



Cat Smith MP
Chair of the Procedure Committee
House of Commons

20 June 2025

Dear Cat,

Thank you for your letter of 12 June to the Lord Speaker, of which I received a copy. The Lord Speaker has asked me to reply on his behalf as Chair of the Lords Procedure and Privileges Committee. I have consulted the Government Whips' Office who are responsible for the processes around Speaker's Lists, and the Government Chief Whip has kindly provided an annex to this letter, setting out the associated procedures addressing the particular questions you raise. Speakers' Lists are *not* used at question time.

I hope this is helpful. Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to get in touch. I look forward to seeing the outcome of your inquiry.

I am copying this letter to the Lord Speaker, Baroness Smith of Basildon, Lord Kennedy of Southwark, Lord True and Baroness Williams of Trafford.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble
Senior Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Procedure and Privileges Committee

Note from Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Government Chief Whip) on Lords Speaker's Lists

Speakers lists have been used in the Lords since the 1960s. The type of business they are applied to has varied, particularly during Covid-19 when they were extended to oral questions, urgent business and SIs (a practice that no longer applies). All management of the lists however (including signing up, ordering etc) is overseen by the Government Whips Office and civil servants, with more detail on how this works in response to your questions below.

Current application - Speaker's lists are used for:

- General debates (Government or other Peer led), whether formally time limited or not;
- Questions for short debate; and
- Second Readings of Government and Private Members Bills.

*They are **not** used for:*

- Amending stages of legislation;
- Secondary legislation debates (even on "take note" motions in relation to an statutory instrument);
- Oral questions;
- Urgent business (either PNQs, or repeated business from the Commons) or
- Normally, House-related business (Conduct, Commission, Procedure Committee report etc). (In exceptional circumstances, some House motions may have lists by agreement of the Usual Channels.)

How members sign up, and lists close

- Members can sign up on the Government Whips website: <https://www.lordswhips.org.uk/speakers-lists>. All Members have their own log in. The website is owned and managed by the GWO team.
- They can also email or call the Whips Office, or attend in person, and a member of the team will sign them up.
- They can only choose to participate virtually if they are on a small named list of Peers who are granted virtual participation by the Additional Support Group (comprising the Senior Deputy Speaker as Chair, the three Chief Whips and Convenor of the Crossbench Peers).
- The lists close two working days before a debate, at 5pm Monday - Thursday, and 4pm on Fridays. On very rare occasions, the Whips Office may agree to keep a list open longer (e.g. urgent debates arranged at short notice), but this does not happen often.

How are they ordered

- The Whips Office coordinate suggested orders from each party office / group in the Usual Channels the day before the debate, but have the ultimate final decision on how a list is ordered.
- Generally debates follow a "standard" order / convention in that after frontbench openers the list will rotate around the House e.g: Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem, Crossbench, Other Peers, where possible and numbers are balanced.
- Each group's peers are placed in the order their group suggests. There is always room for Frontbench winders before the Minister from the Lib Dems and Conservatives.

How they are published

- The list is online for anyone to see in live time - before it closes and is ordered, Peers who have signed up to speak will appear in alphabetical order.
- The final list of Peers signed up to speak is circulated by the Government Whips Office, in alphabetical order, when the list closes, along with the advisory or absolute speaking time limit.
- The Usual Channels then order speakers from their group the day before the debate, and the final ordered speakers list is published on today's list at least an hour before the House sits. This is the first time Peers see the final ordered list as there are often last minute withdrawals from the list (known as 'scratchers') or changes before publication.

How the list is used in the Chamber

- As a self regulating House, save for the member leading the debate, individual Peers are not called in debates. The debate will proceed with each Peer speaking after the Member on the list before them.

Other things to note:

- **If someone misses the deadline:** We do not allow Peers to join the list after the deadline, but they can still speak in the debate in any gap between the last backbench speaker and the first frontbench winder (if there is time within any time limits in the debate and provided they were present at the beginning of the debate). They have to alert the Table, and Whips (to agree they can) if they wish to speak in the gap.
- Peers can choose to "scratch" from the list, but they cannot be removed by the Whips office without their prior consent. They will only be removed without their consent, but with the agreement of the Usual Channels in the Chamber, if they miss the beginning of the debate in line with the conventions of the House.
- Peers are still expected to remain in the debate for the openers, winders, speeches before and after their speech, and the best part of the wider general debate.

Finally, you asked for reflections on any issues the system presents. Generally it works well, and is in keeping with the overall procedures of self-regulation in the House of Lords. We have well established conventions and precedents for how lists are ordered. We have been asked previously whether lists could be published earlier, but we have advised against this given the extensive changes we find from scratchers up until just before the House sits, which would lead to reissuing of the list and potential confusion about the correct version.

LORD KENNEDY OF SOUTHWARK