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**COMMUNICATION**

by

**Mr Liam LAURENCE SMYTH**  
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on

**“The attendance in the House of Commons of Cabinet Ministers who are members  
of the House of Lords”**

**Geneva Session**  
**March 2024**

❖ **THEME : The attendance of Ministers of State to Parliament, to report and give explanations about their management of government business**

**The attendance in the House of Commons of Cabinet Ministers who are members of the House of Lords**

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On 13 November 2023 former Prime Minister David Cameron, who had left the House of Commons in 2016 a few months after the Brexit referendum, was appointed to the role of Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. At the same time he was appointed to the House of Lords.

His appointment marked the first time in over four decades that one of the Great Offices of State had been held by a Member of the Lords. In response to Lord Cameron's appointment, the Speaker wrote to the Procedure Committee on 22 November asking the Committee to explore options for enhanced scrutiny by the House of Commons of senior ministers in the House of Lords.

The normal rule is that only Members of the House of Lords may speak in the House of Lords, and only Members of the House of Commons may speak in the House of Commons.

There is no rule preventing Ministers from one House appearing before Committees of the other House. Lord Cameron has already appeared before the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee.

The House of Lords has arranged a special oral question period for the Foreign Secretary while that position is held by a member of the House of Lords. All other oral questions in the House of Lords are addressed to the Government rather than to individual Departments, and answers are given by members of the House of Lords who hold relatively junior ministerial positions.

Meanwhile in the Commons oral questions, urgent questions and ministerial statements on Foreign Office matters have all been dealt with since December 2023 by Ministers in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office who are members of the House of Commons.

In its report of 24 January 2024, the Procedure Committee recommended that the House be given the opportunity to approve a motion enabling Secretaries of State in the House of Lords to appear in the House of Commons for departmental question time, and for statements and urgent questions, for the remainder of this Parliament (an election must be called no later than December 2024).

The Procedure Committee suggested that a Lords Minister should address the House from the Bar of the House at the opposite end of the Chamber from the Speaker, instead from the normal ministerial speaking position at the despatch box on the right side of the Table of the House.

In a short debate on Wednesday 20 March 2024, all the Government Minister said in response to the debate was “wait until the Government respond to the report.” The Minister referred to a number of historical instances in which Members of the House of Lords have been invited to the House of Commons and answered questions —

- 1779: the Earl of Balcarres and Earl Cornwallis, about the Army’s conduct during the American revolution;
- 1805: Lord Melville, about his own impeachment for misappropriation of public funds;
- 1806 and 1813: Lord Teignmouth, about India;
- 1814: the Duke of Wellington, concerning the war in Spain and Portugal.

Normally the Government is supposed to reply to Select Committee recommendations within two months of publication of the select committee report.

The Procedure Committee was published on 24 January 2024, so a Government reply is expected soon.