



HOUSE OF LORDS

Liaison Committee

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2nd Report of Session 2015–16

# **An International Relations Committee**

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### *The Liaison Committee*

The Liaison Committee advises the House on the resources required for select committee work and allocates resources between select committees; reviews the select committee work of the House; considers requests for ad hoc committees and reports to the House with recommendations; ensures effective co-ordination between the two Houses; and considers the availability of Lords to serve on committees.

### *Membership*

The Members of the Liaison Committee at the time this report was agreed were:

<a href="#"><u>Lord Craig of Radley</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Baroness Seccombe</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Lord Foulkes of Cumnock</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Baroness Smith of Basildon</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Baroness Garden of Frognal</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Baroness Stowell of Beeston</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Lord Hope of Craighead</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Lord Touhig</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Lord Laming (Chairman)</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Lord Wallace of Tankerness</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Baroness Perry of Southwark</u></a>	

### *Declaration of interests*

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests:

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests>

### *Publications*

All publications of the Committee are available at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/lords-liaison>

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### *Further information*

Further information about the House of Lords and its Committees, including guidance to witnesses, details of current inquiries and forthcoming meetings is available at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/lords>

### *Committee staff*

The current staff of the committee are Philippa Tudor (Clerk) and Susan Ryan (Committee Assistant).

### *Contact details*

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# An International Relations Committee

## Background

1. A number of members of the House have called for the establishment of a cross-cutting international relations sessional committee. Most recently, in March 2015, following comments made during a debate on the floor of the House about the Liaison Committee's Report on *ad hoc* Committee activity in Session 2015–16, Lord Howell of Guildford tabled a question for written answer on this subject, and the then Chairman of Committees replied that he would “invite the [Liaison] Committee to consider how best to seek the views of Members on the future shape of Select Committee activity”.
2. At its meeting on 8 June the Liaison Committee agreed that its members should seek the views of Members of their own political parties and, in the case of the Convenor, the Crossbench peers, by the end of June 2015 to inform their decisions on the following questions:
  - Is a sessional International Relations Committee the main priority for Committee activity not presently exercised?
  - If yes, should it be an additional unit of committee activity, or should it replace an existing committee from the start of the 2016–17 session?
3. Liaison Committee members reported a range of views from various Members on this issue. Arguments in favour of a sessional international relations committee included:
  - That there is a need for an authoritative, analysis-based consideration of current and long-standing issues in international affairs and to produce reports;
  - That the Lords should have a voice on issues wider than the EU;
  - That a sessional committee with continuing members could be more nimble in responding to developments and flexible in arranging follow-up activities.
4. Conversely, other members argued that a series of *ad hoc* committees, with changing membership, was better placed to complement the wide range of subjects covered on the floor of the House and to allow a larger number of members to participate in in-depth scrutiny of international relations than would be the case with a sessional committee with a fixed membership. This was considered important given the very wide-ranging nature of this field and the many members of the House with considerable expertise in international relations matters.
5. There was also concern about the potentially high cost of an international relations committee, particularly in relation to travel, given the importance of spending public money wisely.

6. One point of broad agreement was that the creation of a sessional international relations committee should be on the basis of it being an additional unit of committee activity rather than consuming the resources of one of the successors of the four current *ad hoc* committees.

### **Consideration**

7. There has been a range of views across the House, and this matter has been debated by members over a long period. The time has come to reach for the way forward. **The Committee recommends the establishment of an International Relations Committee at the start of the 2016–17 session. This will be subject to a review of all committees which will be undertaken in the 2017–18 session (see below).**
8. **We envisage a total of four *ad hoc* Committees being appointed in the 2016–17 and 2017–18 sessions (the same number as in the present session).**
9. In broad terms the average annual cost of a select committee is £225k. The Committee Office has continued to make significant savings, chiefly due to the reduction in the printing of evidence, which is now published online, and despite running the two additional units of *ad hoc* committee activity agreed by the House during the last Parliament. **We invite the House Committee, in drawing up the House’s financial plan, to consider whether any additional budget required by the Committee Office for this purpose should be offset by savings in other areas.**
10. **In considering the membership of the International Relations Committee, the Committee of Selection should include members with a range of experience.**

### *The EU Sub- Committee on External Affairs*

11. The EU Sub-Committee on External Affairs scrutinises EU documents and policies relating to foreign affairs (including external relations between the EU and non-EU countries, as well as relations between the EU and other international organisations); defence (including EU military and civilian operations outside the EU); international trade and international development aid. Recent inquiries have considered the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the EU’s External Action Service, EU-funded water and sanitation projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, and piracy in Somalia. The Committee also holds one-off evidence sessions on high-profile topical matters, which in recent years have included taking evidence on the EU-Iran Interim Agreement, EU restrictive measures and the EU and Syria. **We recommend an agreement with the EU Committee on the boundaries between the EU Committee’s activities, particularly those of its Sub-Committee on External Affairs, and the International Relations Committee.**

### *The structure of committee activity*

12. Many of those who commented expressed the view that members should be invited to consider a range of options for increased Committee activity, rather than only being asked whether a sessional international relations committee was the main priority for committee activity not presently exercised.

13. **The Liaison Committee keeps the structure of committee activity under regular review, and reported on this structure in each session of the 2010–15 Parliament. We intend to continue this practice. Additionally, we propose a full review of the Committee work of the House, to take place during the 2017–18 session, with a view to rationalising Committee activity.**
14. **We commend this Report to the House.**

## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee recommends the establishment of an International Relations Committee at the start of the 2016–17 session. This will be subject to a review of all committees which **will** be undertaken in the 2017–18 session. (Paragraph 7)
2. We envisage a total of four *ad hoc* Committees being appointed in the 2016–17 and 2017–18 sessions (the same number as in the present session). (Paragraph 8)
3. We invite the House Committee, in drawing up the House’s financial plan, to consider whether any additional budget required by the Committee Office for this purpose should be offset by savings in other areas. (Paragraph 9)
4. In considering the membership of the International Relations Committee, the Committee of Selection should include members with a range of experience. (Paragraph 10)
5. We recommend an agreement with the EU Committee on the boundaries between the EU Committee’s activities, particularly those of its Sub-Committee on External Affairs, and the International Relations Committee. (Paragraph 11)
6. The Liaison Committee keeps the structure of committee activity under regular review, and reported on this structure in each session of the 2010–15 Parliament. We intend to continue this practice. Additionally, we propose a full review of the Committee work of the House, to take place during the 2017–18 session, with a view to rationalising Committee activity. (Paragraph 13)