



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Constitution

House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Tel: 020 7219 1228
constitution@parliament.uk
www.parliament.uk/lords

The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

16 May 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

Government Response to the Lord's Constitution Committee report – Revision of the Cabinet Manual (6th Report, Session 2021-22, HL Paper 34)

I write on behalf of the Constitution Committee following the Government's 7 February response to our report *Revision of the Cabinet Manual*.

As noted in our report and Lord True's response, the Cabinet Manual's role is to record—rather than prescribe—constitutional rules and conventions. We recognise that the Cabinet Manual is an executive document and, as Lord True wrote in his letter, its content—and adherence to that content—is ultimately a matter for you, the Prime Minister.

Nonetheless, we reiterate our recommendation that you make clear, in the foreword to the next edition, the duty on all ministers to adhere to the constitutional principles in the Cabinet Manual. We would be grateful to receive the Government's views on this recommendation.

We also note that there have been significant constitutional developments since the Cabinet Manual was first published in 2011, including, for example, further devolution of powers, the UK's departure from the European Union and changes to the way in which Parliament is dissolved. Given that the updated Cabinet Manual will serve to guide ministers as to the constitutional rules pertaining both to recent developments and longer standing constitutional matters, we consider it prudent to secure a high level of consensus on its content. It is therefore appropriate that this Committee—along with the relevant committees in the House of Commons—be meaningfully consulted, in line with the spirit of consultation that was evident when the first edition of the Cabinet Manual was produced in 2010–2011.¹ We recommend this consultation should include the sharing of draft revisions to the manual with relevant committees in a timely manner, allowing for sufficient scrutiny and feedback. We would be grateful if you could confirm if this is your intention.

We note that Lord True's letter describes the Cabinet Manual as “a UK Government document signed off by UK Ministers, accountable to the UK Parliament”. While we do not contest this, we suggest that as a record of UK constitutional rules it applies to all four nations of the UK. We therefore reiterate our recommendation that the Government should formally consult the relevant committees in the devolved legislatures on any draft

¹ Constitution Committee, [Revision of the Cabinet Manual](#) (6th report, Session 2021-2022, HL paper 24), paras 8–9

revisions to the Cabinet Manual. This would be in line with the Prime Minister's role as Minister for the Union, which includes responsibility to "ensure that all of government is acting on behalf of the entire United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales."¹ We would welcome confirmation on whether this is the Government's intention.

Our report recommended a draft be produced by July 2022. While we note the Government's commitment to publish an updated version of the Cabinet Manual by the end of this Parliament, we would be grateful for an indication of the proposed timeline for this.

I am copying this letter to Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord True, Minister of State, Cabinet Office, William Wragg MP, Chair, House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Clare Adamson MSP, Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Chair of the Senedd Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for the Executive Office.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Drake'.

Baroness Drake
Chair of the Constitution Committee