House of Commons

Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation)

Second Interim Report

Report, together with formal minutes

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Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation)

On 12 November 2008 the House of Commons agreed to establish a new committee, to be chaired by the Speaker and known as the Speaker's Conference.

The Conference has been asked to: "Consider, and make recommendations for rectifying, the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large". It may also consider other associated matters.

The Speaker's Conference has until the end of the Parliament to conduct its inquiries.

Current membership

Under the leadership of the Speaker, Rt Hon John Bercow MP, the membership of the Conference is:
Miss Anne Begg MP *(Labour, Aberdeen South)* (Vice-Chairman)
Ms Diane Abbott MP (*Labour, Hackney North & Stoke Newington*)
Mr David Blunkett MP (*Labour, Sheffield, Brightside*)
Angela Browning MP (*Conservative, Tiverton & Honiton*)
Mr Ronnie Campbell MP (*Labour, Blyth Valley*)
Mrs Ann Cryer MP (*Labour, Keighley*)
Mr Parmjit Dhanda MP (*Labour, Gloucester*)
Andrew George MP (*Liberal Democrats, St Ives*)
Miss Julie Kirkbride MP (*Conservative, Bromsgrove*)
Dr William McCrea MP (*Democratic Unionist, South Antrim*)
David Maclean MP (Conservative, *Penrith & The Border*)
Fiona Mactaggart MP (*Labour, Slough*)
Mr Khalid Mahmood MP (*Labour, Birmingham, Perry Barr*)
Anne Main MP (*Conservative, St Albans*)
Jo Swinson MP (*Liberal Democrat, East Dunbartonshire*)
Mrs Betty Williams MP (*Labour, Conwy*)

Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Speaker's Conference are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Conference (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/speakersconference
A list of Reports of the Conference in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

Conference staff

The current staff of the Conference are Mrs Elizabeth Hunt (Joint Secretary), Mr Paul Zimmermann (Joint Secretary), Mr Philip Aylett (Adviser), Ms Laura Kibby (Media Officer), Miss Emma Sawyer (Senior Committee Assistant) and Mr Ian Blair (Committee Assistant).

Specialist Advisers

The following were appointed as Specialist Advisers to the Conference: Dr Sarah Childs (University of Bristol), Lorraine Gradwell MBE (Chief Executive, Breakthrough UK), Professor Shamit Saggar (University of Sussex) and Professor Paul Whiteley (University of Essex).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Joint Secretaries of the Speaker's Conference, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 0654; the Conference's email address is spconference@parliament.uk

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Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Nearly all Members of Parliament are elected to the House of Commons on a party ticket. This makes the political parties, effectively, the gatekeepers to the House of Commons. It means that if the House of Commons is to become more representative the political parties will, in large part, have to be the agents of change.

2. When the leaders of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, the Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP, Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP and Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg MP, gave evidence to us on 20th October 2009 they each agreed that the diversity of representation within their parties was neither what it should be, nor what they wanted it to be. We welcome this important acknowledgement.

3. Each of the parties monitors its progress on candidate selections internally. The fact that this information is not collected and placed in the public domain, however, means that there is no public accountability; unless the performance of the different parties can be compared with each other (and with the performance of parties throughout the world) there is likely to be insufficient pressure for the political parties to pursue the cultural change which is needed from them before we can have a House of Commons "fit for the 21st century".

4. The leaders of the three main parties also gave us their agreement in principle to publish future reports on the results of candidate selections.

5. We shall table a draft new clause to the Equality Bill which, if enacted, would require registered political parties to report every six months, according to specified criteria, on the diversity of their candidate selections; and to publish those reports online. We hope that this proposal will have the support of the House.