



# Parliaments and Public Engagement

**Innovation and Good Practice  
from Around the World**



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# Introduction

Many legislatures across the globe face a common problem: their public are neither knowledgeable about nor particularly satisfied with them as institutions. Yet as the Inter-Parliamentary Union notes, ‘information and knowledge are essential elements of an effective democracy’.<sup>1</sup> Unless the public are informed about what parliaments are doing they cannot influence the institution; and unless they can influence the institution they cannot hold it and their elected members fully to account.

Over the course of the last decade parliaments – once very inward looking institutions, focused solely on delivering services for Members and supporting the legislative and scrutiny process – have had to grapple with the broad political challenges this problem poses. Political disengagement, diffuse channels of accountability, increased policy and legislative complexity, declining coverage by traditional media and the burgeoning growth of new media have all contributed to the sense of a growing democratic deficit between the public and their parliament. At Westminster, for example, the Hansard Society’s annual *Audit of Political Engagement* demonstrates a significant decline in the perceived impact of Parliament on the British people’s everyday lives over the course of the last decade.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, although 60% said they believed Parliament was ‘worthwhile’, only 19% said it was one of the top three institutions that had the most impact on their lives, and only 27% felt that Parliament was ‘welcoming’ to them.<sup>3</sup>

In an effort to bridge this democratic deficit public engagement programmes have thus become core business for many legislatures. In so far as there is a consensus about the utility and value of the initiatives that have resulted, it is broadly that improved levels of knowledge about a parliament will contribute to greater public understanding of it, which, in turn, might contribute to higher levels of satisfaction with it and perhaps even a greater degree of public participation.

In many instances the public engagement strategies and initiatives are still in their infancy and given the nature and scale of the change required it may take a generation or more to yield results. Yet 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 currently impacting on many countries. At Westminster, for example, the House of Commons Commission has to reduce overall spending by 9% through to 2012-13 and

1 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2010), *International Day of Democracy: Your Parliament: Working For You, Accountable To You*, p.4.  
2 For the annual series of reports see Hansard Society (2004-11), *Audit of Political Engagement 1-8* (London: Hansard Society), [http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament\\_and\\_government/archive/2007/08/08/Public-engagement.aspx](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament_and_government/archive/2007/08/08/Public-engagement.aspx)  
3 Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), p.5.



this will inevitably have a knock on effect on investment in public engagement initiatives and the potential for innovation in the future.<sup>4</sup> Other legislatures around the globe are similarly affected.

The pace of change in the public engagement field has been rapid in recent years, not least because of technological developments, and legislatures cannot afford to be complacent. Yet despite the rate of innovation nowhere is there a single, comprehensive resource that seeks to draw together ideas and examples of good practice in parliamentary public engagement that other legislatures might consider adapting to their own circumstances. This report seeks to address that vacuum.

**It explores how Parliaments around the world are responding to the challenge of how to engage with their citizens, highlighting examples of innovative and potentially transferable good practice. It provides a broad menu of ideas designed to help parliaments consider what options might be the 'best fit' for their own particular institutional circumstances and needs in pursuit of their strategic public engagement goals.**

## STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

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How parliaments define the purpose of their public engagement programmes and what outputs they expect from them differs markedly from institution to institution. For the purposes of this study 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.

The areas we have primarily focused on are:

- **Information provision:** for example, 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;
- **Facilitation:** support platforms for parliamentarians and/or officials to engage with the public, particularly through e-forums or other online, 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.

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. 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. In particular, 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). We received 33 responses from member institutions but in total the desk research explored the work of over 50 parliaments, 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. The desk research was further supplemented by interviews (some face to face, others by telephone) with officials in some of the case study parliaments.

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In total, engagement models emerged from a range of parliaments, including:

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

Language barriers have posed challenges during the research for this project, but particularly so in relation to legislatures 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.

<sup>4</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/>

## CAVEATS AND QUALIFICATIONS

A comparative study such as this poses a number of challenges that have to be borne in mind when considering the importance of the menu of options set out in this report.

**Costs:** we have experienced some difficulty in pinning down the exact costs of a number of initiatives. Often a case study example 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.

**Evaluation:** 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 (evidence of good practice rather than evaluated best practice), not detailed multi-layered analysis for the purpose of implementation. Our objective has been to draw together a broad 'menu of ideas' to help parliamentary officials in legislatures across the globe consider what might be suitable for their own institution. Those that are of interest to them will then require greater and more detailed investigation and analysis.

**Comparability:** parliamentary institutions around the world are intrinsically different; what works in one institution and constitutional setting will not necessarily work in another. We looked at unicameral parliaments as well as bicameral parliaments, national, supra-national and sub-national institutions. The constitutional context inevitably influences the way in which parliaments are internally organised, and their role, functions and resourcing in relation to public engagement. The constitutional arrangements in New Zealand and Switzerland, for example, mean that much effort in relation to public engagement is expended in areas such as parliamentary initiation of citizens' referenda which are not constitutionally transferable in the context of other legislatures. Such examples of 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 other countries, such as the UK, for example, where the Youth Parliament is an independent charitable company limited by guarantee (although it has received considerable support from Parliament). We have therefore not specifically focused on Youth Parliament initiatives.

**Political differences:** parliaments are institutions operating in the most highly charged political settings. Each has a unique political culture of its own which impacts strongly on

what it prioritises and how it implements its public engagement initiatives. Legislatures organised around strong cohesive party blocs, for example, may find it easier to implement certain types of initiatives than parliaments where greater influence and privilege is accorded to the role of each individual MP, particularly in relation to their constituents, with whom the parliament wishes to engage.

**Size matters:** the examples we draw upon come from countries / jurisdictions of various sizes. In terms of public engagement, the size of the population as well as its cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity is critical 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 simply transferred and implemented in larger geographical and institutional contexts to the same effect.

**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.

Nonetheless, bearing in mind the different institutional structures, and issues of size, politics and culture, we believe that the public engagement case studies outlined here will be of interest to parliaments around the world and could perhaps be adapted for wider use by other institutions in the future.

## Do you have new examples of parliamentary public engagement?

Is your parliament undertaking new initiatives to engage the public with its work? Is it providing new information and education resources? Is it setting up new visitor facilities or launching community outreach programmes? Is it developing new and innovative on-line forums or websites? If so, the Hansard Society is keen to hear about these new ideas.

In the future we plan to update this report in order to maintain a single resource which parliaments around the world can consult in order to learn about new ideas and innovations in public engagement that are being tried and tested in other legislatures. So please send information about any new initiatives to us at: [consultation@hansardsociety.org.uk](mailto:consultation@hansardsociety.org.uk).

# 1. 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 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 social media options; and using formal, official parliamentary language or plainer language more accessible to ordinary citizens.

Parliaments looking to be more proactive in improving the range and direction of their information provision, utilising both new and old media forms, may find the following case studies of interest.

## 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. Every parliament's website is necessarily tailored to their institutional identity and the particular demands of their respective national audiences. But no parliamentary website appears to have attained the sophistication of commercial sites such as Amazon. Here, as the chair of the Hansard Society's *Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy*, Lord Puttnam, noted in 2006, the site accurately captures users interests so that they can be 'constantly updated about what has recently become available within my predetermined areas of interest.' What this offers 'is nothing less than an 'enabling mechanism' that could, if used intelligently, significantly increase interest and, at the same time, a far better understanding of the work of Parliament.'<sup>5</sup> The evidence so far suggests however, that parliamentary websites are a long way from achieving this level of refinement.

Nonetheless, there are areas where some parliaments are better than others in reaching out to particular audiences, or providing information in innovative ways.

### Accessibility: social inclusion

A number of institutions lead the way in providing material in accessible form. For example, the Austrian, Czech Republic, Danish, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Portuguese 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 from parliament to parliament but most facilitate a reasonable

The **Swedish Riksdag website** – [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se) – is good example of a parliament taking a proactive approach to social inclusion.

Following a significant re-design of the website 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.\* 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 online content is that 'information should be usable and accessible for everyone'.\*\* Therefore considerable emphasis has been placed on ensuring that the website meets international and national guidelines.

- In its media section it presents a legislative 'digest' which provides brief summaries of the decisions passed by the Riksdag, in accessible and easy to understand language.
- The site has special sections in 'Easy Swedish' (a simplified, more informal style of presenting information) and English.
- It 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).
- There is a 'listening' version of the site 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.† The overall cost of this service to the Riksdag is approximately €8,000 per year.‡
- 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.§

\* Riksdag Administration Annual Report 2008

\*\* Riksdag Administration Annual Report 2006

† <http://www.voice-corp.com/en/>

‡ Information provided by Magnus Korkala, Information Department, The Riksdag, January 2010.

§ [http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R\\_Page\\_\\_\\_\\_1977.aspx](http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page____1977.aspx)

amount of information and navigation by the reading aloud of page links.

Most 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) and more could certainly be done by parliaments with large multi-ethnic populations to expand the level of material provided in other languages. Here again, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Spain all provide above average levels of content in a range of foreign languages.

## Institutional dynamism: committee pages

Compared to many parliaments the UK Parliament's website – [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) – rates highly in terms of content. When a new content management system was introduced in 2010 the site was redesigned with particular emphasis placed on improving access to the work of select committees. Now, as well as each committee having its own pages, each committee inquiry also has its own section. This enables site visitors to follow an inquiry much more effectively and provides a space to aggregate all content related to an inquiry, including audio and video content from evidence sessions, as well as press releases, reports and other associated material.

However, despite the revamp, the committee pages are quite formulaic in comparison to what can be found in other parliaments. Some legislatures do much more to augment the online presence of their committees 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 access information through committee web pages, enhancements to the overall design and accessibility of committee pages would be a useful step for many legislatures.

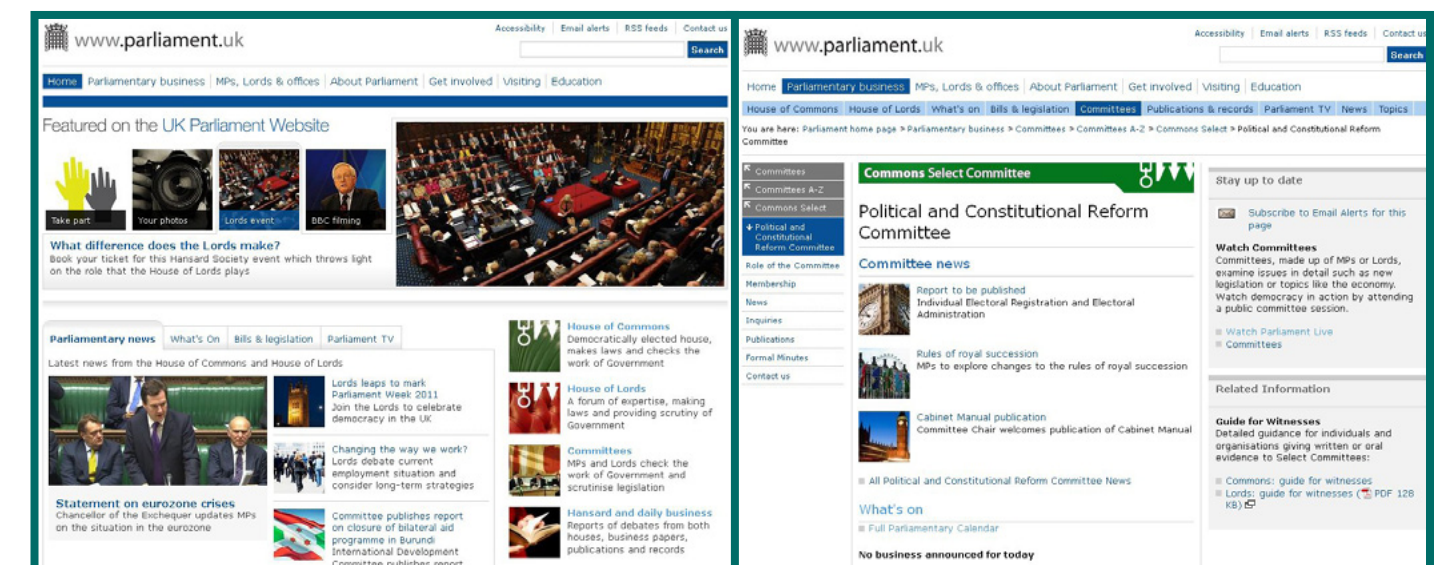


Figure 1: UK Parliament website: homepage (left) and select committee page (right)



**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>\*</sup> for the best congressional committee website to the House Committee on Education and Technology.<sup>\*\*</sup> The winner the previous year was the House Committee on Science and Technology.<sup>†</sup> Screenshots of their front page are provided below. The CMF award recognises that the site get the 'basics' right, posting all information online, 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 social media 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>‡</sup> 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.

### United States Senate Armed Services Committee

Room SR-228, Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-4650  
Main Phone Number: 202-224-1871  
Fax Number: 202-224-0016



Welcome to the web site for the Senate Armed Services Committee. This web site is intended to serve as a resource for those looking for information about the Committee and its activities.



Senator Carl Levin  
Chairman



Senator John McCain  
Ranking Member

Full Committee Members

Subcommittee Members

Hearings

Live Webcasts of Hearings

Committee Publications

Press Releases

About the Committee

Figure 3: Congressional Committee websites. Bad practice example – Senate Armed Services

<sup>\*</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://web.archive.org/web/20091203112452/http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/no\\_20091124\\_4022.php](http://web.archive.org/web/20091203112452/http://www.nationaljournal.com/njonline/no_20091124_4022.php)

<sup>\*\*</sup> <http://science.house.gov/>

<sup>†</sup> <http://edlabor.house.gov/>

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

## Profiling elected representatives

Most members of the public perceive their parliament through the prism of the key actors in it, namely the elected members. Some parliamentary websites provide only basic information about the elected members, namely contact details, biographical information, a history of their political career and policy interests. As a consequence, detailed information about the activity of members is often available only through third party websites (such as [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) in the UK). In contrast, some legislatures go much further in providing a platform for information about their elected representatives, offering modest innovations that might be useful to parliaments looking to add value to the overall content of their website. By incorporating the information directly into the parliamentary website, users will spend more time engaging with parliament directly rather than 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.



Figure 2: Congressional Committee websites. Best practice examples – Education & Labor (left), Science & Technology (right)



The **National Assembly for Wales** provides videos of each Assembly Member introducing themselves on their individual profile page. The Assembly however has just 60 Members, and the resources required to achieve this would obviously be much greater in larger Parliaments.

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

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.\*\*

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

\*\*<http://web.archive.org/web/20101223072449/http://senado.cl/appsenado/index.php?mo=sesionessala&ac=asistenciaSenadores&legiid=481&camara=S&legiini=361>

## Participation portal: an online one-stop shop

A good example of a parliament that effectively aggregates information about its elected representatives in an accessible way, alongside broader information about the parliament itself, is the Catalan Parliament. It deploys a 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.

The design of some aspects of the Catalan Parliament 2.0 site is not particularly attractive 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 online presence and more accessible information about the role and function of members in other legislatures.

## Parliament 2.0 – Catalonia\*

Features of the public participation portal include:

- **My House** – a place to manage and keep track of individual subscriptions and comments to parliament.
- **The President responds** – a space for the exchange of ideas, impressions, questions and opinions with the President of the Parliament.
- **Questions from citizens** – 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.
- **Blogs by Members and deputies** – 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 the Parliament is not liable for any information published on them.
- **TweetParlament** – 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.
- **Activities of Educational Services** – promotes the educational services

aimed at secondary and university students.

The site also provides for ePetitions and contributions to online debate.

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.

\* <http://www.parlament.cat/web/serveis/parlament-20>

Figure 4: Catalan Parliament website





## Blogging power

The House of Lords is only the second chamber in the world with a collaborative blog to facilitate direct dialogue with the public.

### Lords of the Blog – UK Parliament\*

Funded by the House of Lords but managed by the Hansard Society, the 'Lords of the Blog' website is an independent forum for Members of the House of Lords to talk about their life and work with a broad online audience. Launched in 2008 the blog now has over twenty regular contributors who write about their areas of expertise, helping to demystify the House of Lords with personal insight and candour.

*'The blog's most striking feature is that a blogging Lord is willing to follow up on questions/comments. This rarely happens on official blogs and makes the Lords of the Blog unique.'* (Lords of the Blog user research, March 2010)

*'You've got members of the House of Lords writing blogs in their specialist areas .....and that's quite interesting because you know if somebody writes something it's because they generally have an interest or a concern or knowledge of it.'* (Lords of the Blog user research, March 2010)

\* www.lordsoftheblog.net



Figure 5: Lords of the Blog

## PRINT MEDIA AND BROADCASTING

Parliaments operate in an information 'marketplace'<sup>6</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 Hansard Society's *Audit of Political Engagement* has consistently found that in Great Britain, for example, 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. In 2009, 63% of the public reported that the media was one of the two or three institutions that had most influence on their every day life, compared to just 19% who said the same of Parliament.<sup>7</sup> The focus on online 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. 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 inquiries and call for the submission of evidence from the public. This advert was published on 26 October 2011.

Figure 6: Senate committees advert



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. The South African Parliament, for example, has a current affairs magazine called ‘*In Session*’ which is produced monthly by the Information and Content Development Unit of the Parliamentary Communications Service.<sup>8</sup> One of the Swedish Riksdag’s most prominent public engagement activities is its *Riksdag & Departement Journal* (News from the Riksdag and the Ministries).<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1976 it is a current affairs magazine with an online presence. Supported by the Riksdag, with costs offset by subscriptions and advertising, it is nonetheless editorially independent from the Parliament and has in recent years had a reputation for ‘breaking news’ in the political sphere.

However, perhaps the most comprehensive example is to be found in Australia with its ‘*About the House*’ magazine which forms an important part of a wider ‘About the House’ branded marketing and communications strategy. A free, quarterly magazine, ‘*About the House*’ is targeted at the interested general public and specific sectoral interest groups.

Broadcasting

In addition to the internet, radio and TV remain influential information providers and points of connection between the public and politics. Many parliaments broadcast and web-cast their Chamber and Committee proceedings utilising bilateral partnership agreements with external broadcasters such as BBC Parliament in the UK, C-SPAN in the USA and Public-Senat in France. In some cases, however, parliaments have decided to create their own channels in order to maintain editorial control over content as well as to communicate a broader range of activity within the legislature. The plenary proceedings of the South Korean National Assembly, for example, used to be shown exclusively through the state KTV channel. In May 2005 however, the Assembly launched a channel focused on legislative

8 [http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/content.php?Item\\_ID=284](http://www.parliament.gov.za/live/content.php?Item_ID=284)  
9 See [www.rod.se](http://www.rod.se)

About the House Magazine – House of Representatives, Australia\*

A free, quarterly full colour A4 current affairs magazine, *About the House* 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.



Figure 7: About the House magazines

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 appeal in marketing terms: the national airline, Qantas, for example, has stocked it in its business lounge at Canberra Airport.

When a number of teachers and university lecturers indicated to the editorial team that they used articles from the magazine in their classes – there is a regular project page for students and teachers – 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 users 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% 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>†</sup>

In addition, the House of Representatives has developed an online version of the magazine – [www.aph.gov.au/ath](http://www.aph.gov.au/ath) – which includes video news and features. In its first six months this site had 100,000 visits.<sup>‡</sup>

\* *About the House Magazine* is available online at [www.aph.gov.au/ath](http://www.aph.gov.au/ath).

\*\* Information provided by the Liaison and Projects Office, Australian House of Representatives, November 2009.

† *About the House Advertising Kit 2011-12*, [www.aph.gov.au/house/house\\_news/magazine/ATHKit.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/house_news/magazine/ATHKit.pdf)

‡ *Promoting Parliament to the Community*, Presentation by Andres Lomp, Director, Liaison and Projects, House of Representatives, ANZACATT Conference, January 2010. [www.anzacatt.org.au/prod/anzacatt/anzacatt.nsf/key/library.html!OpenView&Start=1&Count=10000&ExpandView](http://www.anzacatt.org.au/prod/anzacatt/anzacatt.nsf/key/library.html!OpenView&Start=1&Count=10000&ExpandView)

affairs, and now broadcasts a much wider range of Assembly proceedings.<sup>10</sup> The Brazilian Chamber of Deputies produces its own in-house news programme including live interviews and debates with host journalists.<sup>11</sup>

24 Similarly, in India two commercial free satellite channels were launched in December 2004 to foster improved coverage of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. In an effort to provide more engaging programming than that offered solely through chamber and committee proceedings the channels have also broadcast 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. 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 reportedly watched the channel.<sup>12</sup>

An alternative approach is for a parliament to reach agreement with broadcasters to enable them to broadcast their own current affairs style television programmes, thus retaining editorial control but without the need to invest in the setting up and running of a stand alone television channel. In Australia, for example, as part of the House of Representatives 'About the House' strategy, the House Liaison and Projects Office, 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 Australian Public Affairs Channel (A-PAC) as well as being made available on the 'About the House'

10 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2006), *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty First Century: A Guide to Good Practice*, p.54.

11 Global Centre for ICT in Parliaments, *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, p.137.

12 Reaching the Masses: Lok Sabha TV extends its Visitors Gallery in *The Parliamentarian: Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth* 2009 Issue 1, XC.

news section of the House of Representatives' 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>13</sup> In September 2010 a new programme, Matters of Public Importance (MPI), was launched – this weekly programme focuses on bringing viewers 'inside the Australian Parliament for a closer look at the work of a parliamentary sitting week'.<sup>14</sup>

In countries with a large emigrant population the link between the broadcasting and online mediums is critically important: online video broadcasting of proceedings in real time via the internet enables the parliament to reach citizens overseas who would not otherwise be able to view proceedings on in-state television channels. This of course can be particularly important if citizens based overseas have the right to vote in parliamentary elections. Similarly, when issues affecting the diaspora are being debated in parliament interest can be spiked. The Mexican Senate, for example, found in 2005 that 400,000 viewers based in the United States watched the proceedings of the Senate hearings into the proposed legislative change that would have granted the right to vote to Mexican citizens based outside the country, including the estimated 10 million of them based in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

25 Amidst the growth of online provision and the fragmentation of television channels in the digital age, the importance of radio for many parliaments should not be forgotten. In Africa in particular, radio still remains a significant source of information about public affairs. In South Africa, for example, the Parliament's radio project includes pre-recorded docudrama series, interviews with Members of Parliament and senior officials as well as infomercials. Broadcast nationally on twelve radio stations in all the official state languages the audience has reached as much as 35 million in previous years.<sup>16</sup>

## Supporting the media

In an increasingly competitive news market, simply providing journalists with greater levels of information and access is not enough to encourage enhanced coverage of parliamentary activity in the press (particularly the print press). Parliaments therefore increasingly provide media officers to interact directly with journalists, highlighting issues and stories of potential interest to them and feeding them the necessary material to support their work.

13 Information provided by the Liaison and Projects Office, Australian House of Representatives, November 2009.

14 See, for example, the MPI TV transcript, 20 October 2010, [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/house\\_news/transcripts/mpi\\_20oct.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/house_news/transcripts/mpi_20oct.htm)

15 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2006), *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty First Century: A Guide to Good Practice*, p.56.

16 *Ibid.*, pp.57-58.



### Media and communications service – UK Parliament

A complete overhaul of the UK Parliament's media and communications service took place following publication of the report of the Hansard Society's *Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy (The Puttnam Commission)* in 2005.\* Both Houses of Parliament recognise that journalists are a vital part of their audience and a filter through which a large proportion of the public learns about the work of Parliament. Press officers have been assigned to each select committee and in the year before the last general election (April 2009 to March 2010) the House of Commons press team promoted over 200 select committee reports, 607 evidence sessions and over 120 other reports and announcements such as calls for evidence, seminars and government responses. Following the general election the House of Commons media team provided briefings on a range of procedural issues, including the election of the Speaker and the swearing-in of Members. A new post has been established in the last year to generate more coverage explaining the work, role and history of the House and the day to day working lives of Members, with a particular emphasis on features and factual programming rather than just news.

In the House of Lords the media team also support the work of select committees. For example, 'Youtube' interviews are regularly held with committee chairs prior to publication of a report. This provides free content for media channels, particularly online media, and has increased the likelihood that coverage will be secured. The first 12 such videos have been viewed over 13,000 times and have been hosted on external websites such as Times Online and Computerweekly.com. Another innovation has been the House of Lords 'River Room Seminars' which since 2008 have been bringing together Members of the House who have specialist knowledge about a particular subject area with a selected group of journalists. These seminars serve to raise awareness of the depth and breadth of experience of Members and help inform journalists' reporting on the issue under discussion. Topics have included science, ethics, and international affairs.

\* Hansard Society (2005), *Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye. The Report of the Hansard Society Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy* (London: Hansard Society).

## 2. 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 to security concerns.

In 2010 the Hansard Society's *Audit of Political Engagement* found that only 27% of the British public believe the Westminster Parliament is 'welcoming' to them.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that many feel that Parliament as a building is closed off from ordinary people and 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, unable to visit the 'backrooms' that they perceived to be the engine room of Parliament where a lot of the 'real work' was done. There is considerable unmet interest in, for example, seeing some of the parliamentary 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 visitor 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 at its disposal to maximum effect whilst taking account of the restrictions posed by the need to preserve and protect the historic heritage and material.

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 from across the globe from which other parliaments might learn.

### VISITS

#### Socially inclusive visitors tours

In the Norwegian Stortinget special guided tours can be provided for the blind, allowing them to touch objects (otherwise not accessible) in the parliament building. Similarly, the German Bundestag provides assistance for people with visual impairment in the form of

<sup>17</sup> Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement* 7 (London: Hansard Society), pp.95-96.



braille labels, and tactile models of the Reichstag building, the plenary chamber, and the parliamentary and government district.

## Thematic tours

Thematic tours are increasingly popular and are now offered by a number of parliamentary institutions. 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.

### Thematic Tours – Bundestag, Germany\*

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. 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.

\* Information provided in ECPRD No. 1294, official response from German Bundestag.

### 'Behind The Scenes' Tours – Parliament of New South Wales, Australia\*

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'.

\* [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/PublicandCommunityPrograms](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/PublicandCommunityPrograms)

### A 'Little Lunch Sitting' for Mature Age Groups – Australia\*

Held at Parliament House in Canberra this was 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 insight into how Parliament works'. In 2009, for example, thirteen lunches were held each on a Wednesday during a sitting week. The minimum number of participants was 15 the maximum 30. Each participant paid approximately \$20 (Australian) for a buffet lunch in the Members or Guest Dining Room and the event ran for around three hours. During their visit the senior citizen toured Parliament House, met their federal member or senator if available, participated in a parliamentary role-play, and observed Question Time in action. A revised version of the programme – Venture into Parliament (ViP) – is now provided by the Parliamentary Education Office and remains oversubscribed.\*\*

\* [www.peo.gov.au/programs/lis2009.pdf](http://www.peo.gov.au/programs/lis2009.pdf)

\*\* [www.peo.gov.au/programs/ventureintoparliament.asp](http://www.peo.gov.au/programs/ventureintoparliament.asp)

### High Teas – Queensland Parliament, Australia\*

In 2010 the Parliament held 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.

\* [www.parliament.qld.gov.au/hightea/view/visitors/highTea.asp#special](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/hightea/view/visitors/highTea.asp#special)

## Visitor assistance

To help visitors find their way around the institution some parliaments invest in visitor guides or assistants. In April 2005 the UK Parliament recruited its first Visitor Assistants in recognition of the need to facilitate greater access and improve information provision for visitors. Uniformed, knowledgeable and friendly, the Visitor Assistants provide the first point of contact for all visitors to Parliament. Welcoming visitors outside the building, once inside they continue to direct visitors, manage the queues for the public galleries, offer specialist tours and talks and ensure that visitors are looked after at every stage of their visit. There are now approximately 30 permanent Visitor Assistants and additional temporary staff are recruited to assist with Westminster's Summer and Saturday Opening tours.<sup>18</sup>

## Tours beyond parliament

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

### Parliament Hill tours and related events – Canada

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'.\* The booklet is free of charge and available all year round via the Parliament Hill information office (it is not available online 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',\*\* 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.'† 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.‡

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 in the parliamentary precinct.§ Visitor targets for the parliamentary estate are in the region of 700,000 people.¶ To support this their 2009 operations budget comprised 15% of the entire NCC budget (\$148,000,000 Canadian). This was split between events (46%); capital marketing and communications (22%); programme support (17%); interpretation (9%); amortisation (3%); and commemorations (3%).#

\* <http://bit.ly/sabCam>

\*\* [www.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Visitors/outdoor-e.asp](http://www.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Visitors/outdoor-e.asp)

† <http://bit.ly/sabCam>

‡ National Capital Commission (2009), *Sharing the Story: Annual Report 2008-09*, p.34.

§ <http://bit.ly/sgp32Y>

¶ National Capital Commission (2009), *Sharing the Story: Annual Report 2008-09*, p.35.

# *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

### Path of Democracy – Bundestag, Germany

Although not solely a 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.\*

\* [www.wegderdemokratie.de/tour/index.html](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. The UK Parliament is one of 700 buildings that open their doors to the general public, for free, as part of the Open House London weekend programme. In September 2010, for example, it attracted 4,800 visitors.<sup>19</sup> 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>20</sup> The Estonian Parliament, the Riigikogu, 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>21</sup> Many parliaments also hold 'open door' days to mark International Day of Democracy on the 15th

### 40 Days of Open Day – The Federal Assembly, Switzerland

The Swiss Parliament held 40 days of 'open house' to celebrate its 100th jubilee in 2002. This was successfully combined with a special exhibition that attracted more than 100,000 visitors.\* 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.

\* ECPRD no. 1294 official response from Switzerland, information provided by Ernst Frischknecht, December 2009.

<sup>19</sup> [www.parliament.uk/visiting/visiting-and-tours/openhouse](http://www.parliament.uk/visiting/visiting-and-tours/openhouse) and [www.londonopenhouse.org](http://www.londonopenhouse.org)

<sup>20</sup> Riksdag Administration, *Annual Report 2008-09*.

<sup>21</sup> Information provided by Maria Laatspera, Information Services Consultant, Estonian Parliament.

September each year.

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.

32

**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 be more appropriately 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 Australia’s oldest working legislature, and how the legislative system works. The programme is run by 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 the legislature. The participants visit both the upper and lower house galleries to view the houses in session (approximately 45 minutes) followed by a debrief. The final part of the event (45 minutes approximately) 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 nonetheless 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.\*

\* Information provided by Ronda Miller, New South Wales Legislative Council, November 2009.

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

**Citizens Day – Folketing, Denmark\***

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.

**Citizens Day – Riigikogu, Estonia\*\***

Each year the Parliament, in partnership with the government, marks Citizens 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.

\* Danish Folketing Communications Strategy 2009.  
\*\* Information provided by Maria Laatspera, Information Service Consultant, Estonian Parliament.

**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 and international artists. It does have the advantage of having additional purpose-built space for this activity.<sup>22</sup>

33

**‘Milestones – Setbacks – Sidetracks’: Historical Exhibition – Bundestag, Germany\***

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).

\* 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)

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 legislatures. 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, the exhibition consists of 12 panels that tell 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.\*

\* 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.

34

An alternative approach was taken by the Austrian Parliament which created a mobile historical exhibition that could travel to schools.

### 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 travelled to schools in all the federal provinces and by the end of the 2010 school year it was believed to have reached approximately 50,000 pupils. The exhibition described key stages in the history of the Austrian parliamentary system and the role and function of the federal legislative system.\*

\* [www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/events08.htm](http://www.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/events08.htm)

Given the temporary exhibitions that many parliaments hold, the production of mobile poster exhibitions for schools, libraries, and town halls, might be a useful tool to enable each institution to broaden their contacts and work in local communities. Alternatively, such a poster exhibit approach might enable greater use to be made of the valuable treasures in parliamentary archives and libraries, promoting knowledge of them across the country even though they must remain housed in the parliament. Poster exhibitions can also be linked to broader education and community outreach 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 or 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 useful model is to be found annually in Scotland.

### Festival of Politics – Scottish Parliament, [www.festivalofpolitics.org.uk](http://www.festivalofpolitics.org.uk)

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

The pilot was so successful that it has been repeated every year since. In addition the Parliament also hosts the World Press Photo (WPP) Exhibition during Festival week. In total since 2005 over 260,000 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 is approximately £45,000 each year, 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

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providing excellent value for money in terms of advertising and marketing work which more than off-sets the cost of the event to the Parliament.\*

\* Information provided by Chris Berry, Festival Manager, Scottish Parliament, January 2010.

Such has been the popularity and success of the Scottish concept that other parliaments are already looking to develop their own initiatives based on this model.

A variation on the Festival of Politics can be found at Westminster which held its first ever *'Parliament Week'* in November 2011. Organised around the theme 'Stories of democracy' the week long programme of national and regional public events sought to raise awareness of Parliament and encourage engagement with the UK's democratic system and its institutions. Twenty-five events were organised involving Parliament's archives, education and outreach services in conjunction with 30 partners including the Hansard Society, Facebook, the Museum of London, the Churchill War Rooms, the Supreme Court, the National Archives and the UK Youth Parliament. Events covered included a workshop and debate on 'Building an effective social media campaign', a schools debate in Bristol, a 'Right to Vote' walk in Birmingham, and a half-day conference entitled 'How to campaign through Parliament' hosted at Manchester's People's History Museum. A number of lectures and panel discussions – including 'Young People's Question Time' – were also held involving the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker as well as MPs and Peers. The BBC also broadcast its weekly flagship 'BBC Question Time' political panel discussion live from the historic setting of Westminster Hall for the first time ever.

A dedicated 'Parliament Week' YouTube channel was launched featuring videos from members and officials in both Houses of Parliament talking about what democracy means to them. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography also put together a collection of biographies of men and women who have 'played a part in changing, championing, defending, and extending democracy in Britain over hundreds of years – as campaigners, activists, debaters, voters, and representatives' Finally, a national photography project – Picturing Democracy – was launched to capture individuals' stories of democracy from across the country. Submissions were invited on anything past or present (except the Houses of Parliament) that represent democracy to the photographer. All the submitted photographs will be published in an online gallery and a selection of the best will go on public display in Westminster Hall during the 'Arts in Parliament' programme in summer 2012.

## ON SITE INFORMATION KIOSKS

A number of parliaments have placed information kiosks in public areas of the parliamentary estate, particularly to make information about Members available 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 supported by BBC Democracy Live are available in the cafeteria 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 was little information currently provided about Members and their electorates. As a result the introduction of 'Meet Your MP' touch screen kiosks was recommended and these kiosks now provide visitors with information about all 150 members of the House in interactive format.<sup>23</sup>

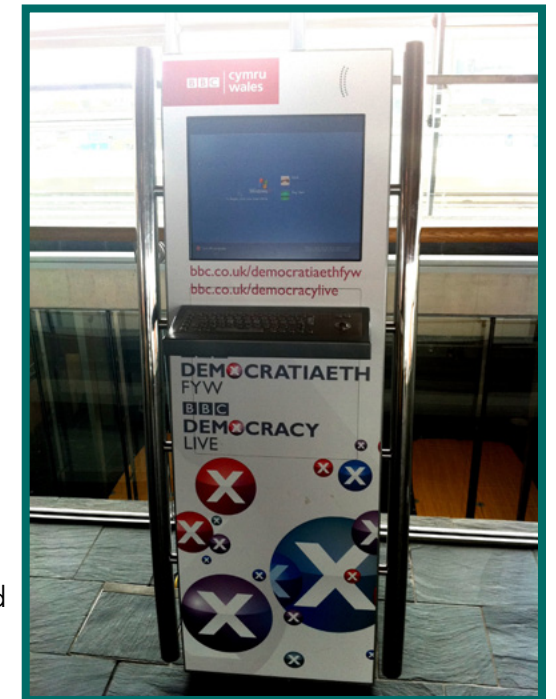


Figure 8: BBC Democracy Live kiosk at the National Assembly for Wales

## VISITOR CENTRES

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>24</sup> Further information is provided though 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.

<sup>23</sup> House of Representatives (Australia), *Annual Report 2008-09*, p.26.  
<sup>24</sup> <http://bit.ly/rZHWY5>.

### Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) – United States of America

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 process as well as the history and development of the architecture and art of the U.S. Capitol.’\* The decision to establish a visitor center was driven by demand, security considerations and the limited physical capacity of the Capitol to accommodate the growing number of visitors wanting to visit. Built between 2002 and 2008, the 55,000 square metre (or 580,000 square feet) facility cost \$621 million in total.\*\*

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† and in March 2011 registered its five millionth visitor.‡ Open Monday to Saturday 8:30am-4:30pm (except Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year and Inauguration Days) visits are 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. Income is generated through its refreshment facilities and its gift shops – the latter alone generated \$2 million in revenue in the first year of operation.

The Center includes a 16,500 square foot exhibition hall on the theme ‘E Pluribus Unum – Out of Many, One’, (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 and an 11-foot tall tactile model of the Capitol Dome.§ Visitors can also access a mobile (cell) phone audio tour of the exhibition hall by calling a dedicated number and using the phone’s keypad to control the audio in accordance with their own pace. The CVC does not charge for the service but phone companies may apply usage charges. In addition to the permanent displays temporary exhibitions are also shown, generally on a six-month rotation, and often in partnership with bodies such as the National Archives. Recent themes have included ‘Capitol and the Congress’, ‘The Civil War’, and ‘Pirates, Protests and Public Health’.

\* [www.visitthecapitol.gov/aboutthecapitol/about\\_the\\_capitol\\_visitor\\_center/](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/aboutthecapitol/about_the_capitol_visitor_center/)

\*\* [www.visitthecapitol.gov/for\\_the\\_press/press\\_materials/fact\\_sheets/pdfrequently\\_asked\\_questions.pdf](http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/for_the_press/press_materials/fact_sheets/pdfrequently_asked_questions.pdf)

† 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).

‡ [www.aoc.gov/aoc/press-room/CVC\\_5millionth\\_visitor.cfm](http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/press-room/CVC_5millionth_visitor.cfm)

§ 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).

## 3. Facilitation Models

Beyond petitioning systems, how parliaments provide and support 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 and 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 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>25</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 broader engagement strategy.

### ONLINE 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>26</sup> It does not provide two-way interaction with members, but all contributions are passed to the relevant member or rapporteur on an on-going 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 many 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 Chile where the Senate takes a proactive interest in the development of online democracy tools.

25 National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee No. 4, Proposed National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Education) Order 2010, Committee Report 2010, p.10.

26 See <http://web.archive.org/web/20100608073538/http://forum.assemblee-nationale.fr/>



Senador Virtual – Senado, Republic of Chile\*

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

\* [www.senadorvirtual.cl](http://www.senadorvirtual.cl)

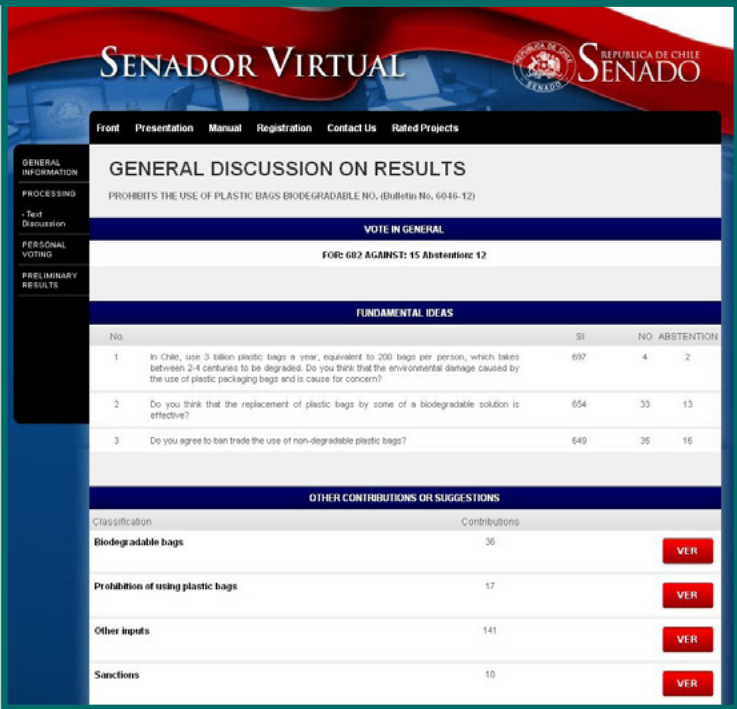


Figure 10: Screenshot of Senador Virtual Results Page



Figure 9: Screenshot of Senador Virtual Home Page

## eConsultations – UK Parliament

The adoption of online forums as an integral part of select committee activity has helped broaden the reach of committee inquiries at Westminster.\* In the last Parliament, prior to the 2010 general election, the forums received over 63,000 unique visitors and just over 120,000 visits. When the House of Commons Justice Committee undertook an inquiry into the role of prison officers, for example, the Committee's site was linked to directly from the intranet system used by prison officers. 318 users registered with the forum – the majority of which were serving prison officers – and 194 individual posts were received, generating positive and constructive comments and debate that were later referenced in the Committee's report. Similarly, when the Business and Enterprise Committee looked at the future of the Post Office, 404 users registered on the online forum and 324 posts were received. The Home Affairs Committee was able to make particular use of the evidence gathered through its eConsultation into domestic violence where 257 users registered with the forum and 228 posts were received.\*\*

\* See <http://forums.parliament.uk/html/index.html>

\*\* See [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmhaff/263/26302.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmhaff/263/26302.htm)

Another approach to online consultation has been adopted in the German Bundestag.

## Thursday Online Chats with MPs – Bundestag, Germany\*

In 2008, for six sitting Thursdays two MPs – one from the government side, one from the opposition – met together to debate issues online 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 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.

\*Deutscher Bundestag Press & Communication (PuK4), 'Chats With MPs Every Thursday: How It Is Organised'.

The Bundestag has also adopted a comprehensive approach to online engagement through its parliamentary portal for young people, 'Mitmischen'.

## www.mitmischen.de – Bundestag, Germany

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 'get involved, tell us your opinions and be active'.\* 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 online '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.

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.\*\*



Figure 11: Members of the Bundestag participating in the 20 May 2010 'chat' about political engagement

\* [http://web.archive.org/web/20091227143243/http://www.bundestag.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2008/pm\\_0811101.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20091227143243/http://www.bundestag.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2008/pm_0811101.html)

\*\* <http://web.archive.org/web/20110107073852/http://www.mitmischen.de/index.php/Community/Gewinnen>



## 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. A leading example of such a Forum can be found in Finland.

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 also been replicated elsewhere, particularly in Scotland.

### Committee for the Future – Tulevaisuusvaliokunta (TVK) – Eduskunta, Finland\*

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 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'.\*\*

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.† 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.‡

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.

\* TVK (2010), Finish Committee for the Future website, <http://web.eduskunta.fi/Resource.phx/parliament/committees/future.htm>  
\*\* Committee for the Future Parliamentary Brochure, <http://web.eduskunta.fi/dman/Document.phx?documentId=np28107102024895&cmd=download>  
† Information provided by Paula Tihonen, Eduskunta, Finland, January 2010.  
‡ B. Groombridge, 'Parliament and the Future: Learning from Finland', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 2, April-June 2006.

Evaluations of the Futures Forums are mixed. The Finish model is highly 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.<sup>27</sup>

### 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.'\* 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 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.

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

The European Parliament offers an alternative approach to expert and civil society consultation.



### e-AGORA – European Parliament\*

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 chosen 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.\*\* 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 online 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.

\* [www.e-agera.info](http://www.e-agera.info)

\*\* ECPRD No. 1294, Official response from the European Parliament

A smaller, 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 be appointed as advisers to members; and a better transfer of knowledge should be achieved between researchers and members.<sup>28</sup>

## 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\*

The Danish Board of Technology was established in 1995 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'.\*\* The Board organises independent technology assessments with the involvement of both experts and the general public, it conducts assessments of the potential 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 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 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 good practice.

The DBT Board usually receives five to eight requests from the Parliament to organise public hearings for committees each year.<sup>†</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 who 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>†</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.

A Future Panel on energy between 2004-2006 for example, provided the basis for Denmark's Future Energy Strategy.<sup>§</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>¶</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. Two thousand 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



Figure 13: Danish Board of Technology Consensus Conference

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, 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>#</sup>

\* Background information provided in telephone interview with Lars Kluver, Director, Danish Board of Technology, August 2009.

\*\* Danish Board of Technology (2009) *Technology with a Human Face*.

† Interview with Lars Kluver, Director, Danish Board of Technology, August 2009.

‡ DBT (2001), *Hearing on surveillance and privacy*, [www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=631&toppic=kategori11&language=uk](http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=631&toppic=kategori11&language=uk)

§ Danish Board of Technology (2005), *Denmark's Future Energy Strategy*, [www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=1085&toppic=kategori11&language=uk](http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=1085&toppic=kategori11&language=uk)

¶ [www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=815&toppic=kategori12&language=uk](http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=815&toppic=kategori12&language=uk)

# [www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=468&toppic=kategori12&language=uk](http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=468&toppic=kategori12&language=uk)

The DBT model of public engagement and consultation is expensive, 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 investigations. 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 from the process.

## 4. 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 the parliament.

### ESTABLISHING A REGIONAL PRESENCE

#### Parliamentary Democracy Offices (PDOs) – South Africa\*

To facilitate public participation and involvement in Parliament, 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 set up 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 one is focused on delivery of the physical infrastructure; phase two will focus on delivery of mobile offices for each of these provincial PDOs. The first three PDOs were established in the Limpopo, Northern Cape and North West provinces but the work of the PDOs is still very much in its infancy.

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

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>29</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. However, they are initiatives that should be watched in the future to see how they develop and if there are innovations that other parliaments' 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) and 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 and teaching materials and watch live debates on web TV. Other events, such as debates, may also be arranged at the *Info Spots* on occasion.\*

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.\*\* 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.†

The regional *Info Spots* are advertised on the Riksdag's website, on the participating libraries' websites, 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.‡

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

\* [http://riksdagen.se/templates/R\\_Page\\_6536.aspx](http://riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page_6536.aspx).

\*\* ECPRD No.1294, official response from Sweden.

† Information provided by Lena Norenhag, Information Department, The Riksdag, January 2010.

‡ Ibid.

## OUTREACH WORKSHOPS

The Westminster outreach service runs workshops and information events across the UK, primarily in partnership with other organisations, to increase awareness and understanding about how to engage meaningfully with the UK Parliament. In 2009 and 2010 over 625 sessions were held across the country by the outreach service involving over 16,000 participants ranging from community leaders to business advocates. Relationship management is a key object of regional delivery to ensure high quality support for parliamentary procedures including select and public bill committees.

### Bill workshops and the 'Train the Trainer' programme – UK Parliament\*

Bill workshops are designed to encourage greater public participation in Parliament's scrutiny of legislation and to shift the emphasis of the outreach activity from promoting understanding of legislative procedures to direct engagement with those procedures. Each workshop focuses on a specific piece of forthcoming legislation and is promoted via the parliamentary website, social media and through direct marketing. In September 2010, for example, a workshop on energy and the green economy was attended by 122 representatives from over 100 different organisations. The events involve presentations from senior Clerks in both Houses as well as other officials including from the House of Commons Library. Topics covered at the workshops include engaging with House of Commons scrutiny of legislation through the public bill committee system, using research by the House of Commons library, tracking the progress of bills via the parliamentary website, and the role of the relevant select committee. Feedback from the September 2010 workshop established that

99% of attendees felt they had a better understanding of how Parliament scrutinises legislation and 94% rated the quality of the workshops as 'good' or 'excellent'.

'Train the Trainer' is a new outreach programme first piloted in 2010. It involves a series of professionally produced, branded training materials about Parliament which third parties are trained to deliver under licence to their members. This substantially increases the reach of the outreach service. A further two modules on the relationship between Parliament and the European Parliament and between Parliament and the devolved administrations are being developed in partnership with the European Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

\* Information provided by the Director of Public Information, House of Commons.

## DEMOCRACY ON THE MOVE

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.'\* It travels from community to community, attending festivals and shows such as 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 committee's members can draw on the opinions and evidence to help inform their decisions. The bus is occasionally used by committees to host



Figure 14: National Assembly for Wales Outreach Bus

evidence sessions in the community. Members of the outreach service also blog from the bus tour with their experiences recorded in video highlights made available via the Assembly website.\*\*

\* Information provided by Natalie Drury Styes, Outreach and International Manager, and Mary Wynn Gooberman, Education Team Manager, National Assembly for Wales.

\*\* [www.assemblywales.org/gethome/get-assembly-area/get\\_involved-outreach\\_bus.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/get-assembly-area/get_involved-outreach_bus.htm)

### Infomobil des Bundestage – Bundestag, Germany\*

Similar to the Welsh outreach bus, the Bundestag also utilises a mobile information bus to take the legislature 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.



Figure 15: External and internal views of the Bundestag Mobil

\* [www.bundestag.de/besuche/bundestagunterwegs/mobil.html](http://www.bundestag.de/besuche/bundestagunterwegs/mobil.html)

## AMBASSADORIAL OUTREACH

The Speaker or Presiding Officer has an increasingly important ambassadorial role and profile as the public face and voice of the institution in many parliaments.

A combination of outreach tours, personal social networking channels, and a blog can all enhance the engagement programmes being pursued by Speakers in parliaments across the globe, underlining their leadership in this field and at limited cost.



### Llywydd's Tour – National Assembly for Wales\*

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 and Blog – Scottish Parliament

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'. Visits are made to charities, schools, hospitals, and other community facilities across Scotland. In 2010 the Presiding Officer instituted a new innovation, the Summer Programme blog, where he related news from the tour on a daily basis.\*\*

### President's Outreach Google Tour Map and 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 known as 'Parliament in the classroom' or 'Parlament a les aules',

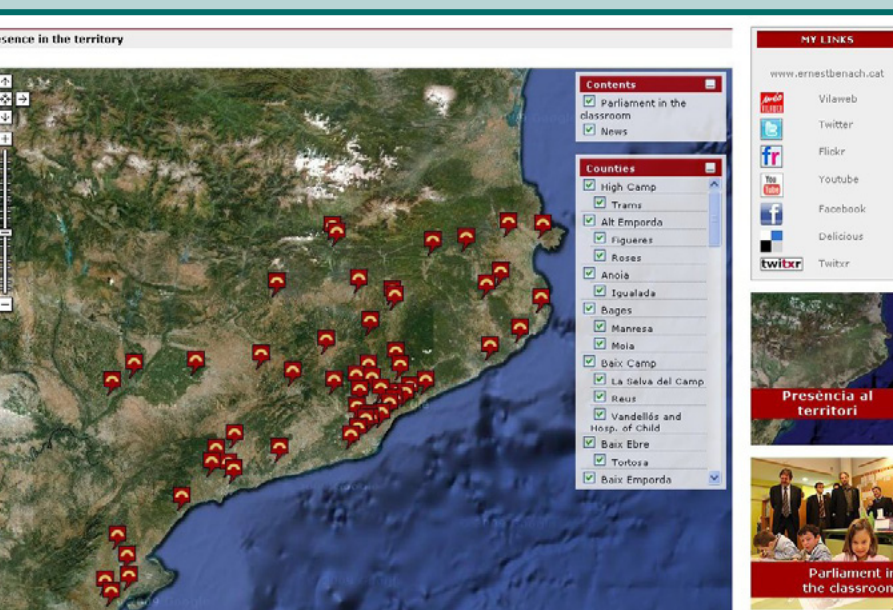


Figure 16: Screenshot of Catalan President of the Parliament's outreach map

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.† The President also has his own dedicated social networking channels including Facebook and Twitter.

\* [www.assemblywales.org/newhome/po-outreach-tour.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/newhome/po-outreach-tour.htm)

\*\* <http://summerprogramme.wordpress.com>

† [www.parlament.cat/web/president/presencia-territori](http://www.parlament.cat/web/president/presencia-territori)

## 5. 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. Legislatures are establishing themselves as proactive social actors with an increasing sense of their own agency in order to raise awareness, 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 benefit from association with them.

### Step Up Cymru – National Assembly for Wales\*

Established in 2009 this is a pilot Assembly and local government mentoring scheme for individuals from under-represented groups – women, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals (LGBT), Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME), disabled, religious affiliations, young and old etc. The participants each year:

- 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.\*\*

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.

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 were women and nine were men; four were from the LGBT and 14 from the BME community and 10 people had a disability. 14 of the 34 participated 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 members 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.

\* Information provided by Adam Rees, Scheme Co-ordinator, National Assembly for Wales, February 2010 and [www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-nafw/equalities/step-up-cymru.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-nafw/equalities/step-up-cymru.htm)

\*\* National Assembly for Wales (2009), Step Up Cymru: Involve. Inform. Inspire. Is it for Me?, p.1.

It is as yet too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this scheme. Given the difficulties that many parliaments face in seeking to engage 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\*

Following the 2007 review of the Parliament's education and outreach strategy\*\* it established what it described as a 'groundbreaking initiative to give voice to people typically under-represented in political life'.<sup>†</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 therefore developed this pilot as a means, 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 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>†‡</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 opportunities for partnership working and the possible 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>§</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 based knowledge of the 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 worked. As well as sending their end-user staff, partner organisations were 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.

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 – for example, 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 – such as use the 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 online.<sup>9</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.

\*\* <http://web.archive.org/web/20090506063628/http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/corporate/anrep-accts/spcb/ar-08/spar08-01.htm>

† [www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/25001.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/25001.aspx)

‡ Scottish Parliament Community Partnerships Project, Briefing for the Presiding Officer by Rosemary Everett, Head of the Education and Community Partnerships Team, August 2009.

§ *Ibid.*

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

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\***

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 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 the 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 speeches 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 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.

\* Information provided in a telephone interview with parliamentary officials in December 2009.

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 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.

# 6. 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 youngest citizens including interactive workshops where school children learn about democracy and about their democratic institutions (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), online educational games (Finland, Catalonia, Germany) and resources (Denmark), and interactive sessions where they can simulate the legislative process in specially designed environments (for example, Estonia's e-chamber, Denmark's Politician for a Day, and Wales' Siambwr Hywel). Role-play schemes are particularly popular in parliaments around the world and those in Denmark and Norway have, historically, proven to be top visitor attractions at their parliament.<sup>30</sup>

## ROLE-PLAY

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

### 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.\*

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 recent years approximately 12,000 pupils have participated. It is significantly over subscribed and at any one time there is a 10-12 month waiting list.\*\*

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 – such as group chair or spokesperson. 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.

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Figure 17: Young people participating in Politician for a Day

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.

\* Information provided by Linda Kubasiak Johansen, Folketing official, October 2009.

\*\* Ibid.

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\***

The *MiniTing* opened in 2005, 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 recent years at the *MiniTing* are: compulsory bio-chip implants for Norwegian citizens; fencing-in of sheep in order to protect them from predators; 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).

\* Information provided by Claus Olav Thorbjørnsen, Stortinget Information Service, December 2009.

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Similar programmes 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. In Estonia the e-chamber simulation of the Riigikogu differs slightly in that all participants sit and work in the 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.

## ONLINE ROLE-PLAY

A number of parliaments have begun developing online role-play games for pupils of all ages to facilitate education and learning away from the parliamentary estate.

### ‘MP For A Week’ and ‘My UK’ – UK Parliament\*

Launched in January 2010, ‘MP For A Week’ is an award winning interactive online game where players take on the job of a backbench Member of Parliament. Their challenge is to survive the pressures of a week in Westminster and the constituency. Players choose to be either government or opposition members and the issues they



Figure 18: ‘MP for a week’ screenshot

face are selected to be of interest to the target age group (11-16 year olds).

Throughout the game players take part in activities reflecting the work of an MP. They choose to attend meetings or events, respond to messages, make speeches in debates or select witnesses for committee inquiries. Other activities are presented to the player at set times such as votes, press conferences and parliamentary questions. As players

progress they must balance and manage the ‘happiness levels’ of their political party, constituents and the media. With more to do than can fit in the virtual week, players must prioritise their workload and confront some difficult dilemmas. Budding MPs will see how their constituents and their party react to their decisions, and realise that there are often important compromises to be made. If players get stuck, real MPs offer a helping hand in the form of video interviews within the game that explain their work and provide a link between the virtual and real worlds. The Education Service developed the game in consultation with teachers, young people, MPs and games experts. In the first six months it received 70,000 unique visits with a growing uptake in the months that followed.

‘My UK’ is an interactive game for 13-15 year olds, putting the player ‘at the centre of British politics with a chance to create a country to call your own’. The student takes on the role of Prime Minister at the start of a new five-year parliamentary term: through the course of the game



Figure 19: ‘MyUK’ screenshot

participants have the opportunity to pass laws, appoint friends to the Cabinet (logging in through a Facebook link), give the nation a make-over (re-design the national flag or currency etc.), and develop their leadership style. Through integrated Facebook and Twitter links players can communicate their vision to their friends and followers, and compete against their fellow game-players. Each game takes anything between 15 and 30 minutes to complete and a range of additional resource materials are available for teachers to supplement lesson planning around the game.

\* [www.parliament.uk/education/online-resources/games/mp-for-a-week/](http://www.parliament.uk/education/online-resources/games/mp-for-a-week/) and <http://createmyuk.org/game.html>

## 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 often have interns working for them directly. However, a number of parliaments also have established internship programmes where students can learn about the behind the scenes workings of the institution, particularly its legislative and procedural processes, alongside officials and members. The internship / work-experience programmes offered by parliaments vary considerably in terms of the age groups covered, the academic demands placed on the participants, and the balance of work involved between basic administrative duties and more complex policy and political research.

### Parliamentary Information and Research Service Internship Program – Canada\*

This scheme is run by the Library of Parliament and supports five interns each year (September to August). A salary of \$32,000 (Canadian) is paid. The 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.

\* [www.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Jobs/PIRSInternship/index-e.asp](http://www.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Jobs/PIRSInternship/index-e.asp)

Another model, mixing involvement in the executive and legislative branches is also provided in British Columbia.



### Legislative Internship Programme – British Columbia, Canada\*

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 online 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 \$21,075 Canadian (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.

\* Information provided by Karen Aitken, Director, Public Education and Outreach, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, September 2009 and from [www.leg.bc.ca/info/bclip/index.asp](http://www.leg.bc.ca/info/bclip/index.asp)

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 or 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 assignment' on a topic related to their work in the Parliament for which they can receive up to 20% accreditation.<sup>31</sup>

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

### House of Commons Page Programme & Senate Page Programme – Canada\*

The current House 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 Quebec). 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 \$11,461 (Canadian) per year and an extra \$1,200 on successful completion of all requirements.

An alternative programme is offered in the Upper House. Each year 15 Pages are appointed and each 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 receive a salary of \$11,461 (Canadian) per year and an extra \$1,200 on successful completion of all requirements; further increments are available to the Chief and Deputy Chief Pages.

\* [www.parl.gc.ca/Employment/House/PageProgram/PP\\_Welcome-e.htm](http://www.parl.gc.ca/Employment/House/PageProgram/PP_Welcome-e.htm) and [www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/programs/senpages/senpages-e.htm](http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/programs/senpages/senpages-e.htm)



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

### **Parliamentary Assistants Programme – House of Representatives, Australia\***

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

\* Department of the House of Representatives, Australia, 2007-08 Annual Report, p.47.

Until recently the US Congress provided a long-standing, well-respected Page programme on a national scale. However, this required greater resourcing by the institution than the Canadian model. Congress recently voted to abolish it on grounds of cost and because many of the roles performed by Pages are no longer relevant or needed given increased digital communications.

### **70 Congressional Page Programme – United States of America\***

The House Page Programme recruited 72 Pages; 48 nominated by representatives of the majority party and 24 by the minority party. The Programme was administered by the Office of the Clerk and supervised by the House Page Board. Two members of the Board were 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 was chosen by the Speaker. Students had to 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 were made via a written essay/personal statement; two supporting letters of recommendation and official transcripts of their high school grades.

Pages were supervised by adult, full-time House employees and worked as a team for party members. Their duties included delivering legislative correspondence within the congressional complex; monitoring phones in member cloakrooms; and preparing the House Floor for sessions. They mixed both school and work experience. The House Page School was located in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress and was accredited through the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. During the academic year, classes began at 6:45 a.m. and included mathematics, English, social studies, science, French / Spanish, and Washington Seminars. The Pages lived in the Page Residence Hall which was staffed by a director, assistant director,

and four proctors. Each room was furnished, had a private bathroom and housed up to four students. It was co-educational with one floor for women and one for men. Security was provided by US Capitol Police. The Pages earned a monthly gross salary of \$1,804.83 from which deductions were made for federal and state taxes, social security, and a 35% room and board fee. A similar Senate Page Programme also recruited 30 Pages each year: 16 were nominated by representatives of the majority party and 14 by the minority party. It was modelled similarly to the House programme although the students received a modestly higher salary.\*\*

\* <http://web.archive.org/web/20110721042859/http://pageprogram.house.gov/factsheet.pdf>

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

## **EDUCATION 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\***

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.

\* 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>32</sup> A number of regional parliaments also provide tailored courses. The New South Wales Legislative Council, for example, provides commercial seminars for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In

British Colombia 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 the waiting list 500 strong.<sup>33</sup>

### 'House Calls' – House of Representatives, Australia\*

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 becoming directly 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.

\* Information provided by Australian House of Representatives Liaison and Projects Office.

\*\* New South Wales Legislative Council, *Draft Business Plan 2009-11: Community Access and Engagement*, p5.

## SCHOOL VISITS

In the UK the House of Lords offers an educational outreach programme for schools and sixth form colleges to help support the teaching of the citizenship studies curriculum and encourage students to learn more about politics and Parliament.

### 'Peers in Schools' – UK Parliament\*

The 'Peers in Schools' project was launched in September 2007 and over 500 school visits by Peers have now been made, meeting over 30,000 pupils. Demand for visits across all regions of the UK has continued to grow with more than 500 schools requesting visits for the 2010-11 academic year alone. The scheme gives young people an opportunity to discuss the role and function of Peers at Westminster, and to hear from and directly question those who are making the laws and holding the

Government to account on a daily basis. The scheme was instigated by the first Lord Speaker, Baroness Hayman, as part of the House of Lords' strategy to raise awareness of the role of the House and the work of its members.

\* [www.parliament.uk/business/lords/lord-speaker/outreach-programme/peers-in-schools/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/lords/lord-speaker/outreach-programme/peers-in-schools/)

## AWARDS AND COMPETITIONS

A number of parliaments hold competitions to engage young people in aspects of the political process. In Australia, for example, the 'My First Speech' competition seeks to 'raise awareness of the federal Parliament among young Australians by encouraging students to voice their opinions as if they were making their first speech in the House of Representatives.'<sup>34</sup> Students are encouraged to submit videos of their speeches for consideration by a three-person panel consisting of two MPs and a political editor of a network news channel. In 2011, 68 schools took part from across Australia.

### Speaker's School Council Award Scheme – UK Parliament\*

Starting in 2009, this new national initiative was run on behalf of the Speaker of the House of Commons to celebrate and reward the achievements of school councils. Young people's first experience of democratic values and practices are often through their school councils and the scheme was designed to recognise this. Every head teacher in the country received a letter from the Speaker with details of the initiative and an invitation to sign-up. In the first year over 2,500 schools registered. Awards are made in four age categories (4-7 years; 7-11; 11-16; and 16-19) to recognise the most innovative and exciting school council projects undertaken annually.



Figure 20: The Speaker of the House of Commons presenting the awards

The finalists were invited to a high-profile award ceremony at Westminster presided over by the Speaker. A best practice publication was produced using case studies of the projects and was made available free to schools signing up to the awards scheme in

33 Information provided by Karen Aitken, Director, Public Education and Outreach, Legislative Assembly of British Colombia, September 2009.

34 [www.aph.gov.au/exhibitions/myfirstspeech/terms-conditions.html](http://www.aph.gov.au/exhibitions/myfirstspeech/terms-conditions.html)

subsequent years. Best practice projects are now 'showcased' on the awards scheme website and a range of supplementary resources are made available.\*\*

\* [www.speakersschoolcouncil.org](http://www.speakersschoolcouncil.org)

\*\* [www.speakersschoolcouncil.org/showcase](http://www.speakersschoolcouncil.org/showcase)

## 7. Strategic Objectives and Organisation

As public engagement initiatives have been increasingly prioritised over the last decade, parliamentary institutions have had to shift from being service providers within their institution to being 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 strategic repositioning, and the greater emphasis consequently place on innovation in the public engagement field, occurs in each institution for a different reason and at a different pace. However, initiatives which represent a major step change in public engagement practice are often the result of the parliament finding that:

- it needs to respond to a crisis; or
- it must react to a significant political shift in the country; or
- it seeks to take advantage of a milestone, such as the anniversary of the founding of the institution.

These three 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. An exception to these factors can be found in Scotland and Wales where the benefits of a 'blank slate' approach as these new institution were 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 institutions 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 of public engagement responsibility can often lead to a more 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, annual or parliamentary term corporate strategies, values and vision documents, strategic implementation plans, information and communication strategies. The challenge of public engagement however, is that by nature it is diffuse, encompassing many aspects of parliamentary activity 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 strategic leadership. In reality, however, in most instances this is not the institutional reality within the parliament. As several officials in different parliamentary institutions admitted during our interviews, the work is 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.

**76** 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.

Nor does any parliament appear to deal effectively with the issue of establishing a cross-media 'branding' campaign for the purposes of marketing the parliament. The Australian House of Representatives again perhaps comes nearest to this with the application of its 'About the House' brand across a number of information and engagement platforms. Given the breadth of information and engagement outlets that parliaments must now cover, some form of overarching brand may be helpful to develop a distinct identity – that is instantly recognisable as being linked to Parliament – for the mechanisms through which the institution disseminates information and communications in the future.

The Australian House of Representatives is rare among parliamentary institutions in trying, at both a strategic and operational level, to institutionalise the public engagement agenda within the organisation.

### Service Charter – House of Representatives, Australia\*

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 that includes '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'.\*\* 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 and 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.

\* [www.aph.gov.au/house/dept/service.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/dept/service.htm)

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

However, 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.

Of our case study parliaments, three of the most comprehensive strategies for public engagement are to be found in Denmark's Folketing, the UK Parliament, and the National Assembly for Wales. These institutions have developed plans that define their objectives and target groups for public engagement, set out an action plan, define outputs and establish time lines for progress and evaluation.

### Communication Strategy – Folketing, Denmark\*

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 'Danish representative

government is among the most accessible in the world'. This is defined as being where everybody knows their democratic rights and duties and has the opportunity to play an active role in the democratic process; everybody can at all times obtain clear information on the work of the Folketing; and everybody has the opportunity to visit the Christiansborg (the parliamentary estate). At a strategic level the Folketing will 'support accessible representative government and citizens' active participation in this with the help of proactive, relevant and up-to-date communication'.

To realise this strategy three distinct groups are targeted:

- a) Professionals – the public sector; 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 Folketing, *Communication Strategy 2009*, pp.1-3.

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\*

The Assembly was committed to increasing 'awareness', 'appreciation' and 'action' and 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.
- 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.

\* National Assembly for Wales (2007), *Communicating the Third Assembly – Greater Power, Better Governance, More Say*.

At an operational level few bicameral parliaments seem to have a bicameral body tasked with co-ordination and implementation of a public engagement agenda in the way that the UK Parliament's Group on Information for the Public (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. But such arrangements tend to be narrowly drawn and be designed to establish economies of scale through shared services, or operational back-up provision in the event of an emergency rather than to institutionalise leadership and strategy in relation to public engagement on a formal cross-chamber basis.

### Group on Information for the Public (GIP) – UK Parliament

GIP's public engagement strategy for 2011-15\* outlines three core goals, namely that by 2015 the public should recognise that: (a) Parliament is the heart of our democracy: respected, effective, efficient and informed; (b) Parliament holds the government to account: it is not the same as government and provides checks and balances to its power; and (c) Parliament's work matters to everyone: it is relevant to our concerns and welcomes our participation. Over the five year period it highlights engagement priorities as being to: maintain efforts to reach all schoolchildren and extend the work to include those in further, higher, adult and lifelong education; to emphasise engagement with adults who want to change things but don't know enough about Parliament to engage effectively; and to focus on those adults it defines as 'politically contented' who do not yet actively engage with Parliament either because they have little knowledge or interest or because they do not yet see the benefits to them of doing so. The strategy document outlines the programmes of activity to be undertaken by each service – education; visitors and onsite facilities; online and broadcasting; outreach and media; archives, information office and publications – to achieve these goals, and the anticipated staffing and funding available for them. The strategy then asks 'what will success look like?' and here it proposes three measures. Firstly, it proposes 'outcome' measures for the strategy based on statistically significant improvements in levels of public knowledge and favourability towards Parliament, as measured in the Hansard Society's annual *Audit of Political Engagement*.\*\* Secondly, it highlights 'quality' measures based around the impact of parliamentary programmes and campaigns. Finally, it sets out 'reach' measures for the strategy based around the number of people who engage with Parliament and states that the 'overall ambition is to double the number of people who engage personally with Parliament as an institution over the lifetime of the Parliament.'

\* House of Commons Group on Information for the Public (2010), *Public Engagement: Parliament's Strategy for 2011-15*.

\*\* See, for example, Hansard Society (2004-11), *Audit of Political Engagement*, [www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament\\_and\\_government/archive/2007/08/08/Public-engagement.aspx](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/parliament_and_government/archive/2007/08/08/Public-engagement.aspx)

These parliaments are relatively rare in having comprehensive communications and / or public engagement strategies that encompass a broad range of education, outreach, facilitation and other initiatives, which set out the target groups for engagement, and which link to clear delivery objectives over the coming years.

Generally the approach taken by most parliamentary institutions is less comprehensive and more *ad hoc*. But it is the adoption of these broad ranging communications and public engagement strategies, supported by institutional commitment and resources, that helps these parliaments drive some of the most innovative examples of good practice in public engagement to be found anywhere in the world.



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