



# LESSONS FROM ABROAD

## How Parliaments Around The World Engage With Their Public

A report for the Group on Information for the Public, UK Parliament

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# CONTENTS

<b>Case Study Menu</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
Parliament and public engagement	4
<b>Structure And Methodology</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Information Provision</b>	<b>12</b>
Websites	12
Public information and social inclusion	12
Institutional dynamism: committee pages	14
Profiling elected representatives	16
An on-line one-stop-shop	17
Print media and broadcasting	20
Advertising	20
A media venture?	21
Broadcasting	23
On-site information kiosks	24
<b>Parliament As Public Space</b>	<b>26</b>
Visits	26
Socially inclusive visitors tours	26
Thematic tours	27
Tours beyond Parliament	28
Open days/nights	30
Exhibitions and democracy museums	31
A Festival of Politics	33
Visitor centres	34
<b>Facilitation Models</b>	<b>37</b>
On-line forums	37
Future forums	41
Public engagement entrepreneurs	44
<b>Outreach</b>	<b>48</b>
A regional presence	48
Mobile presence: an outreach bus	50
Ambassadorial outreach	51
<b>Partnerships With Civil Society</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>58</b>
Role-play	58
Internship schemes	61
Seminars and academic outreach	65
<b>Strategic Objectives And Organisation</b>	<b>68</b>

## CASE STUDY MENU

• Swedish Riksdag website	13
• US Congressional Committee webpages	14
• Participation portal: Parliament 2.0 – Catalonia	17
• Advertising committee activities in the national media – Australia	20
• <i>About the House</i> Magazine – House of Representatives, Australia	22
• <i>About the House</i> TV - House of Representatives, Australia	24
• Thematic Tours – German Bundestag	27
• ‘Behind the Scenes’ Tours – Parliament of New South Wales, Australia	27
• A ‘Little Lunch Sitting’ for Mature Age Groups – Australian Parliament	27
• High Teas – Queensland Parliament, Australia	28
• Canada’s Parliament Hill tours and related events	28
• Germany’s Path of Democracy	29
• 40 Days of Open Day – The Federal Assembly, Swiss Parliament	30
• The ‘Little Night Sitting’ – Parliament of New South Wales, Australia	30
• Citizen’s Day – Danish Folketing & Estonian Riigikogu	31
• ‘Milestones – Setbacks – Sidetracks’ – German Bundestag’s Historical Exhibition	32
• On the Way to the Modern Parliament – Chamber of Deputies, Czech Republic	32
• Democracy Has A History – Austrian Parliament	33
• Festival of Politics – Scottish Parliament	33
• United States Capitol Visitor Center	35
• Senador Virtual – Senado, Republic of Chile	37
• Thursday On-line Chats With MPs – German Bundestag	40
• <a href="http://www.mitmischen.de">www.mitmischen.de</a> – German Bundestag	40
• Committee for the Future (TVK) – Eduskunta, Finland	41

• Scotland's Future Forum – Scottish Parliament	42
• e-Agora – European Parliament	43
• Danish Board of Technology (DBT) – Folketing, Denmark	44
• Parliamentary Democracy Offices (PDOs) – South Africa	48
• Regional <i>Info-Spots</i> – Riksdag, Sweden	49
• Outreach Bus - National Assembly for Wales	50
• Infomobil des Bundestage - German Bundestag	50
• Llwydd's Tour – National Assembly for Wales	51
• Presiding Officer's Summer Work Programme and Blog – Scottish Parliament	51
• President's Google Tour Map and Social Networking – Catalonia	51
• Step Up Cymru – National Assembly for Wales	53
• Community Partnership Programme – Scottish Parliament	54
• 'Understanding & Influencing Your Parliament' Conference – Scottish Parliament	56
• Politician for a Day – Folketing, Denmark	58
• <i>MiniTing</i> – The Storting, Norway	60
• Parliamentary Information & Research Service Internship Program – Canada	61
• Legislative Internship Programme – British Columbia, Canada	62
• House of Commons and Senate Page Programmes – Canada	63
• Parliamentary Assistants Programme – House of Representatives, Australia	63
• Congressional Page Programme – USA	64
• <i>About the House</i> seminars – House of Representatives, Australia	65
• 'House Calls' – House of Representatives, Australia	66
• Service Charter – House of Representatives, Australia	70
• Communication Strategy 2009 – Folketing, Denmark	71
• Communicating the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Assembly – National Assembly for Wales	71

# INTRODUCTION

Successive Hansard Society reports for the House of Commons and the Group on Information for the Public (GIP) have clearly identified the difficulties that exist in engaging the public with the work of the Westminster Parliament and provided evidence of the lack of knowledge about Parliament's work and functions in a number of critical areas.

The *Removing Barriers to Engagement* report, for example, made clear that the two 'overarching barriers to political and parliamentary engagement are lack of knowledge about and interest in politics, along with low participation and satisfaction levels.'<sup>1</sup>

Similar difficulties face every parliament across the globe to varying degrees. This study explores how other legislatures around the world are responding to the challenge of how to engage with their citizens, highlighting examples of potentially transferable ideas and initiatives. It provides a menu of ideas for GIP to consider for adoption by the UK Parliament in order to meet its strategic public engagement goals.

Even allowing for differences in public engagement practice as a result of different political systems, the advantages (or disadvantages) resulting from smaller legislatures and citizen bodies, and cultural differences, it is clear that the Westminster Parliament is at the cutting edge of public engagement. The number of case study examples in this report, (most of which are less ambitious in scope than anticipated when this study was embarked upon), is a consequence of the fact that many legislatures are somewhat behind Westminster in developing a broad range of innovative public engagement initiatives. It has become clear over the course of the last eighteen months however, that the pace of change with regard to public engagement is rapid, and Westminster cannot therefore afford to be complacent and rest on its laurels if it is to maintain its role and reputation as an innovative leader in this field. Indeed, given the pace of development in public engagement in other legislatures we would suggest that GIP/the Hansard Society might consider revisiting this study again on a periodic basis in order to maintain a watching brief on innovation in parliamentary public engagement around the globe.

## Parliament and public engagement

One of the House of Commons Management Board's six strategic goals for 2010-11 is that the public should feel 'respect and trust for the House of Commons as an institution', asserting a new commitment that officials have an obligation to serve the public as much as they are there to serve MPs.<sup>2</sup> To this end the House has identified a number of core tasks in its 2006-11 strategic plan that will enable it to deliver on this goal. With regard to public engagement these tasks are 'to promote public knowledge and understanding of the work and role of Parliament through the provision of information and access'<sup>3</sup> and 'strengthening

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<sup>1</sup> A. Brazier, S. Kalitowski & M. Korris, (2008), *Removing Barriers to Engagement* (London: Hansard Society), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Management Board (2010), *Corporate Business Plan 2010-11*, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Management Board (2010), *Corporate Business Plan 2010-11*, pp. 4-5.

the reputation of the House of Commons with the public' has been identified as a priority for the year.<sup>4</sup> A further core task, 'to maintain the heritage and integrity of the Palace of Westminster and other buildings, objects and documents for the benefit of future generations,' also feeds into the broader public engagement agenda.<sup>5</sup>

At the start of the new parliament the House of Commons Management Board has released a new Strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-15. Its goal is that in five years the Commons will 'be valued as the central institution in our democracy: effective in holding the Government to account, scrutinising legislation, and representing the diverse views of the electorate. It will be seen both in the UK and abroad as a model of good practice and innovation, and will cost less money'.<sup>6</sup> To achieve this the Management Board proposes that the organisation will work at every level to earn respect for the House of Commons by 'encouraging public participation in parliamentary business including the work of select committees and the legislative process, developing our outreach and education services and making the House more welcoming to the public' and 'engaging proactively with the media to encourage full and accurate reporting of House matters'.<sup>7</sup> To make the House more effective it will work to develop 'new ways to represent the diverse views of the electorate' and, particularly relevant in the context of this study, it will seek to make the House more efficient by 'supporting and learning from the experience of other Parliaments'.<sup>8</sup> Finally, to ensure that members, staff and public are well-informed it will seek to give the public 'the information needed to understand and appreciate the work of the House and its Members, by continuing to develop our information, education and outreach services and opening the new Education Centre at Westminster'.<sup>9</sup>

The strategic objectives of the House of Lords dovetail with those of the Commons. Two of the four strategic objectives identified in the 2010-15 Strategic Plan are 'to make the House and its work accessible to the public' and 'to maintain the House's buildings and collections, having regard to the heritage they represent'.<sup>10</sup> A core task to deliver these objectives in the Lords is therefore to 'facilitate public access to, and understanding and knowledge of, the work of the House of Lords, its heritage and collections'.<sup>11</sup> The House is particularly focused on delivery against its identified performance indicators of outreach and access, namely: improvement in user satisfaction ratings for the website; improved public awareness of the role of the House of Lords reflected in surveys of public engagement; increased levels of satisfaction ratings for outreach events under the House outreach plan; and increased press and media coverage for the work of the House and its

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<sup>4</sup> House of Commons Management Board (2010), *Corporate Business Plan 2010-11*, p.8.

<sup>5</sup> House of Commons Management Board (2010), *Corporate Business Plan 2010-11*, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> House of Commons Management Board (June 2010), *New Parliament: Strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-15*, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Management Board (June 2010), *New Parliament: Strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-15*, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> House of Commons Management Board (June 2010), *New Parliament: Strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-15*, pp.2-3.

<sup>9</sup> House of Commons Management Board (June 2010), *New Parliament: Strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-15*, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> House of Lords (March 2010), *House of Lords Business Plan 2010-11*, HL Paper 71, p.10.

<sup>11</sup> House of Lords (March 2010), *House of Lords Business Plan 2010-11*, HL Paper 71, p.11.

committees.<sup>12</sup> To this end a priority list of tasks with deliverable objectives and an identified timeline is set out in the Business Plan addressing press advice and press liaison; promotion of the work of the House of Lords via on-line media; publications; outreach and education; a strategic review of the target audience; and exhibitions.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the Group on Information for the Public co-ordinates the over-arching public engagement strategies of both Houses on a bi-cameral basis. Its goals are:

- To *inform* the public about the work and role of Parliament;
- To *promote* Parliament as an institution and describe why it should be valued; and
- To *listen* to the public by seeking and responding to feedback.<sup>14</sup>

In drafting this report we have taken account of GIP's focus and the ambitions of both the House of Commons and Lords with respect to public engagement in the future.

Both Houses of Parliament have made significant investment in their public engagement strategies in recent years, hence why they are ahead of the game compared to many legislatures across the globe. However, it is likely, indeed perhaps certain, that public engagement work like all other aspects of parliamentary activity will be affected by the austerity drive in public expenditure, as highlighted in the recent announcement by the House of Commons Commission that it is to cut an additional £12 million (5%) from the House budget for the current financial year, with spending reduced by 9% through to 2012-13.<sup>15</sup>

Investment in public engagement, and the need to innovate in this field, must, however, remain a key priority. The most recent *Audit of Political Engagement 7* report demonstrates a significant decline in the perceived impact of Parliament on people's everyday lives. When asked about their knowledge of 'politics', their 'local council', 'the Westminster Parliament' and 'the role of MPs', the public report that they know least about Parliament. A clear majority – 62% – say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about Westminster.<sup>16</sup>

Yet a clear majority of the public (60%) nonetheless believe that Parliament 'is worthwhile'. Though they are critical of the behaviour of MPs, most believe Parliament remains an essential institution for the governance of our society. Fewer people, however, believe that it 'holds government to account' (just 40% say it does this), or that it 'is working for you and me' (just 38% agree).<sup>17</sup> And public dissatisfaction with how Parliament works unsurprisingly rose by 5% to 38% between December 2008 and December 2009, reflecting the impact of the expenses debacle.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> House of Lords (March 2010), *House of Lords Business Plan 2010-11*, HL Paper 71, p.29.

<sup>13</sup> House of Lords (March 2010), *House of Lords Business Plan 2010-11*, HL Paper 71, pp.30-32.

<sup>14</sup> Group on Information for the Public (2008) *Engaging the Public: Business Plan 2008-09*, p.1.

<sup>15</sup> 'House of Commons Commission to extend budget savings', press release, 23 June 2010, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2010/06/house-of-commons-commission-to-extend-budget-savings/>

<sup>16</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), p.68.

<sup>17</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), p.95.

<sup>18</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), pp.87-88.



But at the start of a new Parliament, one of the more worrying trends must be the finding that there has been a significant decline in the perceived impact of Parliament on people's everyday lives. Of eight institutions – the media, local councils, business, the civil service, the European Union, the Westminster Parliament, the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet – Parliament ranks sixth in terms of having the greatest impact. Only 19% say it is one of the top three institutions that have the most impact on their lives, marking a significant decline from the 30% who said the same in the first *Audit* in 2004.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that while the events of the last few years, particularly the expenses scandal, have had a modest impact on the proportion of the public dissatisfied with Parliament as an institution, there may have been a bigger change in the relevance Parliament is seen to have on people's lives, at least in relation to other institutions. The 11% decline in Parliament's perceived influence over recent years is matched by an 11% rise in the perceived influence of the media.<sup>20</sup>

Worryingly, only 27% of the public believe that Parliament 'is welcoming' to them.<sup>21</sup> In several discussion groups conducted in November 2009 in London and the East Midlands to help inform the *Audit* research, it became clear that many members of the public think primarily about Parliament in terms of what politicians are there to do – for example, to debate issues and vote. Their perceptions of Parliament are directly shaped by their response to the behaviour of MPs and for many the 'yah boo' adversarial culture of partisan debate and the unrepresentative nature of the House of Commons is deeply unappealing. For the majority of the discussion group participants, their view about whether Parliament is welcoming was directly related to their perception that politicians fail to listen to the public and that Parliament as a building is closed off from ordinary people.

But the *Audit* suggests that there may be a clear link between familiarity and favourability: those who claimed to know at least 'a fair amount' about Westminster were significantly more likely to view the institution positively than those who had very limited knowledge, if any, of it.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that if more members of the public knew more about Parliament then the institution might be better regarded.

The *Audit* results indicate that there remains much to be done to improve levels of public knowledge about Parliament but that improving familiarity as a route to enhanced favourability may be the best strategic approach to restore the reputation and influence of Parliament in the long term. As such continued improvement in the public engagement field is essential in the long-term if the reputation of Parliament with the public is to be repaired and fostered in the future.

We hope that this report will make a contribution to the future development of Parliament's public engagement agenda and assist it in developing innovative, effective ideas and initiatives for the future.

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<sup>19</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), p.96.

<sup>20</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), pp.96-97.

<sup>21</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), pp.95-96.

<sup>22</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), pp.40-42.

## STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

For this study we deployed a mixed methods approach, combining an in-depth review of parliamentary documentation, a comprehensive literature review, analysis of parliamentary websites, survey submissions, and semi-structured interviews with parliamentary officials.

For the purposes of this research we have defined public engagement in its broadest sense. It is the range of activities whose primary function is to raise awareness of the parliament amongst the public and to facilitate a two-way flow of information, ideas and views, between them, requiring both listening and interaction on the part of both the institution and the citizen.

Mindful of Parliament's strategic objectives and goals with regard to public engagement, the areas we explored focused primarily on:

- **Information provision:** education and training materials; website presence;
- **Parliament as public space:** visitor facilities; access tours; exhibitions;
- **Education:** activities and initiatives on- and off-site for teachers, students and the wider community;
- **Outreach:** civil society links, community partnerships and social inclusion initiatives to engage with hard-to-reach groups;
- **Procedure:** innovations to parliamentary procedure to facilitate greater engagement with the public;
- **Facilitation:** support platforms for parliamentarians and/or officials to engage with the public, particularly through e-forums or other on-line, digital democracy mechanisms;
- **Media:** initiatives with print media, broadcasting and new media platforms – both promotional and partnership work;
- **Organisational structure:** leadership and institutional models for delivery of public engagement strategies, and resourcing of engagement work.

Inevitably some case studies we highlight in this report have elements of cross-over work, encompassing more than one of the above areas.

We chose not to investigate the issue of petitions and e-petitions as the Wright Committee recommended that a petitions system be trialled in the House of Commons for a period through the auspices of an augmented Procedures Committee, and the House has already undertaken a number of studies of petition systems.

Two important caveats pertain to our ability in this report to fully assess any given engagement initiative and its potential relevance for Westminster. First has been the difficulty in pinning down the exact costs of a particular initiative. Often an initiative may form part of a broader engagement initiative or strategy and the costs are rolled up with the other associated costs and cannot be readily disaggregated. Where we have been able to ascertain specific costs these are set out but often this has not been possible. Secondly, many of these initiatives are in their infancy and form part of a long-term plan. As such their home institutions may not have evaluated them yet, and in many instances it is simply too early to do so. Again, where evaluations have been done information is provided but this is not possible in all cases. The case studies set out in this report thus constitute high-level analysis of possible transferable initiatives, not detailed multi-layered analysis for the purpose of implementation. Our objective has been to draw together a broad 'menu of ideas' which GIP members might reflect on. Those that are of interest will then require greater and more detailed investigation and analysis.

In looking at parliaments around the world we sought to cover a broad and representative range of political systems, geographical regions, and developed and developing democracies. In total the desk research explored the work of over 50 parliamentary institutions, examining their official websites, their standing orders, organisational charts, annual reports and all available strategic documents associated with engagement such as their external communication strategies, outreach strategies, and public information guides. This research was augmented by a review of the academic and practitioner literature in the field of public engagement and participation.

A review of all relevant past submissions to the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) was undertaken and a survey then drawn up to fill in the gaps in knowledge (focusing particularly on external communications, outreach, education and institutional leadership). Submission of this survey to the ECPRD system was facilitated by House of Commons officials and we received 32 responses from member institutions.

In total, case studies emerged from a range of parliaments, including:

- UK devolved legislatures: Scotland, Wales;
- The Commonwealth: Australia, Canada, India, Namibia, New Zealand and South Africa;
- Scandinavia: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden;
- Eastern Europe: Czech Republic, Estonia and Romania;
- Latin America: Chile, Peru
- Sub-national legislatures: British Columbia, Catalonia, New South Wales, Queensland;
- Other models: EU Parliament, Austrian Parliament, Swiss Federal Assembly, the German Bundestag and the US Congress.

These cases were investigated in-depth through questions sent direct to the respective institutions and in some cases correspondence was followed up with face-to-face or telephone interviews and with more in-depth documentary research. Face-to-face meetings were also held in London in Summer 2009 with a number of visiting officials from Commonwealth parliaments, facilitated by the UK office of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Office of the Sergeant at Arms and the Parliamentary Overseas Office.

The nature of this research is such that language barriers have been a problem in relation to exploring the work of parliaments across the globe, but particularly in Asia. We recognise and acknowledge that our capacity to research some regions has been greater than others and the weight of the selected case studies inevitably reflects this.

A comparative study such as this reveals a number of challenges that have to be borne in mind, for what works in one institution will not necessarily work in another.

1. **Comparability:** parliamentary institutions around the world are intrinsically different, operating in different constitutional settings. We looked at unicameral parliaments as well as bicameral parliaments, national, supra-national and sub-national institutions. The political, electoral and constitutional context inevitably influence the way in which parliaments are internally organised, and their role, functions and resourcing in relation to public engagement. The constitutional arrangements in, for example, New Zealand and Switzerland means that much effort in relation to public engagement is expended in areas such as parliamentary initiation of citizens' referenda that are not constitutionally transferable in the context of the UK Parliament. Such examples of overseas public engagement models are thus not covered in this report. Similarly, a number of parliaments around the world are directly responsible for their Youth Parliaments and therefore a significant investment of their public engagement resources (financial and staffing) is placed in this direction. This is not the case in the UK where the Youth Parliament is an independent charitable company limited by guarantee (although we recognise that it has received development support from Westminster over the years). We have therefore not specifically focused on Youth Parliament engagement initiatives.
2. **Size matters:** the illustrations we draw upon come from countries / jurisdictions of various sizes. In terms of public engagement, the size of the 'public', as well as its cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity is essential in shaping public engagement strategies. Small countries or regions such as Catalonia, Wales, Scotland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark provide a number of examples of innovative good practice mechanisms that their parliaments deploy to engage with their public. However, these cannot necessarily be transferred and implemented wholesale in larger geographical and institutional contexts to the same effect. Some adaptation may be needed.

3. **Cultural power:** institutions exist within contexts delineated by various social, economic and cultural factors. The Scandinavian countries are well known for high levels of political and civic engagement and are often regarded as the authoritative models for modern participatory democracy. In contrast, the young democratic institutions of Eastern Europe face specific challenges in trying to raise awareness about parliamentary democracy in general and about the relevance of their democratic institutions in particular. Sub-national assemblies, despite benefiting from greater closeness to their public, face challenges with regard to capacity, relevance, resources, and powers. In contrast, supra-national institutions are often seen as too abstract and remote from the people and their public engagement strategies reflect this.

Bearing in mind the different institutional structures, and issues of size and culture, a number of engagement initiatives from around the world are of interest and could perhaps be adapted for use by the UK Parliament. We have set out a range of case studies for consideration. Some are quite different to anything currently deployed at Westminster and would require resources and cultural and attitudinal changes in approach; others are similar to existing engagement initiatives but the ideas provide an alternative, novel angle or focus that might add further value to the existing activities.

## INFORMATION PROVISION

Parliaments around the world offer an impressive amount of information via their official publications and websites. But there are extensive variations in the way they present that information: in static or more dynamic form; with text, video and audio materials; with official transcripts linked to video or audio recordings; with a full or a more limited suite of web 2.0 social media options; and using formal, official parliamentary language or plainer language more accessible to ordinary citizens.

Compared to many institutions we have looked at, the UK Parliament scores highly in terms of the volume and range of information available and the increasingly accessible way in which that information is provided – though there remains scope for improvement. Set out below are a few case studies where we believe Parliament might look to be more proactive in improving the range and direction of its information provision, utilising both new and old media forms.

### Websites

For many parliaments around the world the internet has become the main means of communication with the public and increasingly what is emerging is the concept of an e-parliament. Compared to most, the UK Parliament website is effective in providing an interface between the public and Parliament and, compared with the sites utilised by many other legislative institutions, rates highly in terms of content, tools and design. However, there are a few areas where improvements could be made to maximise accessibility and visibility.

### Public information and social inclusion

In stark contrast to other parliaments across the world (for example Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Catalonia) only very limited content is provided in any language other than English – despite Britain's multi-ethnic and cultural diversity.<sup>23</sup> Other institutions do not generally provide all their content in other languages (with the exception of legislatures where this is a requirement for the home language such as Wales and Catalonia) but more could be done at Westminster to expand the foreign language provision in line with the example set by other institutions.

The UK Parliament website recognises that it needs to improve accessibility and notes that due to a 'large amount of legacy content' it is taking a phased approach to ensure all its pages conform to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.<sup>24</sup> A number of legislatures are clearly ahead of Westminster in this field (though

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<sup>23</sup> The UK Parliament website provides 15 foreign language 'You and Your MP' guides and eight foreign language 'Brief Guide to the House of Commons' and 'Brief Guide to the House of Lords Business' leaflets.

<sup>24</sup> [www.parliament.uk/site-information/accessibility/](http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/accessibility/)

they may have less content to deal with): for example the Austrian, Czech Republic, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish legislatures all have websites designed to be accessible to the blind or visually impaired or to people with learning difficulties. There is generally a 'listen' option embedded in the website which links to an application that reads the pages of content aloud. The volume of content included varies but most facilitate a reasonable amount of information and navigation by the reading aloud of page links.

The **Swedish Riksdag website** – [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se) – provides a best practice example of a more proactive approach to social inclusion.

Following a significant redesign in 2006-07 a number of new accessibility features were introduced and in 2008, the website was chosen as the best public authority website by the Swedish benchmarking company Internetworld.<sup>25</sup> In recent years the site has averaged approximately 3.5 million visits per year compared to just 400,000 prior to the redesign in 2006. The Riksdag's approach to on-line content is that 'information should be usable and accessible for everyone'.<sup>26</sup> Therefore considerable emphasis has been placed on ensuring that the website meets international and national guidelines.

- The website, in its media section, presents a legislative 'digest' which provides brief summaries of the decisions passed by the Riksdag, in accessible and easy to understand language.
- The website has special sections in 'Easy Swedish' (a simplified, more informal style of presenting information) and English.
- The website provides basic information about the Riksdag in 23 different languages, including the national minority languages (areas covered include the history of the Riksdag, the role and functions of parliament, political parties, news from parliaments, decisions in brief). The translation costs are estimated at 1,500 Euros.
- The website has a 'listening' version for those with disabilities and learning difficulties such as dyslexia. It uses a web-based speech-enabling application called ReadSpeaker and the 'Sign Language <SV>' option is highly visible on the home page.<sup>27</sup> The overall cost of this service to the Riksdag is approximately 8,000 Euros per year.<sup>28</sup>
- In addition to the read-aloud option, the website provides sign language films which cover news and decisions made in the parliament; basic information about the history of the Swedish Parliament and its democratic system; information on the legislature's role and function in making laws, and scrutinising the government; information about the work of parliamentary committees, the relationship between the Riksdag and the European Union; and detailed information about how to contact the parliament.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Riksdag Administration Annual Report 2008

<sup>26</sup> Riksdag Administration Annual Report 2006

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.voice-corp.com/en/>

<sup>28</sup> Information provided by Magnus Korkala, Information Department, The Riksdag, January 2010.

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R\\_Page\\_1977.aspx](http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page_1977.aspx)

## Institutional dynamism: committee pages

The committee pages of the UK Parliament website have been revamped but remain formulaic and relatively dull in comparison to what can be found in some parliaments. Given the increasing public and media profile of select committees and the enhanced authority of their chairs and members following election, more could be done to augment their on-line presence and give them a distinct identity within the parliamentary setting. Given that many members of the public who may be inclined to submit evidence to inquiries will also primarily access information through the committee web pages, further enhancements to the overall design and accessibility of the pages would be a useful step.

**US Congressional Committees** provide examples of both good and bad practice.

In 2010 the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) awarded its 11<sup>th</sup> annual 'Platinum Mouse'<sup>30</sup> for the best congressional committee website to the House Committee on Science and Technology.<sup>31</sup> The winner the previous year was the House Committee on Education and Labor.<sup>32</sup> Screenshots of their front page are provided. The CMF award recognises that the sites get the 'basics' right, posting all information on-line, including everything from legislation assigned to the committee, an up to date hearing schedule, to webcasts of past hearings and witness testimony, reports and other publications. 'It serves up this depth of content for all types of users, with targeted information for both novices wanting to know more about what the committee does, and experts looking for the most current legislative reports', said the Foundation of the Science and Technology Committee. This is supplemented by leveraging web 2.0 tools to allow users to send comments to the committee, subscribe to RSS feeds and e-newsletters, or follow the work of the committee on Twitter to keep abreast of its latest actions.

Unlike at Westminster, there is a lack of standardisation in the design and features of the Congressional committee websites, with some having extremely poor static sites, with inappropriate layout and designs. The Senate Armed Services Committee, for example, consistently rates poorly in this respect.<sup>33</sup> A screen shot of this bad practice example can also be found below. The difference between the good and bad practice examples is overt. The more attractive the layout and design of the committee page site the more likely it is that visitors will use it and return to it.

Westminster's committee sites already provide much of the content to be found on the best congressional sites – though some improvements might be considered by the new committee chairs such as sustained use of a broader range of social networking tools (i.e. Twitter etc). The UK committee pages have the advantages of standardisation and therefore avoid the problems caused by disparity in approach in the USA but the overall

<sup>30</sup> For more information about the Congressional Management Foundation's 'Gold Mouse' project see [www.pmpu.org/category/projects/](http://www.pmpu.org/category/projects/). Further information about the ranking of individual Congressional committee websites can be found in a study by the National Journal at [http://www.nationaljournal.com/njon-line/no\\_20091124\\_4022.php](http://www.nationaljournal.com/njon-line/no_20091124_4022.php)

<sup>31</sup> See <http://science.house.gov/>

<sup>32</sup> See <http://edlabor.house.gov/>

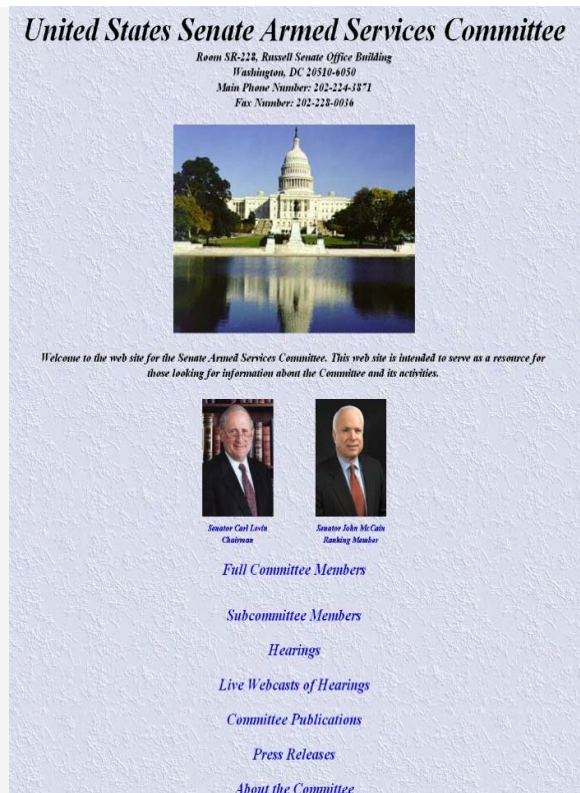
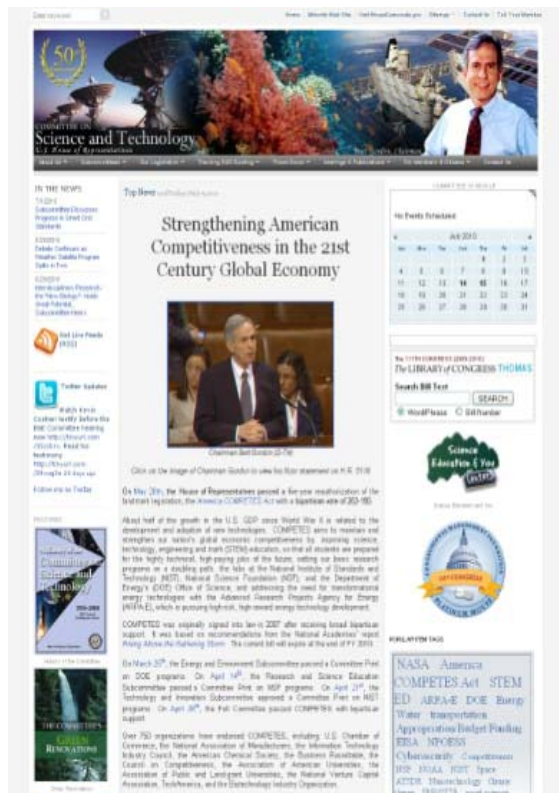
<sup>33</sup> See <http://armed-services.senate.gov/>



design is weak when compared to their congressional counterparts and therefore they are a relatively anonymous presence on the web.



Congressional Committee websites  
Top: Best Practice Example – Education & Labor



Congressional Committee websites  
 Best Practice Example – L: Science & Technology  
 Bad Practice Example – R: Senate Armed Services

## Profiling elected representatives

As the *Audit of Political Engagement* demonstrates, most members of the public perceive of Parliament through the prism of the key actors in it, namely Members of Parliament. However, the UK website provides only limited information about MPs, namely contact details, biographical information, a history of their service in Parliament and policy interests. In contrast, some legislatures go much further in providing a platform for information about their elected representatives, offering modest innovations that might be useful in the Westminster context and thereby add value to the overall content of the UK parliamentary site.

The **National Assembly for Wales** provides videos of each Assembly Member introducing themselves on their individual profile page. We recognise however, that the resources demanded to achieve this would be much greater at Westminster which has 650 members compared to just 60 in the Assembly.

The **Romanian Chamber of Deputies** provides a tool for people to keep track of their elected representatives' activity in the Chamber. As at Westminster, the profile page of each Deputy includes details about the positions they hold in committees and

parliamentary delegations. However, additionally, the profile page also includes statistics on:

- the number of speeches they have made in Plenary;
- the number of political declarations they have made;
- the number of legislative initiatives they have proposed;
- the number of motions and interpellations they have initiated;
- their register of interests.

All these are linked to relevant audio/video/text documents. Hence anyone can easily monitor their elected representatives' activity in the chamber and in committees.<sup>34</sup>

The **Chilean Senate** also provides ready access to information about how Senators have voted through its Ratings Board which is accessed via the home page. This lists each Senator and whether they have attended a vote. Where they have not attended, the reasons for not doing so are provided.<sup>35</sup>

The **US House of Representatives** provides a 'Write Your Representative' facility through which members of the public can e-mail their congressional representative directly.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, in the UK, the public can 'Find Your MP' but then have to go through several links to reach an e-mail address. A more direct contact facility would be useful for the public.

At present detailed information about the activity of MPs in the UK is largely available only through third party websites such as [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com). However, by incorporating the information directly into the parliamentary website as the primary arena for engagement with the public then users need not navigate to external websites. It is also beneficial in terms of reputation, transparency and accountability that any parliamentary institution should publish this level of detail about its business and the conduct of its members.

## An on-line one-stop-shop

### Participation portal: Parliament 2.0 - Catalonia<sup>37</sup>

One of the better examples of a parliament that aggregates information about its elected representatives in an accessible way, alongside broader information about the Parliament itself, is the Catalan Parliament. It deploys a dedicated portal for public participation, 'Parliament 2.0' which is, in effect, a one-stop-shop for information about members, the institution, and how the public can participate. Features include:

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.mp?idm=58&cam=2&leg=2008&idl=2>

<sup>35</sup> See

<http://www.senado.cl/appsenado/index.php?mo=sesionessala&ac=asistenciaSenadores&legiid=481&camara=S&legiini=361>


<sup>36</sup> See <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.parlament.cat/web/serveis/parlament-20>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">My House</a> – a place to manage and keep track of individual subscriptions and comments to parliament.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">The President responds</a> – a space for the exchange of ideas, impressions, questions and opinions with the President of the Parliament.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Questions from citizens</a> – a space to address questions related to the different functions of the Parliament. The issues raised are answered directly via individual email. Citizens who wish to address a question can choose to contact the president of the Catalan Parliament, or individual members, or write directly to specific services on the administrative side.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Blogs by Members and deputies</a> – members blogs are organised within parliamentary groupings with direct links to each one provided. This is accompanied by a disclaimer indicating that the content of the blogs is personal and that Parliament is not liable for any information published on them.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">TweetParlament</a> – contains updates and links to the Twitter feed of individual Members who have authorised the broadcast link. Again, a disclaimer makes clear that the content of the Twitter messages are personal and the responsibility of the authors not the Parliament.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Activities of Educational Services</a> – promotes the educational services aimed at secondary and university students.</li> <li>▪ The site also provides for ePetitions and contributions to on-line debate.</li> <li>▪ In addition this portal provides direct access to the Parliament's own Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and NetVibes channels, as well as 'widgets' and 'gadgets' for 'mash-up' of data, RSS, e-mail and podcast subscriptions, and tools for distribution and sharing of content.</li> </ul>

The design of some aspects of the Catalan Parliament 2.0 site is not particularly attractive (see screenshot below) and the quality and breadth of content varies considerably, although this in part reflects the relative size of the institution and its regional focus. However, the one stop-shop concept is an interesting and transferable one that, if combined with a commitment to providing greater information about members, could provide a powerful new portal for the UK parliament's on-line presence and more accessible information about the role and function of MPs and Peers.





9th July 2010

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**DEMOS @ WORK**

Demos @ Work's goal is to facilitate discussion at European level between elected representatives and civil society.

### 2.0 Parliament



#### Parliament on YouTube

YouTube channel to find part of the contents of Canal House (reports on the activities of the chamber, the functioning of Parliament, Members' portraits ...). The Canal House is an audiovisual platform that aims to publicize the activities of Parliament with information content accessible to everyone.




#### Parliament on Facebook

Parliament has a page on this platform to promote parliamentary activity through social networks.




#### Parliament to Twitter

You can access the Parliament's activities through the new channel site to Twitter. This channel can receive updates at the same site, Mobile, Messenger, or directly to Twitter.



#### Parliament to Netvibes

Parliament has several features and widgets to run today through parliamentary Netvibes platform. You can find them here.



#### Tools 2.0

Parliament offers citizens a variety of tools to facilitate the dissemination, sharing and accessing information from the Parliamentary activity:


- » Widgets for 'mashup' ('widgets' / 'gadgets')**  
A 'mashup' is a web application that users can normally set up, capable of collecting and displaying centrally on a web page or more than one content from different sources (widgets) via Internet.
- » Subscription and syndication (e-mail, podcast and RSS)**  
Parliament provides an automatic service for news headlines and other frequently updated content. You will receive information by email, RSS or podcast.
- » Google Translate**  
This tool allows you to automatic translation in different languages to navigate within the portal and the documents it contains.
- » Sharing**  
Tools for sharing and distributing Web content so friendly that Parliament consider relevant.

#### Areas of participation

With the aim of enhancing the participation of citizens in parliamentary, parliament has opened the portal spaces of Parliament and various platforms:

- » e-petitions**  
The right to individual or collective is a fundamental right recognized by the constitution and statute. Through this site you can send your requests to Parliament so private or public, and allow other people to join them, creating an environment of participation associated with these requests.
- » Participation in debates**  
Space to participate in the meeting commemorating the 30th anniversary of the restoration of the chamber.
- » My House**  
You'll find a place to manage your subscriptions from your web site of Parliament.
- » The president responds**  
This space is intended to exchange ideas, impressions, questions and opinions with the President of Parliament.
- » Questions from citizens**  
It is a space to meet the citizens' queries regarding the different functions of Parliament. The issues raised are answered in an email that citizens receive as soon as payment is handled the request.
- » Blogs by Members and deputies**  
You'll find the blogs of members of Parliament. The blog content accessible from this space is personal and therefore is the responsibility of their authors; Parliament establishes no control or activity or the information it publishes.
- » TweetParliament**  
The microblogs Twitter is a service that allows users to send short text messages with the primary purpose of making immediate communication. This page contains updates to Twitter members who have authorized the dissemination. The content of the entries accessible from this space is personal and therefore is the responsibility of their authors; Parliament establishes no control or activity or the information it publishes.
- » Activities of Educational Services**  
Activities aimed at secondary and university students from educational projects, such as parliamentary simulations and workshops, and production materials.
- » Demos @ Work**  
Demos @ Work is funded by the European Commission in the framework of eParticipation. Participate in the Parliament of Lithuania and of Catalonia and the European Parliament as a collaborator, with input from various members and an advisory board.
- » eRepresentative**  
eRepresentative is funded by the European Commission within the Sixth Framework Programme. The project's full title is "A virtual desktop to help the mobile political representative."

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## Parliament 2.0 – Catalonia

## Print media and broadcasting

Parliaments operate in an information 'marketplace'<sup>38</sup> in which they must compete with other political actors, and more importantly with popular cultural, entertainment and sports events, for people's attention and interest. The latest *Audit of Political Engagement* found that the 'media' are by a significant distance the most influential political actor in terms of the perceived impact they have on people's everyday lives. 63% of the public reported that the media was one of the two or three institutions that had most influence on their everyday life, compared to just 19% who said the same of Parliament.<sup>39</sup>

The focus on on-line provision of information should therefore not be at the expense of publishing information in other, more traditional formats not least because of the digital divide between those with internet access and those without. The most recent available OFCOM figures suggest, for example, that only 68% of the UK adult population have access to broadband internet.<sup>40</sup> Communications strategies for parliamentary institutions must therefore have a strong print and broadcast media element to them although few parliaments seem to do this comprehensively and effectively.

## Advertising

Some parliaments – for example New Zealand and Australia – use national newspapers for the placement of adverts or advertorials – to highlight activities that may be of public interest.

### Advertising committee activities in the national media – Australia

In Australia the Senate and the House of Representatives actively promote their activities through the print media. The Senate Committee Office and its House counterpart place a large, half page advertisement in the only daily national newspaper, *The Australian*, every other Wednesday. These page two adverts inform the public about all current enquiries and call for the submission of evidence from the public. This advert was published on 9 December 2009.

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<sup>38</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2007), *Communicating the Third Assembly – Greater Power, Better Governance, More Say*

<sup>39</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), pp.96-97.

<sup>40</sup> <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/facts/>



**SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES**

**Economics Committee**

The Senate Economics Committee on 19 September 2010 the following matters:

**Competition and pricing in the Australian dairy industry** - the committee will be reporting by 25 February 2011 on the various price fixing and dairy farmers in different Australian states, including their economic effect, the impact of the concentration of ownership of milk processing facilities and supermarket supply contracts on milk market conditions and whether aspects of the Trade Practices Act 1974 are in need of review.

**Sale of the Tasmanian Hydro Electric Scheme** - the committee will report by 19 March 2011 on the sale of the Tasmanian Hydro Electric Scheme, including the building of new hydroelectric power stations, the sale of the Tasmanian Hydro Electric Scheme, including the building of new hydroelectric power stations, the sale of the Tasmanian Hydro Electric Scheme, including the building of new hydroelectric power stations.

**Freedom of information reforms**

The Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee is reporting on the Freedom of Information Amendment (Reforms) Bill 2010 and the Information Commissioner Bill 2010. The purpose of the bill is to make major reforms to the Freedom of Information Act 1997 to provide a pro-business culture, to ensure government and state agencies in government, and to ensure that the Freedom of Information Act 1997 is a pro-business culture, to ensure government and state agencies in government, and to ensure that the Freedom of Information Act 1997 is a pro-business culture.

**An equity and diversity health check in the Navy—IMAS Success**

The House of Representatives, Defence and Trade References Committee is reporting on the Navy's equity and diversity health check in the Navy's IMAS Success. The committee will report by 19 March 2011 on the Navy's equity and diversity health check in the Navy's IMAS Success.

**Community Affairs Committee**

The Senate Community Affairs Committee is reporting on the following matters:

**Trade practices - the Richmond amendment** - the Trade Practices Amendment (Richmond) Bill 2010 will amend the Trade Practices Act 1974. The bill will amend the Trade Practices Act 1974 to provide for a new scheme for the regulation of trade practices, including the regulation of trade practices, including the regulation of trade practices, including the regulation of trade practices.

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These national adverts aside, the Australian Parliament has, over the last decade, adopted a more segmented advertising strategy, recognising that some inquiries would be of interest to a broad swathe of the electorate, whilst others would be of interest primarily to a specialist audience. In addition, the Parliament redesigned its advertisements for greater impact and a more inclusive message. It did away with text heavy adverts that talked of lodging formal submissions to committee inquiries, replacing them with more eye-catching designs that invite people to 'Have a say' on the issues. Similarly, some of the national adverts in *The Australian* have been carried under the banner 'What's happening at your House?' National advertisements are then supplemented with targeted local advertising as required, in order to better reach specific regional or community groups.

## A media venture?

A small number of parliaments publish their own in-house magazines (European Parliament) or information bulletins (Catalonia, Wales) providing updates on events, the legislative process, structural and operational changes, and comment and features on current parliamentary debates.

One of the Swedish Riksdag's most prominent public engagement activities is its *Riksdag & Departement Journal* (News from the Riksdag and the Ministries).<sup>41</sup> Founded in 1976 it is in effect an off-line current affairs magazine with an on-line presence. It is supported by the Riksdag, with costs offset by subscriptions and advertising, but is editorially independent from the Parliament and has in recent years had a record for 'breaking news' in the political sphere.

<sup>41</sup> See [www.rod.se](http://www.rod.se)

But the most useful model for the UK Parliament context is that offered by the Australian *About the House* magazine.

#### ***About the House* Magazine – House of Representatives, Australia<sup>42</sup>**

A quarterly full colour current affairs magazine, it was founded ten years ago and has an estimated readership of more than 80,000 people across Australia. Published by the Department of the House of Representatives and produced by its Liaison and Projects Office it is a free subscription magazine that provides up to date information on key national issues being considered by the House of Representatives and its committees. Articles present information in an easy to read, interesting and apolitical way and a number of features have been picked up by mainstream media outlets, as well as community magazines and newsletters.<sup>43</sup>



The magazine is proactively sent to a wide range of Australia's top companies, government departments, community organisations, members of federal and state parliaments, local governments, lobby groups, libraries, schools, universities as well as the homes of thousands of individual Australians. It is regarded as a high-end publication in terms of its demographic marketing appeal and the national airline, Qantas, for example, stocked it in its business lounge at Canberra Airport.

Teachers and university lecturers have indicated to the editorial team that they use articles from the magazine in their classes – and indeed there is a regular project page for students and teachers. In response, the House sent a copy of the magazine to all high schools in Australia inviting them to join the magazine's mailing list and a significant number took up the invitation.

A recent survey found that 95% of respondents said reading *About the House* had increased their knowledge of the work and procedures of the House; more than 80%

<sup>42</sup> *About the House* Magazine is available on-line at [www.aph.gov.au/ath](http://www.aph.gov.au/ath). The latest edition (May 2010) can be found in electronic form at [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/house\\_news/magazine/40/pdf/ATH40.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/house_news/magazine/40/pdf/ATH40.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Information provided by the Liaison and Projects Office, Australian House of Representatives, November 2009.



reported reading most or all of the magazine; and well over 90% rated the magazine as 'good to excellent' in its range of topics, content, readability, layout and design.

The cost of producing the magazine is partially offset by advertising – companies can advertise at rates between \$1,650-6,000 (Australian) for a half page in one or all four issues; costs for full page advertisements range from \$3,300 to \$12,000 (Australian).<sup>44</sup>

In addition, the House of Representatives has developed an on-line version of the magazine which includes video news and features. In its first six months this site had 100,000 visits.<sup>45</sup>

The South African Parliament also has a similar current affairs magazine called '*In Session*'. This is produced monthly by the Information and Content Development Unit of the Parliamentary Communications Service and is similar in style and content to *About the House*.<sup>46</sup> However, it does not form part of a broader '*In Session*' branded marketing and communications strategy in the way that the Australian model does so the latter is a better source for transferable best practice.

In the UK we do of course have variations on such a model – particularly *The House Magazine*. However, whilst the overall content may not be dissimilar this is not specifically a publication developed and owned by Parliament, although MPs do have editorial responsibility. The *About the House* model serves a different strategic purpose and appeals to a different target audience. *The House Magazine* is a 'Westminster village' focused weekly publication requiring an annual subscription of £195 whereas the *About the House* model is a free quarterly magazine that is more externally focused nationwide in terms of its audience. In terms of good practice a targeted quarterly publication aimed at the interested general public and specific sectoral interest groups may be a transferable model.

## Broadcasting

In addition to the internet, radio and TV remain influential information providers and points of connection between the public and politics. The 2004 *Audit of Political Engagement* found that 76% of the public said they got their information about politics from television.<sup>47</sup>

Like the UK, many parliaments broadcast and web-cast their Chamber and Committee proceedings utilising bilateral partnership agreements with external broadcasters such as C-SPAN in the USA and Public-Senat in France. Some legislatures have established their own radio and TV channels to transmit directly to the public. For example, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies produces its own in-house news programme including live interviews and debates with host journalists<sup>48</sup> as does the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in India. Lok

<sup>44</sup> [www.aph.gov.au/ath](http://www.aph.gov.au/ath) and *About the House* Advertising Kit 2009-10.

<sup>45</sup> Promoting Parliament to the Community, Presentation by Andres Lomp, Director, Liaison and Projects, House of Representatives, ANZACATT Conference, January 2010.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.anzacatt.org.au/prod/anzacatt/anzacatt.nsf/key/library.html?OpenView&Start=1&Count=10000&ExpandView>

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/content.php?Item\\_ID=284](http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/content.php?Item_ID=284)

<sup>48</sup> Hansard Society (2007), *Audit of Political Engagement 4* (London: Hansard Society), p.54.

<sup>49</sup> Global Centre for ICT in Parliaments, *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, p.137.

Sabha TV – a 24 hour commercial free channel – was launched in 2006. In addition to proceedings of the House the Channel also broadcasts several programmes such as *State of Culture* (which showcases Indian cultural events) and *Globe Watch* (which includes profiling and analysis of political events from around the world). Thus the programming is much more engaging than that just provided by Chamber and committee coverage. Though the number of viewers (proportionate to the total population of India) is low, there has been an increase in viewing from 1.4 to 1.6 million over the lifetime of the channel. During important events and crises viewing can be much higher. For example, during a debate on a vote of confidence in the government on 21-22 July 2008, 6.43 million watched the channel.<sup>49</sup>

A more relevant comparison for the UK however, is those examples of parliaments that have reached agreements with broadcasters to enable them to broadcast their own current affairs style television programmes providing commentary on the parliament's own agenda. Again, the best example of transferable practice may be found in Australia.

#### **About the House TV – House of Representatives, Australia**

As part of its 'About the House' strategy, the Liaison and Projects Office of the House of Representatives, in association with the Broadcasting Section of the Department of Parliamentary Services, has developed a 30 minute current affairs style programme that is broadcast on the Sky News channel on the Friday of sitting weeks and some Saturdays. The show is also broadcast on the new Australian Public Affairs Channel (A-PAC) as well as being made available on the parliamentary news website. The content of the programme is focused on parliamentary committee investigations and helps to inform people about new inquiries, evidence presented at public hearings and reports that have been tabled.<sup>50</sup>

Current arrangements for the televising of parliamentary proceedings at Westminster cease in summer 2011 and will have to be re-negotiated.<sup>51</sup> Drawing on the Australian *About the House* example, there may be grounds for exploring whether a current affairs segment/comment programme – branded in such a way that it links strategically to other Parliamentary activities and sources of information across several communication platforms/mediums – might be of interest to the broadcasters beyond the usual outlet of BBC Parliament.

## **On-site information kiosks**

A number of parliaments have placed information kiosks in public areas of the Parliament, particularly to make information available about Members to visitors. These often form the most basic information provision made by parliaments on site and are usually internet linked. At the National Assembly for Wales for example, internet kiosks are available in the

<sup>49</sup> Reaching the Masses: Lok Sabha TV extends its Visitors Gallery, *The Parliamentarian: Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth*, 2009, Issue 1.

<sup>50</sup> Information provided by the Liaison and Projects Office, Australian House of Representatives, November 2009.

<sup>51</sup> House of Commons Management Board (2010), *Corporate Business Plan 2010-11*, p.32.

cafateria area and outside the entrance to the Chamber – here members of the public can access information about the Assembly and its members, following up questions they may have during and immediately after a meeting or tour. Similarly, the Australian House of Representatives commissioned a review of the provision of information in public areas of Parliament House in 2008-09. It found that there is little information currently provided about Members and their electorates. As a result the introduction of a touch-screen kiosk about members of the House was recommended. The 'Meet Your MP' kiosk project is led by the House Liaison and Projects Office and will provide visitors with information about all 150 members of the House in interactive format.<sup>52</sup> Visitors to Westminster also have limited access to information about Members and similar interactive display kiosks highlighting information about members of both the House of Commons and Lords might therefore be a useful addition to the tour and visitor facilities.

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<sup>52</sup> House of Representatives (Australia), *Annual Report 2008-09*, p.26.

## PARLIAMENT AS PUBLIC SPACE

Parliamentary institutions are symbols of democracy, generally hosted in iconic buildings that bear witness to their country's/region's political history and culture. In keeping with the democratic principles of openness and accountability most institutions are treated as public space, though the degree to which the buildings are truly accessible to the general public is increasingly restricted due primarily to security concerns. The *Audit of Political Engagement* found that only 27% of the public believe Parliament is 'welcoming' to them and in the discussion groups conducted for the *Audit* it was clear that many feel that Parliament as a building is closed off from ordinary people. Even those who were aware of the visitor tours, or who had indeed visited Westminster themselves, were frustrated that they could not sit on the green benches and were restricted to public areas and unable to visit the 'backrooms' that they perceived to be the engine room of Parliament where they perceived a lot of the 'real work' was done. There was some interest among the discussion group participants, for example, in seeing some of the offices, dining rooms and the Library to see what life is really like working 'behind the scenes'.

Across the world parliamentary institutions grapple with some of the same problems: how to provide an interesting, satisfying visit experience whilst balancing the curiosity of the public with the working needs of members and officials; how to open up representative institutions in a way that might engage the interest of the public of all ages whilst balancing the demands of security; and how to use the facilities and historic resources that each legislature has as its disposal to maximum effect whilst taking account of the restrictions posed by the need to preserve and protect the historic heritage and material. The Westminster Parliament has an extensive and growing visitors tour programme, and has done much, particularly through the new security entrance, visitor guides, the Westminster Hall information desk, the Jubilee Café and a comprehensive range of information materials to improve the welcome for visitors in recent years. However, whilst allowing for the different physical layout and capacity of each institution, and the different heritage upkeep and security demands that exist, there are a number of examples of initiatives elsewhere from which Westminster might learn.

### Visits

#### **Socially inclusive visitors tours**

In the Norwegian Stortinget special guided tours can be provided for the blind, allowing them touch objects (otherwise not accessible) in the parliament building. Similarly, the German Bundestag provides assistance for people with visual impairment in the form of braille labels, and tactile models of the Reichstag building, the plenary chamber, and the parliamentary and government district. Although Westminster can make advance provision for a sign language tour more could perhaps be done to facilitate socially inclusive access.

## Thematic tours

Thematic tours are increasingly popular and are now offered by a number of parliamentary institutions, for example in Canada, Germany, Denmark and Norway. These tours are generally designed to appeal to a variety of audiences and concentrate on areas such as art and architecture, parliamentary proceedings, education, tradition and custom etc. Westminster has already committed to undertake future tours built around Parliament's art collection but other options might be explored, taking into account, as some institutions elsewhere do, the broader geographical environs of the parliamentary building itself.

### Thematic Tours - German Bundestag<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the traditional tour of the German Reichstag, the German Bundestag operates several guided thematic tours for visitors:

Art and Architecture: There are three art and architecture tours. These take place around (a) the Reichstag; (b) the neighbouring Paul Löbe Building and Jakob Kaiser Building; and (c) the neighbouring Marie Elisabeth Lüders Building and all include a tour of the Reichstag dome. They take place every Saturday and Sunday and on public holidays.

Children's Days: In addition to the regular tours available to school groups, the Bundestag hosts six Children's Days each year (in 2010: 11 January; 1 March; 17 May; 13 September; 29 November and 20 December). Here groups of children aged 6-11 accompanied by at least one adult can between 8am and 1pm take part in a special children's tour of the Reichstag. Demand is such that these have to be pre-booked.

### 'Behind The Scenes' Tours – Parliament of New South Wales, Australia<sup>54</sup>

Because of issues of security and size very few parliaments, even at sub-national level, offer tours that go beyond the public areas. The New South Wales model is a rare exception. It provides occasional 'Behind the scenes at Parliament House' tours which visit the legislative chambers of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly and other public areas, but then go beyond this to explore the dining rooms, gardens, the press gallery and offices. The two hour tour, for which booking is essential, is billed as an opportunity to 'get a look behind work and life in Australia's oldest Parliament'.

### A 'Little Lunch Sitting' for Mature Age Groups – Australian Parliament<sup>55</sup>

Held at Parliament House in Canberra this is a programme run by the Parliamentary Education Office and billed for senior citizens who want to 'step into a world where decisions are made', 'see Parliament in action', 'experience what it is like to be a member or senator', 'match wits against your opposition in a Question Time role-play', and 'gain

<sup>53</sup> Information provided in ECPRD No. 1294, official response from German Bundestag.

<sup>54</sup> [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/PublicandCommunityPrograms](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/PublicandCommunityPrograms)

<sup>55</sup> [www.peo.gov.au/programs/lis2009.pdf](http://www.peo.gov.au/programs/lis2009.pdf)

insight into how Parliament works'. 13 lunches were held in 2009, each on a Wednesday during a sitting week. The minimum number of participants is 15 the maximum is 30. Each pays approximately \$20 (Australian) for a buffet lunch in the Members or Guest Dining Room and the event runs for around three hours. During their visit the senior citizens tour Parliament House, meets their federal member or senator if available, participate in a parliamentary role-play, and observe Question Time in action.

#### **High Teas – Queensland Parliament, Australia<sup>56</sup>**

In 2010 the Parliament is holding seven High Teas in the Strangers Dining Room followed by a guided tour of the Parliament including a visit to the parliamentary library. Attendees are charged \$38 (Australian). Five themed High Tea events have also been held since May 2008 to mark special events such as Easter, Mother's Day, the Queen's Birthday, Christmas and one to coincide with the launch of a new exhibition at the parliament. These themed teas cost \$42 (Australian) – here wine is served and a classical string group play in the dining room.

#### **Tours beyond Parliament**

In addition to tours within the parliamentary building some institutions offer tours which take in important historic, social, cultural and religious sites in the nearby environs.

#### **Canada's Parliament Hill tours and related events**

As well as guided tours, visitors to Parliament Hill have the option to tour the area beyond the immediate parliamentary estate on their own, assisted by a '*Discover the Hill Outdoor Self-Guiding Booklet*' which gives visitors a description of the sights around the Parliament, including statues and buildings. Visitors are invited 'not only to explore the monuments, landscapes and buildings but to look beyond and discover the nation's great history, its present and its future. From flags to flowers, gargoyles to great leaders, visitors make their way around the grounds, discovering that, on Parliament Hill, there is more than meets the eye'.<sup>57</sup> The booklet is free of charge and available all year round via the Parliament Hill information office (it is not available on-line for download).

Between late June and early September a free, daily outdoor guided tour – *In the Footsteps of Great Canadians* – is also offered. This tour 'focuses on a number of historical figures who have helped shape Canada's past, present and future'<sup>58</sup>, encouraging the public to 'set foot on the grounds where prime ministers, royalty and the Fathers of Confederation once stood', learning about 'the individuals, landscape and architecture that make Parliament Hill Canada's most prestigious and symbolic heritage site'.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/hightea/view/visitors/highTea.asp#special>

<sup>57</sup> [www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc\\_web\\_content\\_page.asp?cid=16297-24563-24564&lang=1](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16297-24563-24564&lang=1)

<sup>58</sup> [www2.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Visitors/outdoor-e.asp](http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Visitors/outdoor-e.asp)

<sup>59</sup> [www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc\\_web\\_content\\_page.asp?cid=16297-24563-24564&lang=1](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16297-24563-24564&lang=1)

One of the most popular events supported on Parliament Hill each summer (June-September) is the evening Sound and Light Show when the parliamentary estate is used as a backdrop for the shining of light and projection of images alongside musical performances. The event is free.<sup>60</sup>

The National Capital Commission (NCC) is responsible for developing, conserving and improving the parliamentary estate on Parliament Hill. It works in partnership with the Canadian Parliament to organise these tours and other events to the parliamentary precinct.<sup>61</sup> Their visitor target for the parliamentary estate in 2008-09 was 700,000 people.<sup>62</sup> To support this their operations budget comprised 15% of the entire NCC budget (\$148,000,000 Canadian).<sup>63</sup> This was split between events (46%); capital marketing and communications (22%); programme support (17%); and interpretation (9%).<sup>64</sup>

### Germany's Path of Democracy

Although not strictly a sole Bundestag initiative, the Bundestag and Bundesrat have, in co-operation with the Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Foundation, helped to develop a permanent exhibition and linked tour showing the pathways of democracy. The exhibition consists of display boards with text and photos located at places of contemporary historical interest in the former government district in Bonn, such as the former plenary hall of the Bundestag, the former Federal Chancellery and 'Tall Eugen', formerly the tower-block of offices for Bundestag Deputies and now the centre of the UN campus, the seat of the United Nations in Bonn.<sup>65</sup>

Given the historic setting of the Westminster Parliament it might be possible to develop thematic tours that take in Parliament itself and extend beyond the parliamentary estate to the surrounding environs, placing Westminster in its wider geographical and administrative setting with the objective of developing a better understanding of the nature and history of parliamentary democracy. In Canada the Parliament works with the National Capital Commission, which has responsibility for Parliament Hill, to deliver some of the heritage linked services. So too in Westminster such an approach would likely require partnership working with bodies such as the Greater London Authority which has management responsibility for Parliament Square, government departments such as the Treasury and Foreign Office, and the Church of England for Westminster Abbey etc.

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<sup>60</sup> National Capital Commission (2009), *Sharing the Story: Annual Report 2008-09*, p.34, [http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec\\_docs/22555\\_AR\\_2008-09\\_E.pdf](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec_docs/22555_AR_2008-09_E.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> [http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc\\_web\\_content\\_page.asp?cid=16302-22554-22561&lang=1](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16302-22554-22561&lang=1)

<sup>62</sup> National Capital Commission (2009), *Sharing the Story: Annual Report 2008-09*, p.35, [http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec\\_docs/22555\\_AR\\_2008-09\\_E.pdf](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec_docs/22555_AR_2008-09_E.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> National Capital Commission (2009), *Sharing the Story: Annual Report 2008-09*, p.13, [http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec\\_docs/22555\\_AR\\_2008-09\\_E.pdf](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec_docs/22555_AR_2008-09_E.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> National Capital Commission (2009), *Sharing the Story: Annual Report 2008-09*, p.14, [http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec\\_docs/22555\\_AR\\_2008-09\\_E.pdf](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/data/2/rec_docs/22555_AR_2008-09_E.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.wegderdemokratie.de/tour/index.html>

## Open days/nights

Parliaments increasingly hold 'open days' as a means of generating interest among the wider general public to visit the building and estate. In Sweden, the 2008 Open Day at the Riksdag attracted 4,000 people. 220 politicians and officials took part: the Speaker welcomed the public, moderated public debates were held in the chamber with politicians participating alongside visitors and tours of the estate were provided.<sup>66</sup> Many Parliaments also hold 'open door' days to mark International Day of Democracy on the 15<sup>th</sup> September each year.

The Westminster Parliament already participates in the Open House weekend programme and attracted 4,800 visitors in 2009,<sup>67</sup> but it might be possible to expand this and with a more thematic approach target key segments of the public or link to the work of other institutions also holding open days in order to maximise joint promotional activity. The Estonian Parliament, the Riigikogu, for example, holds an open 'Scientific Day' on 1 September each year when physicists from Tartu University come into the Parliament and conduct experiments and answer questions from the public.<sup>68</sup>

### 40 Days of Open Day – The Federal Assembly, Swiss Parliament

The Swiss Parliament held 40 days of 'open house' to celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> jubilee in 2002. This was successfully combined with a special exhibition that attracted more than 100,000 visitors.<sup>69</sup> The event was organised and co-ordinated by the Public Relations Service, the division that is responsible for the implementation of the Parliament's outreach strategy (it has 12 employees and a 1% budget allocation). Year round the Swiss Parliament holds two open days every year and one open night (Museum Night, when all museums in Bern are open in the evening). The average number of visitors every year is around 6,500 for the open days and 4,000 for the open night. Around 10,000 CHF (approx £6,000) is spent on advertising for the two open days.

Another interesting, though small-scale initiative, takes place in New South Wales, Australia. This is an open evening visit, as well as an educational opportunity targeted at families.

### The 'Little Night Sitting' – Parliament of New South Wales, Australia

A community access programme, this began eight years ago with the Legislative Council but now involves the Legislative Assembly as well. Although billed as a 'night sitting' since the introduction of family friendly sitting hours the programme might more appropriately be regarded as a 'Little Early Evening Sitting'. It involves a tour of the Parliament building, meeting Members, watching both houses in session, learning more about the history of

<sup>66</sup> Riksdag Administration, *Annual Report 2008-09*.

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/visiting/visiting-and-tours/openhouse/>

<sup>68</sup> Information provided by Maria Laatspera, Information Services Consultant, Estonian Parliament.

<sup>69</sup> ECPRD no. 1294 official response from Switzerland, information provided by Ernst Frischknecht, December 2009.



Australia's oldest working legislature, and how the legislative system works. The program is run by the three staff in the Parliament's Education Section. It begins at 5pm with a 30 minute overview presentation on the system of government, elections and parliament. The participants visit both the upper and lower house galleries to view the houses in session (approx 45 minutes) followed by a debrief. The final part of the event (45 minutes approx) is a panel session with at least two Members of Parliament (normally from both houses and different parties) where the Members speak briefly about their involvement in politics and their role as Members, and then take questions. Up to four 'sittings' are held each year but bookings are limited to 50 places. It is therefore a very small-scale outreach initiative but a popular one. Nor is it a targeted initiative as the programme depends entirely on free advertising – through members' offices, in community college brochures, public libraries, local papers, word of mouth, etc. Other than staff time, the only costs to the Parliament are for the tea/coffee and biscuit refreshments provided to the visitors on arrival.<sup>70</sup>

The Parliaments in Denmark and Estonia both set aside time in the year for dedicated events to promote social inclusion.

#### **Citizens Day – Danish Folketing<sup>71</sup>**

Once a year all new Danish citizens (approximately 4,000 per year) are invited to attend a Citizen's Day welcome at the Folketing. A range of educational activities and celebrations are held. The day is highly regarded by participants but take-up has tended to be greatest among new citizens from western countries. The Parliament has therefore recommended a special communications campaign to generate interest among new citizens from non-western countries. In addition, all new citizens receive a copy of 'The Constitutional Act in Plain Danish' from the Folketing (a copy of this is also sent to 18 year olds) and a leaflet, 'Democracy in Danish' is provided to teachers of immigrants at language schools.

#### **Citizen Day – Estonian Riigikogu<sup>72</sup>**

Each year the Parliament, in partnership with the government, marks Citizen's Day – 26 November – with an integration programme to introduce the Parliament to Russian-speaking citizens. A dedicated forum is provided for non-Estonian students to talk about topical issues of concern with parliamentarians, officials and policy experts.

## **Exhibitions and democracy museums**

A number of Parliaments open their doors to facilitate exhibitions across a range of subjects, but particularly art, culture and political history. The German Bundestag, for example, has a 'Bundestag Arts and Architecture Initiative', bringing together art and politics in its buildings in Berlin by providing space for free exhibitions of works by national

<sup>70</sup> Information provided by Ronda Miller, New South Wales Legislative Council, November 2009.

<sup>71</sup> Danish Folketing Communications Strategy 2009

<sup>72</sup> Information provided by Maria Laatspera, Information Service Consultant, Estonian Parliament.

and international artists. It does have the advantage of having additional purpose-built space for this purpose.<sup>73</sup> However, it provides other important exhibitions off-site which, given the space constraints facing the Westminster Parliament, might be an option if it was minded to develop an historical exhibition on parliamentary democracy.

#### **'Milestones – Setbacks – Sidetracks' - The German Bundestag's Historical Exhibition<sup>74</sup>**

Housed on five floors at the Deutscher Dom on Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin, the German Bundestag's historical exhibition traces the development of the parliamentary system in Germany. It offers 90 minute tours for pre-booked groups of between 10 and 50 people; and 30 minute tours for individuals on selected topics. It is open Tuesday – Sunday 10am-6pm (7pm in the Summer).

How to maximise engagement value from a static exhibition or museum that is based in or close to the Parliament building is a challenge facing all such institutions. The Czech Republic's Chamber of Deputies has adopted, albeit on a relatively small scale, an innovative response to this challenge in order to facilitate broader engagement with schools.

#### **On The Way To The Modern Parliament – Chamber of Deputies, Czech Republic**

A permanent exhibition located in the Information Centre of the Chamber since June 2007, it consists of 12 exhibition panels that relate the history and development of parliamentary democracy in the Czech Republic. These exhibition panels have been copied to poster form and can thereby be sent to schools as part of their teaching resources. The Chamber of Deputies also provides a DVD about the Parliament and the package is free of charge. The posters are provided only to schools though the DVD is available to the wider public. The posters can be collected by teachers from the Information Centre or sent via post on request. Although information about the exhibition is on the parliamentary website there is, as yet, no proactive advertising of the availability of the exhibition panels to schools. The exact cost of production, even on a limited scale, is not known as the panels are printed with other materials for the general public as part of a wider print contract. However, it is estimated that circa 100,000 CZK (approx. £3,300) has been spent on them.<sup>75</sup>

An alternative approach has been taken by the Austrian Parliament which has created a mobile historical exhibition which has travelled to schools in the last two years.

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/artandhistory/art/guided\\_tours.pdf](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/artandhistory/art/guided_tours.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Visiting the German Bundestag: Information on services for visiting groups and individuals for the year 2010, p. 13, [www.bundestag.de/htdocs\\_e/visits/besgrupp/histaust.html](http://www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/visits/besgrupp/histaust.html)

<sup>75</sup> Information provided by Mgr. Stanislav Caletka, Parliamentary Institute, Office of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Division of Communication and Education, 4 February 2010.

### **Democracy Has A History – Austrian Parliament**

The Parliament joined with the Austrian Museum for Social and Economic Affairs to establish a mobile exhibition called 'Demokratie hat Geschichte' (Democracy Has A History) which was launched in September 2008. It has travelled to schools in all the federal provinces and by the end of the 2010 school year it is expected to have reached approximately 50,000 pupils. The exhibition describes key stages in the history of the Austrian parliamentary system and the role and function of the federal legislative system.<sup>76</sup>

Given the temporary exhibitions that the UK Parliament holds in Westminster Hall, for example, it might be possible to produce mobile poster exhibitions for schools, libraries, town halls etc, the promotion of which might be managed through Parliament's regional outreach service. Indeed, such a poster exhibition with associated multi-media resources might be a useful tool to enable the outreach service to broaden its contacts and work in local communities. Alternatively, such a poster exhibit approach might enable greater use to be made of the valuable treasures in the parliamentary archive, promoting knowledge of them across the country even though they must remain housed in Parliament, with the poster exhibitions linked to Parliament's broader education and outreach agenda initiatives.

### **A Festival of Politics**

Festivals are a popular means of engaging public interest and participation, albeit generally with those who already have a prior, existing interest in the topic /issue. Staged by a local community or interest group they provide an opportunity for collective celebration of a unique aspect of their work. They are a medium for public entertainment, and for celebration, information and education; historically they have also been a forum in which knowledge has been transferred from generation to generation. A potentially useful model is to be found annually in Scotland.

### **Festival of Politics – Scottish Parliament<sup>77</sup>**

To mark the opening of the new Parliament building in 2004, the Scottish Parliament hosted a pilot Festival of Politics in August 2005, timed to coincide with the annual Edinburgh Festival. The pilot event consisted of 25 events over three days in the Parliament building, including in the Chamber and committee rooms. Speakers included politicians, journalists and actors, such as Shirley Williams, Andrew Marr and Vanessa Redgrave. The events were hosted in partnership with stakeholders such as the British Council and the Electoral Commission and covered themes such as the participation of ethnic minorities in politics; the role of women in politics; and the links between people and the land in which they live. The format of the events varied from traditional lectures, Q&A panels, one-to-one

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/events08.htm>

<sup>77</sup> Information provided by Chris Berry, Festival Manager, Scottish Parliament, January 2010.

discussions with an interviewer, to less traditional musical performances and drama performances.

The pilot was so successful that it has been repeated every year since. The Hansard Society held an event at the 2009 Festival and will be holding another at the 2010 Festival. Hansard Society staff have also been invited to chair one of the 2010 keynote panel discussions in the Parliament Chamber and to take part in another session organised by the Parliament.

The 2009 Festival saw 45 events held over five days with nearly 4,500 visitors attending. In addition the Parliament now hosts the World Press Photo (WPP) Exhibition which attracted a further 60,000 visitors last year. In total since 2005 nearly 177,000 visitors have attended the Festival and WPP Exhibition at a time when the Parliament building would otherwise be quiet during the recess. Additional attention is also generated through the web-casting of Festival events for those who are unable to attend in person.

The direct net cost of producing the Festival in 2009 was £45,000 – including the cost of all technical facilities, and travel and accommodation costs for some of the speakers (the Festival does not pay speaker fees). The costs are kept low because Parliamentary staff volunteer to take on public engagement roles during Festival week, and a majority of events are organised primarily by stakeholder partners who do so free of charge. Modest charges are put on some events, primarily to cover administrative costs (often in the region of £1-£3) and the Festival also attracts some sponsorship from the Scotsman Newspaper, the Law Society of Scotland, and the Carnegie Trust. The media coverage of the event however, generates in excess of £200,000 of Advertising Value Equivalent and 9.5 million ‘Opportunities to See’, thus providing excellent value for money in terms of advertising and marketing work and more than off-setting the cost of the event to the Parliament.

Such has been the popularity and success of the Scottish concept that the Irish and Flemish Parliament’s and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies are already looking to develop their own initiatives based on this model. A pilot Festival event during one of the parliamentary recess weeks, even whilst taking into account the additional challenges posed at Westminster in terms of security and maintenance, might be worth considering. It would be able to attract an equally wide if not greater range of stakeholder participants than Holyrood as well as an international array of speakers and webcasting and broadcasting (for example by BBC Parliament) would add an additional layer of outreach.

## Visitor centres

The Hansard Society has previously recommended that Westminster should establish a Visitors’ Centre.<sup>78</sup> The former Leader of the House, Robin Cook MP, argued as early as 2001 that the creation of a dedicated Visitors’ Centre would be an ‘immense opportunity’ for ‘interpretation of the work and role of Parliament today’ and that it could ‘put the building

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<sup>78</sup> V. Ram, Interpretative Visitor Centre At Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> interim report, *Enhancing Engagement*, May 2005.

and its history in the context of Parliament's place in the constitution and its importance as the expression of our democracy'.<sup>79</sup> In the 2005 Hansard Society report, we drew a parallel with the experience of the Sellafield Visitors Centre. This was established in order to help increase public awareness and understanding of an issue (and therefore influence perceptions) without being either propagandist or didactic. By encouraging people to visit the Sellafield site the public had an opportunity to make up their own minds on the facts. The company sought to generate trust and acceptance through simple first hand experience of it.<sup>80</sup> In light of Parliament's currently diminished reputation we reiterate our view that a Visitors Centre could provide a new medium through which to engage public interest and help address the knowledge gap that currently exists with regard to Parliament.

Across the globe a number of parliaments now have Visitors' Centres in some form though these vary extensively in size, resources and content. The relatively new US Capitol Visitor Center is by far the biggest (in terms of surface and capacity) in the world. But even relatively small countries/parliaments – for example in Scandinavia – have decently sized visitors centres (Norway – 500m<sup>2</sup>; Denmark – 350m<sup>2</sup>; Finland – 250m<sup>2</sup>).

The services and facilities provided also vary: in Sweden there is an enquiry service, TV coverage of the Chamber, official documents, books, souvenirs, exhibitions, lectures and seminars; in Portugal multi-media presentations are prominent; whilst in the Scottish Parliament child-care is also provided. In Austria the visitors centre is particularly well known for its multi-media 'time-wheel' where the public can 'explore Parliament's recent history, or embark on a virtual voyage of discovery through the Houses of Parliament'.<sup>81</sup> Further information is provided through video clips, news tickers and interactive media terminals and comic figures help children to learn more about what they have seen on the guided tour of the building.

However, the most significant new development in this area is to be found in Washington DC. Its success in terms of sheer throughput of visitor numbers in its first years demonstrates that, if done well, there is a public appetite for such a facility.

#### **United States Capitol Visitor Center (CVC)**

The decision to build a visitor centre was driven by demand, the limited physical capacity of the Capitol to accommodate the growing number of visitors, and by security considerations that restricted access to those wanting to visit the Capitol.

The mission of the CVC is to 'provide a welcoming and educational environment for visitors to learn about the unique characteristics of the House and the Senate and the legislative

<sup>79</sup> Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee (2001-02), *Memorandum submitted by the Leader of the House of Commons*, HC 440.

<sup>80</sup> See V. Ram, Interpretative Visitor Centre At Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> interim report, *Enhancing Engagement*, May 2005, pp.9-10.

<sup>81</sup> [http://www.parlament.gv.at/EN/BE/BZENT/show.psp?P\\_INF2=1](http://www.parlament.gv.at/EN/BE/BZENT/show.psp?P_INF2=1).

process as well as the history and development of the architecture and art of the U.S. Capitol.<sup>82</sup>

Built between 2002 and 2008, the CVC is, at 55,000m<sup>2</sup> (or 580,000 square feet) approximately three quarters the size of the Capitol itself. It includes a 16,500 square foot exhibition hall (on the theme *E Pluribus Unum – Out of Many, One*, it is the only exhibition in the country solely dedicated to the legislative branch of the US Government), two orientation theatres where films about the Capitol and the legislatures are shown; a restaurant, gift shop and post office; and the Emancipation Hall central gathering space with a statuary display.<sup>83</sup> Exhibitions are provided on a six-month rotation in partnership with bodies such as the National Archives. Cell Phone Tours enable visitors to access an audio tour of the exhibition hall by using their cell phones and downloading resources to their PDAs.

2.3 million people visited the CVC in its first year of operation – double the number of visitors who came to the Capitol in the previous year. It opened in December 2008 and between March and April 2009 alone it averaged 15,500 visitors per day with a record 19,000 in one single day.<sup>84</sup> In December 2009 there were 104,000 visitors to the Capitol, a 172% increase on the number of visitors in December 2007.<sup>85</sup> Visiting Congress is free but an advance pass obtained over the internet is required. Such has been the demand for tickets and general enquiries that a centralised call centre operation had to be set up. The Congressional Auditorium has 450 seat capacity and is used daily for functions. More than 400 congressionally sponsored events were held in less than six months of operation following its opening.

The CVC is open Mon-Sat 8:30am-4:30pm (except Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year and Inauguration Days). It generates income through its refreshment facilities and its gift shops – the latter alone generated \$2 million in revenue in the first year of operation. The total cost of the CVC is not yet known as some construction and development work is ongoing. The latest estimate is that the CVC will, on completion, have cost \$621 million.<sup>86</sup>

We recognise that in light of budget constraints a Visitors Centre in the foreseeable future is unlikely. However, given the ongoing developments in this area around the world it is an option to keep an eye on in the long-term.

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<sup>82</sup> [www.visitthecapitol.gov/AboutTheCapitol/About%20the%20Capitol%20Visitor%20Center/Page%20-%20About%20the%20Capitol%20Visitor%20Center.html](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/AboutTheCapitol/About%20the%20Capitol%20Visitor%20Center/Page%20-%20About%20the%20Capitol%20Visitor%20Center.html)

<sup>83</sup> The Architect of the Capitol, Preserving the Past, Enabling the Present, Preparing for the Future, 2009 Performance and Accountability Report, pp.32-34, ([www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report\\_rev-0610.pdf](http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report_rev-0610.pdf))

<sup>84</sup> The Architect of the Capitol, Preserving the Past, Enabling the Present, Preparing for the Future, 2009 Performance and Accountability Report, p.32. ([www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report\\_rev-0610.pdf](http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report_rev-0610.pdf))

<sup>85</sup> The Architect of the Capitol, Preserving the Past, Enabling the Present, Preparing for the Future, 2009 Performance and Accountability Report, p.34., ([www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report\\_rev-0610.pdf](http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report_rev-0610.pdf))

<sup>86</sup> The Architect of the Capitol, Preserving the Past, Enabling the Present, Preparing for the Future, 2009 Performance and Accountability Report, p.146., ([www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report\\_rev-0610.pdf](http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/cfo/upload/AOC-FY-2009-Performance-and-Accountability-Report_rev-0610.pdf))

## FACILITATION MODELS

Beyond petitioning systems, how parliaments provide mechanisms to enable parliamentarians and/or officials to engage effectively with the public about legislative and policy issues is a growing area of interest, particularly given the new opportunities that technological developments may provide in the future against a backdrop of reduced parliamentary expenditure. However, apart from petitions and e-petitioning systems very few legislatures have yet developed innovative models in this field. A number of parliaments have begun to develop engagement strategies through web 2.0 social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter but with varying degrees of success. For example, the consultation on the National Assembly for Wales' (Legislative Competence) (Education) Order on the Assembly's Facebook page received no comments at all.<sup>87</sup> The Order would confer legislative competence on the National Assembly in relation to school governance and as such was an important but relatively technical, non-controversial policy development. Simply posting information on a Facebook page that already attracts only a small number of 'Facebook Friends' is a limited and inadequate form of consultation unless positioned as part of a wider, more comprehensive engagement strategy.

### On-line forums

The French National Assembly operates a moderated forum 'for open and constructive debate' to 'allow visitors to share ideas and arguments in a reasoned and courteous way'.<sup>88</sup> It does not provide two-way interaction with members, but all contributions are passed to the relevant member or rapporteur on an ongoing basis. Where the discussion concerns a particular bill, for example, then the information is fed to the member with responsibility for reviewing the bill and often the contributions from the forum are brought together in an appendix to the relevant committee report. Contributors have to register with the forum and are then able to contribute as many comments as they wish. Some issues do attract comments in the thousands but as contributors can and do make multiple comments the number of comments far exceeds the actual number of participants. As with other blog sites, the contributions are often negative and critical in tone and the quality of engagement, and the benefit to the members, can therefore be limited.

An interesting innovation is to be found in the Chilean Parliament which takes a proactive interest in the development of on-line democracy tools.

#### **Senador Virtual – Senado, Republic of Chile<sup>89</sup>**

The Chilean Senate introduced the *Senador Virtual* (Virtual Senator) portal in 2003. This is an on-line voting system that the Senate uses to directly consult the public on specific policy proposals being considered by the legislature. Participants are directed to on-line resources which give them background information on the issues. They can then vote for or

<sup>87</sup> National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee No. 4, *Proposed National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Education) Order 2010*, Committee Report 2010, p.10.

<sup>88</sup> See <http://forum.assemblee-nationale.fr/>

<sup>89</sup> [www.senadorvirtual.cl/](http://www.senadorvirtual.cl/)

against certain proposals within a bill and post their own comments for other participants and Senators to read. Replies are fed through to the Senate at the committee stage, where they can help to influence legislative outcomes.

In order to participate, Chilean voters must register by setting up an account. This ensures that no multiple voting takes place. Participants also receive e-mail updates about the progress of bills that they have voted on and any changes that may occur to a bill as it progresses through the legislature. Legislative proposals are reduced to their essential core features and questions constructed around the key proposals. For example, whether the continued use of plastic bags should be permitted; or whether the 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> September should be established as public holidays. Other subjects have included changes to employment law, the rights of Chileans abroad to vote in elections, and the relationship between Chile and its special territories.

Voting levels are not high as a percentage share of registered voters. One of the highest rated votes was on the question of whether employers should be allowed to drug test a potential employee before hiring them. Overall 991 people voted in favour of the proposal, 777 against, and 72 abstained. However, the popularity of the site is growing – to date there have been just over 300,000 visitors – and Senators and officials are able to draw on not just the voting results but the comments made by participants to inform their deliberations. Once voting on an issue concludes then the results and information are stored in the archive but can be readily accessed via the site.

**SENADOR VIRTUAL** REPUBLICA DE CHILE SENADO

Portada Presentación Manual de uso Inscripción Contáctenos Proyectos votados

**PROYECTOS EN DISCUSIÓN**

EN DISCUSIÓN GENERAL  
Se consideran las ideas fundamentales del proyecto de ley, con el objetivo de admitirlo o desecharlo en su conjunto.

Acceda ¿No está registrado? [Hágalo aquí](#)

USUARIO

CONTRASEÑA

Nº Antetón	Nombre		Periodo de discusión	
			Desde	Hasta
6413-07	Inscripción automática, sufragio voluntario y voto de chilenos en el extranjero	<input type="button" value="VOTAR"/>	07/01/2010	28/07/2010
6800-10	Extiende a los padres trabajadores el derecho de alimentar a sus hijos.	<input type="button" value="VOTAR"/>	18/01/2010	10/07/2010
6129-13	Aumenta sanción a empleadores que exijan antecedentes económicos para la contratación de trabajadores.	<input type="button" value="VOTAR"/>	28/01/2010	10/07/2010
6825-06	Prohíbe difusión de encuestas un mes antes de las elecciones.	<input type="button" value="VOTAR"/>	26/04/2010	24/07/2010
6803-11	Crea un sistema de información comparada de planes de salud de las ISAPRES.	<input type="button" value="VOTAR"/>	30/04/2010	30/07/2010

Screenshot of Senador Virtual Home Page



**SENADOR VIRTUAL**

Front Presentation Manual Registration Contact Us Rated Projects

**GENERAL DISCUSSION ON RESULTS**  
PROHIBITS THE USE OF PLASTIC BAGS BIODEGRADABLE NO. (Bulletin No. 6046-12)

**VOTE IN GENERAL**  
FOR: 682 AGAINST: 15 Abstention: 12

**FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS**

No.		SI	NO	ABSTENTION
1	In Chile, use 3 billion plastic bags a year, equivalent to 200 bags per person, which takes between 2-4 centuries to be degraded. Do you think that the environmental damage caused by the use of plastic packaging bags and is cause for concern?	697	4	2
2	Do you think that the replacement of plastic bags by some of a biodegradable solution is effective?	654	33	13
3	Do you agree to ban trade the use of non-degradable plastic bags?	649	35	16

**OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS**

Classification	Contributions	
Biodegradable bags	36	VER
Prohibition of using plastic bags	17	VER
Other inputs	141	VER
Sanctions	10	VER

*Screenshot of Senador Virtual Results Page*

Senador Virtual is readily accessed via the Chilean Senate web page but does not seem to be proactively promoted or marketed though any other mechanisms as part of a strategic communications strategy. The system is simple and easy to use and allows participation in the democratic process in an informal manner that can attract people from a wide range of backgrounds. The participants receive feedback on the issue that interests them and they can consequently see whether their contribution and views have been reflected in the overall legislative decision. As the site provides background information about the legislation and policy issues it is a useful educational platform and resource as well. In a Westminster context, the big challenge would be overcoming ingrained cultural and political objections to reducing legislation to a few key, often controversial, concepts which are naturally perceived in a partisan way. As with referendums, the problem would be securing consensus around the wording of the questions.

Another approach to on-line consultation has been adopted in the German Bundestag.

### Thursday On-line Chats with MPs – German Bundestag<sup>90</sup>

In 2008, for six sitting Thursdays two MPs – one from the government side, one from the opposition – met together to debate issues on-line with the public. The forum ‘chats’ were organised by the Bundestag internet division in partnership with Politik Digital, a non-profit organisation. The latter’s role was to invite the MPs, moderate the ‘chat’ and provide the software (Talk 42). It was an opportunity for less prominent MPs to present their viewpoint and to engage directly with the public on issues being discussed that week in plenary debates. The number of forum participants varied considerably from 33 to 120 users at any one session so the ‘reach’ of this initiative was limited. It did, however, attract positive press coverage and was relatively cost effective to run at approximately 600 Euros per session which covered the costs that Politik Digital incurred with three to four hours of preparation time per session, largely communicating with the participating members and liaising with the press.

The Bundestag has also adopted a comprehensive approach to on-line engagement through its parliamentary portal for young people, ‘Mitmischen’.

### [www.mitmischen.de](http://www.mitmischen.de) – German Bundestag

The portal offers an internet platform for both information and communication with young people and members of the parliament. Web forums, real-time chat, blogs and voting are all available, inviting young people ‘to discuss, to argue, to doubt, to complain or simply just to chat peacefully’.<sup>91</sup> Participants have to register and they can then participate via an open forum, a ‘chat’ session with parliamentarians, or the voting system.

The Forums are moderated and require pre-registration. Young people can then raise any issues of concern, or participate in the themed debates – recent topics have included ‘What we want to save?’ regarding deficit reduction, children and youth rights, and young people and alcohol. Some background information and links are provided and where relevant feedback is provided to members. In terms of meaningful engagement however, the approach is quite limited as a largely one-directional form of communication.

However, the Bundestag has extended the concept of the on-line ‘chat’ to young people and every two months or so a ‘chat’ session is held with five members of parliament drawn from different parties on topics of interest. In May 2010 for example, Thomas Jarzombek (CDU / CSU), Sönke Rix (SPD), Florian Bernschneider (FDP), Jan Korte (The Left) and Kai Gehring (Alliance 90/The Greens) participated in a ‘chat’ about political engagement.

This ‘chat’ element of the site is similar in concept to that of the Hansard Society’s HeadsUp forum although HeadsUp is a more intensive exercise. HeadsUp forums provide more background information material about the issue under discussion as well as how Westminster operates, reports are disseminated to Members with an interest in the

<sup>90</sup> Deutscher Bundestag Press & Communication (PuK4), ‘Chats With MPs Every Thursday: How It Is Organised’.

<sup>91</sup> [http://www.bundestag.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2008/pm\\_0811101.html](http://www.bundestag.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2008/pm_0811101.html)

particular topic as well as relevant government department ministers and officials, committee's and All Party Groups etc. Responses to the reports are actively pursued and placed on the website for the forum. HeadsUp thus appears to generate more in terms of direct outputs.



*Members of the Bundestag participating in the 20 May 2010 'chat' about political engagement*

Young people's involvement in the Mitmischen site is incentivised by a points system that rewards different types of participation on the site. 100 points is secured for registration; 50 for participating in a 'chat' or subscribing to the newsletter'; 10 points are allocated for every forum comment or for taking part in one of the games on the site; and finally five points are the reward for voting. Each month the points are totalled and the 20 most active users are then invited to Berlin for an expenses paid three day visit where they spend part of their time at the Reichstag.<sup>92</sup>

## Future forums

Another method by which a number of parliaments attempt to gauge the opinions of and listen to the public is through Future Forums. These provide an arena in which cross-cutting long-term policy issues can be discussed by a variety of actors such as politicians, government officials, civil society representatives as well as ordinary citizens.

Two leading examples of such Forums are to be found in Finland and Scotland.

### **Committee for the Future – *Tulevaisuusvaliokunta* (TVK) – Eduskunta, Finland<sup>93</sup>**

The TVK was an ad hoc parliamentary committee set-up in 1993 following the country's accession to the EU. Its remit was to conduct research associated with futures studies, to conduct assessments of technological development and the effects on society of technology and to deliberate on all parliamentary documents referred to it. In 2000 it became a permanent 17 member parliamentary committee following reforms to the

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.mitmischen.de/index.php/Community/Gewinnen>

<sup>93</sup> TVK (2010), Finish Committee for the Future website, <http://web.eduskunta.fi/Resource.phx/parliament/committees/future.htm>

country's constitution with a remit to 'conduct an active and initiative-generating dialogue with the Government on major future problems and means of solving them'.<sup>94</sup>

From a public engagement perspective the value of the TVK lies in its innovative approach to both expert and public consultation despite its relatively small research budget of just 80,000 Euros.<sup>95</sup> The committee solicits input from various sources including current academics and scientists, but it has also created a 60 member *Forum of the Experienced and the Wise* to assist its work. This forum consists largely of retired professionals in four categories: those with public administration experience; former academics and scientists; former private sector leaders; and former politicians and media professionals. Forum members attend two meetings of the TVK every year. It often works in partnership with outside organisations while conducting its inquiries and benefits from broad participation by independent experts, interested organisations and the general public. A seminar series, 'Turning Innovations into Resources', is also held across Finland each year in order to inform and involve the public – these seminars are held at a variety of events not commonly associated with politics, such as the national Jazz Festival.<sup>96</sup>

Every second year after an election the Government must submit a 'Report on the Future' setting out its long term policy framework and this forms the basis for much of the TVK's research analysis. The TVK is tightly integrated into the work of the Eduskunta, initiates about 75% of its own work, and provides a valuable mechanism to transmit academic and other relevant research findings into the decision-making and scrutiny process such that the research can have practical benefits in terms of policy development.

This model of a permanent forum for debate on economic and social futures issues, operating within the parliamentary structure but taking considerable advice from a permanent advisory body of experts and citizens from outside parliament, has been replicated elsewhere, particularly in Scotland.

### **Scotland's Futures Forum – Scottish Parliament**

The Forum, also known as Holyrood's 'think-tank', was created by the Scottish Parliament to 'help its Members, along with policy makers, businesses, academics, and the wider community of Scotland, look beyond immediate horizons, to some of the challenges and opportunities we will face in the future.'<sup>97</sup> By looking beyond the electoral cycle it was hoped that fresh perspectives and ideas for policy development would emerge and the Forum thus undertakes studies and organises public seminars and consultations to provide long term solutions across a variety of policy areas. The board consists of both politicians and stakeholders, including the Presiding Officer of the Parliament and other Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), academics and private sector leaders and is operated as a company limited by guarantee in order to raise third party finance to support its work. The

<sup>94</sup> Committee for the Future Parliamentary Brochure,

<http://web.eduskunta.fi/dman/Document.phx?documentId=np28107102024895&cmd=download>

<sup>95</sup> Information provided by Paula Tihonen, Eduskunta, Finland, January 2010.

<sup>96</sup> B. Groombridge, *Parliament and the Future: Learning from Finland*, *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 2, April-June 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Scotland's Futures Forum <http://scotlandfutureforum.org/index.php?id=55>

Forum itself is led by a 10 member Board but there are 2,000 members across civil society. Like the TVK it undertakes research into long-term and cross-cutting policy areas such as drug and alcohol misuse, the implications of poverty in Scottish society, and what a learning Scottish society should look like.

Evaluations of the Futures Forums are mixed. The Finish model is widely regarded not least because, as the first such Forum, it represents an innovative model for consultation and engagement. However, some are critical that the TVK's public participation is too heavily dependent on web dialogue, whereas the Scottish model is dedicated to a more expansive model of public engagement both on and offline.<sup>98</sup> An alternative approach to expert and civil society consultation is provided by the European Parliament.

#### **e-AGORA – European Parliament<sup>99</sup>**

The e-AGORA forum is a mechanism set up by the European Parliament to bring together Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and civil society actors from across the EU in order to facilitate discussion on important issues. Forums have been held on the future of Europe (2007) and climate change (2008). Plenaries and workshops are held over a two day period within the chamber of the European Parliament. Over 500 participants, drawn from a list of the parliament's contacts, meet to discuss matters pertaining to the particular policy theme. For example the e-AGORA on the effects of climate change examined how the issues of resources, techniques, solidarity, economics and governance will determine responses to future problems.<sup>100</sup> Debates are led by co-moderators, one of whom is an MEP and the other is drawn from civil society. The event concludes with the drafting of a final report by the civil society activists. This is then used to inform future debates amongst MEPs. The e-Agora programme places great emphasis on the internet as a means of bringing people together to discuss issues of common interest and concern and to bridge the difficulties posed by geographical distances within the EU. All the events are streamed on-line and all information relating to the meetings, including the conclusions of the workshops, are posted on the internet. Participants can also post responses to policy suggestions, share research and briefing-papers, and provide resources to better inform representatives. The e-AGORA on the Future of Europe led to 73 postings and the subsequent event on climate change saw 164 postings.

A smaller-scale less resource intensive alternative to these models of consultation and engagement is offered in Sweden where, since 2006 the Riksdag has organised a Future Day where researchers and members of the Parliament meet to discuss long-term policy issues of concern. In 2008, for example, the agenda for the day addressed three themes: climate change, IT and the ageing population. The Day promotes dialogue and engagement but the model is very limited as an effective mechanism for producing outputs: in 2008 the researchers presented members with a wish-list for greater political courage to take long-term policy decisions; more money for research; more researchers to

<sup>98</sup> Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Postnote, May 2009, No. 332, p.3.

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.e-agera.info/>

<sup>100</sup> ECPRD No. 1294, Official response from the European Parliament.

be appointed as advisers to members; and a better transfer of knowledge should be achieved between researchers and members.<sup>101</sup>

The House of Commons Public Administration Committee has previously recommended that a forum modelled on the TVK or Scotland's Future Forum should be established.<sup>102</sup> This would, as the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology has noted, provide a means to increase Parliament's capacity to engage with outside experts and the wider public' and 'further the Commons Commission's objective to promote public knowledge and understanding of the work and role of Parliament through provision of information and access.'<sup>103</sup> The approach might be enhanced still further if greater use of technology was made for the purposes of consultation, learning from the development of the e-AGORA project, and if on-line evidence submissions were able to directly influence the drafting of reports. This Forum approach to consultation and engagement is very much focused on experts and the interested, informed member of the general public. The number of the EU wide e-AGORA postings illustrates the limitations of the approach in terms of size and scale. It is very much an exercise in quality rather than quantity engagement, in an open and transparent environment.

## Public engagement entrepreneurs

Although parliaments usually establish their own consultation mechanisms that feed into the legislative scrutiny process or into the policy process more widely, there are some examples where third parties (independent or semi-independent organisations) are used to facilitate engagement between parliament and the public.

### **Danish Board of Technology (DBT) – Folketing, Denmark<sup>104</sup>**

The Danish Board of Technology was established in 1995 by an Act of Parliament as an arms-length organisation of the Folketing. Its remit is 'to promote the technology debate and public enlightenment concerning the potential, and consequences of technology'.<sup>105</sup> The Board organises independent technology assessments with the involvement of both experts and the general public, it conducts assessments of the potential and consequences of technology, and it raises public awareness about the role of technology in Danish society. It acts as an adviser to both the Danish Parliament and the Government.

The 11 member Board of Governors has an annual budget of approximately 1.3 million Euros and a staff of thirteen. The Ministry for Science and Technology provides a monitoring function and the Board is accountable, via an annual report, to the Parliament's Committee for Science and Technology. The Government appoints the Chair and three

<sup>101</sup> The Riksdag Administration 2008, p.18.

<sup>102</sup> House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (2006-07), *Governing the Future*, HC 123.

<sup>103</sup> Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Postnote, May 2009, No. 332, p.3,

<sup>104</sup> Background information provided in telephone interview with Lars Kluver, Director, Danish Board of Technology, August 2009.

<sup>105</sup> Danish Board of Technology (2009) *Technology with a Human Face*.

other members, the rest are appointed on the recommendation of other bodies. It also has a 50 strong Board of Representatives made up of a cross-section of Danish organisations.

Parliamentary committees can request specific subject advice and assistance with a technological assessment. The resulting work might involve answering a specific Members' question, or addressing issues in their regular newsletter, 'From Board to Parliament'. However, it is their role in arranging hearings for parliamentary committees that they are most relevant in the context of public engagement and the possible transference of best practice to the UK.

The DBT Board usually receives five to eight requests from the Parliament to organise public hearings for committees each year.<sup>106</sup> On occasion, the Board itself also suggests ideas for public hearings – sometimes the hearings may be a one-off, sometimes a series of hearings over a period of a year or more. The Board is responsible for managing the hearing and appoints a project manager, project assistant and secretary to undertake the work. If the Board determines that an expert monitoring group is required it appoints between three and five experts to assist. The committee hearings are supervised by a moderator who is familiar with the policy issue but is politically impartial. They may moderate independently or jointly with the committee chair. Additional experts participate in the hearings – they will have submitted formal evidence in advance and are given approximately 5 minutes to make an oral presentation to the committee and then answer questions. Each hearing is divided into 30 or 60 minute topic blocks, each with its own panel of expert presentations, they are open to the public and are typically attended by 100-150 people. The DBT then compiles the subsequent report for the committee and disseminates it in the public arena. The DBT has held more than 30 hearings in the Folketing on issues such as stem cell research and electronic surveillance<sup>107</sup> and more recent hearings have focused on obesity as a social problem. The hearings cost DKK 150,000-250,000 (approximately £17,400 – £29,000), plus the cost of the DBT Secretariat's work.

The Board's expertise in engaging the public in debates about technological issues stems from a tried and tested methodology developed over the last decade. In addition to traditional parliamentary committee hearings it also utilises café seminars, citizen's summits, citizen's juries, citizen's hearings, future panels and consensus conferences in order to involve experts, policy makers, legislators and the public in meaningful conversations and debates on technology issues.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Lars Kluver, Director, Danish Board of Technology, August 2009.

<sup>107</sup> DBT (2001), *Hearing on surveillance and privacy*, URL: <http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php?article=631&toppic=kategori11&language=uk>





*DBT Consensus Conference*

A **Future Panel** on energy between 2004-2006 for example, provided the basis for Denmark's Future Energy Strategy.<sup>108</sup> A cross-party panel of 20+ members of the Folketing was supported by a steering group of key experts and stakeholders within the energy sector and by the Board's secretariat. The panel conducted four open hearings over the course of two years, sharing expertise and knowledge in the area and building scenarios for the future. The cost of a Future Panel is DKK 600,000 (approximately £70,000) plus the Secretariat costs.<sup>109</sup>

An alternative consultation model used by the DBT is a **Consensus Conference**. Here ordinary citizens are directly involved in a consultation on a technological issue. There are usually two weekends of preparatory work followed by a four day conference and then a report is submitted to the Folketing. 2,000 participants are chosen randomly by computer selection and they are then contacted and invited to apply for a seat at the conference. The Board then selects a representative group of 14-16 citizens for the Citizen's Panel. A journalist is often appointed to draft the introductory material for those on the panel and a professional communications consultant, who is non-partisan and not an expert in the policy field, is also appointed to facilitate the panel proceedings as the 'process consultant' or 'panel lawyer'. Their role is to help the Panel members communicate with the DBT project management team and with the politicians, experts and fellow citizens on the Panel. The preparatory weekends are for the Panel to formulate the themes and questions of the conference that they wish to raise with the experts.

The four day conference itself, usually also held over a weekend, begins with questioning of a group of up to 25 experts over the course of a day followed by discussion of the presentations. As consensus is reached a report is drafted but typically the discussions can continue throughout the night as the panel members seek to resolve differences over key issues. On the final day the Panel presents its report to the expert participants so that any errors can be addressed and questions answered. The report is then disseminated to MPs,

<sup>108</sup> Danish Board of Technology (2005), *Denmark's Future Energy Strategy*,

<http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=1085&topic=kategori11&language=uk>

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=815&topic=kategori12&language=uk>



the experts, the media and other key stakeholders. The DBT has held dozens of Consensus Conferences in Denmark on issues such as road pricing, electronic surveillance, and GM foods. The cost of a consensus conference is usually around DKK 600,000 (approximately £70,000).<sup>110</sup>

The DBT model of public engagement and consultation is expensive by UK parliamentary standards but this 'engagement broker' approach is perhaps a more effective way of securing sustained expert and public interest and engagement in policy discussions. It also provides a range of different models of consultation to best suit the policy subject under discussion and therefore secure the best outcomes compared to the rather traditional inquisitorial approach offered by parliamentary select committee inquiries. It might perhaps best be suited as a model for occasional use to be actioned on those occasions when a parliamentary committee requires a very wide-ranging, cross-cutting policy consultation that will strain existing parliamentary resources and in-house skills. The clear disadvantage of the model is that the engagement exercise does not necessarily enhance Parliament's own profile directly: though MPs participate, the institution of Parliament is operating at one remove in the process.

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<sup>110</sup> <http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=468&topic=kategori12&language=uk>

## OUTREACH

In order to better engage with the public beyond easy physical reach of the parliamentary building, parliaments, like Westminster, are increasingly focused on regional outreach and peripatetic activity: taking the work of the parliament out into the community rather than relying on the community to come to parliament.

### A regional presence

#### Parliamentary Democracy Offices (PDOs) – South Africa<sup>111</sup>

To facilitate public participation and involvement in Parliament, (which is a constitutional requirement in South Africa), the Parliament is in the process of establishing a PDO in each of the nine provinces, primarily in 'the under-served, under-resourced and deep rural areas' in order to provide all citizens with an opportunity to be involved and participate in the legislative process and other parliamentary activities. The objective is that these offices will help the Parliament better engage with those who normally find themselves excluded from political debate. They are to:

- a) conduct public education and provide information about Parliament and its work;
- b) provide a platform for people to access and participate in the processes of Parliament;
- c) provide ground and logistical support for parliamentary programmes and activities;
- d) co-ordinate and co-operate with other spheres of government.

The plan is to provide both physical regional offices as well as mobile offices in each of the nine provinces, co-ordinated by a central office in Parliament. Phase 1 is focused on delivery of the physical infrastructure; phase 2 will focus on delivery of mobile offices for each of these provincial PDOs. To date, three PDOs have been established in the Limpopo, Northern Cape and North West provinces and the work of the PDOs is very much in its infancy.

Similarly, in Namibia the Assembly has recently augmented its outreach programme with new plans to establish regional Parliamentary Access Centres (PACs). At the instigation of an individual MP, the Assembly proposes to establish 13 regional outreach offices across the country in order to provide information about the legislature, host events, and provide a platform for Governors, regional councillors, tribal and church leaders to engage with the Assembly.<sup>112</sup> Because the work of the South African PDOs and Namibian PACs is only just beginning it is too early to assess how effective they will be in helping their respective legislatures engage with otherwise hard-to-reach groups in communities across the country.

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<sup>111</sup> [http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/content.php?Category\\_ID=170](http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/content.php?Category_ID=170)

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Manasse Zeraeua, Namibian Assembly official, July 2009, and subsequent correspondence, October 2009.

However, they are initiatives that should be watched in the future to see how they develop and if there are innovations that the Westminster outreach teams could utilise in a different regional setting.

An alternative, smaller-scale approach to regional outreach has been taken in Sweden where the Riksdag has established regional parliamentary *Info-Spots* in collaboration with public libraries.

#### **Regional *Info-Spots* – Riksdag, Sweden**

Four regional parliamentary *Info Spots* (parliamentary corners) have been located in the main libraries of Malmö (South), Gothenburg (West), Sundsvall (Middle), Umeå (North). The aim is to promote the spread of parliamentary related information from the Riksdag to other parts of the country. At these *Info Spots* members of the public can arrange to meet their locally elected MP, surf the parliamentary website on provided computers, collect printed information, teaching materials and watch live debates on web TV. Other events, such as debates, may also be arranged at the *Info Spots* on occasion.<sup>113</sup>

The *Info Spots* have a budget of around 300,000 SEK (approx £26,000), which is spent mostly on local information about visits from MPs and on the ongoing education of the librarians that work with the project.<sup>114</sup> At the libraries where *Info Spots* are located, two librarians are trained to deal with requests and help members of the public to find out further information about Parliament. Training is provided twice a year for these staff members.<sup>115</sup>

The regional *Info Spots* are advertised on the websites of the Riksdag and the participating libraries, and in the local press at the beginning of each parliamentary session. The library webpage also presents a calendar of events (i.e. the dates of visits by MPs). Citizens can access printed material and educational material publicised by the Riksdag free of charge at the *Info Spots*.

Visitor numbers to the four library locations cannot be assessed as the *Info Spots* are not physically separated from the rest of the library space. The best estimate of numbers is of those who attended meetings with the MPs in 2009 namely:

- Gothenburg approx. 350 visitors;
- Malmö approx. 150 visitors;
- Sundsvall approx. 170 visitors;
- Umeå approx. 130 visitors.<sup>116</sup>

At £26,000 each this model is perhaps an expensive one given the level of engagement that takes place and the limitations that the regional model provides. However, an alternative to a Centre might be an Information Kiosk – either a fixed or mobile version,

<sup>113</sup> [http://riksdagen.se/templates/R\\_Page\\_6536.aspx](http://riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page_6536.aspx)

<sup>114</sup> ECPRD No.1294, official response from Sweden.

<sup>115</sup> Information provided by Lena Norenhag, Information Department, The Riksdag, January 2010.

<sup>116</sup> Information provided by Lena Norenhag, Information Department, The Riksdag, January 2010.

usually internet based – that are smaller in scale and still provide key information about Parliament which could readily be located in libraries or other similar community locations.

## Mobile presence: an outreach bus

An alternative to a fixed outreach presence is the mobile 'outreach bus' utilised by several parliaments to good effect.

### Outreach Bus – National Assembly for Wales

Launched in May 2009 the bus is 'an offshoot of the role of the Outreach Service' and 'is central to promoting and widening engagement in devolution by proactively taking the Assembly to the citizen in their groups and communities.'<sup>117</sup> It travels from community to community attending festivals and shows like the Royal Welsh Show and the National Eisteddfod to highlight the role of the Assembly in Welsh life. It is also used to visit schools across the country. The interior of the bus is equipped with an exhibit timeline of key events in the Welsh devolution process, highlights of the Assembly's first ten years, as well as a range of information materials. The bus is also equipped with a video booth where members of the public can record their views so that when issues are being discussed in committees members can draw on the opinions and evidence to help inform their decisions. The bus is also used occasionally by committees to take direct evidence in the community.

### Infomobil des Bundestage – German Bundestag<sup>118</sup>

Similar to the Welsh outreach bus, the Bundestag also utilises a mobile information bus to take the Parliament to communities across the country. Members of the Bundestag take part in Q&A activities on board the bus when it visits their constituency. The bus has an area for the provision of information, a discussion area, a large-screen display for films, and internet access to the Bundestag website. Visitors can take away a CD-Rom about the Bundestag plus other free education and information materials.



*An external and internal view of the Infomobil des Bundestage*

<sup>117</sup> Information provided by Natlalie Drury Styes, Outreach and International Manager, and Mary Wynn Gooberman, Education Team Manager, National Assembly for Wales.

<sup>118</sup> [www.bundestag.de/besuche/bundestagunterwegs/mobil.html](http://www.bundestag.de/besuche/bundestagunterwegs/mobil.html)

## Ambassadorial outreach

Both the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker are committed to an increased ambassadorial role and profile. Looking at examples elsewhere there are some models that might be utilised to improve the profile of their work in this area.

### **Llywydd's Tour – National Assembly for Wales<sup>119</sup>**

Each year the Presiding Officer (Llywydd) visits all five regions of Wales to encourage people to engage in the democratic process and to highlight the role of the Assembly in national life. The visits are advertised on the Assembly's website as well as in local and regional media. Recordings of each visit are made and then subsequently placed on the Assembly website.

### **Presiding Officer's Summer Work Programme & Blog – Scottish Parliament<sup>120</sup>**

Each year the Presiding Officer undertakes a 10 day programme of visits across the country to 'listen and learn from local people and groups about how the Scottish Parliament is communicating with them'. In 2009 the programme included visits to groups such as Combat Stress; Gardening Leave; Galloway Forest Park; Kirkcudbright exhibitions; Burns National Heritage Park; a Policy Conference launch in Dumfries; Borders General Hospital Radio and the Braemar Junior Highland Games.

For the 2010 programme the Presiding Officer has instituted a new innovation, the Summer Programme blog where he relates news from the tour on a daily basis.<sup>121</sup>

### **President's Google Tour Map & Social Networking - Catalonia**

In Catalonia the President of the Parliament also has a proactive role in outreach and education to promote the Parliament and engage the public with its work. To illustrate his outreach programme, particularly his school visits, 'Parlament a les aules' or 'Parliament in the classroom', the locations and links to each visit are recorded on Google Maps which is accessible from the main parliamentary website. The public and media can therefore track and learn about his activities in their community.<sup>122</sup> The President also has his own dedicated social networking channels including Facebook and Twitter.

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.assemblywales.org/newhome/po-outreach-tour.htm>

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/corporate/po/PO-Tour2009.htm>

<sup>121</sup> <http://summerprogramme.wordpress.com/>

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.parlament.cat/web/president/presencia-territori>



*Catalan President's Google Tour Map*

A combination of outreach tours, personal social networking channels, and a blog would all combine to add another layer to the engagement programmes being pursued by the Speaker and Lord Speaker and underline their leadership role in this field, all at limited cost.

## PARTNERSHIPS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Parliament's increasingly have a role as an actor in the civic arena working in partnership with other organisations or interested parties – for example, local government, academics, business, third sector NGOs – to deliver shared objectives. They are establishing themselves as proactive social actors with an increasing sense of their own agency in order to raise awareness and deliver education and outreach programmes and to facilitate public consultation and participation. By working in partnership, parliaments are finding that they need not necessarily always be the lead institution in developing these initiatives but they 'add value' to the process and secure advantages by association with them. Indeed, this is the case at Westminster where events run in conjunction with citizenship test centres or other partner organisations tend to be more successful and draw a higher attendance than if Parliament organises them in isolation. Again, compared to many legislatures Westminster is quite proactive in this area but looking at partnership projects with civil society groups elsewhere, there are a number of case studies where ideas and transferable innovations might be generated.

### Step Up Cymru – National Assembly for Wales<sup>123</sup>

Established in 2009 this is a pilot Assembly and local government mentoring scheme for individuals from under-represented groups (women, LGBT, BME, disabled, religious affiliations, young and old). The participants each year will:

- *receive training related to politics, democracy and political engagement;*
- *have a personal mentor (either an Assembly Member or local councillor) who they can seek guidance and support from;*
- *observe what the mentor does and learn more about their role;*
- *be encouraged to become more active in their community;*
- *meet interesting people and make useful contacts from all across Wales.*<sup>124</sup>

The scheme seeks to develop community ambassadors who can ensure that the interests of these groups are represented in the policy making process in the future. The scheme was not nationally advertised because the focus was on recruiting under-represented groups – thus a targeted recruitment campaign was used involving the distribution of information via a network of voluntary organisations and stakeholders and sector specific and local media. Candidates do not need to have come from political backgrounds or have political experience, but they do need to be enthusiastic about civic participation, want to learn more about politics, be keen to act as community ambassadors, and be willing to work flexibly around their personal and work commitments.

<sup>123</sup> Information provided by Adam Rees, Scheme Co-ordinator, National Assembly for Wales, February 2010 and <http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-nafw/equalities/step-up-cymru.htm>

<sup>124</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2009), *Step Up Cymru: Involve. Inform. Inspire. Is it for Me?*, p.1.



80 applications were received for 2009-10, 50 were then shortlisted. They then participated in a one-day seminar on democracy before the list was whittled down to 34 finalists. Of these, 25 are women and 9 are men; 4 are from the LGBT and 14 from the BME community and 10 people have a disability. 14 of the 34 participants shadow Assembly Members, the rest local councillors.

The programme is funded jointly by the National Assembly for Wales Commission (£40,000) and the Welsh Local Government Association (£50,000). A steering group has been established to advise on the development of the programme and the member include: Operation Black Vote, All Wales Ethnic Minority Association, Stonewall Cymru, Disability Wales, Women Making A Difference, Wales Women's National Coalition, Funky Dragon and Cytun.

It is as yet too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this scheme. It is similar to the Operation Black Vote shadowing / mentoring scheme operating at Westminster but is broader in its reach than the Westminster programme. Given concerns about the difficulties of engaging hard-to-reach groups, and encouraging people from certain backgrounds to consider running for office, such a scheme may have merit for the future as it provides the participants with first hand experience of interacting with politicians at local and national level. However, the success of any such scheme will be dependent up how many Members are willing to become ambassadors and share their knowledge and experience in their communities.

The Scottish Parliament is also actively developing programmes to better enable it to reach a range of different communities across the country.

### **Community Partnership Programme – Scottish Parliament<sup>125</sup>**

Following the 2007 review of the Parliament's education and outreach strategy<sup>126</sup> it established what it described as a 'groundbreaking initiative to give voice to people typically under-represented in political life'.<sup>127</sup> Three groups were identified in the review as 'core target' groups that were currently under-represented in terms of engagement with the parliamentary process: blind and partially sighted young people; ethnic minority youth, and hard-to-reach young people.

The Parliament recognised that it had limited institutional capacity to reach out and engage with these young people. The Education and Community Partnerships (ECP) team has therefore developed this pilot as a way, through partnership working, of utilising the skills, experience and capacity of grass-roots, community based organisations that do have contacts with the relevant groups of young people. In short, through the programme, the Parliament hopes that the community groups will be able to help them build some

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<sup>125</sup> Unless otherwise specified the information is based on correspondence with and information provided by officials in the Scottish Parliament particularly the Scottish Parliament Community Partnerships Project, Briefing for the Presiding Officer by Rosemary Everett, Head of the Education and Community Partnerships Team, August 2009.

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/corporate/anrep-accts/spcb/ar-08/spar08-01.htm>

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/outreach/CPPIlot2009.htm>



expertise and capacity in order to help hard-to-reach groups make their voice heard more effectively in Parliament.

The aim of the partnerships is to 'build confidence on the part of external organisations' by:

- strengthening **understanding and awareness** of the Parliament, its role and its processes;
- enhancing ability to take **positive action** through parliamentary processes;
- facilitating **engagement** by each partner group in the parliamentary process.<sup>128</sup>

The ECP team undertook research in 2008 exploring potential partner organisations within the three target groups. Officials then met with the groups to explore the potential for partnership working and the potential barriers to participation. The aim was to 'identify organisations with a national remit that have good grassroots contacts / credibility with the target audiences, as well as staff resources to be able to sustain a pilot project.'<sup>129</sup>

The first three partner organisations for the 18 month pilot (August 2008-March 2010) were: Action for Children (previously known as National Children's Homes); HaggEye (previously the Royal National Institute for the Blind) Youth Forum); and Multi Ethnic Aberdeen Limited (MEAL). Having agreed the initial partner organisations the work commenced with a series of eight information workshops organised and delivered by the ECP team. The Parliament covered the costs of travel and accommodation, venue hire, lunches, refreshments, etc. The workshops were delivered at two residential weekends at Holyrood, a day visit one weekend to Edinburgh, plus a series of local, weekday evening sessions. The themes covered included:

- introducing the Scottish Parliament;
- visit to Holyrood;
- MSPs and voting;
- committees;
- how to get involved;
- petitions;
- how laws are made;
- what next? / action plan / over to you ....

The purpose of the sessions was to ensure that the staff of the partner organisations had a broad base knowledge of Parliament and how it works, and particularly the opportunities available to engage with Parliament, in order to impart this to the young people with whom they work. As well as sending their end-user staff, partner organisations were also asked to nominate delegates who could train other people locally, thus building additional skills capacity into the programme to enable it to be rolled out more widely.

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<sup>128</sup> Scottish Parliament Community Partnerships Project, Briefing for the Presiding Officer by Rosemary Everett, Head of the Education and Community Partnerships Team, August 2009.

<sup>129</sup> Scottish Parliament Community Partnerships Project, Briefing for the Presiding Officer by Rosemary Everett, Head of the Education and Community Partnerships Team, August 2009.

Following the sessions the partner organisations were then asked to identify an issue or problem affecting them that they would like to actively try and address using the parliamentary process. Using the learning and skills gained in the workshops the groups have been further coached by officials in ways to engage productively and positively with the Parliament – through its procedures such as committees and petitions, and with the individuals in Parliament such as the MSPs and Ministers. The key is that ECP staff are not directly involved in the engagement action but help to support and facilitate it through the provision of advice and guidance.

The engagement can be procedural – e.g. submitting a petition or evidence to a committee or contacting an MSP. Alternatively, project partners may choose to use their newly gained knowledge of Parliament to inspire an arts-related project – e.g. to use art, literature, music, poetry, or a video / DVD production to reflect and present their lives and experiences to politicians, perhaps based around an event or exhibition that might be held in Parliament.

The partners showcased their activities at a special Community Partnerships Project Outcomes Conference in March 2010 – footage from the conference can be watched on-line.<sup>130</sup> Work to evaluate the success of the programme was carried out between March and June 2010 but at the time of writing the results are not yet available. However, the Parliament is sufficiently confident of the success and value of the partnership programme that it has already embarked on a second tranche of partnerships for the year ahead with South Ayrshire Youth Forum, the Mud Argyll Youth Project and Ownership Options in Scotland (which works with disabled people).

Until the results of the Community Partnerships project are known it is difficult to assess its full utility in a Westminster context but clearly Parliament's regional Outreach Programme and broadening community contacts would provide the institutional structures necessary to help develop a similar Community Partnership programme with perhaps one or two partners selected in each region. Indeed such a programme might add real value to the work of the outreach programmes by providing further structure and outcomes to their existing outreach work.

The Scottish Parliament also organised a conference in 2009, as part of its Ten Year celebrations, dedicated solely to helping third sector organisations learn more about the Parliament and how they can influence its deliberations.

#### **'Understanding and Influencing Your Parliament' Conference – Scottish Parliament<sup>131</sup>**

This one-day conference hosted by the Presiding Officer was held on Saturday 21 November 2009 (10:30am-4:00pm) to help smaller voluntary, charity and civic groups as well as campaign organisations, with limited staff resource and policy-making capacity, to learn more about how they can influence the parliamentary decision-making process. The 150 attendees were from local organisations that had previously had little or no

<sup>130</sup> [http://vr-sp-archive.lbwa.verio.net/archive/260310\\_community\\_partnership.wmv](http://vr-sp-archive.lbwa.verio.net/archive/260310_community_partnership.wmv)

<sup>131</sup> Information provided in telephone interviews with parliamentary officials in December 2009.

engagement with the Parliament. The organisations were approached following consultations with officials at local government level and contact was made with them often via telephone rather than other normal marketing routes. The process was thus time-consuming and resource intensive. National charities or campaign groups – the ‘usual suspects’ – were deliberately excluded from the event. Attendance, lunch and refreshment was free and subsidised travel and accommodation was available on application.

The conference focused on the practicalities of lobbying the Scottish Parliament and the challenges of participation. Keynote addresses were given by MSPs, Ministers and parliamentary officials and a panel discussion was chaired by the Presiding Officer. In the afternoon a series of workshops were held focusing on practical advice and guidance about running a campaign. One workshop concerned running a campaign, another explored how to utilise cross-party groups, one how to engage with committees and the final one looked at public petitions. Participants in this latter session included members of the public and campaigners who had successfully petitioned the Parliament themselves and could pass on their advice about the process. At the end of the day attendees had a tour of the Parliament and the Presiding Officer hosted a closing reception.

The Scottish Parliament believes that the conference was unique (in terms of audience, aims and objectives) and certainly we have found nothing similar to it during the course of our research. At the time of writing the Parliament is inviting any organisations or individuals interested in attending a similar conference in future to contact them, but no date has been agreed for another such conference as yet.

As with the Welsh Step Up Cymru initiative, it could be argued that initiatives such as this work better where the parliament is able to operate on a small scale (in terms of population, geographical area etc). Nevertheless, capacity building initiatives to help organisations that deal directly with target groups that the parliament wants to engage more with could be done, particularly by utilising the Outreach teams. Effective targeting of these organisations is essential and the Scottish Parliament has proven to be both innovative and effective in using local community networks in order to reach the heart of local communities. In a Westminster context, greater use of local government and Local Strategic Partnership networks might offer a way forward in this regard.

## EDUCATION

Every parliament we have looked at has some form of educational provision for young people. At the most basic level this may involve merely the provision of information materials and guided tours. However, a number of parliaments, particularly in Scandinavia, make much greater, innovative provision for their young citizens including interactive workshops where school children learn about democracy and about their democratic institutions (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), on-line educational games (Finland, Catalonia, Germany) and resources (Denmark), and interactive sessions where they can simulate the legislative process in specially designed environments (Estonia's *e-chamber*, Denmark's *Politician for a Day*, and Wales' *Siambwr Hywel*). Some of these – with the exception of the latter category – are often similar in design and objective to those offered by Westminster's Parliamentary Education Service (PES) in terms of both on-line and off-line provision. This chapter explores a number of initiatives – large and small – which we believe are sufficiently distinct to what is offered by Westminster as to be worth considering for the purposes of supplementing PES provision.

The Danish Folketing in particular has a very extensive educational programme and many of its initiatives have been replicated elsewhere (Iceland, Norway, and Estonia for example).

### Role-play

#### Politician For A Day – Folketing, Denmark

This interactive centre where primary school children learn about their democracy was opened in 2003. It was first suggested in 1998 but only in 2001 was the right location agreed (a 300 square metre complex in the upper basement of the Christiansbourg parliamentary estate) and it then took two years to establish. The project aims to 'provide inspiration for active participation in Danish democracy and to offer school children the opportunity to experience that they can make a difference.' The project comprises an interactive computer assisted role play (designed by Expology Burston-Marsteller) and then a guided tour of the parliamentary estate. It cost €2 million to renovate and establish and was financed half by the Ministry of Education and half by the Folketing. Annual running costs to the Folketing are now in the region of 50,000 Euros.<sup>132</sup>

In addition to the main centre with its computer room, there is also a small café and cloakroom, and the building has good disabled access. A visit to Politician for a Day is free and can be booked via the visitors service. The programme is advertised on the Folketing's website, through a network of schools, and via the youth portal of the EU website. It runs three times a day on Monday-Thursday and twice a day on Fridays. In 2008-09 approximately 12,000 pupils participated. It is significantly over subscribed and at any one

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<sup>132</sup> Information provided by Linda Kubasiak Johansen, Folketing official, October 2009.

time there is a 10-12 month waiting list.<sup>133</sup> As a consequence the administration is currently looking at strategies to either reduce waiting times by enlarging the capacity of the current centre, or relocating to other premises on the Christiansbourg site.<sup>134</sup> Development of a web-version of the role-play is also being considered.

The experience lasts 2.5-3 hours depending upon whether the guided tour of the Folketing is also included. Teachers are able to make advance preparations for the visit by utilising guidance and instructions on the Folketing website. On arrival a 'pilot' guide (employee of the Folketing) leads the class through the role-play. The centre is divided into three segments reflecting different aspects of the political process: party premises; Parliament hall; and a committee room. The group is divided into fictitious parties and each must take up a role within their party group – e.g. group chair, spokesperson etc. The students debate three proposals and consider the influence exerted on them during the process by fellow party members, experts, interest groups and voters. The spokespersons must give speeches in the 'chamber' and take part in committee meetings. The objective is for each group to establish a majority for its proposition by reaching agreement within a party group and then with other party groupings, compromising where necessary. During the course of the game, two amendments can be made to each proposition and voted on as required. A final reading and vote on all three propositions is then undertaken.



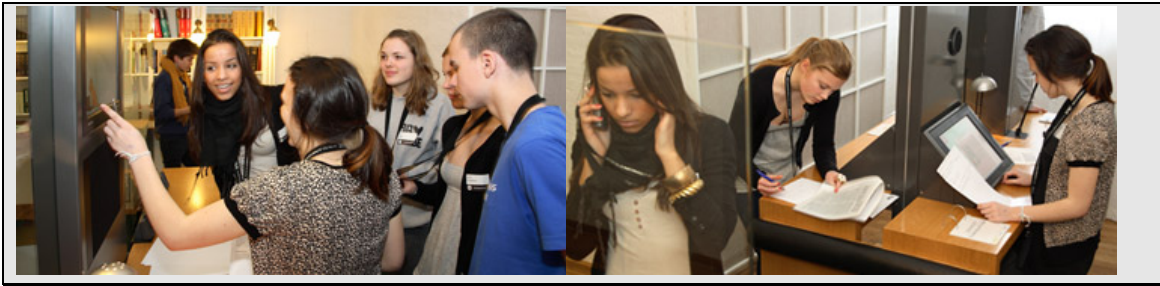
[captions for pictures here and below?]

In addition to the pupil participants there are approximately 100 other roles (Members, officials, experts, journalists etc) played by actors and conveyed through computer based, virtual video and audio sequences. In the centre there are 45 computer stations that the pupils use throughout the role-play. To facilitate the role play the centre has its own server facility with a main server, lighting and audio server, a database and a telephone server. Multimedia manuscripts totalling more than 1,300 pages have been transformed into video sequences, sound, animation, texts, and mobile phone messages. The 7.5GB programme contains around 3,000 files in total and during any one visit approximately 50,000 messages are sent between the various PCs and servers as the game plays out.

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<sup>133</sup> Information provided by Linda Kubasiak Johansen, Folketing official, October 2009.

<sup>134</sup> Folketing Administration (2009), *Communications Strategy*, p.13.



An alternative to the Danish model, with more emphasis on personal role-play and less on computer aided interactivity, is provided in Norway with its *MiniTing* programme.

#### ***MiniTing* – The Storting, Norway<sup>135</sup>**

The *MiniTing* opened in 2005 and is physically greater in size, replicating the parliamentary chamber with a 500m<sup>2</sup> complex that can seat 169 members, and also contains party and committee rooms as well as a television studio. The target age group is older pupils (generally 16-19 years) than at the Folketing. The issues considered in the last year at the *MiniTing* are: compulsory bio-chip implants for Norwegian citizens; fencing-in of sheep in order to protect them from predators; and paying upper secondary school students to go to school; and a private members bill theme such as ethnic housing zones in the biggest cities. The pupils divide into their party groups and agree their positions before splitting into committees for hearings. Each committee then rotates between four 'working stations': oral question time; group room services (where they can read e-mails, answer phone calls etc); information kiosks where they meet voters, lobbyists and the media; and a TV debate. The role-play ends in a plenary debate. Around 6,000 students attend the *MiniTing* each year. It cost 17 million Norwegian Krone to establish (approx £1.8 million) and costs one million Krone per year to run (approx £110,000).

Similar types of programme operate in other countries such as the Swedish Riksdag's *Democracy Workshop* and the Icelandic *Skolathing*. In terms of aims and objectives and broad aspects of operational delivery these do not differ dramatically from the Danish model but the Folketing places much greater emphasis on the interactive computer component of the role-play. A unique element of the Swedish programme is a visit to *The Democracy Vault* adjacent to the Democracy Workshop premises. This is a 13<sup>th</sup> century vault reached via a specially excavated opening and contains an exhibition about the growth of democracy. During the exercise a few students at a time are taken down to the *Democracy Vault*. Using a computer screen, questions can be put to a panel of Riksdag Members based on three themes: the duties of an MP, making decisions, and the future of democracy. The purpose of the vault is to both inspire the students about the work of the Riksdag and to think about how more people could become interested in politics.<sup>136</sup> In Estonia the e-chamber simulation of the Riigikogu differs slightly in that all participants sit and work in the

<sup>135</sup> Information provided by Claus Olav Thorbjørnsen, Stortinget Information Service, December 2009.

<sup>136</sup> ECPRD Request No. 1294: official response from Sweden.

same room, rather than being split off into rooms dependent on which political party or standing committee they have been assigned and the project is also open to adults.<sup>137</sup>

In terms of transferability of innovative ideas and good practice, there may be lessons for Westminster in the context of the new Education Centre. Role-play schemes are particularly popular in parliaments around the world and those in Denmark and Norway in particular have, historically, proven to be the top visitor attractions at their parliament.<sup>138</sup> The UK parliamentary website already has an interactive role-play game, MP For A Day: the challenge will be whether this, or a version of it, can be converted into an active role-play activity on site at Westminster in the context of the facilities that will be available in the new Centre.

## Internship schemes

Internship schemes are a popular way in which parliaments provide an active-learning experience for older students (often at university or recently graduated) to learn about the workings of the parliament and its members, acting in the future as ambassadors for the parliament and the importance of politics and democracy generally. Members of Parliament have interns working for them directly as in the UK. However, elsewhere individual Parliaments have also established internship programmes where students can learn about the behind the scenes workings of Parliament, particularly its legislative and procedural processes, alongside officials and members, and in both the legislative and executive branches of government.

### **Parliamentary Information & Research Service Internship Program – Canada<sup>139</sup>**

This scheme is run by the Library of Parliament and supports five interns each year (September to August). A salary of C\$32,000 is paid. The recent graduates specialise in one of five research streams: industry; infrastructure and resources; international affairs; trade and finance; legal and legislative affairs; social affairs; or reference and strategic analysis.

They help research responses to questions from parliamentarians, committees and associations; participate in committee work as a member of the committee research team; and help to prepare studies on public policy topics of interest to federal parliamentarians. Applicants are expected to have a strong academic record and to be fluent in both English and French.

An alternative model, mixing involvement in the executive and legislative branches is also provided in Canada.

<sup>137</sup> Information provided by officials from the Riigikogu, February 2010.

<sup>138</sup> DG4 Information (2005), *Evaluation Survey of National Parliaments' Visitor Services*, Visitor's Centre Project.

<sup>139</sup> <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Jobs/PIRSInternship/index-e.asp>

### **Legislative Internship Programme (BCLIP) – British Columbia, Canada<sup>140</sup>**

Established in 1976 (and modelled on the Canadian national programme) this programme, supports 10 recent university graduates each year who spend six months (usually January to June) working in the parliament, learning first hand about the policy-making process. Around 50-60 applications are received on-line each year of which 20 are invited to a two-day interview in Victoria and/or Vancouver in March. Of these 10 are then selected by the Programme Director and the Academic Directors who are leading political scientists at state universities. The interns receive a stipend of C\$21,075 (approximately £14,000) and can receive academic credit for their Masters degree by prior agreement with their university. Applicants must be resident in British Columbia, be Canadian citizens, and have completed a bachelors degree with a Canadian university or state college within two years of the proposed start of the internship programme. Applications are based on submission of a personal resume, academic transcripts for all credits, and three academic references.

The interns receive an orientation programme from parliamentary officials and then spend their first month in the executive branch, typically working in a government department where they are appointed a Mentor. Here they learn about the work of the department and conduct research into policy and planning issues. The next four months are then spent with a party caucus where they get involved in writing speeches, members' statements, and handling parliamentary questions, as well as researching topics of interest to their assigned Member. The final month varies but the interns are expected to participate in a variety of educational opportunities within the Assembly. Once the placement is complete interns are expected to write about their experiences in a newspaper that is disseminated within the Assembly. Funding permitting, interns may undertake an exchange programme visit to another provincial legislature.

The programme is sponsored by the Office of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, is run by a Program Director based in the Assembly's Public Education and Outreach Office, and is supported by an advisory group of Academic Directors drawn from university political science departments.

There is also an active alumni organisation that holds events to bring together former interns in all aspects of professional life and ensures that the benefits of the scheme are long-term.

An alternative approach is offered in the Queensland Parliament, Australia, where applicants are current university students (usually third or fourth year, or postgraduate) who are able to utilise the internship – with either a Member of parliamentary official – to pursue a research project of their choice. They spend approximately half of their time on the research project which is worth 80% of their final accreditation for the internship programme. In addition they have to supply a 2,000 word Parliamentary Activity

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<sup>140</sup> Information provided by Karen Aitken, Director, Public Education and Outreach, Legislative Assembly of British Colombia, September 2009 and from <http://www.leg.bc.ca/info/bclip/index.asp>



Assignment on a topic related to their work in the Parliament for which they can receive up to 20% of the credits.<sup>141</sup>

Internship style programmes are also available for younger age students, usually in the form of a 'Page Programme'.

#### **House of Commons Page Programme – Canada<sup>142</sup>**

The current Page Programme was established in 1978 at the instigation of the Speaker of the House and currently supports 40 Pages per year drawn from schools and colleges across Canada. The students work part-time during their first year of study at one of the four universities of the northern capital region (Ottawa, Carleton, Saint-Paul, or l'Université de Québec). Applications are made via submission of a one page CV, an essay on an assigned topic, and submission of their academic transcripts. Applicants must be Canadian citizens and speak English and French. The successful students attend a one-month orientation and training programme each August and then begin in September. They receive a salary of C\$11,461 per year and an extra C\$1,200 on successful completion of all requirements.

#### **Senate Page Programme – Canada<sup>143</sup>**

An alternative programme is offered in the Upper House. 15 Pages are appointed each year who must be in full time education at one of the four northern capital universities. They are offered a one year contract with the possibility of renewal for a second and in exceptional cases for a third year if the Page is promoted to Chief or Deputy Chief Page. Indeed, some Pages historically have transitioned to full-time employment in the Senate in some capacity. The application process includes a written examination and interview which tests the students' knowledge of the organisation of the Senate and parliamentary procedures; the Standard Operating Procedures for Pages; and of current affairs. Pages are expected to arrange their university classes around their Page duties and where there are clashes to prioritise their work in the Parliament. A minimum of 500 hours over the course of the year is required if the Page is to be fully compensated. They too receive a salary of C\$11,461 per year and an extra C\$1,200 on successful completion of all requirements; further increments are available to the Chief and Deputy Chief Pages.

A smaller scale work experience programme is provided in the Australian House of Representatives.

#### **Parliamentary Assistants Programme – House of Representatives, Australia<sup>144</sup>**

For the last decade the Sergeant-at-Arms' Office has recruited a number of university students to work as assistants alongside the 'messengerial attendants' in the House each

<sup>141</sup> <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/education/internship.asp>

<sup>142</sup> [http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/programs/pages/PP\\_Welcome-e.htm?WhereFrom=](http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/programs/pages/PP_Welcome-e.htm?WhereFrom=)

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/programs/senpages/senpages-e.htm>

<sup>144</sup> Department of the House of Representatives, Australia, 2007-08 Annual Report, p.47.

year. The assistants work for an average of ten hours per week, with duty rosters planned around their individual study commitments. Many of the students work during evening or sitting days when they have no scheduled classes. Necessarily, most of the students are based in Canberra so the geographical reach of the programme is limited but for those who do participate it is a useful educational experience.

The US Congress also provides a long-standing, well respected Page programme on a national scale which thus requires greater resourcing by the institution than the Canadian model.

### **Congressional Page Programme – USA<sup>145</sup>**

The House Page Programme recruits 72 Pages; 48 nominated by representatives of the majority party and 24 by the minority party. The Page Programme is administered by the Office of the Clerk and supervised by the House Page Board. Two members of the Board are drawn from each party plus the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms, a former Page and the parent of a Page. The Chair of the Board is chosen by the Speaker. Students must have a 3.0 GPA score or higher in five core academic subjects; be a high school junior between 16-17 years old, and be a US citizen. Applications are made via a written essay/personal statement; two supporting letters of recommendation and official transcripts of their high school grades.

Pages are supervised by adult, full-time House employees and work as a team for party members. Their duties include delivering legislative correspondence within the congressional complex; monitoring phones in Member cloakrooms; and preparing the House Floor for sessions. They mix both school and work experience. The House Page School is located in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress and is accredited through the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. During the academic year, classes begin at 6:45 a.m. and include mathematics, English, social studies, science, French / Spanish, and Washington Seminars. The Pages live in the Page Residence Hall which is staffed by a director, assistant director, and four proctors. Each room is furnished, has a private bathroom and houses up to four students. It is co-educational with one floor for women and one for men. A curfew is imposed and security is provided by US Capitol Police. The Pages earn a monthly gross salary of \$1,804.83 from which deductions are made for federal and state taxes, social security, and a 35% room and board fee.

A similar Senate Page Programme also recruits 30 Pages each year, 16 are nominated by representatives of the majority party and 14 by the minority party. It is modelled similarly to the House programme although the students receive a modestly higher salary.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> <http://pageprogram.house.gov/factsheet.pdf>

<sup>146</sup> [http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference\\_index\\_subjects/Pages\\_vrd.htm](http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Pages_vrd.htm)

The internship / work-experience programmes offered by parliaments around the world therefore vary in terms of the age groups covered, the academic demands placed on the participants, and the balance of the work involved between basic administrative duties and more complex policy and political research.

In the UK context any of these models, or a mix of them, would be applicable. Given the wide availability of internships in Members offices an institutional parliamentary scheme might perhaps be the best approach – there need be no direct involvement from the parties as in the Congressional model, though their in principle support would of course be valuable. The costs of any scheme would clearly be dependent on the age group(s) targeted but in order to make this a truly national scheme, available to young people from all social backgrounds, the scheme would need to make some financial provision or offer support with accommodation and travel expenses. Schemes that provide additional academic accreditation are also valuable. To begin a scheme from scratch and provide all the necessary support mechanisms could be costly. However, the Hansard Society and other organisations, already run established study / internship schemes with an international profile and reputation that could be utilised by Parliament through a partnership scheme to provide all the necessary infrastructure such as academic advisory support, access to accommodation and pastoral support and thus help defray some of the expense through economies of scale.

## Seminars and academic outreach

A number of parliaments now offer a range of educational seminars and workshops to the public and to private bodies; the former usually free of charge the latter sometimes requiring a fee. Several legislatures have also established visitor programmes to universities in order to better engage with graduates about the role and function of the parliament.

### ***About the House* seminars – House of Representatives, Australia<sup>147</sup>**

Expanding the '*About the House*' brand the Australian lower house holds a range of seminars each year.

An annual seminar programme for public servants is held at Parliament House in Canberra attracting around 400 participants. Here the attendees focus on procedures and practices of the House, providing practical advice to those whose work may involve contact with the House at some time in their career. These seminars are therefore held on a partial cost recovery basis. Similar seminars can also be arranged for organisations on request and tailored to their needs – this is proving to be a growing body of work for the Parliament.

Seminars are also on occasion conducted outside Canberra – at locations in other cities such as Melbourne and Hobart. Sometimes these are organised in conjunction with Members of the House of Representatives who want to help inform their communities about the work of Parliament and parliamentary process and procedure.

<sup>147</sup> Information provided by Australian House of Representatives Liaison and Projects Office.

Similarly the New Zealand Parliament also provides a public service programme that can be tailored and delivered at the Parliament or in workplaces as required as well as three annual seminars for librarians in different regions each year.<sup>148</sup> A number of regional parliaments also provide tailored courses. The New South Wales Legislative Council for example provides commercial seminars for NGOs. In British Columbia the Legislative Assembly has run a free Parliamentary Procedure Workshop Programme since 2003. It provides places for up to 35 public servants, primarily ministry staff, attending in groups of up to eight per one-day session. The attendees learn about how the parliamentary system governs the work of the public service, parliamentary procedure and the legislative process including bill drafting, how Orders in Council and Regulations are processed, how policy work informs the legislative process, and how the Budget and Estimates process works. The programme is very popular and there is currently a 500 strong waiting list.<sup>149</sup>

**'House Calls' – House of Representatives, Australia<sup>150</sup>**

This university lecture programme has now been running for several years. The Speaker and Clerk of the House visit universities and deliver guest lectures about the work of the House, followed by a Q&A discussion with the students. The lectures are provided at no cost to the universities and seven different universities across the country have participated in the programme in recent years. In addition to an educational function the programme further underlines the Speaker's ambassadorial role.

The **New South Wales Legislative Council** is actively considering going a step further and getting involved in delivering a university course unit on the function and role of the Legislative Council at an institution such as the University of Sydney Graduate School of Government.<sup>151</sup>

A broad-based seminar programme specifically promoted by Parliament (as opposed to being at the instigation of Members or groups associated with Parliament such as the Study of Parliament Group) could readily be established at Westminster. These might be both paid and free seminars dependent on the target audience concerned. A bicameral lecture programme for universities might also be valuable, augmenting the ambassadorial work of the Speaker and Lord Speaker. However, we would recommend that any such lecture programme be undertaken under an agreed 'brand' of activities similar to the '*About the House*' brand utilised by the Australian Parliament but mystifyingly not used for the lecture programme. A number of university courses – particularly at Hull and Leeds, for example, have a substantial parliamentary element to them – but there are other institutions that may

<sup>148</sup> Information provided by David Wilson, Office of the Clerk, House of Representatives, New Zealand, October 2009.

<sup>149</sup> Information provided by Karen Aitken, Director, Public Education and Outreach, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, September 2009.

<sup>150</sup> Information provided by Australian House of Representatives Liaison and Projects Office.

<sup>151</sup> New South Wales Legislative Council, *Draft Business Plan 2009-11: Community Access and Engagement*, p5.

be interested in and benefit from a stronger, more official relationship with Parliament than the current ad hoc links that develop between individual academics and officials.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ORGANISATION

The case studies in this report demonstrate clearly that there are three parliamentary groups at a national level that have done some of the most innovative work in public engagement, developing initiatives that Westminster might adapt and learn from. These are:

- a) the Commonwealth parliaments – particularly Australia and Canada;
- b) the Scandinavian parliaments – particularly Denmark and Sweden;
- c) the UK devolved parliaments – particularly Scotland and Wales.

Over the course of the last decade parliaments that once were very inward looking institutions, focused solely on delivering services for Members and supporting the legislative and scrutiny process, have had to grapple with broader political challenges. Growing political disengagement, diffuse channels of accountability, increased policy and legislative complexity, and declining coverage of parliaments by traditional media have all contributed to the sense of a democratic deficit and an information gap about the work of parliamentary institutions. Increasingly these institutions have therefore had to shift from being service providers within their institution, to service providers externally to the public. They have become promoters of the values and operation of parliamentary democracy, bringing about a cultural and attitudinal shift within each institution based on a recognition that the public are their core stakeholders equally as much as, if not more than, the elected members.

This change of gears happens in each institution at a different pace and for different reasons. Looking at parliamentary activity across the board it is clear that three key factors influence the strategic repositioning of established parliaments and the greater emphasis they consequently place on innovation in the public engagement field. Initiatives which represent a major step change in engagement practices seem to occur either as the result of the parliament finding that it needs to respond to a crisis, or that it must react to a significant political shift in the country, or it seeks to take advantage of a development or achievement marking an important milestone in the life of the parliament which it wishes to commemorate and promote in a very proactive public way, such as a major anniversary of the founding of the institution. These factors – ‘windows of opportunity’ – often lead to reviews of established practices and a determination to inject fresh thinking and new ideas into the public engagement process. The exception to these factors are to be found in Scotland and Wales where the benefits of a ‘blank slate’ approach as a new institution was established led to much innovative thinking and leadership, supplemented subsequently by an institutional commitment to review and evaluate progress, not least in order to ensure that the parliaments remained demonstrably different to the culture of Westminster. Similarly, albeit on a lesser scale, institutional changes which lead, for example, to the setting up of a new office or group charged with some aspect(s) of public engagement

responsibility can often lead to a more aggressively proactive approach particularly when the staff are recruited specifically for the role and join with a real sense of vision and enthusiasm for the task ahead. As, for example, with the establishment of the new Liaison Office in the Australian Parliament's House of Representatives, which led an overhaul of the House's approach to marketing and community outreach.

In developing their public engagement strategies each parliament grapples with many of the same challenges: how to draw the line between political and parliamentary activity; how to balance the needs of the political representatives with those of administrative officials whilst retaining the support of the former as the primary 'face' of the institution in the public mind; how to develop an ambassadorial capacity; how to reach out beyond the 'usual suspects' to engage with a broad range of organisations and individuals; how to go beyond traditional media outlets in communicating the best work of the parliament; and how, in the face of enormous market competition, to make best use of limited resources?

Each parliament has its own array of annual reports, corporate strategies, values and vision documents, strategic implementation plans, information and communication strategies. The problem with public engagement however, is that by nature it is diffuse, encompassing many aspects which necessarily transcend internal organisational boundaries. Therefore to be effective a comprehensive public engagement strategy requires a great deal of cross-departmental co-ordination and work that, in turn, requires strategic leadership to make such an approach work organisationally. In reality, in most cases, this is not the institutional reality within the parliament. The work is, as several officials in different parliamentary institutions have readily admitted, often fragmented and diffuse with activities being pursued in separate parts of the organisation, all with the strategic objectives and goals of the parliament in mind, but without the co-ordination necessary to extract added value from their combined efforts.

A further flaw, reflecting and indeed derived from this organisational problem, is that although public engagement is an increasingly important demand placed on the work of parliaments, few have actually drawn together and developed a comprehensive public engagement strategy. As a consequence organisational weaknesses are compounded by weaknesses in internal strategic thinking. Some parliaments have media or communications strategies; some have education or outreach plans; but few draw these together in a comprehensive way to create a plan for public engagement.

The Australian House of Representatives is a rare counter to this argument as its corporate plans say little about what might be deemed public engagement and what role departments may play in facilitating this. The emphasis at the strategic plan level is on informing the public about the work of the legislature. However, in practice, at an operational level the public engagement agenda is institutionalised within the organisation.

### **Service Charter – House of Representatives, Australia<sup>152</sup>**

Operational institutionalisation of public engagement is achieved through two key mechanisms. Firstly, the work of the House Department revolves around five key outputs, one of which is Community Awareness, including 'public information and education services to increase public knowledge and awareness of, and interaction with, the work of the House of Representatives and the Commonwealth Parliament'.<sup>153</sup> The aim is to increase knowledge about the House of Representatives in the community and encourage community participation in the work of the House and its committees. The Department's Liaison and Projects Office leads or co-ordinates much of the work in this field. The second mechanism is provided by a Service Charter that sets out the House's community service standards and aims, in the words of the Clerk of the House, to inform the public of 'the services that we provide to the community'. It reflects the officials 'commitment to assist everyone who visits the House or wants to know more about or contribute to the work of the Australian Parliament'. The Charter sets out the key values of the House administration, lists 'what we can do for you', highlights 'our service standards' and sets out how the public can easily contact the relevant parliamentary departments.

The Service Charter is important as an internal document and point of reference but is tucked away in an obscure section of the Australian parliamentary website such that it is likely that few visitors to the site will be aware of its existence. A more imaginative approach to design and dissemination of a Service Charter model could make it a focal point of information for the public about what their Parliament can do for them; how they can learn more about it and how they can engage with it. It could set out, in one accessible location, all the services that are available and how any interested member of the public can therefore make use of them with direct links provided on the website version of the Charter.

No parliament appears to really deal effectively with the issue of establishing a cross-media 'branding' campaign for the purposes of marketing of the parliament. The Australian House of Representatives again comes nearest to this with its '*About the House*' model across a number of information and engagement platforms but this certainly does not amount to a comprehensive branding of all the institution's activities. Given the breadth of information and engagement outlets that parliaments must now cover, some form of overarching brand message may be helpful to develop a distinct identity – one that is instantly recognisable as being linked to Parliament – for the mechanisms through which the institutions disseminate information and communications in the future.

One of the challenges faced in this study was assessing the resources (primarily financial) that each parliament dedicates to its public engagement agenda. The sheer number of different institutional structures and the separation (in practice and on paper in accounts) of, for example, educational work from outreach initiatives, means that making any accurate comparative assessment is fraught with difficulty as one is rarely able to compare like with

<sup>152</sup> <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/dept/service.htm>

<sup>153</sup> Australian House of Representatives, Annual Report 2008-09. [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs/ar08-09/output1\\_2.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs/ar08-09/output1_2.htm)



like. Where possible the focus has therefore been on determining the costs of specific initiatives but this information is not always readily available either. At best it can be said that most parliaments spend in the region of 0.5-2.5% of their total annual budget on public engagement as the concept is understood in its broadest sense.

Resources aside parliament's also need a robust strategy for development and implementation. Of our case study parliaments, two of the most comprehensive strategies for public engagement are to be found with Denmark's Folketing and the National Assembly for Wales. Both have developed communication plans that define their target groups for public engagement, set out an action plan for each target group and establish time lines for action and progress.

#### **Communication Strategy 2009 – Folketing, Denmark<sup>154</sup>**

The Danish Parliament's communication plan embraces a mission, vision and strategy. The broad mission is to 'disseminate knowledge of the work of the Folketing and Danish democracy', in accordance with a vision in which the parliament is 'known as a trustworthy, open and historically anchored institution that moves with the times'.

To realise this strategy four distinct groups are targeted:

- a) *Internals* – staff at the folketing
- a) *Professionals* – the public sector – ministries and government agencies; organisations, companies and the judicial system; researches and students; and international stakeholders.
- b) *Communicators* – journalists, teachers and librarians.
- c) *Citizens* – interested citizens, children and young people, first-time voters, immigrants and new citizens and tourists.

For each group (and the sub-groups within them) an 'action plan' is provided setting out which initiatives, both currently in existence and forthcoming over the next three to five years, will be most relevant to them.

The National Assembly for Wales in its Third Assembly Communications Strategy likewise adopted a similar strategic approach.

#### **Communicating the Third Assembly – National Assembly for Wales<sup>155</sup>**

Like GIP's three-pronged focus on 'informing', 'listening' and 'promoting' the Assembly committed to increasing 'awareness', 'appreciation' and 'action'. It also established a tripartite division of its target group audiences:

- a) *Those who 'must know'* – including Assembly Members and their staff; the Assembly Commission; Assembly staff and advisers; the Welsh Assembly Government; the civil service and local government.

<sup>154</sup> The Folketing, *Communication Strategy 2009*, pp.1-3.

<sup>155</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2007), *Communicating the Third Assembly – Greater Power, Better Governance, More Say*.

- b) *Those who 'need to know'* – including the media in Wales and further afield; the public, civil society campaigning groups, academia, community networks, and the business sector.
- c) *Those who 'would like to know'* – including the general public, visitors to the Senedd, European audiences, and international audiences.

These parliaments are relatively rare in having a comprehensive communications strategy that reflect the broad nature of public engagement, encompassing education, outreach, facilitation and so on and which sets out the target groups for engagement and links to clear actions for delivery over the next few years. Generally the approach taken by parliamentary institutions is more ad hoc or simply less comprehensive.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, at an operational level we have found no evidence that any bicameral parliament has a bicameral body tasked with co-ordination and implementation of a public engagement agenda in the way that GIP is tasked with this at Westminster. Certainly within parliaments, one can find evidence that both Houses communicate formally and informally and at times co-operate and indeed share resources. In the Canadian Parliament, for example, the two Houses have established cross-chamber Memorandum of Understandings for areas such as printing services.<sup>156</sup> But such arrangements tend to be narrowly drawn, designed to establish economies of scale through shared services, or operational back-up provision in the event of an emergency. There is no example similar to GIP of another Parliament institutionalising its leadership and strategy on a formal bicameral basis.

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<sup>156</sup> The Senate (Canada), *Report on Activities 2008*, p.46.