

# Westminster Seminar

## Final Report

May 2024



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# Outcomes and Outputs



## Outcome

Delegates will have enhanced their ability to effectively scrutinise, represent, and deliver oversight in their respective legislatures.

## The outputs for the Westminster Seminar are as follows:



### Output One

Delegates will have an opportunity to widen their networks, creating open communication lines to work collaboratively with their peers.



### Output Two

Delegates will be introduced to knowledge, tools, and skills to enhance their leadership and administrative role in their respective legislatures.



### Output Three

Delegates will gain a deeper understanding of the components that make up an effective parliament, using examples from the UK and across the Commonwealth.



### Output Four

Wales: Through a comparative analysis, delegates will have increased knowledge of how effective subnational and/or small legislatures operate and the common challenges they face.



# Introduction to the Seminar

Between 11 – 15 March 2024, CPA UK hosted the 72nd edition of its annual flagship programme, the Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, for which we welcomed 64 delegates to the United Kingdom. The Seminar coincided with celebrations marking the 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth, celebrating diversity, unity, and shared values of the Commonwealth.

The Seminar is a forum for parliamentarians and parliamentary officials who are relatively new to their role. It is designed to provide a highly participatory platform for delegates to exchange ideas on parliamentary practice and procedure and draw from their experiences across the Commonwealth.



Sarah Dickson, Chief Executive of CPA UK, emphasised the Seminar’s overarching goal of experience sharing and the value of peer-to-peer learning. Delegates explored potential solutions to shared challenges they face in their respective legislatures through a blend of contributions from participants and interactive exercises. They discussed leadership and the importance of accountability in parliaments, comparing the systems and structures of their legislatures. They also noted the importance of representing their constituents while maintaining the smooth operation of parliament.

Participants explored effective communication skills and identified good practice in fostering professional and respectful relations between parliamentarians and parliamentary officials. There were also opportunities to experience the work of the UK Parliament in practice. Delegates observed Prime Minister’s Questions and visited the House of Commons Library and Education Centre, as well as a range of constituencies in both London and Cardiff.



Delegates from smaller and sub-national legislatures travelled to the Senedd in Wales to gain insight into parliamentary operations on a smaller scale, while parliamentarians and officials from federal Parliaments remained in Westminster.

All delegates had the opportunity to network and build deeper connections, attending Commonwealth Day celebrations including the Commonwealth flag-raising ceremony at the invitation of The Rt. Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, Speaker of the UK House of Commons, and the Commonwealth Service in Westminster Abbey.



# Delegate List



## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Hon. Nathan Ip MLA  
Hon. Chantelle de Jonge MLA



## Parliament of Antigua & Bermuda

Rosemarie Weston



## Parliament of Bermuda

Senator Leslie Robinson



## House of Assembly of the British Virgin Islands

Hon. Corine George-Massicote MP  
Hon. Stacy Mather MBE MP



## Parliament of Cameroon

Hon. Ngo Issi Rolande MP  
Hon. Lawson Tabot Bakia MP  
Mr Ndum John Teboh



## Parliament of Canada

Hon. Alexandra Mendès MP  
Hon. Robert Kitchen MP  
Ms Shaila Anwar



## Parliament of the Cayman Islands

Hon. Christopher Saunders MP  
Hon. Sabrina Turner MP  
Ms Nordra Walcott



## Legislative Assembly of the Falkland Islands

Hon. Jack Ford MLA



## Parliament of Grenada

Hon. Leo Cato MP  
Hon. Dessima Williams MP  
Andrew Augustine



## States of Deliberation, Guernsey

Deputy Yvonne Burford  
Deputy Christopher Blin  
Mr Simon Ross

# Delegate List



## Parliament of Jamaica

Senator Sherene Samantha Golding Campbell  
Mr Brandon Everton Nash



## States Assembly of Jersey

Deputy Hilary Jeune  
Deputy Karen Wilson  
Mr Yannick Fillieul



## Parliament of Kenya

Hon. Anthony Njoroge Wainaina MP  
Senator Fatuma Dullo Adan MP  
Ms Jennifer Ndeto



## Parliament of Malawi

Hon. Esther Suman Majaza MP  
Hon. Lobin Lowe MP  
Ms Mary M. Nkhata



## Parliament of New South Wales

Jenny Leong MP  
Hon. Natalie Ward MLC  
Jenelle Moore



## National Assembly of Quebec

Hon. Sona Lakhoyan Olivier MNA  
Hon. François St-Louis MNA



## Legislative Council of Saint Helena

Hon. Ronald Coleman MLC  
Hon. Karl Thrower MLC



## Parliament of Saint Lucia

Senator Deale Lee  
Sharon Montoute



## Senedd Cymru

Carolyn Thomas MS



## Parliament of Sierra Leone

Hon. Adama Bangura MP  
Hon. Sorieba Alhaji Turay MP  
Edward Sahr Lebbie

# Delegate List



## Parliament of Sri Lanka

Hon. Ajith Nishantha Rajapakse  
Hon. (Dr) (Ms) Harini Nireka Amarasuriya  
Mr Chaminda Kularatne



## National Assembly of St Kitts & Nevis

Hon. Dr Joyelle Clarke MNA  
Hon. Latoya Jones MNA



## National Assembly of The Gambia

Hon. Alhagie Mbow MNA  
Hon. Amie Colley MNA  
Mrs Jestina Greywoode



## Legislative Assembly of Tonga

Lord Fatafehi Fakafanua MLA



## Parliament of Victoria

Hon. Sam Groth MP  
Hon. Belinda Wilson MP  
Dr Vaughn Koops



## Parliament of Western Australia

Hon. David Scaife MLA  
Hon. Magenta Marshall MLA  
Thomas Moorhead



## National Assembly of Zambia

Hon. Chrizoster Halwindi MP  
Hon. Gystave Chonde MP  
Ms Sibonelo Jere



# Westminster Seminar Delegates



# Summary of Discussion

## 1. Roles and Responsibilities

Impartiality, leadership, and representation were highlighted as key characteristics for a successful Speaker. The Rt. Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons and Hon. Dr. Dessima Williams, Madame President of the Grenada Senate, noted the value of Standing Orders and codes of conduct in ensuring impartiality, leadership, and appropriate behaviour amongst parliamentarians during sitting periods. Similarly, Clerks noted that Standing Orders need to be impartial and effective for advising MPs on the rules and procedures in the Chamber, as well as committees.



Clerk participants also reflected on the challenges they encounter during the induction training of new Members. One delegate highlighted their concerns that varying levels of education in their country has an impact on induction training and the extent to which a Clerk has to guide newly elected Members. Another delegate discussed the challenge of creating a single one-size-fits-all induction course when there are differing levels of Member experience and knowledge.

Representation and its importance were stressed by Mr Speaker. Touching upon his responsibility as an MP first and foremost, he talked about the need to create personal connections with his constituents, remaining mindful of who he was elected to represent. This was echoed by Member participants who accentuated the need to be attentive to the interests of constituents. Participants also emphasised the need to strike a balance between an MP's work in parliament and their constituency. Transparency was a noteworthy theme throughout the programme. Delegates discussed the connection between transparent legislatures and greater representation, noting how improved levels of transparency often coincide with greater levels of public trust and therefore help strengthen parliamentary democracy.

From a smaller or sub-national parliament's perspective, there may be greater need for Members or Clerks to utilise mechanisms to influence policy and Ministers. Those who visited the Welsh Parliament noted the potential to establish more personal relationships with individuals, which can be utilised to influence. A member of the Welsh Parliament highlighted the crucial importance of an accelerated process of pre-legislative scrutiny, given the small team supporting the drafting of legislation.



## 2. Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy

Embracing technology and innovation has the potential to enhance parliamentary democracy by fostering greater engagement between the public and Members. Representatives from Canada and Sri Lanka shared insights on how their online systems and interfaces support parliamentarians by addressing frequently asked questions and issues. Some delegates underscored the benefits of technology in facilitating public access to Hansard.



Participants identified that the adoption of advanced technology may be limited by budgetary and resource constraints. Delegates also highlighted the importance of leveraging and enhancing existing skills to streamline parliamentary processes. Additionally, concerns were raised during interactive sessions regarding the potential misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to disseminate misinformation and erode trust.

Advocating for campaigns aimed at bolstering diversity and inclusion can enhance parliamentary democracy by improving representation and the quality of participation. Delegates had the opportunity to listen to and discuss their strategies for fostering a more welcoming and accessible environment within parliament for various segments of society, recognising that promoting diversity and inclusion is a collective responsibility.



Delegates emphasised the need for ongoing affirmative action to strengthen the representation of women in politics and parliaments. Progressive policies that have already been implemented successfully, such as allowing family leave and reforming working environments to accommodate family-friendly schedules, were highlighted. In addition to these initiatives, the enactment of legislation plays a significant role in reaffirming women's involvement in politics. Looking at the Senedd, one way it has furthered its ambitions is by integrating gender equality into legislation, having already achieved gender parity.



Discussions emphasised how failure to address gender-based violence in all its forms threatens the equal right to political participation. Alarming statistics were highlighted, such as 4 out of 5 female parliamentarians having experienced psychological violence. Delegates called for an end of abuse towards female politicians, highlighting the importance of not only ensuring the support and nomination of women, but the need for civil society engagement to promote gender equality.

Holding the executive branch to account reinforces parliamentary democracy by upholding transparency, accountability, and oversight, thereby preventing the abuse of power and reinforcing adherence to the rule of law. Delegates exchanged insights into their effective methods of scrutinising and holding their Ministers or Government accountable. Representatives from New South Wales elaborated on their distinctive “Call for Papers” authority, allowing members to request any government document for production. Additionally, they clarified that any Minister can be queried during question time, with or without prior notice, effectively avoiding delays in holding the government accountable.

Participants also noted how cross-party committees can serve as another way to hold the executive to account. Discussions underscored the vital role of accountability.



### 3. The Role and Impact of Select Committees

Select Committees play a crucial role in holding the government accountable, ensuring transparency, oversight, and the effective scrutiny of government actions and policies. To achieve this, clerks and officials listed the importance of being impartial but not necessarily apolitical. Transparent and clear work, coupled with an understanding of political tensions when analysing evidence, can enhance the impact of relevant suggestions.

Funding was highlighted as a possible obstacle to effective committee scrutiny. Some delegates shared their experiences regarding how their respective parliaments draft and allocate budgets between parliamentary committees. This practice often requires balancing budgets across committees, which can restrict the actions of individual committees. Instead, delegates advocated for the committees to draft their own budgets based on the work they aim to accomplish.

Given the range of inquiries handled by select committees, determining when to revisit a topic or explore a subject more thoroughly is important. Participants discussed how regular responses and updates on ongoing policy matters could be scheduled, perhaps every six months, for better manageability by the committee.

Additionally, the Chair of the committee plays a pivotal role in encouraging members to take the lead on specific aspects of the inquiry, helping to foster member engagement. Members noted that this practice may also support effective scrutiny of government policies.





## 4. Public Outreach and Engagement

Parliaments across the Commonwealth have devised a range of outreach strategies and initiatives to reach less engaged stakeholders. In particular, participants emphasised the significance of youth engagement. Delegates noted that youth engagement does not only bring unique perspectives and experiences to the political arena, but also nurtures future leaders who are informed, active, and invested in shaping their communities and societies.



Delegates visiting the Senedd had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Delyth Lewis, the Manager of the Welsh Youth Parliament, who emphasised the importance of placing young people at the core of the Welsh Youth Parliament, ensuring their participation in consultation processes, and allowing them to guide the parliament's direction themselves.

Social media and other communication channels can serve as effective tools for engaging with constituents, utilised by both members and committees. Examples of their use in public engagement include:

- Reaching stakeholders of all kinds – contacting expert witnesses can be made easier.
- Postal Service agreements – an agreement between parliament and postal services can enable MPs to send postage free mail to communicate with constituents.
- Listening and sharing – understanding the platforms where the public is most active can enable you to listen to their concerns effectively. Utilising social media can also enhance the communication of policies.

However, delegates also noted three potential barriers to social media use:

- Age inclusivity – some members of society do not use social media, which has the potential to exclude these groups.
- Volume of responses – inquiry processes may experience delays due to a large number of submissions, especially when the team is small, and resources are limited.
- Controversy and online harassment – social media can exacerbate online violence and harassment through factors such as anonymity, viral spread, echo chambers, targeted attacks, normalisation of toxic behaviour, and underreporting.



## 5. Constituency and Educational Visits

Members had the opportunity to attend constituency visits in both London and in Wales. In London, groups were hosted by Nickie Aiken, MP for Westminster, Rupa Huq, MP for Ealing Central and Acton, and Virendra Sharma, MP for Ealing, Southall. In Wales, delegates were hosted by Jenny Rathbone, MS for Cardiff Central, and were met by Councillor Huw Thomas.

Each constituency visit was unique. Some delegates visited an MP's local office to discuss and compare methods of constituent support, while others explored the constituency, visiting schools and discussing local developments like community hubs.

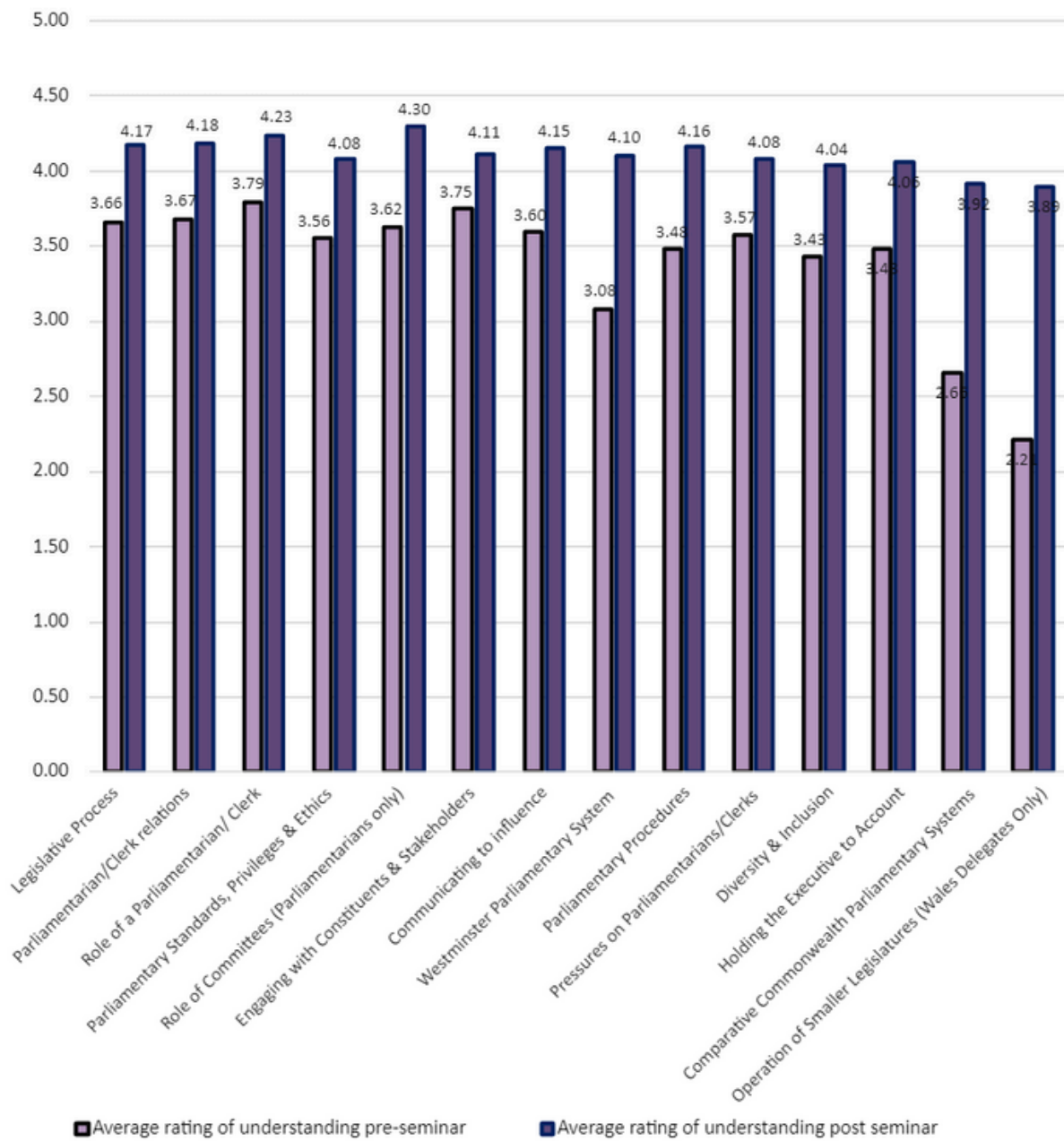
In Westminster, Clerks toured the House of Commons library, engaging in discussions about resource allocation, the support provided to members, and the confidentiality surrounding these services. During their time in Wales, delegates visited Cardiff Castle, engaging in discussions about how the city council functions and the relationship between devolved bodies and central government operations.



# Monitoring and Evaluation

As part of the Seminar’s monitoring and evaluation process, delegates were asked to complete pre- and post-Seminar assessment forms to measure how effective the Seminar had been in raising their level of understanding on the sessions covered. The graph below shows the average understanding substantially increased across the board as a result of the seminar.

Average Understanding of Programme Areas



Ratings:  
 1= No understanding;  
 2 = Basic understanding;  
 3= Moderate understanding;  
 4= Good

# Conclusion

The 2024 Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments was welcomed as an opportunity for colleagues to meet for the first time, providing a space for peer-to-peer learning to enhance their roles and further build on their understanding of the Westminster parliamentary system.

This year's Seminar not only provided parliamentarians, clerks, and officials with the opportunity to learn about Westminster, but also for UK members and clerks to learn how parliaments across the Commonwealth work effectively. The programme, with some interactive, combined, and split sessions for Members and clerks, gave an opportunity for collaborative discussions and enhanced engagement, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and insights.

Each parliament operates uniquely, especially larger federal ones in contrast to smaller or sub-national legislatures. Through collaboration with the Senedd, delegates had the chance to visit Cardiff, gaining first-hand experience of a smaller-scale parliamentary system. The feedback from this visit was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the value of such experiences.

We are committed to strengthening this programme for the benefit of participants. This involves partnering with past delegates to identify what has worked well for them and their colleagues, as well as consulting early with upcoming delegates to understand their preferences for the Seminar. Furthermore, we will tap into the wisdom of Westminster Seminar alumni to ensure the network remains vibrant and fosters ongoing connections among participants.





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