

Procedure Committee

Status of independent Members of Parliament

Third Report of Session 2024–25

HC 534

Procedure Committee

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The powers of the Committee are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 147. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 16 July 2025, to be printed. It was published on 22 July 2025 by authority of the House of Commons.
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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Procedure Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3351 / 0207 219 0969 / CommonsPressOffice@parliament.uk (Media enquiries) / 18001 020 7219 3351 (text relay); the Committee's email address is proccom@parliament.uk. You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsProcCom](https://twitter.com/CommonsProcCom) and on Bluesky using [@CommonsProcCom.parliament.uk](https://bsky.app/profile/CommonsProcCom.parliament.uk).

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Summary

The increase in the number of independent Members of Parliament elected to the House of Commons following the 2024 General Election, and the decision of some of those Members to form a ‘technical group’, has prompted questions as to the procedural status of such groupings, and the status of independent MPs more broadly.

In contrast to some legislatures, such as the Irish Parliament, the Standing Orders of the House of Commons give little formal recognition to political parties or to organised groups of individual MPs. Each MP is an elected representative from their respective constituency, and is deemed to be acting individually in the discharge of their duties. Evidence we heard suggested that independent Members can broadly exercise the same rights and opportunities within the Commons as Members who are part of a political party, but that they may require additional support in doing so. Whilst we commend the significant levels of high-quality support and training provided to new Members by the House Administration, we recommend that, prior to the next General Election, this offer should be reviewed to ensure that sessions and resources meet the particular needs of new Members who are elected as independents.

In respect of the decision of some independent Members to form what they termed a ‘technical group’, we wish to clarify that the concept of a ‘technical group’ is unknown in our parliamentary democracy and has no status within the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

A number of matters would require consideration and clarification prior to extending the rights and privileges of smaller political parties to a so called ‘technical group’. Outside the House, unlike registered political parties, such groups are not subject to the statutory framework which establishes financial regulation and other responsibilities relating to transparency. Within the House, extending the rights and privileges of smaller parties to ‘technical groups’ would not necessarily be a straightforward exercise; the rights of smaller parties are governed primarily by convention rather than by Standing Order, and it was put to us that, prior to considering the status of ‘technical groups’, consideration should be given as to the status of smaller parliamentary parties and whether this ought to be further clarified.

The evolution of the rights and privileges provided to political parties and ‘technical groups’ in the Irish Parliament demonstrates that a flexible approach to this matter is required. We consider that it would

be premature to recommend the extension of conventions applicable to small parties to ‘technical groups’ without a more detailed consideration as to what precisely the rights of small parties are in the first instance. However, a more formal codification of the rights of smaller parties would be a significant departure from the current practice and conventions of the House, requiring, for example, changes to the Standing Orders and consideration of the unfettered discretion of the Chair. We therefore recommend that no recognition should be afforded to ‘technical groups’ at this time, but that the House ought to be given an opportunity to express its view on formalising the rights of smaller parties, and that the House may wish to consider what should happen if a large number of independent MPs expressed a desire to collaborate as a ‘technical group’ upon their election.

In addition to the increase in the number of Members elected to the House as independent candidates, recent Parliaments have seen many more Members categorised as ‘independent’ on a temporary or permanent basis owing to the suspension, withdrawal or resignation of their party Whip. Some Members have questioned their description as ‘independent’ in official parliamentary records such as in Hansard and on the Parliament website, and we considered the question as to whether a descriptor such as ‘[Party name] (suspended)’ should be permitted.

We found that the use of such a descriptor would be problematic. It would be inconsistent with the rules that govern the use of registered party names on the ballot paper, and it lacked support amongst the parties themselves. Furthermore, the transition between a temporary and a permanent suspension, and the exact moment when this change in status occurs, is not always clearly demarcated. The use of any descriptor to more clearly distinguish Members who have been temporarily suspended from their party Whip would require a much more formal mechanism to indicate to the House Administration whether a loss of the Whip was intended to be temporary or permanent. All these issues taken together introduce a risk of inaccuracy, which we deem to be too high.

We understand, however, the concerns that the way in which party affiliation descriptors appear on the parliamentary website and on parliamentary papers could lead to confusion regarding the status of individual MPs who have had the Whip suspended temporarily or withdrawn permanently, or who have resigned the Whip, compared to those Members elected as independent candidates. We therefore recommend that the House Administration trial changes to the parliamentary website which would add clear information to describe the use of the category ‘independent’, and make the party affiliation history of each Member more prominent and easier to view for the public.

1 Background

1. Just over twice as many independent candidates stood in the 2024 general election than in 2019.¹ Six independent candidates were subsequently elected to the House of Commons in July 2024 - the highest number in modern history. On 2 September 2024, five of those Members informed the Speaker that they were forming what they termed a ‘technical group’ to be known as the Independent Alliance. Media reports on the formation of the Independent Alliance suggested that the ‘technical group’ had hoped to have more opportunity to choose debate topics and ask parliamentary questions.² The increase in the number of independent Members elected to the House of Commons, and the decision of some of those Members to form a so called ‘technical group’, has given rise to questions about the procedural status of such groupings, and the status of independent Members more broadly.
2. Whilst some Members are elected to the House as independent candidates, others are elected as a representative of a political party but are subsequently designated as ‘independent’ on a temporary or permanent basis owing to the suspension, withdrawal or resignation of their party Whip. Recent Parliaments have seen many more Members designated independent in such circumstances, with suspensions of the party Whip occurring more frequently now than in the past.³ Some Members have questioned their description as independent in official parliamentary records such as in Hansard and on the Parliament website.
3. At the outset, we wish to make clear that the concept of a ‘technical group’ is unknown in our parliamentary democracy, though the language reflects the practice in some other jurisdictions. For example, we discuss ‘technical groups’ in the context of the Irish Parliament (the Oireachtas) in Chapter Three of our Report. Throughout this Report, we will consider a ‘technical group’ to be a number of otherwise independent MPs working together for a common procedural aim or goal (e.g. to gain procedural benefits afforded to political parties), which is often why they are formed and how they

1 [2024 general election: Independents and minor parties](#); 459 independent candidates stood in the 2024 general election: just over twice as many as the 224 independent candidates that stood in the 2019 general election

2 BBC, [‘Corbyn forms new group with four pro-Gaza MPs’](#), 2 September 2024 [accessed 31 January 2025]

3 House of Commons Library, [MPs’ changes of party allegiance in the House of Commons since 1979](#), Research Briefing, 29 May 2024

operate in other jurisdictions which have such a concept. This should not be read as a tacit recognition or acceptance of the existence of ‘technical groups’ in the House of Commons.

Our inquiry

4. We launched our inquiry in December 2024 to examine whether and how the status of independent Members differs from those who sit as a representative of a political party, and whether and how the procedures and conventions of the Commons distinguish between political parties and other groupings of Members, such as the ‘technical group’ formed by five of those Members elected as independents. We also examined whether ‘independent’ is an applicable description of all possible circumstances Members may find themselves in (such as those that have temporarily lost their party Whip), or whether other descriptions could be foreseen and should be provided for. On 26 February 2025, we took oral evidence from Shockat Adam MP and Iqbal Mohamed MP, each of whom were elected as independent candidates and subsequently formed part of the Independent Alliance.⁴ We also took oral evidence from Ian Byrne MP and Rt Hon John McDonnell MP on the matter of how Members temporarily suspended from their party Whip are categorised on the Parliament website and in Hansard.⁵ We also received written submissions on these issues from several party Whips and Leaders. Beyond the House, we received written submissions from the Electoral Commission, the Hansard Society, and Dr Louise Thompson, a senior lecturer in politics at the University of Manchester who specialises in the rights of smaller parliamentary parties. We are grateful to all those who have provided evidence to our inquiry.
5. We were keen to learn more about the procedural status of independents and ‘technical groups’ within other legislatures, in order to see whether there could be any lessons learned from their experiences. In May 2025, we visited Dublin to examine the procedures and conventions that apply to independent TDs (Deputies to the Dáil) and ‘technical groups’ within Dáil Éireann, the lower house of the Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament), and how these procedures have evolved over time. We held meetings with politicians and officials in the Dáil, as well as with academics from Dublin City University. We wish to thank all those who assisted us with our inquiry during our visit in Dublin.

4 [Qq1–26](#)

5 [Qq27–48](#)

2 Status of independent Members of Parliament

6. Each Member of Parliament undertakes vital work in carrying out the core duties of the House of Commons. They are legislators; examining, considering and proposing the approval of new laws, or changes to existing law. They scrutinise the work of government, holding the executive to account through a range of means within and beyond the Chamber, and through work undertaken by House committees. They discuss and debate issues of both local and national interest, making representations and raising issues on behalf of their constituents. These functions are facilitated and governed by a broad spectrum of House procedures, practices and conventions. The recent increase in the number of independent candidates standing for election, and the electoral success of independent candidates in 2024, gives rise to the question as to whether or how the procedures of the House may distinguish between those Members elected as independents, and those elected as a representative of political party.
7. As noted in evidence we received from the Hansard Society, “[t]he Standing Orders and customs of the House of Commons give surprisingly little formal recognition to ‘political parties’, instead emphasising the formal equality of individual Members of Parliament”.⁶ While the UK constitution is based on a multi-party system, MPs are all ‘individual’ elected representatives from their respective constituencies and are deemed to be acting individually in the discharge of their duties. Those Standing Orders that do recognise political parties speak broadly in terms of ‘the government’, ‘the official Opposition’ and ‘the second largest opposition party’. The effect of these Standing Orders is to:
 - Allocate time for Opposition Day debates (Standing Order No. 14);
 - Permit extended speaking time during debates for frontbench Members of these groups (Standing Order No. 47); and

6 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#))

- Set out requirements regarding the allocation and nomination of select committee chairs, and the requirement at the start of each Parliament for the Speaker to inform each party leader of the proportion of select committee chairs allocated to each party (Standing Orders No. 122B and No. 122D).
8. The smaller parties (this is to say any party within the House that is neither in government, the official Opposition, nor the second largest opposition party) are not recognised in the Standing Orders, save in those Standing Orders which set out requirements for Members standing for certain elected positions to be nominated by Members of other parties than that to which they belong, or of no party,⁷ and relating to the operation of the Backbench Business Committee.⁸ The Standing Orders confer no additional rights or privileges to Members of these parties, either individually or collectively, and a relatively limited set of rights and privileges to those Members elected to a party in government, the official Opposition or the second largest opposition party. In terms of the Standing Orders, therefore, no distinction is made between an independent Member and a Member of a smaller party, and relatively little distinction is made again between an independent Member, a Member of a smaller party, and a Member of one of the three party groups explicitly referred to within the Standing Orders.
 9. In other legislatures, the procedural status of political parties and ‘technical groups’ is more clearly set out within Standing Orders, including the rights and privileges afforded by this status. During our visit to Dublin, we heard that for TDs within the Dáil, speaking rights in particular were more explicitly codified and linked to membership of a group of a certain size (see Box 1). We learned that the conceptualisation of groups and their rights within the Standing Orders of the Dáil meant that independent TDs generally believed that they could operate more effectively if they joined a ‘technical group’, notwithstanding the other opportunities open to all TDs to participate in proceedings. We heard that whilst independent TDs would usually first seek to form a ‘technical group’ with others of a similar political position, alliances of necessity, rather than necessarily political unity, were common and navigated as required.

7 See: Standing Order No. 1B(3)(b) (Election of Speaker by secret ballot); Standing Order No. 122B(8)(c) (Election of select committee chairs); and Standing Order No. 122D(1)(d) (Election of Chair of Backbench Business Committee).

8 See: Standing Order No. 152J(7).

Box 1: Recognition of groups and their rights within the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann

Standing Order 170. Groups

- (1) A group is a body of members in Opposition who may avail of the rights provided for in these Standing Orders for groups.
- (2) The minimum number of members required to be recognised as a group is five.
- (3) Where members of a registered political party are elected to the Dáil, those elected members are referred to in these Standing Orders as a “party”, and such a party is automatically recognised as a group where it has five members or more.
- (4) A body of members which includes any combination of the following categories of members—
 - (a) members of a party with five members or more,
 - (b) members of a party with fewer than five members,
 - (c) non-party members, may also be recognised as a group, and shall be referred to as a technical group.
- (5) A group may not include—
 - (i) a party which contains a Minister or Minister of State;
 - (ii) a member who is a Minister or Minister of State;
 - (iii) some of the members of a party but not the others.
- (6) A member of a technical group may not also be a member of another technical group.
- (7) There is no limit on the number of groups which may be recognised in a Dáil.

Standing Order 171. Rights of groups: members may not benefit “on the double”

- (1) Groups have the rights assigned to them in these Standing Orders in relation to—
 - (i) Leaders’ Questions,
 - (ii) Questions nominated for priority,
 - (iii) private members’ business,

- (iv) the opening speeches on the motion for the second reading of a Bill,
 - (v) the right to make a brief statement opposing a proposal on the Order of Business, and
 - (vi) such other rights as may be provided for groups in these Standing Orders.
- (2) A party which is automatically recognised as a group, and which has joined with other members to form a technical group, may only avail of those rights arising from its membership of a technical group.

Source: Dáil Éireann, [Standing Orders relative to Public Business](#), 2024 edition - 34th Dáil, in effect as of 7 April 2025

10. In the Commons, speaking time for backbench MPs is primarily governed either by random ballot (in the case of oral questions and applications for a debate), or by the unfettered discretion of the Chair to call Members during questions or a debate.⁹ In practice, there is a well-observed convention as to how debates are run, with the Chair calling Members to speak by alternating from one side of the House to the other. The Chair often takes things into account beyond party affiliation when calling speakers, such as All-Party Parliamentary Group membership, select committee membership, or particular topics of interest or expertise that any individual member may have. In addition to speaking time, and regardless of whether a Member is elected with any party or none, there are a broad range of opportunities in the House through which Members can conduct their work and engage in proceedings. This includes, but is not limited to, submitting written parliamentary questions, bidding for oral questions, presenting a Private Members' Bill, applying for debates in the Chamber or in Westminster Hall, tabling amendments to legislation, and submitting requests for an urgent question.
11. On 26 February 2025, we took oral evidence from Shockat Adam MP and Iqbal Mohamed MP, each of whom were elected as independent Members at the July 2024 General Election. We asked to what extent they had felt able to engage in proceedings as independent Members of Parliament. Mr Adam and Mr Mohamed each told us that they had been called to speak in debates regularly, and that where they had been called later in a debate, or not called, they could not say for certain that this was owing to their being an independent Member.¹⁰ Mr Adam told us that, whilst he had not yet been selected for a debate in Westminster Hall, he had “not seen a pattern” to suggest that this was owing to his being an independent.¹¹ We also heard

⁹ See: Erskine May, 25th edition, 2019, [Para 18.14](#), [Para 21.8](#), [Para 22.3](#), [Para 23.6](#)

¹⁰ [Qq4–5](#)

¹¹ [Q6](#); Mr Adam has since led a debate in Westminster Hall, for example on [18 March 2025](#).

that Mr Adam had been selected in the ballot for oral questions, and that Mr Mohamed had been called to ask supplementary questions during oral questions.¹² An area in which Mr Adam and Mr Mohamed felt that there may be scope for change with regards to the participation of independent Members was the allocation of Members to committees.¹³ We return to the matter of participation in select committees in Paragraphs 22 and 23 of our Report.

- 12.** Whilst independent Members can broadly exercise the same rights and opportunities within the Commons as Members who are part of a political party, Mr Adam and Mr Mohamed suggested in oral evidence that more could be done to ensure that independent Members have the right level of support to engage confidently with parliamentary proceedings and processes. We have received evidence from the House Administration detailed the post-election training offer for new Members.¹⁴ Reflecting on this training, Mr Mohamed explained that whilst his experience of the sessions and meeting other new Members was “really positive”, the training itself was “too high level”.¹⁵ This meant that, several weeks and months into the new Parliament, he was still seeking information on processes such as the proposal and passage of legislation, and how to use digital tools such as MemberHub.¹⁶ Mr Adam agreed, and noted that whilst all new Members may find the initial induction period “extremely overwhelming”, those elected with a party had access to a party machinery that could “add on value and learning after the initial induction phase”.¹⁷ He told us that he would have found it “very useful” to have a ‘check-in’ six to twelve weeks into the new Parliament, with an offer of further training where this may have been required.¹⁸

12 [Q8](#)

13 [Qq11–15](#)

14 House Administration ([IMPO010](#))

15 [Q2](#)

16 [Q2](#); MemberHub is a digital application which enables Members to submit parliamentary questions, apply for Adjournment and Westminster Hall debates, and table an Early Day Motion.

17 [Q3](#)

18 [Q3](#)

13.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of whether a Member of Parliament is elected as a representative of a political party or not, all Members are elected with an equal mandate to represent their constituents. This is an established and important constitutional principle that underpins our representative democracy, and it must continue to be maintained and asserted. Members elected as independents are able to participate in Parliamentary proceedings alongside those elected with a political party label.

14.

CONCLUSION

The House Administration provides significant levels of support and training to Members when they are elected. Ongoing support is also available to Members following those initial induction training sessions from the Members and Members Staff Services Team, who can signpost all Members to appropriate assistance on a wide range of issues, including procedural matters. We understand, however, that given the lack of a party machinery available to them, independent Members may appreciate additional support, both in the initial stages, and on an ongoing basis, to assist them in ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills required to engage in proceedings across the House.

15.

RECOMMENDATION

We commend the House Administration for the broad and high-quality support and training that they provide to new Members of Parliament, both in the initial stages following their election, and on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, we recommend that, prior to the next General Election, the House Administration review the induction and training offer for new Members elected as independents, with a view to ensuring that sessions and resources meet their particular needs and address the particular challenges faced by those Members of Parliament.

3 Status of ‘technical groups’

16. When we took evidence from Shockat Adam MP and Iqbal Mohamed MP on 26 February 2025, Mr Mohamed told us that the ‘technical group’ was formed:

to amplify and multiply the opportunities and the voice that each of us has in the House and in other forums that we can participate in in Parliament.

We hoped that numbering five—the same number as Reform and greater than the Greens and Plaid Cymru—we would be on a par with access to questions and opportunity to speak at that level. We could also co-ordinate work and activities and campaigns and [...] build on each other’s expertise and efforts.¹⁹

The formation of a ‘technical group’ within the House gave rise to the question of its procedural status, and in particular the status of a ‘technical group’ relative to a registered political party.

17. As noted earlier in our Report, little status is afforded to political parties within the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, and the concept of a ‘technical group’ is not envisaged at all. Whilst the Standing Orders do not give particular recognition to smaller political parties, it is customary practice for small parties to:
- At the Speaker’s discretion, and on an informal rotational basis, have an opportunity for their party leader to ask questions at Prime Minister’s Questions;
 - Have a clear public profile in that the party is recognised on the Parliament website and in various Parliamentary documents, such as Hansard; and
 - According to tradition, have their interests protected by the second largest opposition party.

19 [Q18](#)

To date, these conventions have only been applied to those smaller political parties that are officially registered with the Electoral Commission. The House of course has the power to regulate its own internal proceedings and, as such, the Speaker or the House could take a view that these customs ought in future to be extended to ‘technical groups’. However, a number of matters would require consideration prior to taking such a step.

18. Outside the House, political parties have clear responsibilities and obligations. Under the Registration of Political Parties Act 1998 and the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), a group wishing to establish itself formally as a political party must register, and responsibility for maintaining the register of political parties sits with the Electoral Commission. In its written submission, the Electoral Commission explained that the “main benefit of registering a political party is that the party name, as well as any descriptions or emblems, are eligible for use on ballot papers by the party’s candidates”. It also noted that “[r]egistration of a political party brings an important obligation to comply with the financial controls and responsibilities set out in PERA”.²⁰ Matters governed by PERA include, for example, the reporting of donations to registered parties and the control of campaign expenditure.²¹ Technical groups have no legal status in the United Kingdom system.
19. Within the House, registered political parties have access to Short Money.²² As noted by the Hansard Society, Short Money is available only to political parties that satisfy one of two conditions:
 - i) it has at least two MPs who were elected as its candidates at the previous general election, or
 - ii) it has one MP who was elected as its candidate and the party as a whole received more than 150,000 votes in total.²³

Parties formed during the course of a Parliament are therefore ineligible for Short Money, as by extension are ‘technical groups’. The Hansard Society added that “Short Money enables parliamentary parties to employ staff who assist with briefing materials, policy development and legislative research on behalf of the party’s MPs”, and that the absence of this for ‘technical

20 Electoral Commission ([IMP0001](#))

21 [Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000](#)

22 Short Money is funding provided by the House of Commons to support opposition parties. It was first introduced in 1975. See [SN01663.pdf](#)

23 Details of Short Money are provided by the [Members Estimate Committee](#), which publishes regular reports. The most recent report of the Committee, published on 12 September 2024, can be found here: Members Estimates Committee, First Report of Session 2024–25, [Consolidated list of provisions of the Resolutions of the House relating to expenditure charged to the Estimate for House of Commons: Members as at 10 September 2024](#), HC 244

groups’ meant that they were reliant upon “the standard funding provided to individual MPs for their parliamentary duties, along with any additional resources they can raise independently”, potentially making the demands of parliamentary business more of a challenge.²⁴

20. We asked Mr Adam and Mr Mohamed about the implications of ‘technical groups’ being ineligible for Short Money, and they were clear that access to financial assistance was not a driver of their decision to form such a group.²⁵ Rather, a primary driver behind the formation of the group was the hope that there would be procedural benefits, such as greater participation in question time, and that this would reduce the difficulties they perceived in obtaining access to places on select committees and other House committees, such as Public Bill Committees.²⁶
21. Extending the rights and privileges of smaller parties to ‘technical groups’ would not necessarily be a straightforward exercise. For example, the convention (at the discretion of the Speaker) around the participation of smaller parties in Prime Minister’s Questions has thus far applied to the recognised leader of those parties. The Hansard Society highlighted in its submission that “informal groupings of independents typically lack a designated leader or other frontbench spokespersons, making it difficult to extend those same privileges to them”.²⁷
22. With regards to places on House committees, an individual independent Member, a ‘technical group’ of independents, and a smaller political party are all in the same position. There is no procedural bar to independent Members or Members from smaller political parties being appointed to committees. Having said this, the Hansard Society and Dr Louise Thompson argued that there is no formal procedural mechanism through which these groups can guarantee access to places on House committees.²⁸ Committees of the House are nominated with regard to the composition of the House; however, the Hansard Society noted that the size of House committees (typically 11 Members for a select committee and 17 Members for a public bill or delegated legislation committee) is usually too small to include independents or Members from smaller parties and remain proportional. Moreover, the precise division of seats by party within each Committee is negotiated via the ‘Usual Channels’ of the major party Whips.²⁹ Whilst

24 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#))

25 [Q22](#)

26 [Qq21, 11](#)

27 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#))

28 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#)); Dr Louise Thompson ([IMP0004](#))

29 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#)). The Hansard Society also noted a recommendation made by the Liaison Committee in 2015, which said that the balance of individual committees need not strictly mirror the composition of the House, provided overall representation was “fair and proportionate”. This recommendation was not adopted by the House.

seats on select committees may be, and indeed have been, ‘given up’ to independents owing to their expertise in particular policy areas, and to Members of smaller parties, this is ultimately at the discretion of the largest parties.³⁰ Where such discretion is applied, this is often due to the territorial nature of the committee in question (for example, the Northern Ireland Affairs, Scottish Affairs, and Welsh Affairs committees). Broadly speaking, however, in most circumstances and on most committees, the smaller parties and independent MPs do not get representation.

23. Although the Hansard Society suggested that the current process for the nomination of committees was “not fair” for independent MPs and smaller parties, it nevertheless highlighted the complexity of potential changes to convention. Were a proportion of committee seats to be allocated to independent Members, “there [would be] no obvious or agreed method for determining which of them should occupy those seats, since no independent MP can legitimately claim to represent the rest”.³¹ Were a proportion of committee seats to be allocated to a technical group or groups, the Committee of Selection may need to have regard as to “whether the grouping [had] an internal structure capable of nominating or electing members to serve on committees”.³² Holding internal elections within the political parties in order to nominate Members to select committees was a recommendation of the Wright Committee in 2009, to increase the standing of committee members and “demonstrate the determination of the House more effectively to hold the executive to account”.³³
24. Dr Thompson’s submission highlighted a fundamental point which underpins the question of extending the rights and privileges of smaller parties to ‘technical groups’: the rights of smaller parties are governed primarily by convention rather than by Standing Order. Dr Thompson argued that whilst there may be a case to be made for clarifying the status of ‘technical groups’ within the House, “this should sit alongside clarifications to the status of other parliamentary party groups”.³⁴ Dr Thompson added that:

Independent MPs and small party parliamentary groups face very similar challenges, but there are key differences between these two types of group which may need to be accounted for when considering the rights which should be available.³⁵

30 Dr Louise Thompson ([IMPO004](#))

31 Hansard Society ([IMPO003](#))

32 Hansard Society ([IMPO003](#))

33 House of Commons Reform Committee, First Report of Session 2008–09, [Rebuilding the House](#), HC 1117, para 80

34 Dr Louise Thompson ([IMPO004](#))

35 Dr Louise Thompson ([IMPO004](#))

25. As noted earlier in our Report, the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann in the Irish Parliament provide a helpful example of a legislature in which the rights of political parties and ‘technical groups’ are explicitly codified. During our visit to Dublin, we learned more about how these Standing Orders operate, and how they have evolved over time. There is a long tradition of independent TDs in Irish politics, and technical groups have been formally recognised within the Dáil for many years.
26. We heard that ‘technical groups’ have the same rights in Dáil procedures as smaller parties, with the current threshold for availing of procedural benefits being five TDs in both cases, having been reduced from a previous threshold of seven TDs in 2016.³⁶ The procedural entitlements of ‘technical groups’ and small political parties have evolved over time and have not been without controversy. Issues arose following the 2024 Irish General Election and subsequent government coalition agreement, in which some independent TDs were given ministerial roles whilst others agreed to support the Government. Those Members without a ministerial position subsequently sought to register as a technical group along with other independent TDs, and the question arose as to whether those Members could be designated as ‘Opposition’ Members, as required by the Standing Order which governs the registration of a technical group (See Box 1). The Government proposed to resolve the matter of speaking rights for Government-aligned independents by amending the Standing Orders so as to create a new “Other Members” descriptor, which would be unrestricted by the binary ‘Government’ or ‘Opposition’ categories, which was passed by the Dáil on 25 March 2025 (See Box 2).³⁷

Box 2: Recognition of Other Members within the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann

Standing Order 176A. Rights of Other Members

- (1) Subject to paragraph (2) of this Standing Order, members who are not members of a group pursuant to Standing Order 170 shall be referred to in these Standing Orders as “Other Members” and shall have the following entitlements: (a) Other Members’ Questions in accordance with Standing Order 38A;
- (b) Questions nominated for priority in accordance with Standing Order 50(1);
- (c) speaking time on private members’ business pursuant to Standing Order 177;

36 Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform, [Final Report](#), 24 May 2016

37 RTE, [Explained: Technical groups and the Dáil speaking rights row](#), 21 January 2025; BBC, [Dáil adjourns as rowdy scenes erupt over speaking rights](#), 25 March 2025

(d) representation on the Business Committee established pursuant to Standing Order 28;

(e) representation on the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform established pursuant to Standing Order 128; and

(f) such other rights as may be provided for Other Members in these Standing Orders.

(2) The following members qualify as Other Members for the purposes of these Standing Orders:

(a) members of a party in Government; and

(b) all members not included in paragraph (a) who are not members of a group pursuant to Standing Order 170 and who number at least five;

Provided that no member of the Government or Minister of State shall be considered to be one of the Other Members.

Source: Dáil Éireann, [Standing Orders relative to Public Business](#), 2024 edition - 34th Dáil, in effect as of 7 April 2025

- 27.** The evolution of the rights and privileges provided to political parties and ‘technical groups’ in the Dáil demonstrates that, in order both to uphold the rights of all Members, and to maintain the integrity of and the confidence in the procedural framework, a flexible approach is required. Changes to the composition of the House, whether this be a gradual evolution over time, or a more immediate change following a General Election, may require consideration to be given as to the rights of the smaller parties, those of independent Members and, if they were to be permitted, to ‘technical groups’. With regards to the extension of rights to ‘technical groups’, the Hansard Society’s submission highlighted the appointment of Members to select committees as an area requiring consideration. It noted that the formation of ‘technical groups’ of independent Members may not occur for some time following a General Election, whilst select committees are appointed at the beginning of a Parliament. The inclusion of such groups within the composition of select committees might therefore necessitate a delay in their nomination and appointment, which comes with implications for the scrutiny functions carried out by those committees.³⁸ Indeed, during our visit to Dublin in May 2025, we heard that the nomination of select committees in the Dáil had been significantly delayed pending issues relating to the composition and status of technical groups being resolved.

38 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#))

28. There are key issues requiring consideration with regards to the extension of the conventions currently applied to smaller parties to ‘technical groups’. These include the effect this would have on the operation of the rights afforded to smaller parties, and whether a registered political party and a ‘technical group’ should be afforded a comparable status, especially as the latter would not have to adhere to the same obligations surrounding transparency and financial reporting to the Electoral Commission. We wrote to party Whips and Leaders to ascertain their views on this matter. The responses we received from the Conservative Party (currently the official Opposition), the Liberal Democrats (currently the second largest opposition party), and the Green Party of England and Wales highlighted that the extension of the conventions regarding speaking time, in particular, would have the effect of ‘fragmenting’ the time currently provided for smaller political parties.³⁹ The Chief Whip of the Liberal Democrats, Wendy Chamberlain MP, further noted that:

In principle, [the current conventions] serve to benefit smaller parties and also the House as a whole. The House, and within it the Government, has an interest in hearing the full range of views supported by the British public as represented by political parties. Where no such unity of purpose exists, privileging voices by dint of their *lack*⁴⁰ of unified purpose appears actively perverse.

In practice, we would also highlight that these privileges are often a zero-sum game. Space given at PMQs is necessarily taken from the smaller parties or from backbench MPs.⁴¹

As we have noted earlier in our Report, the current minimal recognition of political parties within the Standing Orders serves to emphasise the primacy of individual Members, and in particular backbench Members, on all sides of the House. The formalisation of the rights of smaller parties, and, if agreed, the extension of those rights to ‘technical groups’, might therefore have the effect of reducing the amount of time available for individual backbench MPs across the House.

39 Leader of the SDLP ([IMP0008](#)); Liberal Democrat Chief Whip ([IMP0005](#)) and Chief Whip of the Official Opposition ([IMP0006](#))

40 Ms Chamberlain’s emphasis.

41 Liberal Democrat Chief Whip ([IMP0005](#))

29.

CONCLUSION

We believe that it would be premature to recommend the extension of conventions applicable to small parties to ‘technical groups’ without a more detailed consideration as to the rights of small parties in the first instance. A more formal codification of these rights would be a significant departure from the current practice and conventions of the House. It is likely to require changes to the Standing Orders, and have implications for the unfettered discretion of the Chair. It would also present a rupture from the legal regime operated by the Electoral Commission relating to the registration of political parties, and the corresponding obligations placed on them regarding transparency and financial reporting.

30.

RECOMMENDATION

We are of the view that the House should not formally recognise ‘technical groups’ which have not been subject to the same obligations as registered political parties, which are subject to statutory regulation. Any perceived procedural advantages should not be based on numerical size alone; the House would be right to require registration as evidence of a willingness to incur obligations in order to accrue any such benefits. Therefore, we do not recommend any changes to the procedures of the House of Commons at this time, though the House may wish to consider what should happen if a large number of independent MPs wished to collaborate as a ‘technical group’ upon their election.

31.

RECOMMENDATION

Moreover, we do not think that the case has been made for a further codification of the status of small parties in the procedures of the House of Commons. Nevertheless, the future status of small parties in House procedures should be considered in more detail, and accordingly we recommend that the House be given the opportunity to express its views on this matter.

4 Categorisation of Members who have lost their Party Whip

- 32.** During the course of a Parliament, a Member elected as a representative of a political party may experience the temporary suspension or permanent withdrawal of the party Whip, or may themselves resign from the party. Currently, in all such circumstances, a Member's descriptor across the Parliament website and in the Official Report is amended to list them as 'Independent'.
- 33.** On 26 February 2025, we heard oral evidence from Ian Byrne MP and Rt Hon John McDonnell MP, each of whom were temporarily suspended from the Labour Whip in July 2024.⁴² Mr McDonnell told us he had written to the Speaker to express that he did not believe 'independent' to be an accurate description of his circumstances, and that he would prefer a descriptor such as 'Suspended Labour' or 'Labour (Suspended)'. Mr McDonnell explained that his categorisation as an independent Member had led to "inaccurate" reportage and caused confusion within his constituency as to whether he had left the Labour party entirely.⁴³ Mr McDonnell added that it was a requirement that suspended Labour Members continue to follow the party Whip.⁴⁴ Mr Byrne agreed that 'independent' was not an appropriate label for Members temporarily suspended from their party Whip, and told us that "how we are titled is important, because we were elected as Labour MPs and not independents".⁴⁵ As noted by the Hansard Society, the House has previously allowed 'Independent Conservative' and 'Independent Labour' as a descriptor for Members who have had the Whip withdrawn. However, such descriptors have not been used since 2010.⁴⁶
- 34.** Whilst variations on a party name may have been permitted for a small number of Members in the past, outside the House, strict rules govern the use of registered party names on the ballot paper. The Electoral

42 Mr Byrne had the Whip restored on 5 February 2025. At the time of writing, Mr McDonnell's suspension from the Parliamentary Labour Party was ongoing.

43 [Q28](#)

44 [Qq 28, 33](#)

45 [Q30](#)

46 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#))

Commission confirmed that candidates standing for a party can use only the party's name, description or emblem on a ballot paper. The word 'independent' cannot be used alongside an existing registered party name or description.⁴⁷ The Electoral Commission further noted that it is only responsible for regulating the use of party names on ballot papers, and that "[a] candidate may choose to use descriptions and other identifiers in their campaign material or when speaking to voters, and there are no laws governing how they choose to do this".⁴⁸

35. A key purpose of the rules applied to ballot papers is the avoidance of voter confusion. Whilst the House is not itself bound by these rules, a departure from the current practice of how Members are described requires careful consideration of the potential implications, both within and outside the House.
36. A descriptor such as '[Party name] (suspended)' may more clearly distinguish Members elected as independent candidates from those temporarily suspended from their party Whip; however, this description is not without risk of sowing confusion of a different nature. Suspension of the Whip may occur for political reasons; it may also occur due to misconduct. A further difficulty here was neatly summarised by the Hansard Society, who wrote that "the distinction between temporary and permanent suspensions is often less clear-cut than it seems: temporary suspensions may become permanent, and supposedly permanent withdrawals [of the Whip] are sometimes later reversed".⁴⁹ The use of 'suspended' therefore has potential to cause confusion as to the status of a Member in relation to the party under whose banner they were elected. As well as a risk of causing confusion amongst the public, the House may itself become unclear on the relationship between a Member and the party for which they stood at election. The transition between a temporary and a permanent suspension, and the exact moment when this change in status occurs, is not always clearly demarcated, and this may put the House authorities in the unacceptable position of having to determine whether 'suspended' or 'independent' is the more accurate description of a Member at any given point in time.
37. A further question arises as to whether it should be the Member or their parliamentary party who has the final say on use of the party name in these circumstances. Evidence we received from party Whips and Leaders indicated that most believe the current use of 'independent' to be broadly sufficient, and that most would oppose the introduction of a new descriptor for suspended Members which retains reference to the party name, as they

47 Electoral Commission ([IMP0001](#))

48 Electoral Commission ([IMP0001](#))

49 Hansard Society ([IMP0003](#))

considered that this would be inappropriate.⁵⁰ The Government Chief Whip, Rt Hon Sir Alan Campbell MP, also noted that Members' party affiliation and election history are available on the individual Member profiles on the Parliament website, and elsewhere.⁵¹

- 38.** The Liberal Democrat Chief Whip, Wendy Chamberlain MP, questioned in her submission whether the introduction of descriptors used in the House of Lords, such as Crossbench, might usefully distinguish between Members elected as independent candidates and those who become independent during the course of a Parliament.⁵² Within the House of Lords, the term 'non-affiliated' is also used to describe Peers who are neither part of a parliamentary party nor a member of the Crossbench group. Such terms may not easily transfer for use in the Commons. Replicating these descriptions in the Commons might also suggest a political association between Members who were described as "cross bench" or "non-affiliated" and similarly designated Peers in the Lords which would not be accurate. In any case, the use of such descriptors would not allow a Member temporarily suspended from their party to retain a clear link to their former party; it would serve only to distinguish more clearly between various ways in which a Member could be termed 'independent'. In the absence of a clear mechanism to distinguish between a temporary and a permanent suspension, the introduction of different descriptors for different circumstances would be prone to the same difficulties we set out above (see paragraph 36).
- 39.** It is notable that affiliation descriptors were first introduced in 2003 at the discretion of the Editor of Hansard; before this only a Member's name and their constituency were included. As Hansard's online presence and external access to it grew, the addition of descriptors was deemed helpful and transparent to readers from outside Parliament. Today, rapid access to a wealth of information about Members begs the question as to whether continued reference to this information in Hansard is needed, particularly given the difficulties in succinct description of those who have been suspended from or left a party. Whilst parliamentary party affiliation descriptors are currently integrated within Hansard, other parliamentary

50 Liberal Democrat Chief Whip ([IMP0005](#)); Government Chief Whip ([IMP0009](#)); Chief Whip of the Official Opposition ([IMP0006](#)); Green Party of England and Wales ([IMP0007](#)). Note: The Leader of the SDLP expressed that she would be comfortable with a new descriptor, see: Leader of the SDLP ([IMP0008](#)).

51 Government Chief Whip ([IMP0009](#))

52 Liberal Democrat Chief Whip ([IMP0005](#)). Crossbench Peers are non-party political and by tradition sit on the benches that cross the chamber of the House of Lords. Peers must apply to become a Crossbench Peer.

documents and resources include only a Member's name and, on occasion, their constituency. These include the daily Order Paper and the annunciators in place across the Estate.⁵³

40. CONCLUSION

We urge caution against the introduction of descriptors such as '[Party name] (suspended)', or other descriptors seeking to distinguish between Members elected as an independent candidate and Members who have been suspended from their party Whip. Permitting a Member suspended from their party Whip to use a descriptor including reference to their parliamentary party does not appear to be supported by the parliamentary parties themselves. It would also be inconsistent with the regulation of the use of party names on ballot papers at elections. Furthermore, if Hansard were to develop terms to distinguish between Members elected as independents and those temporarily suspended from their party Whip, parliamentary parties would require a much more formal mechanism to indicate to the House Administration whether a loss of the Whip were intended to be temporary or permanent, and to alert the House to the point at which this change in status, or any subsequent change, occurred.

41. CONCLUSION

Hansard and the Parliament website are intended to be impartial, official records and should not be drawn into matters of party discipline; the introduction of new descriptors would risk undermining this fundamental principle. Moreover, given that such descriptors appear in records that are produced overnight, the timing and notification to House authorities becomes paramount, and to make such changes would introduce the possibility of errors and inaccuracies occurring, the tolerance for which is, and rightly should be, very low.

53 The annunciator system provides constantly updated information on what's happening in the Chamber: the subject of debate, the stage of a bill's progress, the MP speaking, their constituency, and the time they began speaking.

42.

CONCLUSION

Having said this, we understand the concerns that the way in which party affiliation descriptors appear on the parliamentary website and on parliamentary papers could lead to confusion regarding the status of individual MPs who have had the Whip suspended temporarily or withdrawn permanently, or who have resigned the Whip, compared to those Members elected as independent candidates. We considered whether an appropriate solution might be the removal of party affiliation descriptors from the Official Report, which would see a return to previous practice and would be in keeping with the practice of the Order Paper and the annunciators. Given that these descriptors were introduced to aid clarity and transparency, however, as well as the impact on internal and external users of this information, we do not consider the removal of descriptors to be a possible solution. Instead, we believe that the solution may lie in the provision of more information on the Parliament website to set out more clearly the circumstances encompassed by the ‘Independent’ descriptor.

43.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the House Administration trial changes to the parliamentary website to increase clarity about the situations in which Members of Parliament may variously be described as ‘independent’ by adding clear information describing the use of the category ‘independent’, and by making the party affiliation history of each Member more prominent and easier to view for members of the public. We also strongly encourage those publishing news stories concerning those MPs who have had the Whip withdrawn permanently or temporarily, or who have resigned the Whip, to take care to avoid creating confusion in their use of the word ‘independent’.

Conclusions and recommendations

Status of independent Members of Parliament

1. Regardless of whether a Member of Parliament is elected as a representative of a political party or not, all Members are elected with an equal mandate to represent their constituents. This is an established and important constitutional principle that underpins our representative democracy, and it must continue to be maintained and asserted. Members elected as independents are able to participate in Parliamentary proceedings alongside those elected with a political party label. (Conclusion, Paragraph 13)
2. The House Administration provides significant levels of support and training to Members when they are elected. Ongoing support is also available to Members following those initial induction training sessions from the Members and Members Staff Services Team, who can signpost all Members to appropriate assistance on a wide range of issues, including procedural matters. We understand, however, that given the lack of a party machinery available to them, independent Members may appreciate additional support, both in the initial stages, and on an ongoing basis, to assist them in ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills required to engage in proceedings across the House. (Conclusion, Paragraph 14)
3. We commend the House Administration for the broad and high-quality support and training that they provide to new Members of Parliament, both in the initial stages following their election, and on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, we recommend that, prior to the next General Election, the House Administration review the induction and training offer for new Members elected as independents, with a view to ensuring that sessions and resources meet their particular needs and address the particular challenges faced by those Members of Parliament. (Recommendation, Paragraph 15)

Status of ‘technical groups’

4. We believe that it would be premature to recommend the extension of conventions applicable to small parties to ‘technical groups’ without a more detailed consideration as to the rights of small parties in the first instance. A more formal codification of these rights would be a significant departure from the current practice and conventions of the House. It is likely to require changes to the Standing Orders, and have implications for the unfettered discretion of the Chair. It would also present a rupture from the legal regime operated by the Electoral Commission relating to the registration of political parties, and the corresponding obligations placed on them regarding transparency and financial reporting. (Conclusion, Paragraph 29)
5. We are of the view that the House should not formally recognise ‘technical groups’ which have not been subject to the same obligations as registered political parties, which are subject to statutory regulation. Any perceived procedural advantages should not be based on numerical size alone; the House would be right to require registration as evidence of a willingness to incur obligations in order to accrue any such benefits. Therefore, we do not recommend any changes to the procedures of the House of Commons at this time, though the House may wish to consider what should happen if a large number of independent MPs wished to collaborate as a ‘technical group’ upon their election. (Recommendation, Paragraph 30)
6. Moreover, we do not think that the case has been made for a further codification of the status of small parties in the procedures of the House of Commons. Nevertheless, the future status of small parties in House procedures should be considered in more detail, and accordingly we recommend that the House be given the opportunity to express its views on this matter. (Recommendation, Paragraph 31)

Categorisation of Members who have lost their Party Whip

7. We urge caution against the introduction of descriptors such as ‘[Party name] (suspended)’, or other descriptors seeking to distinguish between Members elected as an independent candidate and Members who have been suspended from their party Whip. Permitting a Member suspended from their party Whip to use a descriptor including reference to their parliamentary party does not appear to be supported by the parliamentary parties themselves. It would also be inconsistent with the regulation of the use of party names on ballot papers at elections. Furthermore, if Hansard were to develop terms to distinguish between Members elected as independents and those temporarily suspended from their party Whip,

parliamentary parties would require a much more formal mechanism to indicate to the House Administration whether a loss of the Whip were intended to be temporary or permanent, and to alert the House to the point at which this change in status, or any subsequent change, occurred. (Conclusion, Paragraph 40)

8. Hansard and the Parliament website are intended to be impartial, official records and should not be drawn into matters of party discipline; the introduction of new descriptors would risk undermining this fundamental principle. Moreover, given that such descriptors appear in records that are produced overnight, the timing and notification to House authorities becomes paramount, and to make such changes would introduce the possibility of errors and inaccuracies occurring, the tolerance for which is, and rightly should be, very low. (Conclusion, Paragraph 41)
9. Having said this, we understand the concerns that the way in which party affiliation descriptors appear on the parliamentary website and on parliamentary papers could lead to confusion regarding the status of individual MPs who have had the Whip suspended temporarily or withdrawn permanently, or who have resigned the Whip, compared to those Members elected as independent candidates. We considered whether an appropriate solution might be the removal of party affiliation descriptors from the Official Report, which would see a return to previous practice and would be in keeping with the practice of the Order Paper and the annunciators. Given that these descriptors were introduced to aid clarity and transparency, however, as well as the impact on internal and external users of this information, we do not consider the removal of descriptors to be a possible solution. Instead, we believe that the solution may lie in the provision of more information on the Parliament website to set out more clearly the circumstances encompassed by the 'Independent' descriptor. (Conclusion, Paragraph 42)
10. We recommend that the House Administration trial changes to the parliamentary website to increase clarity about the situations in which Members of Parliament may variously be described as 'independent' by adding clear information describing the use of the category 'independent', and by making the party affiliation history of each Member more prominent and easier to view for members of the public. We also strongly encourage those publishing news stories concerning those MPs who have had the Whip withdrawn permanently or temporarily, or who have resigned the Whip, to take care to avoid creating confusion in their use of the word 'independent'. (Recommendation, Paragraph 43)

Formal minutes

Wednesday 16 July 2025

Members present

Cat Smith, in the Chair

James Asser

Bambos Charalambous

Mr Lee Dillon

Graeme Downie

Mary Kelly Foy

Tracy Gilbert

Gurinder Singh Josan

Joy Morrissey

Michael Wheeler

Sir Gavin Williamson

Status of independent Members of Parliament

Draft Report (*Status of independent Members of Parliament*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 43 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Wednesday 3 September at 2.30 pm.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 26 February 2025

Shockat Adam MP; Iqbal Mohamed MP

[Q1-26](#)

Rt Hon John McDonnell MP; Ian Byrne MP

[Q27-48](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

IMP numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Shockat Adam MP and Iqbal Mohamed MP	IMP0002
2	Rt Hon Sir Alan Campbell MP, Government Chief Whip	IMP0009
3	Wendy Chamberlain MP, Liberal Democrat Chief Whip	IMP0005
4	Green Party of England and Wales	IMP0007
5	Claire Hanna MP, Leader of the SDLP	IMP0008
6	Hansard Society	IMP0003
7	Dame Rebecca Harris MP, Opposition Chief Whip	IMP0006
8	House Administration	IMP0010
9	The Electoral Commission	IMP0001
10	Dr Louise Thompson	IMP0004

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
2nd	Proxy voting: Review of arrangements introduced in Session 2024–25	HC 489
1st	Written parliamentary questions: Departmental performance in Session 2023–24	HC 461
2nd Special	Written Parliamentary Questions – Departmental performance in Session 2023–24: Government Response	HC 793
1st Special	Written Parliamentary Questions: Departmental performance in Session 2022–23: Government responses	HC 325