

Member Briefing: Session 3

What's distinct about being an MP?

Introduction

In the third meeting of the Forum, we will explore **what's unusual or distinct about being an MP**.

It will include discussions around:

- What being an MP entails from when they start their role, and when it ends
- What are emerging issues for prospective or serving MPs

How this will work

You will hear information from the following speakers:

Mark D'Arcy, Political Journalist | Lived experience of being an MP

Tom Brake, Former MP and founder of Unlock Democracy | What the public can find challenging about MP pay and funding

Hannah Phillips, Jo Cox Foundation | What's less understood or an increasingly important consideration to being an MP

After the speakers' talks, you'll discuss what you heard in groups. A facilitator will guide the conversation and help capture your thoughts and questions. If there is time, the experts may answer some questions during the session. Other questions may be answered later.

What's unusual or distinct about being an MP?

What happens upon becoming an MP?

When elected, an MP sets up an office to manage parliamentary and constituency work, operating much like an independent organisation. MPs act as employers: they hire and manage their own staff and funding, with responsibilities for contracts, pay, business costs, and workplace policies. An MP has these responsibilities as soon as they are elected (i.e. the day after a General Election), even though they may be entering Parliament with different levels of past experience in these areas.

MPs become accountable for how they spend public money as soon as they are elected. They receive training from the House of Commons and from IPSA on how to manage the budget set by IPSA once they have entered office.

What does life as an MP look like?

Life as an MP involves splitting time between Parliament, their constituency and their party, with no set working hours or job description*. This means the experience can vary enormously between different MPs. Often the role demands availability at short notice. Some MPs say this makes it hard to have a good work-life balance, especially for those whose constituencies are further from London due to increased travel time.

The role brings unique pressures. Many MPs regularly face death threats and experience a loss of privacy due to being high-profile locally and public interest in their personal lives.

MPs with disabilities, caring responsibilities, or other personal circumstances may face additional barriers in carrying out their role, and IPSA provides funding to help address these where possible, for example providing BSL interpretation or enabling family members to travel between London and their constituency.

Unlike most workers, MPs have no formal performance reviews. Their accountability comes directly from constituents who decide, roughly every 5 years, whether to re-elect them or not.

Many MPs do additional paid work outside their job as an MP, commonly referred to as 'second jobs'. Research from April 2025 showed 236 out of 650 current MPs claimed some additional earnings, with 105 MPs declaring ongoing paid employment and 164 declaring one-off payments.

The extent of this additional work varies greatly: sometimes MPs will be obliged to continue practising in their previous professions to satisfy regulatory or licensing requirements, such as in law or medicine. Sometimes this work will simply be giving a lecture or writing an article. Sometimes it is more extensive and takes up more of their time.

** It might be interesting to note that there is not a single parliament in the world that has a job description for its elected members.*

What happens after being an MP?

At any UK General Election, an active MP may lose their seat and therefore their job. In-between General Elections, an MP may lose their seat if they are disqualified (e.g., due to appointment to certain public offices, bankruptcy, or criminal conviction) or through a recall petition if they are found guilty of serious wrongdoing under the Recall of MPs Act 2015.

When an MP leaves office, they have a period of 4 months (known as the winding-up period) to close their offices, end staff contracts, and settle their finances according to IPSA rules. Some limited support might be available from IPSA. This can cover things like:

- Redundancy payments for staff whose contracts end.
- Other ongoing office costs and travel incurred during the winding-up period.

The MP will also be paid for their work during the 4 month winding-up period.

After leaving Parliament, MPs might pursue a new career, return to their previous career, or they might retire. Having been an MP can both help or hinder career prospects: some employers might be attracted to their skillset, while others find the political associations problematic or don't see directly transferable experience. In short, it depends on the individual and on which career they choose to pursue.

What do we need to consider?

Here are a few different factors and possible points of view for you to consider when thinking about how MPs' roles are distinct (though of course there are many more). Have a think about how these factors might influence how we think about pay and funding for MPs:

- **Varied role:** Some people might point to the varied and distinct responsibilities MPs hold as employers, to their constituents, and as lawmakers.
- **Potential benefits:** Others might point to the perceived benefits of being an MP - things like the privilege of serving and some flexibility in setting your own hours.
- **Security and privacy concerns:** Others still might consider the difficulties around privacy and family life, alongside growing issues like abuse and intimidation.

A few starting questions

Below are some questions that you might want to think about. Don't worry about having answers to these. They are just there to help you think about the topic in different ways.

What do you think about the range of responsibilities that an MP has?

Do you think that MPs have the right level of accountability when it comes to how they spend their time and budget?

Does MPs' pay and funding reflect all aspects (positive and negative) of their role?

How does being paid a lot or a little affect how well you can do a job?

Key words & concepts

Below are some key words and concepts that you might hear. You don't need to memorise these, but you may find it helpful to look back at them throughout the session.

Key word or concept	What it means
By-election	An election held in a single parliamentary constituency, to fill a vacancy as a result of an MP stepping down or dying.
Freedom of speech	MPs have the right to express their views in debates and other parliamentary proceedings without being questioned in any court or other place outside Parliament.
MPs' Code of Conduct	A document setting out the standards of conduct that MPs are held to.
Parliamentary privilege	A set of protections that MPs have to ensure they can perform their duties effectively and without external interference. This includes freedom of speech in the House of Commons and managing their own affairs.
Principles of Public Life (or Nolan Principles)	7 principles that make up part of the MPs' Code of Conduct: honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, selflessness, openness, and leadership.
Recall of MPs Act 2015	Allows constituents to remove their MP before the next General Election if they have been found guilty of serious wrongdoing. E.g., a criminal conviction, suspension from the House of Commons, or false business costs claims. Requires at least 10% of constituents to sign the recall petition to trigger a by-election, and a majority to then vote against their MP.
Representative mandate	The authority an MP has to represent their constituents' interests and concerns in the House of Commons.
Tenure	The length of time a person can work at their current job. MPs have no guaranteed tenure and must be reelected in order to maintain their seat. Outside of elections, MPs can lose their seat through resignation, recall petition, or disqualification.