



## PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

### REPORT ON THE 64TH WESTMINSTER SEMINAR ON PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

# W<sup>64</sup><sup>TH</sup> WESTMINSTER SEMINAR ON PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE & PROCEDURE

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HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT





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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The annual Westminster Seminar is CPA UK's flagship capacity-building programme for first-term parliamentarians and newly appointed procedural/committee Clerks from across the Commonwealth. Every year the five-day programme provides a unique, international platform for its participants to meet their counterparts and explore parliamentary democracy, practice and procedure within a Westminster framework, and share experiences and challenges faced in their parliamentary work.
- 1.2 This year CPA UK hosted the 64th Westminster Seminar on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure from Monday 30 November – Friday 4 December 2015 at the Houses of Parliament, London. The programme facilitated rigorous discussions on the continuing evolution of best practice within a Westminster-style framework, as adapted across the Commonwealth.
- 1.3 The Programme Outline and Images of the Seminar are hereby attached as **Annexure 1** and **Annexure 2** respectively.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The 64<sup>th</sup> Westminster Seminar was a five-day programme designed to strengthen the knowledge, skills and confidence of first-term Members of Parliament and newly-appointed Clerks in the core aspects of their work of parliamentary practice and procedure within a Westminster framework.
- 2.2 The delegation comprised the Hon. Samuela Vunivalu (Government backbencher), Hon. Ratu Isoa Tikoca (SODELPA Whip), the Secretary-General, Viniana Namosimalua and the Deputy Secretary-General, Jeanette Emberson.
- 2.3 The study tour was made possible by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Parliament project through funding support from the European Union (EU). The initiative by the UNDP Parliament project is part of assistance to the Fiji

Parliament by the project donors (EU, New Zealand, Australia and Japan) since January 2014.

### **3.0 DAY I**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM AND KEY CURRENT CHALLENGES**

The Seminar uses the UK Parliament as template for discussion on parliamentary practice and procedure.

With reference to the 2015 Anniversary celebrations, this session provided an overview of the development of parliamentary democracy and the Westminster system, from historic milestones, to its defining features and current challenges. The aim is to look at facts into parliamentary democracy.

**Chair Rt Hon. David Hanson** introduced the session by saying that, looking into evolution of democracy and facts from the constituencies, there have been many changes within the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy, including in the Scottish Parliament. He said that there are many changes even in the way Westminster deals with the 4 corners of the country, and that other changes include the House of Lords, which has undergone many changes including in its size. Mr Hanson said that this poses questions regarding the modern democracy as well and the role of the House of Lords in it.

Mr Hanson went on to say that petitions to the House of Commons as well as debates, have been also some of the newest initiatives in the House of Commons. Other aspects of the routine work of MPs (including working hours) have changed to address new issues such as gender inclusion, as well as other issues such as transparency regarding the work and financial aspects of the work of MPs. Mr Hanson continued, saying that MPs are moreover much more in touch with their constituencies now, due also to the changes in technology and communications. The Chair encouraged the participants to also engage and discuss practices from their own countries, and the changes that have taken place.



**Lord Lisvane KCB** said that the experiences of MPs are very similar, due to a large degree to the fact that MPs respond in all cases to their constituencies. Even Westminster Hall has copied other examples, including from Australia. Lord Lisvane said that he will focus on the challenges faced by the UK Parliament as well. The greatest change that has taken place, he said, is the enormous increase in the pool of the constituencies. Lord Lisvane said that while there physically, in the last years the demands from constituencies have increased. This is also reflected in the number of researchers that has increased from 20 in the 70s to more than 2000 today, as a reflection of the expectations of the constituencies.

Drawing from his experiences, Lord Lisvane also indicated that the contact and expectations from the public are also much harder to ignore. Constituencies also expect that MPs know 'real life'. Lord Lisvane said that every Parliament has issues of confidence with the public. The first step is to get the public to understand what the Parliament does, explaining its value and meaning for the public. Aspirations of politics can be shared by public and Parliament at large. Lord Lisvane said we must make it easier for people to engage with the public. Westminster does so through Select Committees, going across the political divide and acting as a means to keep the executive in check. The Petitions Committee is exactly a means for the public to reach the Parliament. Petitions go back to medieval times, and the role of the committee is thus important. However Lord Lisvane said that, at the same time, the committee needs to be responsive as well. This includes both the means through which the public gets information, including here social media and the internet.

Lord Lisvane continued, saying that the first issue is the future of the UK. The base issue of the UK is asymmetry. England has 85% of the economic activity risking the country to be England-focused. There needs to be an act of Union which will set out in a comprehensive form the rights and responsibilities of constituencies. Moreover the relationship between the House of Lords and House of Commons should also be addressed, he said. The two chambers do things in different ways but without competing but rather complementing each other.

Lord Lisvane concluded by saying that the last issue is the Palace of Westminster itself, which is in need of reconstruction and works and a study has been initiated by Lord Lisvane himself on the maintenance needed for the Palace. This also probably includes the need to move out to other premises.

**Charlotte Leslie MP** argued that in a world where challenges are so global, we are all global colleagues. In 2015, we have to go back to 2009. The expenses scandal, which revealed a tension building, as well as the outing of the old guard in the 2010 elections was a turning point. Something about the institution MPs are in, she said, has made these people change their morals, or so it appeared. Ms Leslie said that we faced also a changing era of social media, an era where scrutiny committees even changed their membership adding to further accountability.

She said it is easy to recognize the loud voices of social media as being prevalent voices. However, these people do not necessarily represent the majority or the whole of the constituency. The 2010 election was shaped by both the financial crisis and the review of the role of the Liberal Democrats – this forced the Liberal Democrats to go on the grass-root level, forcing other parties to do so as well.

Finally, she touched on the Scottish referendum and the rise of the Scottish National Party, which could possibly affect also England. At the same time Britain is also looking into its role in the EU and having a referendum in the future. Ms Leslie said that as the news of the last few months have shown, nation states do not have strict boundaries anymore, especially with the rise of terrorism and its penetration in many countries and lives.

### **3.2 OVERVIEW OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

The legislative process is a core element of Parliament's work. The Westminster Seminar programme looked in detail at various aspects of the process, from inception to royal assent. This session offered an introductory overview of the passage of bills through Parliament. How are bills drafted? What are the opportunities for public



consultation? What is the purpose of secondary legislation?

**Damian Collins MP** began the session by stating that the role of MPs beyond legislating and debating is to scrutinize the work of the executive. Other topics include approval for British personnel in war operations. The last role is interaction with stakeholder groups, he said.

**Liam Laurence Smyth** talked about how parliamentary procedure shares tradition which has adapted but the key feature is the dominance of the executive. The bills that get passed are government bills, he says. Mr Laurence Smyth said that it is rare for a government bill to be defeated, as it is rare for an individual member bill to pass unless it has support from the government. However, Parliament is not an originator but rather a checker of the bills, he said.

Mr Laurence Smyth said it is the House of Commons that has the power to deal with money, which means that they expect the government to get the legislation through. However, there is an enormous amount contributed in the process. While it is hard to see where the changes have taken place, he said, some aspects are bending or changing based on pressures. However, subtleties mean that the government can also be defeated with small changes. He said this was also what happened with the EU referendum where small changes allowed the government to proceed.

Mr Laurence Smyth continued by saying that, contrary to former beliefs, there are no more delay tactics. This means that often time is tight in committees, and scrutiny is more intense due to the programming of bills. In general the MPs act a plenary, acting as in serious meetings formally and open to the public. He said that the process of challenge and debate also takes place through formal amendments. However, in these formal proceedings the Minister can so readily bat away amendments, and the bills just go through the process and the government does not get scrutinized enough. He said that we now have impact assessments allowing the members to challenge bills, due also to the lack of preparations of the MPs.

The biggest fault, Mr Laurence Smyth said, is that he can see it is a waste of time by the government in delaying the bill through back benching where government members shout. These people do not need to do so because they are in the majority, he said. Mr Laurence Smyth said here needs to be more engagement of government members in the legislative review. He argued there might be a way for the legislation to be reviewed by the opposition.

Mr Laurence Smyth stated that Bills can often go through even if Lords do not agree, however, government deals with Lords recommendations based on their political positioning and interests, especially when money issues are involved. Tax credits were a case where Lords almost used their veto power, by adding conditionality upon reviews, by killing also the tax credit changes. He said that the relationship between the Houses, with the Lords challenging the primacy of the Commons is important and the Lords should see itself as a debating chamber rather than as a vetoing position. The formality of proceedings and the beating heart and ability of the government, he said.

**Jessica De Mounteney** said that the office was created in 1869. They provide counsel to other organizations as well. They run through Cabinet but operate independently, working at most with the Leader of the House. She said that they review subordinate legislation as well as advising on constitutional issues. Often bills have to pass very fast, and even within one day. Several Northern Ireland bills have been passed (2007 case).

Ms Mounteney explained that drafting is done based on instructions of ministers as well. The process used to be more formal and through correspondence, whereas now the process is more collaborative. The advantage is that you get to make decisions quickly, but fast process has led to corporate knowledge and history getting lost. The process has been less thorough due to use of technology, she said.

She went on to say that Amendments sometimes are drafted not by government, but because there is tension on some issues. Pre legislative scrutiny can be through a



committee or more informal. Consultation is extensive; one was the Defamation Act (2013) where many groups and interests were heard. The Energy Act (2013) was less successful, as the timelines were pressed and the bill had to be rewritten. Scrutiny is not simply a process to go through and needs its time.

Ms Mounteney continued and explained that technical staff are there to draft only, but the process of drafting requires that several issues need to be reviewed and input to be provided; especially in cases where there is difficulty in the drafting it is an indication of issues with the bill itself usually.

### **3.3 PARLIAMENTARY ADMINISTRATION, FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

A modern-day parliament is a complex institution that requires an appropriate management structure to ensure its effective functioning. Many parliaments are governed or administered by a form of Parliamentary Commission comprising of its Members, alternatively many are overseen by the executive. This session examined how the Parliament at Westminster is administered and managed. What are the roles of the House of Commons Commission and House of Lords House Committee? How do these bodies interact with their management boards and each other? How is tradition balanced with modern practicalities?

**David Natzler** began the session by explaining that a new structure of the Parliament was created under the review of the Parliament and that resources of Parliament were broken up due to this. Mr Natzler said that after 2009, payment of MPs was assigned to an independent body, before going through the chronology of the events:

- The Commission sets budget for house administration of the government.
- The Speaker retains soft power as well as control of precincts.
- The issue of governance has received public attention in the last 15 months. It has been a chance to get things on the open. It has been MPs that have addressed the issues.

**Ian Ailles** explained that there is a large executive committee and heads of several departments. The key issue is that services include people from clerks to security and services staff, he said. It is important to see the customer service aspect of the Parliament for whom services need to be provided. He argued that outreach is also necessary for the constituencies.

Mr Ailles said that one of the issues assigned to him was the improvement of processes, following also the Straw Report, including here through the reorganization of services. A clear strategy is needed to coordinate all the projects that are ongoing, he argued. Also digital and IT issues are also to be incorporated in the functioning of the Parliament.

**Andrew Makower** mentioned 500 staff. The governance of the House is simple, he said, involving several domestic committees. There is a Management Board as well as official groups, including audit. The House is independent of the government and parties. The Audit committee dates only from 2002 whereas the speaker dates from 2006.

Mr Makower went on to explain that in several aspects the Houses are separate (including budgets) so in a sense there is no one Parliament. The Houses share the Palace, estates, visitors, broadcasting, digital, and website etc., based on specific terms. Parliamentary programs are joint enterprises, he said, with half running costs set and managed with House of Commons. He explained that getting the relationship right is one of their priorities.

### **3.4 ROLE OF THE SPEAKER**

The Speaker/Presiding Officer of a parliament is a very important appointment and one that has played a unique and prominent role throughout the development of the Westminster system. What is the role of the Speaker in a modern-day parliament? How is the Speaker elected and how can he/she ensure independence? How can the Speaker ensure his/her impartiality and fairness? Should the Speaker be a serving parliamentarian? How does the role of the Speaker vary between the two Houses?

**Rt Hon John Bercow MP** started by explaining that the speaker is simply trying to keep



order and encourage people to take part, and keep to a minimum disruptions and people from being excluded. The role is to allow members to vote as they desire. He explained that a decade ago the House divided and elected speakers whereas now the whole House votes by secret ballot. The concept of impartiality is guaranteed through:

1. It is a matter of propriety and ethics as well as responsibility
2. We are now in a democratic age where there is transparency. The Chair can easily appear to the public.

The Speaker explains that he continues to have contact with constituency, by seeing the Minister, contacting on settlement. In recent times there has been more focus on energizing the role of the backbencher, he said. The scrutiny of government is better, select committee chairs are elected something which also gives more confidence to the heads of the select committees. Mr Bercow explained that new modern facilities have been added, including a nursery, an education center as well as the changes in the wages levels to the minimum wage.

**Rt Hon. Baroness D'Souza** said that the role of the Speaker in the House of Lords is not more than 10 years old. In the contexts of the constitutional reform act in 2005, the Lord Chancellor was part of both the government and Judiciary, and it seemed that there was not adequate separation of powers. She said there were 2 women speakers so far. The role is different from the House of Commons. The House of Lords does not institute legislation but instead scrutinises legislation, she said.

Baroness D'Souza explained that the House is a self-regulating body, where each and every one takes a role in maintaining a degree of order and courtesy. There are no points of order, but there are rather older habits and customs. The Speaker does not actively intervene since it is maintained that there is a sense of self-regulation and convention. Outside the Chamber she is involved in the running of the House, as well as participates in several committees. There is freedom to move to convey influence on issues being discussed. The Speaker has a ceremonial as well as an outreach role in schools and different areas of the country.

## **4.0 DAY II**

### **4.1 ROLE OF AN MP**

What is the role of an MP in the UK Parliament? How can MPs balance various commitments and prioritise their time between their constituencies, Westminster, special interests and many other political and personal pressures? What is the relationship between the political party and the MP? What are the differences between a list MP and a constituency MP?

**Valerie Vaz MP** began the session by welcoming everyone, and talked about her constituency in West Midlands where she had experience as a lawyer for 25 years. She talked about how she manages her time: Mondays and Thursdays based in Westminster and the rest of the time in her constituency. She went on to talk about holding the government to account despite the fact that she is a backbench opposition MP. She also discussed the importance of Select Committees, where they make decisions and produce reports based on evidence and discussions. Furthermore, she maintained that it is possible to use the parliament and select committees to bring about change. She encouraged the participants by reminding them of the opportunities for MPs to bring about small and big changes to people's lives.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh OBE MP** talked about being a member of the third largest party in Westminster which has opened up many opportunities for them. This is something the party is fully embracing. She argued that in the Scottish Parliament there is a system of maximum representations with a true mix of leaders representing their constituencies. She also mentioned that in the Scottish parliament, electoral vote is used.

### **4.2 ROLE OF THE LOYAL OPPOSITION**

This session looked at life in opposition and cross-party cooperation. What is the role of opposition parties in scrutinising the executive? What is understood by the terms



“Loyal or Official Opposition” and “Government-in-waiting”? What is the role of the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Cabinet? How are political parties financed?

**Mr Stephen Pound MP** started the session by talking about the role of the loyal opposition. He said the role of the opposition is to hold the government to account and present an alternative narrative. Mr Pound said the opposition must present itself as an alternative government-in-waiting, within the Parliamentary system, to which it was loyal. The system of ‘shadow’ ministers, in which each government minister was shadowed by a member of the opposition with the brief to present alternative policies and engage with society in developing them, embodied this principle. He then argued that simply opposing everything is not effective, rather you should hold the government to account, oppose but as a government in waiting present an alternative.

**Ms Kirsty Blackman MP** said that as a member of SNP, she recognizes that she and her colleagues will never be in the forerun of the loyal opposition. She talked about how there are a mix of constituencies in the parliament, everyone has manifestos and not everyone agrees so you will not find loyal oppositions agreeing all the time. In the current set up, the Scottish Parliament is in the hands of SNP – in Westminster Labour and SNP are working together but in Scotland SNP and Labour are working against each other. She mentioned that SNP is the only party in house that is a nationalist party but it does not stop them working in the house with other issues.

Ms Blackman explained that the SNP only stood MPs in Scotland, and could not aim to be the official UK opposition to any government. She agreed that opposition parties should hold government to account, and closely scrutinise new legislation. But oppositions also had a duty to oppose legislation in principle, where it conflicted with their manifesto commitments. Kirsty also spoke about relations between opposition parties. On some issues, they could combine against government policy; on others they found themselves in conflict. This was particularly the case with issues concerning the UK constitution, and Scotland’s interests. It was impossible to overstate the importance of the SNP’s commitment to Scottish national interests, and the way in which this separated them in principle from other parties.

She went on outline the way in which the funding of political parties was organised. Parties, of course, raised funds from their own supporters. They were also funded by public money. MPs received a salary, expenses and an office budget. Parties also received public funding on the basis of the number of votes they won in the last general election – known as ‘Short money’. Funding from these and other public sources enabled parties to work on policy development – essential for the effective working of the parliamentary system.

**Rt Hon. Cheryl Gillan MP** said that she had been an MP for 27 years, some of the time in opposition, some in government, including as a member of the Cabinet. She noted that Short money rarely found its way to individual MPs, even cabinet members; it went to the centre of the party. In addition, the SNP tended to benefit more than UK parties from such funding: they could concentrate it on the particular policy areas that their nationalist interests focused on. In these contexts, MPs, especially opposition MPs, relied on the House of Commons Library as a resource for research and policy briefings.

Oppositions needed to work harder than governments on policy development, she said. This was because they lacked the resources of the Civil Service, and came to rely on networking with think tanks and other external organisations to develop the detail of policy proposals. An effective opposition was essential to parliamentary democracy: it could hold the government to account, and it could work to improve legislation introduced by government. The most successful politicians were those who could work across party lines to achieve such change, and could avoid creating tribal divisions between themselves and their opponents.

Ms Gillan talked about how she is aware of the pain and agony of being in opposition with limited opportunity to make big difference. As opposition, she mentioned relying on briefings from House of Commons. She talked about the importance of reacting fast and adapting to situations. Further, she discussed how those in government are less keen to talk to opposition members, therefore it is your responsibility to be eager to make contacts. She also mentioned the power of Select Committees. She



encouraged delegates to be respectful positive politicians, and to not attack individuals. She also talked about the importance of knowing your rights as opposition politicians.

**Rt. Hon. Patrick Yaw Boamah MP** thanked CPA for providing an excellent platform for everyone to share their experiences. He talked about how the party in opposition is a party to form the next government and they need to provide alternative policies. Mr Boamah said the opposition should not oppose government policy for the sake of it, but appeal to the electorate offering viable solutions and alternatives, basing itself on a concern for peace and stability. A number of parliamentary avenues were open to them to do this, including putting motions, private members' bills (though opportunities for such bills were rare) and posing questions during question time. To be effective, an opposition depends upon the resources of civil society, including the media; in addition, opposition parties had a right to state support, which must not be reserved only for the party in power. Freedom of information was therefore essential. The abuse of power to check civil society's freedoms was sometimes a problem in developing countries, and should be challenged.

Mr Boamah continued by saying that in Ghana, the opposition party is simply referred to as the minority party, and traditionally they scrutinize the government. He mentioned that in Commonwealth countries, Private Members' Bills are rare, therefore opposition members should recognize such limitations and use other tools such as Question Time. He argued for a platform where researchers and members could share vital information. Military and police are often used in order to deal with opposition, and it is a challenge for opposition to tackle this, and we are beginning to see traditional rules being reinvented. Mr Boamah's party are currently in opposition. In Ghana, parliamentary business is done through committees. He argued for funding supporting from the government, and said a state must assist opposition parties. Further, in the context of Ghana, he said there is agreement on the need for funding, however no consensus on how much should be spent.

### 4.3 BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

This session looked at the process of organising the UK Parliament's business. How does the Leader of the House organise Government business? What is the Leader's role in enhancing Parliament/Government relations? How is backbench business allocated? What are the 'Usual Channels'? What recent changes have been made to ensure the parliamentary calendar more is more family-friendly and flexible?

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall** began by discussing how the session will be looking at organising business in the houses, in particular in House of Commons. However, she said it would be worthwhile to mention that business is dealt with differently in House of Lords. The main difference lies in the fact that House of Lords prides itself on being self-governed, rather than being directed by the Government. This does not mean that the government has no say, but it is up to the House of Lords to discuss how and what to discuss.

**Rt Hon. Chris Grayling MP** talked about how the process of business in the House of Lords with regards to the timeframe does not exist in House of Commons. While there is a degree of timing, the overall framework of sitting hours is agreed by the house as a whole, e.g. through setting limits to the length of sessions. The tendency is for issues of timing to be settled by 'backbench' MPs, to a greater extent than in the past.

He mentioned how there are debates around how that time should be allocated, and the responsibility lies with the Chief Whip. The time in the house is divided between parties and backbenchers. He said the government sets out when and what is debated, and produced a timetable that is humane. The allocation of time for debates and other business takes account of both Government and Opposition interests.

Within the time allocated to it, government sets out timetables for the law-making process. The conduct of debates is in the hands of the Speaker, who calls members to speak and determines the length of time for which they should speak. He argued that



the crucial difference between House of Commons and House of Lords is that the latter is driven by its members.

**Chris Bryant MP** gave a brief and critical history of Parliament. The phrase, 'the mother of parliaments', he said, was coined by the reforming MP John Bright in the nineteenth century. Yet England, or Britain, did not invent parliament. Iceland created statute law before England, and Bright was using the phrase to criticise the limits of the English system, claiming it was not democratic enough. There was much that could be improved in the current system, he said. Government had far too much control over the business of Parliament and only the government can change standing orders because they have the majority.

Mr Bryant went on to say that important policies, especially ones concerning the Budget, were not adequately scrutinised, because of an absence of time. Governments are happy to ignore resolutions voted for by back-benchers – Chris Bryant gave the example of the banning of animals in circuses. He said that there was much to learn to from all the other countries present at the conference. Further, backbench debates have practically no effect at all on law. He said that there is much to learn to from all the other countries present at the conference.

**David Nuttall MP** said there is no doubt that the Backbench Business Committee is one of the latest developments. He explained that the Backbench Business Committee, established in 2010, is responsible for determining, on behalf of backbench members, the business before the House for approximately one day each week. The committee is made up of the chair and seven other members. He explained that the business includes Thursday sittings in the parallel debating chamber, known as Westminster Hall, which do not involve law-making. He explained that while there are debates in the main chambers and Westminster Hall, only the former gets televised.

It is chaired by a member of the opposition, and selects topics for debate on the basis of their political significance and their importance to members. Debates can be

general – e.g. about child poverty – or directed towards calling for the government to take specific action. Votes are not binding on the government. There was some discontent that while the Committee was ‘given time’ for debates, it had no influencing over the ‘timing of the time’, and debates were often scheduled at times when high attendance was difficult to achieve. This includes Thursdays when most members are keen to get back to their constituencies. Further, Wednesday is often the opposition day. There is tension between committees and government over the notice of time.

#### **4.4 PARTY DISCIPLINE IN PARLIAMENT**

This session generated discussions on party discipline and the role of Whips in the UK Parliament. How do Whips operate as a channel of communication between the front and backbenches? How is discipline maintained? How are Whips’ offices organised? How do Whips interact with Members who take the major decision to vote against their party line? Is the role of the Whips changing?

**Dame Angela Watkinson MP** started the session by talking about the term ‘Whip’. She said that a Whip’s duty is to keep everybody on the party’s side. Further, she mentioned that the Government Chief Whip has long associations with the Parliamentary Secretary. She argued that the first Whips were no more than servants to treasurers, but they now try to block legislations and are appointed to bring about Bills. The voting system is used as a way of estimating member’s loyalty. Moreover, she said Whips act as a channel of communication between backbench and frontbench Members. She discussed the Whip’s main functions as not only managing the business of the day, but also dealing with Human Resources. The Government Chief Whip is assisted by the Deputy Chief Whips, Whips, and Assistant Whips. The business of voting is taken seriously by everyone, and it is the duty of Whips to know every single Member’s thoughts and feelings in order to estimate the outcome of the vote. Thus, Whips are great observers of people’s comments, and they also serve on committees. She moved on to discuss the importance of the relationship between Whips and MPs. She argued that one thing Whips cannot and do not do is to bully anyone which goes against common perception that Whips are rude and aggressive.



**Rt Hon. Alan Campbell MP** said that while the term 'whip' suggested compulsion, the actual role was much more consensual. The Labour Party did not expect its MPs to be present for every vote, so it was a matter of identifying key votes and maximising turnout for them. The Party expected voting discipline from its MPs, though as with any party this was not always possible. As an opposition Whip he had the responsibility of negotiating with Government whips on the issues of Parliamentary business. These were functional discussions rather than political ones, and were conducted on the basis of trust and truthfulness.

Mr Campbell said that the key to being a good Whip is good communication. It is common practice that at the end of week every member receives an e-mail with regards to whipping business for the following week and recommendations. Mr Campbell mentioned that the number of lines underneath the e-mail show how important and demanding the legislation and debate might be. He argued that the key problem is attendance e.g. if someone is not present the Chief Whip should be talking to them.

Further, he suggested that pastoral care is an important part of the Whip's jobs. He also argued that they are not an alternative government or aspire to be one, but they do mirror the government. Although, the government gets its way most of the time, both sides will try to catch each other out without breaking the rules. He also discussed smaller parties that can also have Whips but some of them may not. He said that they are the official opposition, and the nearest after Labour is SNP, and for this reason they expect to be respected.

**Rt Hon. Anne Milton** said how the Whips function is extraordinary. As the Deputy Government Chief Whip she works closely with the opposition than any other work in the parliament. She argued that the work depends on honesty, sticking to your word, and the relationships between actors. She argued that the best way to get the government's business through is by negotiating and facilitating a common ground with Government Ministers. She agreed with Mr Campbell by saying that pastoral care

is a crucial part of the role, and more platforms are being provided to address health and emotional issues of Members.

Ms Milton talked about changes in the role of the Whip. The role was now much more consensual than in the past, based on supporting members and expecting in return a strong degree of party loyalty. In the past, a position like hers would have been held by someone with a background in the armed services. The situation was different now. Parliament was more 'open-minded'. Women were becoming more prominent in Parliament, and she was the first female member of her Party to become Deputy Government Chief Whip.

#### **4.5 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: PRE-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY AND COMMITTEE STAGE**

What is the purpose of pre-legislative scrutiny? Is it effective? How are draft bill committees formed and how do they operate? Where can Members seek specialist advice on pre-legislative scrutiny of a bill? What are the unofficial channels for scrutinizing legislation?

**Rt Hon. Caroline Spelman** discussed the UK as one of the only countries that has introduced a Bill to tackle the modern global problem of trafficking which many countries are engaged in. She said that in order for the Bill to be passed, there was a long series of committee meetings, and one of the big differences was introducing a pre-legislative phase that allowed for evidence to be taken. She argued this was beneficial in trying to take a robust legislation to tackle modern day slavery. She mentioned the government as the deciding actor on pre-legislative scrutiny. By using this method, she argued that there is more time to spot problems with the legislation, and in this case it was clear that there was a strong desire for transparency in supply chains which was not included in the original Bill. Originally the government felt that putting a requirement on business to do a check on slavery in their supply chains would discourage businesses.

However, the pre-legislative scrutiny committee took case studies and evidence that suggested businesses would be keen to follow the requirements because of their

reputations and brand names which resulted in the government putting the transparency in supply chains forward. Ms Spelman gave the example of John Lewis as a reputable company that discovered to their horror that one of their products was being made by slaves. She used this example to argue that it was transformational for companies who appreciated tougher procedures. Further, she mentioned that they not only took evidence from businesses, but from victims and those who were supposed to be legally looking after them. She finished her talk by suggesting that this method is not something that is possible to do for every Bill, and it is not ideal for every Bill as it increases the time before the Bill is passed.

**David Lloyd** started the session by agreeing with Ms Spelman in her description of the legislative process. He moved on to say that scrutiny is part of the role of the committee, however their particular focus is on drafting Bills, providing legal expertise, and supporting departmental committees. Mr Lloyd talked about two current Draft Bills: The Draft Investigatory Power Bill, and the Draft Wales Bill. He said that they do not have many Draft Bills in each session, rather they have around 3 Draft Bills per session. He argued that it is difficult to judge which pre-legislative format works best. Ultimately, it is the government who decides whether pre legislative scrutiny is more appropriate or a particular select committee. He used the example of the Draft Care Bill about Social Care that Mr Lloyd's committee worked on, however the government decided joint committee was the most appropriate format.

#### **4.6 LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: AMENDING LEGISLATION**

The session provided an opportunity to examine the process of amending legislation throughout its different stages within and between Chambers. What is the role of public bill (standing) committees? What are the hurdles in amending legislation? What determines the success of a legislative amendment?

**Mr David Slater** said that to start with there is the debate about the Bill, once the Bill has been passed it goes to a committee stage, and for most Bills it goes to a public committee to get scrutinized during that process. The committee is temporary and only sits once for that particular Bill then split, and for another Bill there will be a new



committee. He mentioned that the balance of membership is based on the majority of the house. The Chair of Bill Committee is different to Select Committees, in the sense that the chair is chosen from a panel of chairs, and their job is to act partial and not participate in the debate itself.

Mr Slater said that the Committee Chair had a vital role in arranging the business of the committee. The Chair was assisted by a Parliamentary Clerk, who offered detailed legal advice on questions of drafting and procedure. He argued that one interesting factor is the scope of the Bill which is the subject matter of the Bill. He talked about small Bills, for example a Bill which introduces fines for motor vehicles, could only be slightly amended. On the other hand, a criminal justice Bill which covers a whole range of topics could be widely amended.

**Dr Louise Thompson** spoke about the chances for successful amendment of a government bill at the committee stage. Ministers were very reluctant to approve opposition amendments because to do so would be to admit to their own weaknesses. Usually, only minor amendments had a chance of success. Government amendments, of course, were very likely to be passed. This did not mean however that the opposition was wasting its time: ministers often offered to 'reconsider' a point which was under debate, thus offering the possibility that the opposition's arguments might be reflected to some extent in the final wording of a bill.

She went on to talk about issues that arise for backbenchers or opposition MPs that try to make change. She said that there in around 150 Bill Committees, in around 8 out of 10 cases a Bill will be amended, however most of these Bills are government's, if government is taken out of the equation and we merely look at backbenchers and opposition it is only 2 or 3 out of 10. She argued that opposition amendments are only about 0.6% successful. She said that if an opposition amendment was to be accepted, first the government MPs would get in trouble because they fear telling their other members that they lost the debate, and second they would want ownership and authorship.

Dr Thompson argued that this proves how misunderstood the Westminster legislation process is. Her argument was that looking at amendments give a false impression, this does not mean that a Bill Committee is not a good place to make an amendment, but it should be looking behind the scenes to see what is actually happening with government amendments. Further, she posited that it is at the report stage where most amendments are made, and MPs often talk with ministers outside committee room to discuss the Bill. She recommended for Bill Committees to take evidence right at the beginning of their committee meeting.

#### **4.7 ROLE OF A COMMITTEE MEMBER**

This session provided an overview of the Westminster select committee system. What role do committees play in holding the government to account? How are committees formed? How to ensure their independence and effectiveness?

As part of his introduction, **Mr Bernard Jenkin MP** told delegates that he has been a MP since 1992 and representing a constituency in East London. He said that the Select Committees have had a long period of development. Early individual committees were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however they were not regarded as much success until the 1960's. He said committees were established to scrutinize some parts of the government. He argued that generally speaking, Governments are not a fan of committees because they create a different kind of scrutiny which is much more difficult for ministers to invade. He mentioned that Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister established a Select Committee for every department.

Mr Jenkin talked about his own committee that looks at the charity commission, and state of civil servants, and UK statistic authority which runs government services. His committee scrutinizes the electoral commission. They announce the scope of an enquiry, and then a session with evidence from witnesses takes place. Once that is done, then Clerks and the Chairman draft a report for discussion, which is debated upon and finally published. He talked about the Government's responsibility to respond to each recommendation. He argued that the important of Select Committees

lies in the fact that they are a cross party system, and the best reports are agreed unanimously because the government is forced to deal with it.

**Dr Ruth Fox** talked about her political research and education charity that works with parliaments. She mentioned her focus on strengthening Select Committees. She argued that they are currently the most effective they have been over the past 30 years in terms of reforms that have taken place. Although, she recognised that assessing effectiveness is an area with difficulty in parliament. She said that when the government accepts recommendations from reports, it does not necessarily mean that they take them on board. According to Dr Fox about 40% of Select Committee reports are accepted by the government and around 30% are implemented over a long period of time.

She said that from her interviews with members and ministers, Select Committees are now widely recognized as influential. She also argued that time and resources are very important for their success, and they are much more strategic in their approach. However, she highlighted an issue with the lack of join work within committees. However she said that there is a huge amount of innovation across committees around how they plan their documents, and how they gather evidence and engage with witnesses, expert research, online evidence collection etc. however according to Dr Fox, these innovations are not universal across all committees.

**Bernard Jenkin MP** argued that the actual mechanics of what the committee does is really only the surface. As soon as there is a witness, the language they use and how they present themselves becomes influential.

**Iain Wright MP** introduced himself as the previous minister for the Labour Government, and talked about his move from frontbencher to Select Committee Chair. He said that he has a very powerful mandate for what his Select Committee will be doing. He described himself as having a clear personal agenda, which challenged the effectiveness of government policies for business and competitiveness. He said his Select Committee had the potential to 'add value' to policy-making by engaging in



detail with ministers and stakeholders. He offered quality assessment in higher education as an example.

Mr Wright said that his vision is a more productive, more innovative economy with better skill levels. He argued that as a Minister you can be shallow about the changes you make, however as a Select Committee member you become more aware. He said that the role of the chair is to challenge, but to make effective recommendations while remaining constructive and broadly consensual.

## **5.0 DAY III**

### **5.1 GIVING MPs A VOICE: PRIVATE MEMBERS' LEGISLATION, ADJOURNMENT DEBATES, PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS AND MOTIONS**

Within the Westminster parliamentary system what tools are at the disposal of individual Members to raise issues of importance? This session discussed the procedure, practice and effectiveness of the Member-led Bills, adjournment debates, Early Day Motions and parliamentary questions. What is the role of adjournment debates? What is the procedure for introducing a Bill and what are the associated challenges? What rules govern parliamentary questions? How do questions enable MPs to hold the Government to account – and how effective is the summoning of Ministers to Parliament to answer an urgent question?

**Mr Andrew Stephenson MP** said that it is a hectic day in the parliament because of the vote on Syria bombing at 10pm. He talked about his own experience as a Member of Parliament since 2010. He represents a deprived area of the country, Pendle, with very specific issues. He had been an active backbencher, raising several hundred parliamentary questions to further the interests of his constituents, particularly around questions of regeneration. Since 2015, he had shifted his role from the backbenches to become a junior member of the government.

He spoke about the art of being an effective backbencher, in relation to making alliances with other MPs, making use of the 10 minute Bill procedure, generating

media interest, and selecting when to hold ministers to account. He shared that he started as a backbench supporter of the coalition government but changed to being a part of the majority. He would challenge his government when necessary, but had only twice voted against it. He said that he always tries to use parliament procedures without actively voting against his party. He gave an example of a large redundant building in his constituency that he wanted to see regenerated. He raised it at every oral question time from different angles, and because of his tactic and persistence, the government granted several million pounds to the project.

He argued that during Prime Minister's Question time in the House of Commons, the media and other people are watching which allows for generating further pressure. He said that debates are an important aspect of what they do as MPs. He talked about the challenge of using his power to confront policies without getting into trouble with the Whips. Mr Stephen mentioned the Private Members Bills, and the number of different ways they could be brought forward. There is a strong mechanism called the 10 minutes rule Bill, where they propose a change in the law and there is 10 minutes to put forward your bill, your change. However, he recognised that such Bills never really get far and die quickly, but they should be seen as a good opportunity for MPs to set out the law that they think needs to be changed and get further support from elsewhere.

**Mr Andrew Stephenson MP** gave the examples of the murder of three of his constituents in Pakistan, and a woman who was murdered by her boyfriend because of a judge's error that inspired him to fight for amendments in different Bills. He said he used different mechanisms to push something forward, get other parliamentarians supports and ultimately the change he wanted.

**Fergus Reid** said that Private Member Bills are not really about changing the law, but rather they should be looked at as another tool. He talked about the 13 Fridays put aside for Private Member Bills, and argued for the importance of getting one of first spots in one of those days. This means that from around 500 members, there is only 7 that have a chance for a reading. Further, he said the first 20 people are the ones

who come out of the ballot. The order in which they are called out is the order used, hence timing is crucial. He mentioned other routes such as members presenting their Bill to a chair at any time, however with no opportunity to explain anything other than the title. Further, he also talked about the 10 minutes rule which allows for one member on Tuesdays, one member on Wednesdays to bring about a change.

**Mr Mike Hennessy** talked about the German debates which last around 30 minutes between members who requested the debate and the minister. He mentioned that there are 10 Westminster Hall debates a week, and there are different deadlines. In the German debates, there are no votes possible, but they are still very popular and get around 70-80 requests.

German debates: no votes possible on these debates. They are very popular and they get around 70/80 requests. He also talked about the backbench business which is relatively new and was introduced in 2010. He argued, this has introduced a category of business which did not exist previously, and which allows for backbenchers to do something they have never been able to do before. Another way for backbenchers to push government is through Parliamentary Question Time. However, there are around 45,000 questions submitted for one session. In the past, he mentioned a member wrote 530 questions. The oral questions are drawn from a shuffle, and the opening question does not really challenge the Prime Minister but rather the supplementary questions are often the most powerful ones.

He said that there must be some sort of basis to the question, they should not be argumentative, and should be asking for more information, and cannot be something you can google to find the answer. He also discussed early day motions and argued that the chances of them getting debated is near to zero.

## **5.2 HOLDING THE PRIME MINISTER TO ACCOUNT – PRIME MINISTER’S QUESTIONS**

At Westminster the Prime Minister, like his/her Ministers appears in Parliament once a week to answer questions. Many Parliaments have a similar process. What is the purpose and procedure of Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs)? How effective are



PMQs in holding the Prime Minister to account? In what other ways is the Prime Minister held to account? Following this discussion delegates had the opportunity to view PMQs live via a video stream in the Attlee Suite.

**Graham Stringer MP** mentioned that Prime Minister's Question Time was taken of the business of the house in order to make time for the debate on Syria. He said that this has only happened in one occasion, and that was when David Cameron's son died which shows that it only happens under very unusual circumstances. Graham said that from talking to colleagues some still had not made up their minds, however it was looking like the government was going to win substantial votes. But, he said some minds will be changed with the power of arguments and debates.

Prime Minister's Question Time has not always been around, it was introduced around 60-70 years ago. Prime Minister's Question Time changes from parliament to parliament depending on the personality of the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition who is the main focus of the debate. He argued that at times it is very vicious, but at other times it is more intellectual. He said that Jeremy Corbyn has a much more quiet and relaxed tone which has changed the exchange within the chamber. The leader of opposition is allowed 6 questions, the leader of second largest opposition is allowed 2 questions. Other people can get in by trying to catch the attention of the speaker. When the list is printed, the speaker balances the debate by calling someone who was not on the paper.

The Prime Minister's office will look at the names on the paper and go through the issues that the MPs are concerned with. Prime Minister would get a brief for example on hospitals, schools etc. depending on the certain member's interest, and he would be briefed on those issues but he wouldn't know what was going to be asked. On the morning, those issues will be prepared and the PM will go into the whips office and ask for advice regarding members' interests. At the same time the opposition will meet and decide on a theme. Since general election, the government has proposed changes.

He asked the big question of the efficiency of Prime Minister's Question Time. By asking a series of questions, does it change policy? He argued that it often does not, and depends vastly on the credibility of the opposition. Consistent questioning on difficult issues has changed the government's policies in the past. Occasionally, individuals try to get difficult questions to make the Prime Minister look bad but they rarely succeed.

### **5.3 THE ACCOUNTABLE PARLIAMENT: PARLIAMENTARY ETHICS AND STANDARDS**

This session provided an overview of how parliamentary ethics and standards evolved and discussed the practice of upholding the parliamentary Code of Conduct. How are the rules on parliamentary privilege affected by the modern-day environment in which they operate? What is the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and how does it differ from the work of IPSA? Why are there separate committees on Standards and on Privileges? What effect does the parliament's approach have on public confidence?

**Rt. Hon. Sir Kevin Barron** gave an introduction to the session by discussing the Standards of Public Life Committee that was organized by John Major for all people in public life, local governments, civil servants who should have a set of ethics standards to guide them. He mentioned the following as the general principles behind the Code of Conduct:

- 1) Selflessness – solely in public interest;
- 2) Integrity;
- 3) Objectivity in carrying out public businesses;
- 4) Accountability for decisions and actions;
- 5) Openness; and
- 6) Honesty.

Leadership – something in Kevin's view they struggle with, in terms of committees.

**Ms Eve Samson** said that the title of the session raises questions of accountability – i.e. accountable to whom, and how accountable. She argued that it is impossible to say that certain things are definitely wrong. For example, lying in the parliament is definitely wrong, how is keeping some information back wrong?

**Lord Bew** talked about Kathryn Hudson as the current lead commissioner for 5 years. She has great independence. Commissioner's work is overseen by the committee on standards but not directed by it. Her main role is to maintain four registers: register of members' financial interest, members of staff, media register is around 400 pages long. He said that the Code of conduct is short and runs to over two pages. One page sets out principles, and the other sets out 7 rules. Another part of Kathryn's role that takes most of her time and public attention is dealing with complaints.

**Lord Bew** said that key is that they are a non-departmental body so they are not regulators. Their function is to advice on ethical questions to the Prime Minister. Press culture is behind public's disbelief in MPs. He said that there is more transparency than 20 years ago, e.g. you can find out what your MP is spending on expenses. He argued that while this parliament takes standards issues seriously but there is not going to be a magical transformation of public attitudes. The powers they have as a committee is to suspend a member for a long time, they would lose their rights of salary and pension – he suggested that this happens from time to time.

#### **5.4 DISPERSING SOVEREIGNTY: DEVOLUTION AND LOCALISED GOVERNANCE**

Across the world there has been an increasing move towards devolution. This session drew on examples from the UK and beyond in asking whether devolution is always the right option? How to ensure effective collaboration and scrutiny between the national parliament and devolved legislatures? What is the West Lothian Question and EVEL?

**Patrick Grady MP** began the session by talking about the relatively new role of the SNP party in Westminster, and the transformation of Scotland's political story. He argued that the more modern SNP came out of nationalist movements, and it was not necessarily campaigning for complete independence. He said that the success people



saw had deep historical roots, and that has been part of a broader discussion of devolution of the UK.

Mr Grady mentioned that since 1997, there has been increasing devolution of different parts of the UK and this has continued to this day. He argued that town hall meetings, door to door engagement, media and social media over two years led to the referendum. Since last December's vote, the Prime Minister promised to look at more powers that could be given to Scotland, but we have also seen the introduction of English votes for English Laws which has occupied our attention since May. He said that the SNP will be seeking a third term with the clear desire to get majority

**Lord Purvis of Tweed** said that is new and interesting in the debates is the devolution of health and social welfare powers with which comes fiscal powers. There is ongoing work to discuss the principles of fiscal arrangements. There is no clear statement of what fundamental reserved powers there are, and it has not entirely resolved what this parliament does when it devolves power. He mentioned that he is currently working on the relation of Westminster Parliament vs the devolution of the other.

**Ms Meka Whaitiri MP** said she will make her contribution through the lenses of indigenous people of New Zealand. In the context of the New Zealand government, there is no single constitution as there is in the UK. Ministers are responsible both collectively and individually. The indigenous people of New Zealand operate under a Nominated Member of Parliament votes system. There is now a treaty for the Maori people that focuses on claiming national resources and assets, and education, and media by Maori people for Maori.

She argued that the Treaty of Devolution has benefited the Maori people as it has legitimized their rights, and Maori people are for the first time able to criticise. She said that based on their experiences, devolution was a good thing for the representation of governance, however there is still a lot to do.

## 5.5 KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH AND INFORMATION SERVICE

To function better, parliamentarians should have access to up-to-date, reliable and independent information services, but the investment is large. How are information services structured in a modern parliament? Taking Westminster as an example, what services are offered through the House of Commons Library, research departments and the Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology (POST)? What other information services are available to Members? How can parliamentary staff use the information available to offer targeted advice to their Members?

**Ms Penny Young** argued that if one could be on top of information, it allows for articulating the problem and bringing to life the experiences of the public. It is about the impact of policies and official statistics and so on. She mentioned the House of Commons Library, which is the work place of 120 research professionals. They receive around 30,000 inquiries, and the individual service they provide is a confidential service, and focused on helping members find whatever they need.

**Dr Nath** said that everyday an issue arises that requires some understanding of science. She mentioned that they have different ways of making sure MPs get what they need. One of the most valuable things has been evidence checks, and how the government has used evidence in a particular situation. Dr Nath said that the House of Lords Library is smaller. They are internal with vested interests, but they do not make recommendations – where they differ from the library is that what they do is proactive, rather than topics of tomorrow. She said they are administrated by a board of MPs. Further, she discussed their reports as mainly 4 pages synopsis on complex topics. She argued that the aim of their work is to inform parliamentary debate but not influence it in any way, and they often put issues on the radar before they are topical.

**Mr Rollo Hope** started by saying that he has been in parliament for 5 years. He uses the 120 researchers in the library to find out information for Sir Gerald Howarth. He mentioned the different techniques he uses to find information – such as the library, general Google search, Conservative research party, think-tanks outside the

parliament, in parliament in the select committees papers, the parliament website, or even newspapers. However, he argued that the library is fundamental to his work. If an MP was doing a radio interview and was questioned about his sources, the House of Commons Library would never get questioned. He also mentioned another benefit of the researchers at the library being good at finding information very quickly, is that the European Union's website is very complicated which makes it a struggle to find anything, however researchers are able to find the information you need from there.

## **6.0 DAY 4**

### **6.1 PARLIAMENT IN THE AGE OF MODERN DEMOCRACY: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

A modern-day Parliament has numerous mechanisms to directly connect with the public. How can modern technology and innovation ensure parliaments are more accessible, engaging and representative? Can technology provide innovative solutions to closing the communication gap between parliaments and the younger generation? Can it lead to more representative democracies?

**Chloe Smith MP** said that they have every opportunity to look at new technology and that as MPs they have a responsibility to do so. Politics must be where people are, and the way they live their lives and if politics leaves this out, they fail to represent their people.

**Louise Palmer** said that her responsibility is to look after the on-site programme. They run it from ages 5-18 for anyone in formal learning. Until July 2015 they used the resources of this building, but they didn't have designated buildings or rooms. Their remit is to welcome both Houses to facilitate understanding about Parliament and democracy. Before July 2015 there were 45000-50000 visitors, this month they have been gone up to 100k. The demand from school visitors is incredible. Ms Palmer says they need to make children understand that this is part of their life.

There was demand and they needed the capacity and they needed the designated space (lunch, bathrooms). The learning environment was very important, bringing



together Parliament, history and modern times. They didn't want to replicate a school room or that atmosphere however.

*Delegates were shown a video about the Education Centre*

Ms Palmer said Parliament is yours, and Parliament is evolving, which is also represented in the building – bringing the old and new together by bringing complex ideas together in a grounded environment. She said that they used all the technology available to them, the Discovery space 360° room, which gives people a context about the tour they are going to see, and about the history of Parliament. They can recreate the debating Chambers, they have a debating chamber of House of Commons and House of Lords. They can bring the Chambers to the people and show who the key members are. They have green screen actors that can give a presentation and performance of key events. For example – voting rights for women etc. Ms Palmer said they also use Voting pads, as it makes them understand their votes and demystifies the voting system. They can see pros and cons of voting systems and helps them pick on complexities.

Ms Palmer continued by saying that the Education Centre are lucky that they have enough tablets for student pairs, to effectively let them work in groups and let them quickly put presentations together and use online technology. Augmented technology uses tablet technology, they have an App that when you hold it up, it triggers an experience. It is hidden until the App brings it to life. They also have a 3D printer. It enables us to use mini-props to demonstrate ideas and put it into our loan boxes to send out to schools. The Education Service produces resources for teachers and schools for people to download that allows them to extend the education process to schools more easily. There are also sound-showers which are audio-speakers that hang from the ceiling, with wonderful audio clips so they are immersed in that experience. In the future they want to include experiences from visitors in too.

The Education Centre also produces online services like games, she said, and other things to extend their experience as well as the use of social media. There are also a number of online competitions to extend their experience, like "if you could make a

law, what would it be?" In summary, Ms Palmer said the Education Centre enables them to bring Parliament to life and it underpins a lifelong relationship with it.

**Meg Hillier MP** began by explaining that she is an MP for East London and was one of the members of Digital Democracy, an attempt to push parliament and MPs faster down the path of digital engagement. There are still a bulk of colleagues who still don't want to engage.

The Commission was set up in January. The idea was to "drag" MPs into the digital world and help them understand the demands of an MP. Some of the recommendations include that by the next elections 2020, the House of Commons and everyone should understand what it does. They wanted to break away the "middleman".

The commission provided recommendations:

- By the next elections the House of Commons should promote and allow everyone to understand what it does. This includes language adaptations, providing explanations on what amendments would do and how they would affect the bill. This includes plainer language use.
- Open Data- All published information of the House should be provided on an open format to allow the development and analysis of information. In transportation, for example, the release of data allowed the development of apps that improve the quality of use of data.
- Using social media, using hashtags and allowing people to know when to engage.
- Allow to engage in a proper way, and seeing how we reply or get back to the citizens in a dialogues rather than a news bombardment.
- By 2020 online voting should be available.

They wanted to get the public engaging better in what we do, and create a facility for MPs to engage back. Some select Committees use a specific twitter hashtag. There also needs to be a way to figure out how to provide feedback back when people engage. This means also getting the dialogue going in a digital way. By 2020 secure online voting should be an option.

MPs are worried, even those digitally-savvy, about the twitter abuse and backlash from social media.

## **6.2 A PARLIAMENT FOR ALL: ENSURING EQUALITY AND GOOD WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

“Despite its history and traditions, Parliament is not an unchanging institution... Given the House has changed before, it can change further” (APPG Women in Parliament Inquiry 2014: Improving Parliament).

This session looked at parliament as an employer; asking whether the institutional structures and culture is keeping up with the speed of social change. What is required to ensure that parliament is an equal opportunity employer, ensuring an accessible and enabling working environment for all?

**Baroness Barker** said that parliament provides a public forum for its citizens to debate the future. And if only a party is represented, it does not do its job well. After the Second World War a lot of people came to this country as economic migrants, and when they arrived they were subject to the most horrible discrimination. In the 1960s a process of legislation change took place for more inclusion, she said. There was a public discourse through the 1970s against discrimination, outside Parliament. Any great change starts outside parliament but is only fully accomplished once it changes legislation and is reflected in it.

In 1988 Section 28 of Local Government Act passed regarding homosexuality which was the first piece of legislation on the discrimination of a group of people based on who they are. It was the catalyst for a second generation of work towards equality. People were so outraged by Section 8, that they sparked the movement. (“The Stonewall”) Present Parliament is as diverse as it can be at the moment, and particularly the HoL is trying to make up for the in-diversity in the HoC (male, white). HoL is probably more diverse than HoC, she said, and more active in including people with disability too especially when seeing how many people actively participate in discussions.



She argues that we have come to the realisation that discrimination is a costly business, and especially in parliament as it means you do not represent a certain group of citizen. Diversity is good for business, therefore also a good economic reason.

**Prof. Sara Childs** argued that parity is unlikely to happen naturally. Thought should be put in in terms of intervening, adding diversities of identities, especially when taking into consideration how over-represented men are in the UK parliament.

There is also a question of asymmetry, she said. All parties have expended considerable efforts to include women. But, differences also exist at the party-level. How does the parliament fit in the wider social context and culture? When thinking about the number of women in parliament, parliamentary efforts won't be sufficient, because parties select who gets elected; attention should be paid at what parties are doing to recruit women. All have increased their efforts to "supply" for women, especially to "ask" women and recruit them. Prof Childs said political parties have to be proactive. Women in these parties have been active to expand their influence.

Professor Childs said that civil society can create a public demand for more women but also a better parliament. Inter-party competition devoted energies to increase the number of women in 2000s. In 2010 the Speakers conference took place indicating a response by government to take such issues seriously. The conference discussed gender as well as disability although not class. Also it saw what kinds of resources these women need. Most of the debate was focused on the party changing party demand but also enabling people to engage. Demands like establishing a party crèche have been implemented, others haven't been addressed yet.

Professor Childs pondered that, given the criticism, how could parliament change to let women be effective parliamentarians, including the building, the process etc. Establishment of a Women's Select Committee was an idea. A group of parliamentary women also made an informal report on how to recruit and retain and enable women to be effective:

- Parliamentary week
- Culture
- Buildings
- How we do politics should be professionalized
- Women's select committee should exist

She said that this is really about institutionalizing the efforts of including women. Some people felt that there was a lack of set of actors to hold in account the government, she said. The Select Committee addresses institutionalization that enables MPs to act. Some of the questions that emerge are: Are women marginalised in certain committees? Do we need a rule that committees aren't single sex? To what extent does the parliament provide a necessary infrastructure? Is there sufficient support for childcare, caring more widely, particular needs to effectively do your job. Culture – cultural change has to come organically it is thought often. However, if we are to change culture we might have to create a demand (request from outside and inside parliament), she said, as Parliaments do not always change without intervention.

**Ann Moghaddami** said that there is a strategy on improving disability access but there has also been a review based on focus groups and other research between 2012 and 2015 as well as a survey of 400 people. They found that day-by-day it seems that there is no change, but that there are changes compared to a few years back. This includes in the building, in participation, work place equality reform, senior management etc. There were serious impediments to make the organization change. However, disability standards have been introduced, which aim to reveal how inclusive organisations are in terms of disabilities (both physical, hearing impaired people, as well as e.g. learning disabilities) and how to improve these areas.

Now there is a disability standard in order to see how the Parliament is faring based on indicators and improving in these areas. Some of the work is also about hearing impaired people. Work also focuses on making the environment more accessible for employees and visitors to the area, including committee rooms. Sign language and

subtitles have been introduced, and extending the lift refurbishment, to make all areas more accessible and extending the ramps, as well as emergency exits and alarms have been improved. Improved rest-room areas for more mobility also exist, she said.

ParliAble is one of the workplace equality networks – along with ParliReach, Parliagender, ParliOUT – which are addressing access. She said that one of the biggest projects at the moment is workplace adjustment as there is no such project for employees in the Houses. Work place adjustment is aimed at helping staff do their job better. There are no clear workplace adjustment guidelines for employers so staff needs to be given some support in requesting changes.

### **6.3 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

With parliament and the media being key stakeholders in a working democracy, it is important that they build a strong professional relationship based on mutual respect and recognition. Yet that is not always the case. This session discussed the role of the media in scrutinising the work of parliament and how this mandate affects its relationship with MPs. How can a successful relationship between the two parties be developed? What effect has the rise of modern technology and social media had on the media's oversight function and its relationship with the MPs?

**Diane Abbott MP** said that the relationship has evolved over the years. One of the key points of it has been the relationship of politics and the media. Now the people get their information from a range of outlets, from newspapers but now increasingly from online (Social media, blogs, etc.). It has changed the immediacy on news and stories being broadcasted.

**James Landale** said that his role is to report on politics in general. Westminster is the central physical location of politics and not only Parliament. He travels with ministers and visits summits, e.g. he went to Afghanistan and Iraq twice a year. Westminster here is the central hub of UK domestic news. It is a system of lobby-system, an old system when there was a small number of correspondence.



It is understood that any conversation he has with the Parliament, any information he will be given in this geographic location is broadcast-able. It has been discussed to be problematic, due to members of parliament using it to their advantage or journalists quoting unnamed ministers to their advantage. It is a relation that is collaborative but it is also conflictual, especially when they broadcast something they would not like, but that is the nature of the thread as both have different agendas. His job is to broadcast everything that is said objectively.

The Westminster media might get too close to the government of the day, as they spend a lot of time together with the politicians. The personal relationship developing between the journalist and for example Prime Minister, due to the time spent together, may complicate the work of the journalist. Trust matters hugely to make a relationship like this work. Social media now is hugely important in the way they operate. Twitter is the vehicle for broadcasting, it is a form of communication and source of news.

**Hon. Sunjeev Kaur Birdi MP** said she always believed it takes a certain type of person to be in parliament, a leader. Media is the make all and be all, make or break, for a Member of Parliament. Media and Politics are two different sides in a single road. People are trying to use the media for their benefit, especially members of parliament, therefore it has to be supervised carefully. In Kenya, the media should not be used to promote negativity in the country. The broadcast media (TV, print, social media) should be used to get the message across. They have legislation concerning media in Kenya as well.

She has always struggled with establishing a successful relationship between media and politics. As a journalist, you are always looking for stories, and even if you find a story you cannot sell a story, because it might not be newsworthy. As a politician, you have to try to establish a good relationship with the media. Social media has really kicked in in Kenya.

**Diane Abbott MP** argued that an important role of the media is to hold systems and institutions to account. Media and politics are intertwined, and both need each other's.

#### **6.4 PARLIAMENT, NGOs AND CSOs**

Civil society across the world has never been so vocal; still their messages often fail to reach the decision-makers. As the current debate around the Sustainable Development Goals call for a global multi-stakeholder partnership and a data revolution, this session explored the relationship between parliamentarians, non-governmental and civil society organisations – how can mutual cooperation be encouraged? How can more active partnership lead to a better informed and more representative decision making?

**Klara Skrivankova** began by stating that they are the oldest NGO in the world, founded 1838. Already back then they were very close to the parliament, and had been campaigning for legal abolition of slavery. They have worked with parliamentarians and also hold them accountable. With the modern Slavery Act, the work on it with parliamentarians was more intense than ever before. They haven't had a discussion of this scale ever before, and the input of civil society is very valued. As there are so many topics and issues, especially when it comes to complex issues it is hard to be an expert on all of it, this is why these organisations like theirs are so important, she said. They have the knowledge and expertise, but they can also verify the data and information.

A lot of people still think that modern slavery takes place elsewhere in the world, whereas we actually do have problems of it in this country and the constituencies. The other area they have looked at was bringing the voice of civil society together with business. An issue is how businesses are involved and to what extent can transparency be assured.

The word of an NGO is often not regarded as valuable in the world of business. It was fascinating to see, both civil society and business together talking about the same issue, and business being responsible and advocating to inform parliamentarians that it is not only an isolated voice, but it is also regarded as an issue in business.

Klara asked if they make a difference and if it is worth it. Not just for the people, but also could they demonstrate to their founders that they have made progress. It does make a big difference, she said, not just now but also before, as they did manage to change the law that was then effectively used to prosecute people who were practicing slavery. It was a very successful collaboration of getting the right information to the right people at the right time.

**Susy Latta** said the first question is, do they need the parliamentarians, as there are lots of ways to get things done without the parliamentarians. One can often change something at the local level much more easily. They wanted to get people to understand how parliament works and how they can influence it, e.g. getting them registered to vote etc. (especially young people).

The Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy got lots of young people together, often from backgrounds where they wouldn't usually get together with their politicians, and got them to talk about the technologies they would prefer to be included and accessible to parliament/politics. High speed railway between London and Birmingham: residents of north London will be affected by this, and these locals now were campaigning on the issue.

After Scottish Referendum, there were lots of questions about the British Constitution, and there was a discussion on how to get people involved in decisions.



## 6.5 CLOSING PLENARY – COMMON PATH TO DEMOCRACY: COMMONWEALTH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In 2012, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies embarked on a three-year AHRC-funded project to produce an oral history of the modern Commonwealth (since the creation of the Secretariat in 1965). The project, which was recently completed, contains around 80 digitised transcripts of interviews with key international players in the organisation's past. Professor Murphy and Dr Onslow talked about the genesis of the project and presented its key findings.

**Prof. Philip Murphy** said that they work for a relatively small unit at the University of London (UoL), specialising in the history of the Commonwealth and human rights. The project was developed as a resource for the oral history of the Commonwealth. For the 80s and 90s there was a lack of good historical material. Church College Cambridge has a lot of information on diplomats interviewed about their service. They thought the same thing should exist for the Commonwealth. He said this is particularly useful as from paperwork we have an idea of the formal policies and actions, but it is harder to do so on the thoughts and meetings considered at the time. As there are often no meetings the interviews provide good insight. The only way to capture these insights is from the individuals. Putting the information together to the HRC made sense, as the project satisfied the criteria of the 3 Ps. (Project, Place, People.)

Prof. Murphy said that the people and the team of historians was great and being in London was a big advantage strategically as people pass along anyway. They value their academic freedom of speech and neutrality. They wanted to go in in a party-neutral way and ask questions about whether the Commonwealth has achieved anything in the past 20 years.

**Dr Sue Onslow** said that they talked over 70 people, they had 90 fully searchable interviews, and a particularly strong voice from a strong voice from a diversity of people. She said that the benefit of doing the research herself and doing the interview, was that she could cross-reference the information given. One thing that helped her

understand was the complex mind of the Commonwealth, and the importance of having an accredited institution. She said that 140 election monitoring missions since 1980 were carried out by the Commonwealth. These interviews show how they build the international organisation, she said. It's a soft-power organisation and an extraordinary piece of diplomacy.

**Prof. Philip Murphy** *showed some PowerPoint slides with some of the issues raised in the interviews.* Regarding South Africa, he highlighted the importance of financial sanctions in the 80s. After Mandela was released there was still Commonwealth engagement. The Commonwealth seemed to speak with a united voice (in comparison to the EU), which gave its voice more leverage in the discussions. The issues of a historical project is that nothing is definite and set in stone. There are several voices and opinions afterwards. The issue of the greatest achievement of the Commonwealth was raised, and he argued that the answer is 'that it is still here'.

## **7.0 DAY V**

On the final day of the Seminar, there were discussions on the sessions and highlights of the week.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 Parliament is invited to note the content of the report and annexures.

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# **ANNEXURE 1**



# PROGRAMME

## SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER

ALL DAY

ARRIVAL DAY

## MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER - ATTLEE SUITE

1000-1200	Registration (official Seminar hotel)
1200-1300	WELCOME LUNCH
1300-1340	Welcome and introductions. Overview
1340-1345	Housekeeping announcements
1345-1445	Session 1: Introduction to the Westminster
1445-1545	Session 2: Overview of the legislative process
1545-1600	Coffee/Tea
1600-1700	Session 3: Parliamentary administration
1700-1800	Session 4: Role of the Speaker
1800-2000	Opening lecture at the Speaker's House What gives Parliament its power? Followed by a reception

## TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

	Members only - Attlee Suite
0900-1000	Session 5A: Role of an MP
1000-1100	Session 6A: Role of the Loyal Opposition
1100-1115	Coffee/Tea
1115-1215	Session 7A: Business of the House
1215-1315	Session 8A: Party discipline in Parliament
1315-1415	Lunch
1415-1515	Session 9A: Legislative process: pre-legislative scrutiny and committee stage
1515-1530	Coffee/Tea
1530-1630	Session 10A: Legislative process: amendment and legislation
1630-1730	Session 11A: Balancing priorities: between the Chamber and the constituency (including Friday programme briefing)

# PROGRAMME OUTLINE

## SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER

ALL DAY	ARRIVAL DAY
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## MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER - ATTLEE SUITE

1000-1200	<i>Registration (official Seminar hotel)</i>
1200-1300	WELCOME LUNCH
1300-1340	Welcome and introductions. Overview of the Seminar programme
1340-1345	<i>Housekeeping announcements</i>
1345-1445	Session 1: Introduction to the Westminster System; key current challenges
1445-1545	Session 2: Overview of the legislative process
1545-1600	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
1600-1700	Session 3: Parliamentary administration, finance & governance
1700-1800	Session 4: Role of the Speaker
1800-2000	Opening lecture at the Speaker's House What gives Parliament its power? <i>Followed by a reception</i>

## TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

<i>Members only - Attlee Suite</i>		<i>Clerks only - CPA Room</i>	
0900-1000	Session 5A: Role of an MP	0900-1000	Session 5B: Role of the Committee Clerk
1000-1100	Session 6A: Role of the Loyal Opposition	1000-1100	Session 6B: Role of the Legislative Clerk
1100-1115	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>	1100-1115	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
1115-1215	Session 7A: Business of the House	1115-1215	Session 7B: Role of the Procedural Clerk
1215-1315	Session 8A: Party discipline in Parliament	1215-1315	Session 8B: Member/Clerk relations
1315-1415	<i>Lunch</i>	1315-1415	<i>Lunch</i>
1415-1515	Session 9A: Legislative process: pre-legislative scrutiny and committee stage	1415-1515	Session 9B: Legal services & the Speaker's Counsel
1515-1530	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>	1515-1530	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
1530-1630	Session 10A: Legislative process: amending legislation	1530-1645	Session 10B: Standing Orders
1630-1730	Session 11A: Balancing priorities: between the Chamber and the constituency (including Friday programme briefing)	1645-1730	Session 11B: Clerks' workshop briefing (including case study presentation for the committee exercise)





### WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2015 - ATTLEE SUITE

0930-1100	Session 12: Giving MPs a voice: Private Members' legislation, adjournment debates, parliamentary questions & motions
1100-1130	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
1130-1230	Session 13: Holding the Prime Minister to account - Prime Minister's Questions [video link]
1230-1330	<i>Lunch</i>
1330-1430	Session 14: The ever-evolving Parliament: Parliamentary ethics & standards
1430-1530	Session 15: Competing sovereignty: bicameralism & working with devolved legislatures
1530-1545	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
1545-1700	Session 16: Knowledge is power: parliamentary research and information services
1730-1900	Reception hosted by the Clerk of the House

### THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER 2015 - ATTLEE SUITE

0900-1000	Session 17: Parliament in the age of modern democracy: education & outreach
1000-1115	Session 18: Parliament, international organisations & civil society
1115-1130	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
1130-1245	Session 19: Working Parliament
1245-1345	<i>Lunch</i>
1345-1500	Session 20: The role of the media
1500-1600	Session 21: A Parliament for all: ensuring equality and good working environment
1600-1630	Closing Plenary: Common path to democracy: <i>Commonwealth Oral History Project</i>
1630-1730	Closing address and certificates <i>Afternoon tea will be served</i>

### FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER 2015 - CONSTITUENCIES/ATTLEE SUITE (TBC)

<i>Members' programme</i>		<i>Clerks' workshop</i>	
0800-1500 (approx. timings)	Constituency visits (various locations)	0900-1000	Best practice for holding a committee enquiry
	<i>End of programme</i>	1000-1115	Writing an effective committee report
		1115-1130	<i>Coffee/Tea</i>
		1130-1300	Improving committee effectiveness: interactive exercise
		1300-1400	<i>Lunch</i>
			<i>End of programme</i>



# ANNEXURE 2





# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

## REPORT ON THE 64TH WESTMINSTER SEMINAR ON PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE

