

Written evidence submitted by Dylan Hibbert, BSc (CSL 03)

Description

Following the appointment of the Rt Hon Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton to the role of Foreign Secretary on 13 November 2023, the Procedure Committee is undertaking an inquiry to explore options for MPs to effectively scrutinise Secretaries of State in the House of Lords and the work of their departments.

Questions

The Procedure Committee is inviting written evidence submissions on the following questions:

1. Should Secretaries of State in the House of Lords be more directly accountable to the House of Commons?
2. If yes, what forum would be most effective for such scrutiny to occur? For example, the House of Commons Chamber, Westminster Hall or another forum?
3. What form should such scrutiny take? Should it be limited to certain types of business such as statements or departmental questions, for example?
4. How often should Secretaries of State in the House of Lords be expected to appear before the House of Commons?
5. Are there any international comparators that would be useful for the committee to look at?

Questions

1. Should Secretaries of State in the House of Lords be more directly accountable to the House of Commons?

The emphasis in the Maude Review on enhancing accountability within the Civil Service aligns with the notion that Secretaries of State in the House of Lords should indeed be more directly accountable to the House of Commons. The recommendations for transparent plans, a Head of the Civil Service role, and merit-based appointments underscore the importance of accountability for effective governance.

Merit-Based Appointments: The Maude Review underscores the significance of merit-based appointments through an expanded role for the Civil Service Commission. Applying this principle to Secretaries of State in the House of Lords ensures that appointments are based on competence and accountability.

Effective Decision-Making: The Review's focus on practical solutions for enhanced decision-making resonates with the need for increased accountability, as transparency and effective decision-making go hand in hand.

2. If yes, what forum would be most effective for such scrutiny to occur? For example, the House of Commons Chamber, Westminster Hall, or another forum?

The Maude Review's proposals for restructuring central government departments, including the creation of specific offices, echo the need for a well-defined forum. While the review doesn't explicitly mention the House of Commons Chamber or Westminster Hall, the overarching theme of streamlining governance suggests that major sessions in the House of Commons Chamber could serve as an effective forum, supplemented by additional forums for more detailed scrutiny.

Streamlined Governance: The Maude Review proposes reorganising central government departments, and introducing new offices like the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This aligns with the need for a

streamlined governance structure, suggesting that major sessions in the House of Commons Chamber could be an effective forum.

In-Depth Discussions: While the Maude Review doesn't explicitly mention specific forums, its emphasis on overcoming challenges, including the digital and data skills gap, highlights the need for in-depth discussions. Forums like Westminster Hall or dedicated committee-style scrutiny could provide space for a more detailed examination.

Adaptability: The emphasis on a flexible structure in the Maude Review aligns with the suggestion to consider multiple forums. This adaptability allows for effective scrutiny tailored to the nature and significance of the discussions.

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Diverse Scrutiny Approaches The Maude Review calls for various forms of scrutiny, including regular statements, departmental questions, and dedicated sessions. This aligns with the idea that scrutiny should encompass diverse approaches to ensure a comprehensive review of policies, initiatives, and challenges.

-Comprehensive Understanding: The Review's focus on comprehensive discussions and change management expertise suggests that scrutiny should not be limited to specific types of business. This approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the workings of the Secretaries of State in the House of Lords.

-Regular Engagement: The Maude Review's emphasis on regular accountability corresponds with the suggestion that scrutiny should be an ongoing process, incorporating different forms to engage consistently with the House of Commons.

4. How often should Secretaries of State in the House of Lords be expected to appear before the House of Commons?

-The Maude Review's suggestion for a balance in accountability and avoiding undue burden resonates with the idea that Secretaries of State in the House of Lords should appear regularly but not excessively. The recommendation for quarterly appearances or as needed for significant developments aligns with this balanced approach.

-Balanced Accountability: The Maude Review recommends a balance in accountability, avoiding undue burden while ensuring regular appearances. This aligns with the notion that Secretaries of State in the House of Lords should appear regularly but not excessively, maintaining a balance that serves the interests of accountability without hindering efficiency.

-Significant Developments: The suggestion in the Maude Review for appearances as needed for significant developments echoes the idea that scrutiny should be tailored to the urgency and importance of events. This ensures that Secretaries of State are held accountable for major policy changes or challenges.

-Avoiding Overload: The Review's approach acknowledges the need to avoid overloading Secretaries of State with appearances, ensuring that accountability remains effective without becoming burdensome.

5. Are there any international comparators that would be useful for the committee to look at?

-Global Best Practices: The Maude Review's consideration of practices in comparable democracies like Australia and New Zealand suggests that examining international comparators can provide valuable insights. Understanding how other countries manage ministerial accountability to the lower house offers a global perspective.

-Adapting Successful Models: The Review's emphasis on the importance of digital and data skills and its recommendations for streamlining governance align with the need to adapt successful international models. Comparative analysis can inform the committee on effective practices in other democracies.

- Learning from Experiences: As the Maude Review reflects on lessons from comparable countries, the committee could draw lessons regarding the potential benefits and challenges of implementing similar changes. Learning from experiences globally can guide the committee's decision-making.