

# 73rd Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments

Report

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March 2025



# Contents

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OUTCOME

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

OUTPUTS

- 1 Delegates will have an opportunity to widen their networks, creating open communication lines to work collaboratively with their peers.
- 2 Delegates will be introduced to knowledge, tools, and skills to enhance their leadership and administrative role in their respective legislatures.
- 3 Delegates will gain a deeper understanding of the components that make up an effective parliament, using examples from across the Commonwealth, including the UK.

DELEGATE LIST	3
MONDAY 10 MARCH	6
TUESDAY 11 MARCH	7
WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH	9
THURSDAY 13 MARCH	11
FRIDAY 14 MARCH	14
MONITORING & EVALUATION	15

# Delegate List

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## Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda

Ondell Constant



## Parliament of Barbados

J'anne Greenidge



## House of Assembly of the British Virgin Islands

Hon. Luce Hodge-Smith

Hon. Melvin Turnbull

Myrna Lennard-Penn



## Parliament of Canada

Senator Paulette Senior

Senator David Wells

Caroline Bosc



## Parliament of the Cayman Islands

Twila Escalante



## House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus

Hon. Savia Orphanidou



## Parliament of Gibraltar

Hon. Nigel Feetham

Hon. Craig Sacarello

John B Reyes



## House of Representatives of Australia

Dr Joel Bateman



## Parliament of Jamaica

Colleen Lowe



## States of Jersey

Deputy Elaine Millar

Rebecca Graham

# Delegate List

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## Parliament of Kenya

Hon. Beatrice Chepng'eno Kemei  
Hon. Daniel Kiili Karitho  
David Kimaro Mcharo



## National Assembly of Malawi

Raphael Kapalamula



## People's Majlis of Maldives

Hon. Mohamed Mamdooh  
Mohamed Rasheed



## Parliament of Malta

Hon. Davina Sammut Hili  
Hon. Charles Azzopardi  
Emma Terribile



## Montserrat Legislative Assembly

Hon. Dwayne Hixon MLA  
Adina Lee



## National Assembly of Pakistan

Asia Naz Tanoli MNA  
Syed Haseen Raza Zaidi



## National Assembly of Québec, Canada

Alice Abou-Khalil  
Frédéric Beauchemin  
Alexandre A. Régimbal



## Parliament of St Lucia

Hon. Alvina Reynolds  
Nita Louis



## Parliament of Sierra Leone

Hon. Alie Bayoh  
Ismaila Ibrahim Ahmad Kabba Esq.



# Delegate List

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## House of Assembly of Tasmania, Australia

Jenna Butler MP



## National Assembly of The Gambia

Hon. Dawda Jeng

Hon. Maimuna Ceesay

Toney F. Mendy



## Tynwald, Isle of Man

Dawn Kinnish MLC

Francisca Gale



## Legislative Council of Victoria, Australia

Renee Heath MP

Daniela De Martino MP

Keir Delaney



## Senedd, Wales

James Evans MS

Tom Lewis-White



## National Assembly of Zambia

Hon. Jaqueline Sabao

Hon. Joel Chibuye

Chabala Phiri Chalema

# Monday 10 March

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On the first day of the programme, delegates came together to mark Commonwealth Day, an annual occasion celebrating the Commonwealth of Nations. This year's theme, 'Together We Thrive', was echoed by the Speaker of the House of Commons during a parliamentary flag-raising ceremony, and by His Majesty King Charles III during the multi-faith service at Westminster Abbey.



# Tuesday 11 March

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## **Effective Parliaments and Parliamentary Systems Analysis**

In this session, delegates were brought together to look at their different parliamentary systems. In small groups, the delegates analysed the strengths and weaknesses of their parliamentary systems and others across the Commonwealth.

The discussions reinforced that there is no single best parliamentary system, but rather a spectrum of approaches suited to different political environments. The ability of parliaments to function effectively depends on financial independence, robust scrutiny mechanisms, and engagement with both the public and opposition. As political landscapes evolve, continuous learning and adaptation remain crucial for strengthening democratic governance.

## **The Role and Responsibilities of Parliamentarians**

This session explored how parliamentarians can contribute to making parliament more effective, while managing the expectations of the electorate and delivering on promises made on the campaign trail.

The discussion highlighted universal challenges in parliamentary roles, including constituent engagement, political integrity, media influence, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. Key solutions include data-driven policymaking, direct engagement with the electorate, strategic media use, and the establishment of clear personal boundaries.

## **Pressure on Parliamentarians**

Discussions highlighted how different parliamentary structures influence the scrutiny of legislation and the amendment process. While cross-party collaboration can occur in committees, political realities often mean that members vote along party lines when bills reach the chamber. The influence of party discipline in legislative scrutiny was noted across several jurisdictions.

The discussion reinforced the complexity of legislative scrutiny and the impact of parliamentary structures on the effectiveness of law-making. Key challenges include balancing political realities with cross-party cooperation, ensuring procedural integrity, and adapting to evolving technological influences.

Strengthening parliamentary resources, enhancing transparency, and maintaining trust in legislative processes were identified as crucial to improving legislative scrutiny and policymaking.



# Tuesday 11 March

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## **Effective Management of Time and Resources**

This session explored the administrative functions within different parliamentary settings, highlighting the challenges faced by parliamentary clerks and support staff. A key theme was the importance of structured processes, resource management, and staff recognition in ensuring efficient parliamentary operations.

The discussion underscored the importance of structured administrative processes in ensuring smooth parliamentary operations. Effective delegation, strategic task management, and workplace recognition were highlighted as key factors in maintaining efficiency and staff morale. Additionally, logistical constraints, such as the absence of permanent parliamentary facilities, require innovative approaches to time and resource management. Strengthening internal communication and establishing clear procedural guidelines were identified as essential steps for improving parliamentary administration.

## **The Role and Responsibilities of Clerks**

Discussions highlighted how different parliamentary structures influence the scrutiny of legislation and the amendment process. While cross-party collaboration can occur in committees, political realities often mean that members vote along party lines when bills reach the chamber. The influence of party discipline in legislative scrutiny was noted across several jurisdictions.

The discussion reinforced the complexity of legislative scrutiny and the impact of parliamentary structures on the effectiveness of law-making. Key challenges include balancing political realities with cross-party cooperation, ensuring procedural integrity, and adapting to evolving technological influences. Strengthening parliamentary resources, enhancing transparency, and maintaining trust in legislative processes were identified as crucial to improving legislative scrutiny and policymaking.



# Wednesday 12 March

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## **Holding the Executive to Account**

This discussion explored the function of second chambers in legislative processes, mechanisms for holding governments accountable, and the importance of improving representation within parliamentary systems. The experiences of the UK House of Lords and the Parliament of Zambia were highlighted, offering insights into different models of governance and oversight.

The discussion underscored the importance of strong parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms, whether through second chambers or committee-based processes. While the House of Lords serves a vital role in refining legislation through expert contributions, challenges around legitimacy and reform remain. In Zambia, efforts to strengthen parliamentary oversight and increase women's representation are ongoing, though resource constraints and executive dominance present obstacles. The session highlighted the need for continuous improvements in legislative processes, accountability mechanisms, and representative diversity across parliamentary systems.

## **Committee Recommendations and Follow Up**

This session focused on the role of parliamentary committees in ensuring government accountability, with particular attention given to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Health and Social Care Committee. The discussion also touched on methods of tracking and following up on committee recommendations, the relationship between committees and the government, and the challenges faced by committees in holding public bodies to account.

The session highlighted the vital role of parliamentary committees in holding the government to account, ensuring that public funds are spent efficiently, and following up on recommendations. While the PAC focuses on scrutiny of public spending and value for money, the Health and Social Care Committee conducts more detailed, long-term inquiries. Both committees face challenges, such as ensuring recommendations are implemented, dealing with arms-length bodies, and managing relationships with government officials. Despite these challenges, both committees have made strides in holding the government accountable and ensuring that public services meet the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

# Wednesday 12 March

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## Effective Report Writing

This report writing workshop focused on the key principles of drafting effective parliamentary reports, with particular emphasis on writing clear conclusions and recommendations. Delegates engaged in discussions on best practices, common challenges, and strategies for ensuring reports are impactful and well-structured. The workshop reinforced the importance of structured, evidence-based, and strategically framed recommendations in parliamentary reports. Ensuring reports are clear, well-edited, and mindful of external interpretation enhances their impact and likelihood of influencing policy. Ongoing improvements in committee processes, including better follow-up mechanisms, remain an area for further development.





# Thursday 13 March

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## Parliamentary Culture

This session discussed the changing culture of parliamentary work, the importance of ethics and standards, and the challenges of ensuring public engagement, particularly among younger generations. Key topics included parliamentary accountability, the role of social media, and measures to combat disengagement with elections.

The discussions underscored the importance of maintaining high ethical standards, particularly as there is a sense that public trust in politicians is in decline. Both parliamentary committees and social media play pivotal roles in shaping public perceptions of political institutions. Engagement with younger people and addressing issues such as corruption and electoral participation are seen as essential to ensuring the long-term health and legitimacy of democratic systems.

## Inclusive Parliaments

This session focused on the importance of diversity and inclusion within parliamentary institutions, the challenges faced by minority groups, and the steps being taken to improve gender equality and accessibility for people with disabilities. It also touched on the broader societal implications of these issues, including the role of political campaigns in promoting or hindering equality.

The session underscored the ongoing need for diversity and inclusion in parliamentary institutions. Delegates agreed that the challenges faced by women, minority groups, and people with disabilities must continue to be addressed, with a particular focus on improving representation, changing parliamentary cultures, and enhancing accessibility. Efforts to ensure that all members of society can participate fully in the democratic process are crucial for building more inclusive and equitable political systems.



# Thursday 13 March

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## Parliamentary Outreach

This session discussed various approaches to enhancing parliamentary engagement, particularly with young people, underrepresented groups, and those in local communities. It highlighted strategies for promoting democratic participation, the challenges of digital engagement, and the importance of fostering inclusive environments within political institutions.

In conclusion, there was a shared sense that the future of democratic engagement lies in a balance between digital outreach and traditional, in-person engagement. While social media offers a direct channel for young people to voice their opinions, it also poses challenges in terms of maintaining respectful dialogue and fostering a deeper understanding of political processes. Additionally, there is an increasing need to defend democratic values in the face of rising social media toxicity and to encourage meaningful political participation that extends beyond superficial online interactions.

Efforts to improve youth engagement, ensure accessibility for underrepresented groups, and promote transparency in political reforms are essential for strengthening democracy and fostering a politically active and informed population.





# Thursday 13 March

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## Implementing AI in Parliaments

The discussions focused on the potential applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in parliamentary functions, with a particular emphasis on improving efficiency, ensuring confidentiality, and the ethical considerations surrounding AI tools. Notably, the use of AI for tasks such as transcribing debates, summarising written questions, and triaging constituent queries was highlighted, with various countries exploring the integration of AI into their parliamentary processes.

AI presents significant opportunities for improving parliamentary efficiency, communication, and constituent engagement. However, its integration into parliamentary systems must be handled carefully to ensure data security, manage public perception, and ensure that technology does not replace the nuanced judgement of human parliamentarians. Collaborative efforts between parliaments and AI developers, alongside robust education and transparency initiatives, are essential for the successful implementation of AI in parliamentary processes.

## Guidelines for AI in Parliaments

The discussions focused on the applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in parliamentary functions, highlighting its potential to improve efficiency, enhance cybersecurity, and facilitate knowledge-sharing between legislatures. Key topics included AI-driven transcription tools, the ethical and legal considerations of AI-generated content, and the need for structured training to maximise AI's effectiveness in parliamentary settings.

AI presents significant opportunities for improving parliamentary efficiency, communication, and security. However, its integration into parliamentary processes must be carefully managed to mitigate risks related to data security, accuracy, and overreliance on automation. Ongoing collaboration between parliaments, AI developers, and legal experts, alongside comprehensive training and policy development, will be essential to ensure that AI enhances parliamentary functions without undermining human expertise and institutional integrity.

# Thursday 13 March

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## Experience of AI as a Parliamentarian

The discussions highlighted varying levels of Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption across different parliamentary systems, with a focus on improving administrative tasks, enhancing productivity, and addressing concerns around privacy and security. Several jurisdictions are experimenting with AI tools for transcription, research, legislative drafting, and speechwriting. However, there are concerns about data security, especially regarding the use of AI tools developed by large corporations.

AI is seen as a valuable tool for enhancing productivity and efficiency in parliamentary functions, particularly for administrative tasks and transcription. However, privacy, security, and the control over data remain key concerns that must be addressed for AI adoption to be fully embraced. Collaboration between parliaments and sharing knowledge on best practices will be crucial in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by AI.

# Friday 14 March

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On the final day, participating Members of Parliament visited UK constituencies, where they observed constituency surgeries and visited local businesses and schools. These visits offered valuable insights into the day-to-day responsibilities of MPs beyond Westminster and highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong connection with the constituents they represent.

Concurrently, parliamentary clerks and officials visited the UK Parliament's Education Centre to observe its outreach activities. A central theme throughout the week was constituent engagement, with a particular focus on youth involvement. The Education Centre exemplifies the UK Parliament's efforts to promote political literacy and transparency among citizens. Following this visit, clerks and officials participated in a walking tour of Westminster, gaining a deeper understanding not only of parliamentary history but also of the wider historical context of the area.

# Monitoring and Evaluation

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

Overall, participants found that the workshop increased their knowledge in all nine areas, up to 49%, as illustrated in the below chart. Around 78% of participants found the workshop 'fully relevant' to their role and 22% stated 'partially relevant' while no one said 'not relevant'.



