

Catherine Ashton
European Commissioner for External Trade

Catherine Ashton was born in Upholland in Lancashire, from where she takes her title, Baroness Ashton of Upholland.

From 1983-89 she was Director of Business in the Community, and established the Employers' Forum on Disability, Opportunity Now, and the Windsor Fellowship.

Catherine Ashton chaired the Health Authority in Hertfordshire from 1998 to 2001, and became a Vice President of the National Council for One Parent Families.



In 1999 Catherine Ashton became a life peer. She was made Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for Education and Skills in 2001, and then Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department for Constitutional Affairs and subsequently Ministry of Justice with responsibilities for human rights, freedom of information and equalities. She became a Privy Councillor in May 2006.

Catherine Ashton was appointed Leader of the House of Lords and Lord President of the Council in Gordon Brown's first Cabinet in June 2007. As well as Leader of the Lords, she took responsibility in the House of Lords for equalities issues.

In 2005 Catherine Ashton was voted House Magazine Minister of the Year and Channel 4 Peer of the Year. In 2006, she was voted Stonewall Politician of the Year.

Catherine Ashton brings with her significant European experience, including steering the Lisbon Treaty through the UK's upper chamber and dealing with EU justice and home affairs issues in her previous positions.

During her time as Director of Business in the Community, Catherine Ashton worked together with companies and communities on creating effective business strategies, while ensuring equality and diversity in the workforce. She gained practical experience in what makes companies competitive and what they need to do to be profitable, while maintaining a foothold in their communities.

Catherine Ashton also has experience in international negotiations on trade topics. During her time in the Department of Constitutional Affairs and Justice she had responsibility for negotiations on international trade in legal services with India and South Africa. The focus was on seeking better access to global markets for lawyers to enable them to provide business-to-business (B2B) services to international companies and investors.

What is a Privy Councillor?

Privy Councillors are members of the Queen's own Council: the 'Privy Council'. There are about five hundred members who have reached high public office. Membership includes all members of the Cabinet, past and present, the Speaker, the leaders of all major political parties, Archbishops and various senior judges as well as other senior public figures. Their role is to advise the Queen in carrying out her duties as Monarch. In the past Privy Councillors were the chief governing body and fulfilled the role that the Cabinet performs today. During debates in the Commons, MPs who are Privy Councillors are referred to by their colleagues as 'The Right Honourable Member'.

What is Stonewall?

Stonewall is a privately funded organisation that campaigns and lobbies for equality and justice for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

What is Business in the Community?

Business in the Community works with companies on responsible business in four areas: Community, Environment, Marketplace and Workplace. With more than 850 companies in membership, Business in the Community represents 1 in 5 of the UK private sector workforce and convenes a network of global partners.