bank of England (Director of the Bank of England). She currently sits on the House of Lords Financial Services Regulation Committee.

The Baroness (Kate) Parminter (Liberal Democrat)

Baroness Parminter was created a life peer in July 2010 and sits on the Liberal Democrat benches. She chaired the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee from 2021-2024. Prior to becoming a peer she worked in charities involved with the environment and animal welfare. She was also a Councillor on Horsham District council for eight years.

The Right Hon Baroness (Ann) Taylor of Bolton (Labour)

Baroness Taylor of Bolton was the first woman to serve as Leader of the House of Commons and Lord President of the Privy Council in 1997. She went on to become the first woman to serve as Government Chief Whip (Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury). Baroness Taylor is the former MP for Bolton West (1974 – 1983) and Dewsbury (1987 – 2005) and was made a Life Peer in 2005. She currently sits on the Industry Regulators Committee, Procedure and Privileges Committee, and the Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House.

Annex B - Individuals vetted and subsequently appointed

Labour

February 2024

Ayesha Hazarika MBE
Jane Ramsey
Gerald Shamash
John Hannett OBE

July 2024

The Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett GBE
John Cryer
The Rt Hon Harriet Harman KC
The Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge DBE
The Rt Hon Kevan Jones
Barbara Keeley
The Rt Hon John Spellar
The Rt Hon Dame Rosie Winterton DBE

December 2024

Wendy Alexander
Sir Brendan Barber
Luciana Berger
Mary Bousted
Kevin Brennan
Lyn Brown
Dinah Caine CBE
Kay Carberry CBE
Margaret Curran
Thangam Debbonaire
Julie Elliott
David Evans
Sue Gray
Theresa Griffin
Anji Hunter
Carwyn Jones
Mike Katz
Gerard Lemos CMG CBE
Alison Levitt KC
Anne Longfield CBE
Deborah Mattinson
Steve McCabe

Claude Moraes OBE
Wendy Nichols
Simon Pitkeathley
Dame Anne Marie Rafferty DBE
Krish Raval OBE
Marvin Rees OBE
Russell Rook OBE
Phil Wilson

Conservative

February 2024

Charles Banner KC
Franck Petitgas
Peter Booth
John Fuller OBE
Stuart Marks CBE
Paul Goodman
James Jamieson
Rosa Monckton MBE

July 2024

The Rt Hon Sir Graham Brady
The Rt Hon Chris Grayling
The Rt Hon Dame Eleanor Laing DBE
Craig Mackinlay JP
The Rt Hon Theresa May
The Rt Hon Sir Alok Sharma KCMG
Liam Booth-Smith

December 2024

Nigel Biggar CBE
Joanne Cash
The Rt Hon Dame Thérèse Coffey DBE
Roger Evans
Rachel Maclean
Toby Young

Liberal Democrat

July 2024

Caroline Pidgeon MBE

December 2024

Shaffaq Mohammad MBE
Mark Pack

Plaid Cymru

February 2024

Carmen Smith

UUP

July 2024

Thomas Elliott

Ministerial appointments

Conservative

March 2024

Donald Cameron

Labour

July 2024

Sir Patrick Vallance KCB
The Rt Hon Jacqui Smith
James Timpson OBE
Richard Hermer KC
The Rt Hon David Hanson

October 2024

Catherine Smith KC

November 2024

Poppy Gustaffson CBE

Prime Minister's exceptions

July 2024

Minette Batters
Hilary Cass OBE

Non-party-political peers recommended by the Appointments Commission

May 2024

Alexandra Freeman
Lionel Tarassenko CBE