

Post Election Seminar Final Report

Montserrat

April 2025

Table of Contents

Outcome and Outputs	1
Programme Overview	2
The Roles and Responsibilities of Members and Clerks	3
Standing Orders and Parliamentary Standards	4
The Role of Committees and Cross-Party Working	5
Parliamentary and Committee Questioning	6
Outreach and Engagement with the Public	7
Effective Management of Time & Resources	7
Next Steps and Monitoring and Evaluation	8

Outcome and Outputs



Outcome

Members will deepen their understanding of parliamentary procedures and increase their ability to effectively scrutinise, represent and deliver oversight in their respective parliaments.

The outputs for the visit are as follows:



Output One

All 9 Members of the Legislative Assembly have attended the seminar to gain valuable insights on how to conduct their roles effectively in parliament.



Output Two

All 9 members will report an enhanced understanding of parliamentary procedures including the committee inquiry process.



Output Three

The link between the participating legislatures is established through the mutually beneficial sharing of knowledge and experience.

Programme Overview

The Post Election Seminar in Montserrat was a three- day programme from 18- 20 February 2025. The seminar was delivered from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK (CPA UK) and a delegation which consisted of Hon. Akierra Missick MP from the Turks and Caicos Island Parliament, Deputy Carina Alves MP from the Jersey Parliament, Simon Ross, Greffier of the States of Guernsey and Liam Laurence Smyth, Senior Clerk from the UK Parliament. The programme was designed in collaboration with the Montserrat Legislative Assembly and explored a range of sessions which included the role and responsibilities of Members and Clerks, Standing Orders, separation of powers and parliamentary and committee questioning.

This report will highlight the key learnings from the discussions that took place during the Seminar.



The Roles and Responsibilities of Members and Clerks

The pressures and expectation that a Member has to manage can at times be difficult, such as balancing the time you spend in your constituency, to the time you spend on your parliamentary work. Having professional boundaries in place can help mitigate the workload to enhance a better work/life balance and to put self-care as a priority. Another point was raised that there is an expectation for Members to be an expert in parliamentary processes and procedures from the first day of being elected and it can feel like you under a 'microscopic lens' where there is a risk of being scrutinised if you make a mistake. It is important to remember that it is an ongoing learning process and you need to explore different working styles that suit you which can help you deliver your role as a Member effectively and efficiently.

In comparison Clerks, who balance various responsibilities such as committee work and writing minutes, are the transfer of knowledge for the Members and Speaker of the House. Clerks are recognised for being the 'oil in the engine that keeps parliament running smoothly'. It was noted that when there is an increased turnover of staff, it makes their job even more demanding. Furthermore, if resources are limited, this increases the pressure to fulfil the responsibilities within the role. Greater advocacy and support for clerks is needed so Members have another person to go to when they need information or tasks completed. Employing a deputy clerk can help support these tasks.



Standing Orders and Parliamentary Standards

The participants were able to discuss the differences and similarities of the standing orders between participating parliaments. For example, in the Jersey Parliament and States of Guernsey, there is a time limit on speeches of 15 minutes. This is compared to the Turks and Caicos Parliament where they have 20 minutes, and the Legislative Assembly of Montserrat, where the Speaker, with the consent of the majority of the Assembly, may fix the total time for the speech or debate.

A point was highlighted that there is a no universal version of standing orders that fits all. Some of the standing orders have been amended to align with the cultural context of where the parliament is based. It was agreed among the participants that standing orders must be clear and not ambiguous. Some examples were expressed on what is included in their jurisdiction standing orders:

- How to appropriately address the Speaker in the chamber
- How a Member should behave during meetings
- How a Member should dress when conducting parliamentary business in the estate.

A key point to emphasise is modernisation of the standing orders is important to ensure it is still relevant to modern parliamentary life. Many of the participants during the discussion pointed out that a standing orders review committee can help to ensure the orders are fit for purpose.

The role of the Integrity Commissioner, also known as Commissioner for Standards in other jurisdictions, was also discussed. The Commissioner investigates allegations of misconduct and provides advice in ethics and integrity matters. Currently this position remains vacant in Montserrat. In the context of the Turks and Caicos Islands, they have appointed a judge to be the chair of their integrity committee. The parliaments in Jersey and Guernsey share a Commissioner for Standards and in the UK Parliament, a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is an independent officer that monitors the operation of the House of Commons Code of Conduct and Registers.

The Role of Committees and Cross-Party Working

The purpose of a scrutiny committee is to focus on specific areas of policy or issues that are of public concern. It was noted that committees are made of parliamentarians from government and opposition, and it is encouraged they work together, and political biases are left outside of the committee room. Cross – party collaboration works well when there is one goal, and a shared vision parliamentarians can work towards. Cross- party collaboration can take place in meetings, at parliamentary events, before or after parliamentary sittings, or in informal social settings such as during lunch breaks. Women’s Caucus are another form of cross-party collaboration. Participants noted the Montserrat Access Special Committee as an example of cross- party collaboration.

Participants discussed the makeup of the Public Accounts Committee in each jurisdiction. The PAC in the UK Parliament is made of sixteen elected Members, the Turks and Caicos PAC consists of three elected Members of the House appointed by the Speaker, two appointed experts in public finances and a Chair who is on the Opposition. In Jersey, there are five elected Members, four co-opted members and a lead officer. The States of Guernsey have a Scrutiny Management Committee which is made up of four members which includes a President, Vice President, a Member and a Principal Clerk. The PAC of Montserrat can consist of three Members selected by the Speaker and one member from outside the Assembly with commercial and accounting experience. The Auditor General plays a key role in offering expert and impartial advice to assist the PAC, submits follow-up reports to the PAC and they play a crucial role in upholding and maintaining transparency and accountability.

Committees meet regularly and evidence can be submitted from experts, researchers, and the general public for an inquiry. At the end of an inquiry, a report is produced with recommendations and there is a set timeframe that differs between jurisdictions for the government to respond by. Additional committees can be established if it is outlined in the Constitution, but participants agreed that effective committees depend on sufficient staffing. There was interest from Montserrat Legislative Assembly Members to set up another Standing Committee such as a Public Administration Committee.

Parliamentary and Committee Questioning

In order to ask an effective question, it is important to know what information you are seeking. Are you asking for information or for an action? An example could be that you are questioning a Minister to bring legislation forward and want to get information on when that will happen. Questions are equally valuable to Ministers, as they provide an opportunity to highlight policies and how policies will be improved.

Supplementary questions can be asked to seek clarity on the response to the primary question. It was pointed out that in Jersey, there is an opportunity to ask a final supplementary question and for a Member to refer to the Speaker if they are not satisfied with the response. You can ask the same question again at a later sitting if a Minister commits to an act by certain date, and nothing has happened. This is compared to Turks and Caicos where an additional supplementary question can be asked if the response is still not clear. If not, the Speaker will invite the questioning Member to provide a written question, to avoid a debate. The use of supplementary questions is normally found in each jurisdiction's standing orders.

Committee questions should be structured, and it is a collaborative process. One option is for the chair to discuss and allocate questions between members in a pre-committee meeting, so all the topics are covered. This ensures similar questions are not being asked and gives the committee more time to explore what other information they think is crucial to receive. An effective hearing is when both the chair and members work with the witnesses to help understand the issue so the appropriate recommendations can be submitted and responded to by the government. It is advised that you should not ask a question you already know the answer to. In order to maximise the time the committee has with the witness.



Outreach and Engagement with the Public

Connecting the general public and parliament enables interest and trust to be enhanced. The Legislative Assembly in Montserrat has an active and diverse youth parliament that empowers young people to get involved in discussions about the issues that affect them. They have opportunities to hold parliamentary hearings and debates and engage in policy work by attending workshops to express their views. Certain challenges were identified that include institutional barriers such as the age boundary for eligibility in the youth parliament, and socio-economic constraints as civic engagement are not fully compensated and if an economic opportunity arises, that will take priority over the youth parliament activities.

Visibility is essential and getting involved within the community as a Member can promote more engagement, such as participating in charity fundraisers, campaigns, visiting schools and community groups and using digital technology to reach more people such as social media, having a website, local radio and newspapers and podcasts.

Many Members use Friday's to be in their constituency to connect with local people but find it challenging to attend all events they are invited to. Prioritising what invitations to accept can help. For example, by focusing on three objectives you would like to achieve during your term and then seeing what events align with them.

Effective Management of Time and Resources

Some legislatures have used technological innovations to support with their tasks. An example was shared that the States of Guernsey introduced an electronic voting app for State Members to use in the Chamber and the results will be published immediately after. It was designed to make the voting process more transparent and to save time. In small parliaments with limited staff, one option for clerks to lighten challenging workloads is to coordinate with relevant government staff, where appropriate. For example, in Guernsey, when preparing for an international parliamentary meeting, parliamentary staff worked with government outreach staff to utilise their event organisation experience.

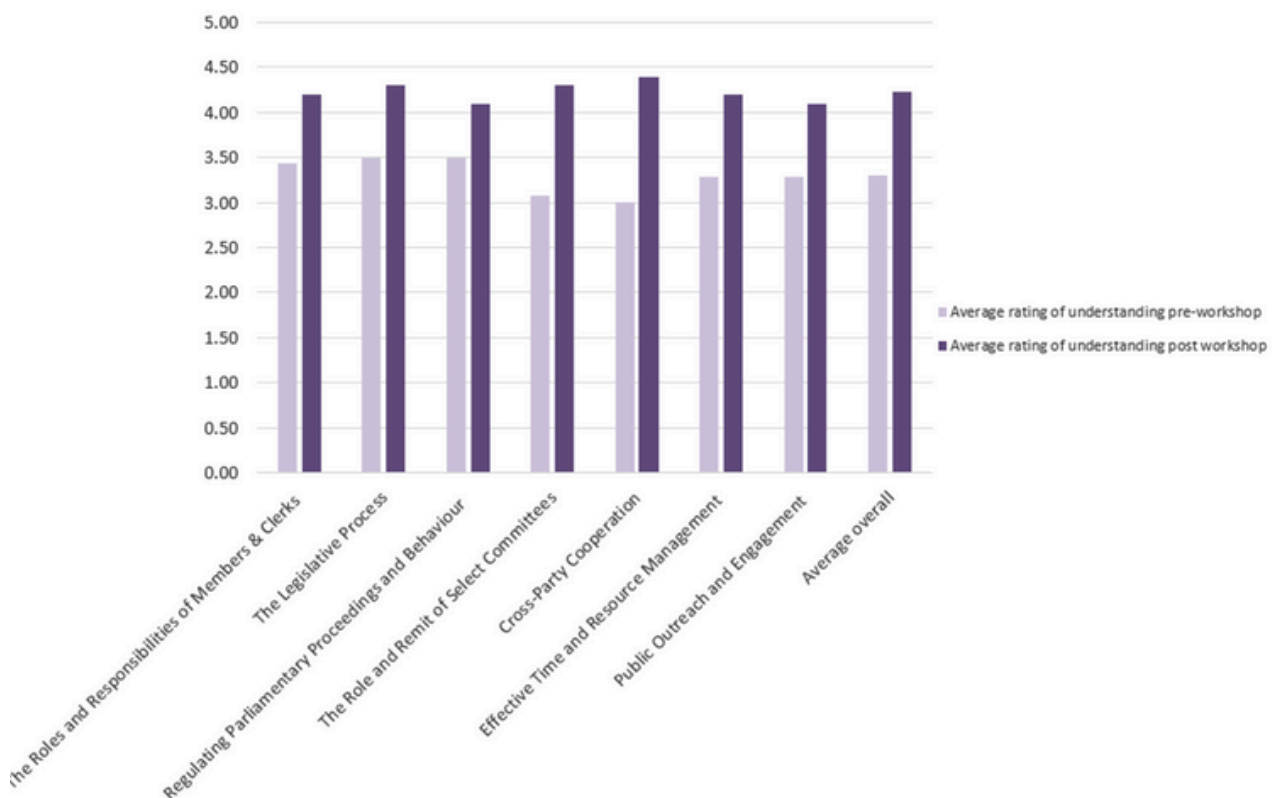


Next Steps and Monitoring and Evaluation

Potential areas for future CPA UK support to the House of Assembly include:

- Support the review of the Standing Orders
- Share Code of Conducts of other Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies
- Delegates to share business case examples for applying for additional parliamentary staff
- Facilitate a meeting the Legislative Assembly and States Greffier of Jersey to discuss creation and resourcing of committees.
- Facilitate a meeting between the Legislative Assembly and the Channel Islands Integrity Commissioner

At the beginning of the programme, each participant completed a pre-programme assessment and then completed a post-programme assessment at the end, evaluating their own level of understanding of the areas explored in the programme. The scale of understanding ranged from (1) “None” to (5) “In-depth”.



Overall, participants found that they increased their knowledge in all seven areas as illustrated in the chart above, with an average increase of 28.83% across all areas. The average rating of understanding for participants increased from ‘moderate understanding’ to ‘good understanding’.

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