

A Year in the Life: from member of public to Member of Parliament

Interim briefing paper, June 2011



Matt Korris



Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| Introduction | 2 |
| Salary and expenses | 3 |
| Change in salary | |
| IPSA | |
| Working operations | 5 |
| Working hours | |
| Division of time | |
| Work priorities | |
| Voting priorities | |
| Communications and technology | |
| The parliamentary experience | 10 |
| Satisfaction with Parliament | |
| Impact on personal life | |
| Aspirations | |
| Next steps | 13 |
| Research details | 14 |
| Endnotes | 15 |

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Ruth Fox, Stuart Hallifax, Rachel Heydecker and Virginia Gibbons for their assistance and support, to the MPs for participating in this research and the staff of the House of Commons for their advice and interest in the project.



Hansard Society, 40-43 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1JA
Tel: 020 7438 1222. Fax: 020 7438 1229. Email: hansard@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Copyright © 2011 Hansard Society.

Cover image: Malcolm Jack, Clerk and Chief Executive of the House of Commons, addressing the new MPs. © UK Parliament

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, without the prior permission of the Hansard Society.

For more information about other Hansard Society publications visit our website at www.hansardsociety.org.uk

Executive Summary

New MPs are certainly not in it for the money

- More than half of new MPs (56%) have taken a salary cut on becoming an MP, with almost a third (31%) taking a cut of £30,000 p.a. or more.
- The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) is a source of considerable discontent for the new MPs, despite the fact that they are untainted by the expenses scandal. Eighty-five per cent of the new MPs were dissatisfied with the induction provided by IPSA and, six months on, 79% were still dissatisfied with the workings of IPSA.

New MPs are working very long hours, to the detriment of their personal/family lives

- New MPs start off expecting a 60 hour week (plus eight hours travel) but find themselves working 67 hours per week. Six months on this had increased to an average 69 hours per week.
- A vast number of the new MPs have found the job has a significant negative impact on their personal/family lives. Comments such as 'overwhelming', 'devastating', 'detrimental' and 'a struggle' are common.

MPs face a difficult balancing act, weighing up the demands of constituency work and their parliamentary role

- The new MPs split their working time 63% in Westminster and 37%

in their constituencies.

- Yet it is constituency casework that takes up the largest portion of their time (28%), followed by constituency meetings/events (21%) and the Commons Chamber (21%).

Early Day Motions are the biggest source of dissatisfaction with how Parliament works

- Seventy per cent of the new MPs are dissatisfied with Early Day Motions (EDMs). The sitting hours of the House of Commons (51%) and Private Members' Bill procedures (43%) are the next least popular.
- In contrast there is almost universal satisfaction with many other aspects of Parliament. More than 90% are satisfied with select committees, second readings, the business in Westminster Hall, urgent questions and ministerial statements.

Most of the new MPs aspire to make politics a long-term career and more than half hope to become ministers

- Eighty-two per cent of the new MPs aspire to make politics a long-term career; 55% hope to become ministers.
- The most eagerly anticipated parliamentary aspects of the role of an MP are working in all-party groups and on select committees, with 98% and 87% of the new MPs indicating they were keen to get involved with these at the start of their first year.

INTRODUCTION

Entering Parliament as a new MP is a daunting experience. Exhausted from months of campaigning, they are faced with a huge and multifaceted job for which no job description exists. New MPs need to master the traditions and procedural complexities of the Commons, set up their offices, hire staff, find personal accommodation and re-arrange family life – and that is all before they can properly begin working as a legislator and constituency representative. The challenges are significant and there is no time to waste – the voracious demands and expectations of constituents, party and the 24/7 media are present right from the start.

The general election saw the largest turnover of MPs since 1997, with 232 new Members elected (including five returning MPs who had previously lost their seats). For this new intake there is also the added pressure of the post-expenses scandal climate: there is an expectation among the public and media that the culture and practices of Westminster will change on their watch.

So how do the new MPs approach their many and varied tasks and meet the expectations placed upon them? What do they think of Parliament and what are their hopes for the future? What has the

transition from being a member of the public to becoming a Member of Parliament been like?

The findings in this briefing paper begin to answer these questions. The new MPs are working extremely long hours and, despite spending more of their working week in Westminster, it is constituency casework that takes up the largest portion of their time. They are largely satisfied with how Parliament works, but the hours, the division of time between Westminster and their constituency and the effects of IPSA's expenses system combine to make the maintenance of any semblance of a family life a struggle for many of them. Yet despite the difficulties, the majority hope to make politics a long-term career and many aspire to take on a second job as a minister.

This briefing paper is a selected summary of interim findings of the Hansard Society's *A Year in the Life: From member of public to Member of Parliament* project. It is based on the analysis of two surveys of the new MPs, conducted in August 2010 and March 2011, to which approximately one quarter of the new intake responded. More details about the surveys and the respondents can be found in the research details section at the end of the paper.

The final report, supplemented by additional research, the findings of a third survey, as well as interviews and discussion groups will be published toward the end of 2011. This research expands significantly upon a similar study conducted by the Hansard Society in 2005 which can be downloaded at: <http://hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2007/10/17/A-Year-in-the-Life.aspx>

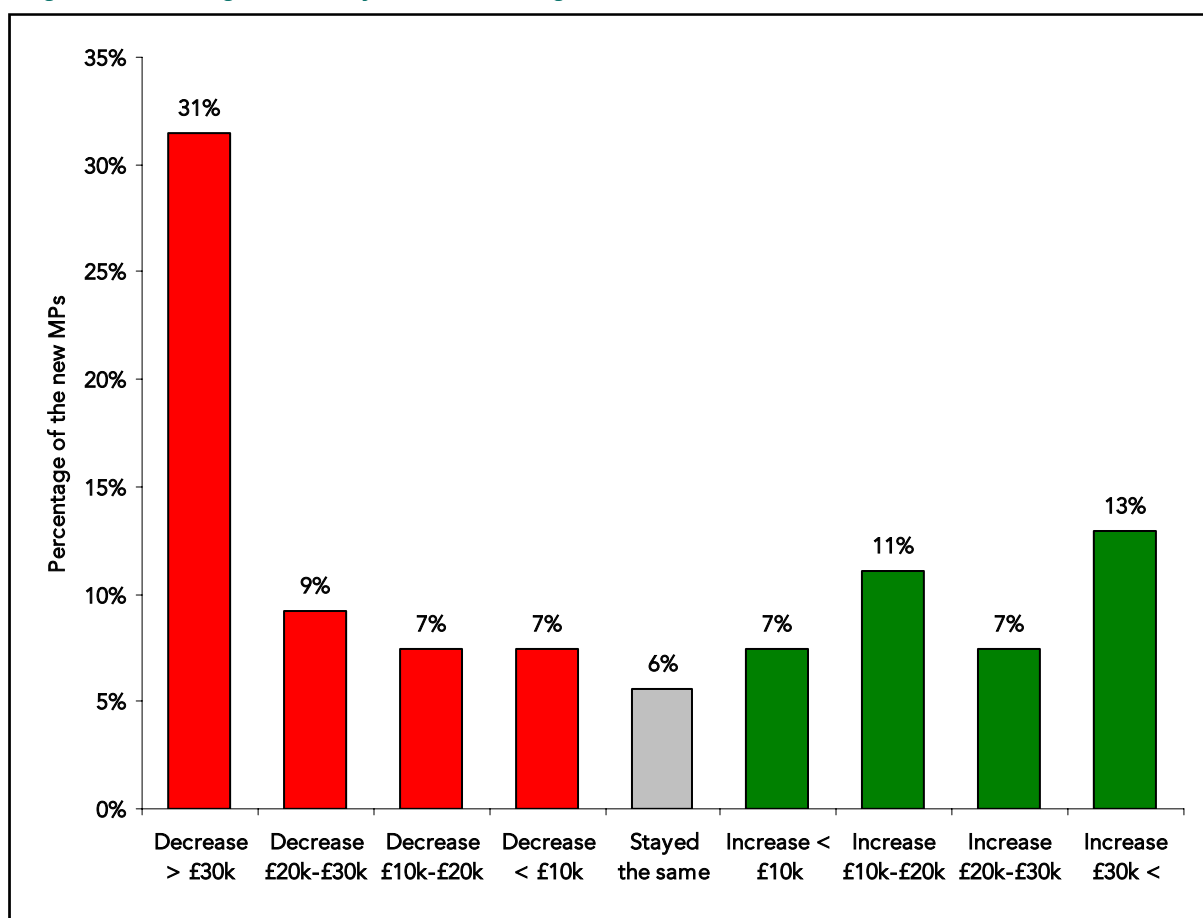
SALARY AND EXPENSES

Change in salary

The new MPs are certainly not in it for the money. Members of Parliament earn £65,738 per year and for more than half (56%) of the new MPs this represents a salary decrease. Almost one third (31%) have taken a pay cut of £30,000 p.a. or more.

Just 13% saw a salary increase of £30,000 p.a. or more, which means that 87% previously earned more than the London average wage of £33,380.¹

Figure 1: Change in salary on becoming a Member of Parliament



Survey 1, August 2010, n=54

The new Conservative MPs on average earned more than Labour Members prior to election, with 65% of Conservatives seeing a reduction in salary (45% of them faced a drop of more than £30,000 p.a.) compared to 39% of new Labour MPs. (Too few new Liberal Democrat MPs were elected in 2010 to make statistical comparison in this study). The new male MPs also tended to be better paid prior to their election, with 63% reporting a fall in income compared to 44% of women.

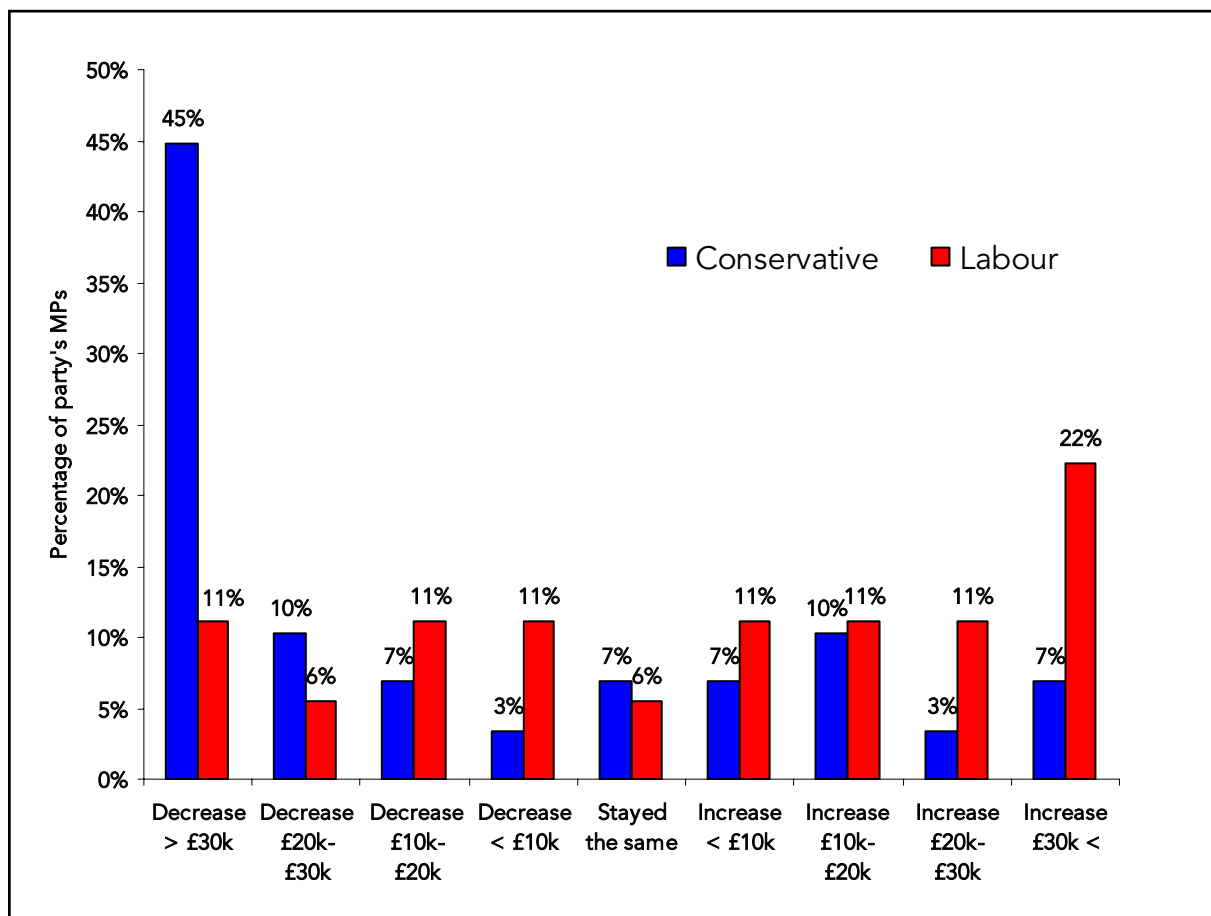
IPSA

The Independent Parliamentary Standards

Authority (IPSA), which oversees the expenses arrangements for Members of Parliament, is a source of considerable discontent for the new MPs, despite the fact they are untainted by the expenses scandal.

Eighty-five per cent of the new MPs were dissatisfied with the induction provided by IPSA in the early days of the Parliament, in comparison to high levels of satisfaction with all the aspects of induction provided by Parliament and their parties. Six months on, 79% still said they were dissatisfied with the workings

Figure 2: Change in salary on becoming a Member of Parliament: party comparison



Survey 1, August 2010, n=52

of IPSA, with many citing it as having a negative affect on their personal lives.

Many comments focused on the IPSA system being 'too bureaucratic', 'inflexible, counter-intuitive', 'cumbersome and time-consuming'. IPSA is accused of failing 'to understand [the] role and function of MPs along with diversity between constituencies, numbers of electors, size of seats, amount of travel involved and hours we work'.

By the time of the March 2011 survey a few MPs acknowledged that IPSA was improving, but overall the mood in relation to expenses is grim.

Most damning of all was the remark that 'If I'd known about IPSA beforehand I would not have stood'.

"Parliament's woeful inability to confront and modernise pay and conditions for MPs is a tragedy. We are now living through a post-expenses period in which parliamentary morale has collapsed and in which a new generation of untainted MPs are finding it impossible to cope with split life, 7 day a week life, young families etc on £60k. Many will leave." - A new MP

WORKING OPERATIONS

Working hours

The 2010 intake arrived in Parliament expecting to work long hours in their new role – on average they anticipated working 60 hours per week, with eight hours travel on top. However, three months in, almost half (47%) admitted that their expectation had been too low. Of those who felt their estimate had been about right, the average working week was 67 hours plus 10 hours of travel.

By the time of the second survey in March 2011 the new MPs were working even longer – on average 69 hours per week with many working considerably more.

Conservative MPs report working a longer week, averaging 71 hours, to the 62 hours of Labour MPs. There is no difference in the hours worked by male and female MPs, but those MPs without children reported a longer working week, averaging 72 hours per week compared with 65 hours for those with children.

Division of time

The new intake split their working time 63% in Westminster and 37% in their constituencies. Labour MPs report spending slightly more time at Westminster (68% compared to 61% among Conservatives), as do female MPs

Figure 3: Working hours for new MPs

| Working hours per week | Proportion of new MPs |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 40-49 | 2% |
| 50-59 | 13% |
| 60-69 | 33% |
| 70-79 | 31% |
| 80-89 | 13% |
| 90+ | 7% |

Survey 2, March 2011, n=54

(64%) compared to men (61%).

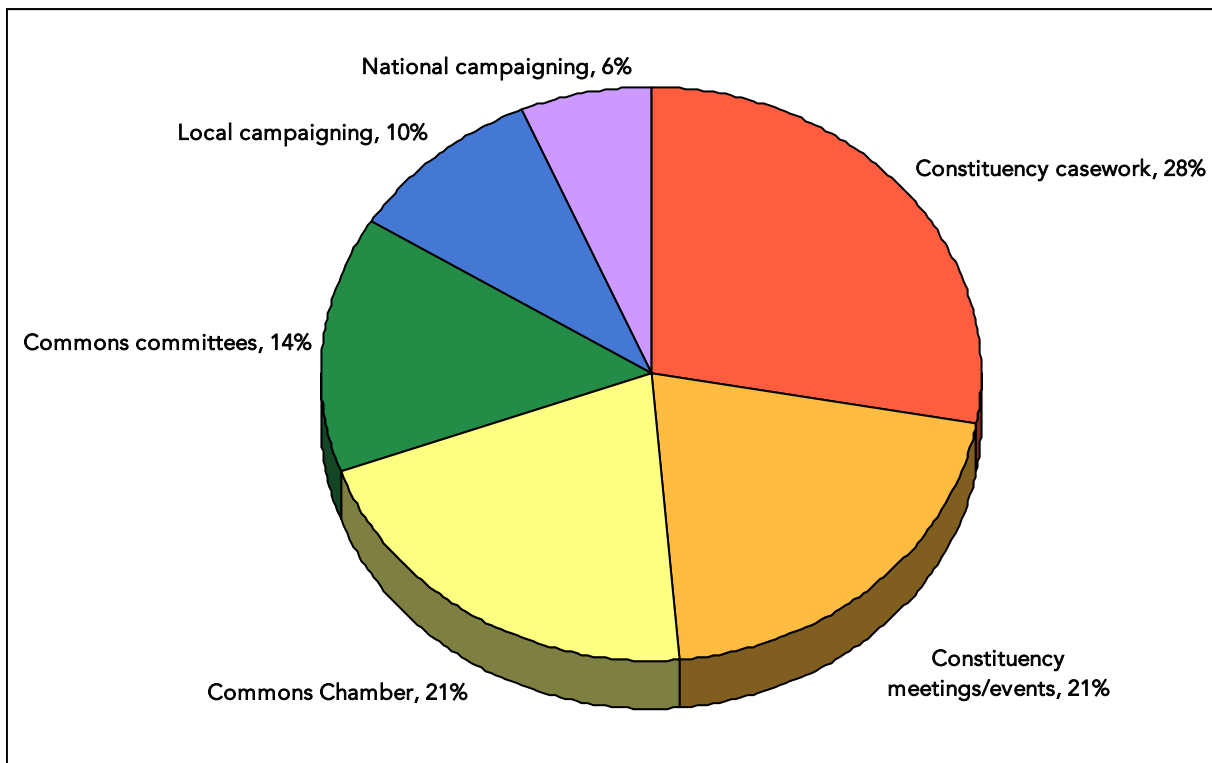
Despite spending more of their working week in Westminster, it is constituency casework that takes up the largest portion of time for new MPs (28%), followed by

constituency meetings/events (21%) and the Commons Chamber (21%). Indeed, while there is roughly a 60-40 split in the working week in favour of Westminster, in terms of the tasks that new MPs are undertaking it is 60-40 in favour of local constituency activity – a fact which underlines the challenging balancing act MPs must address.

New Conservative MPs report spending a greater proportion of their time on constituency casework (28%) and meetings (23%) than Labour contemporaries (22% and 20% respectively), while Labour MPs spend more time in the Commons Chamber

Figure 4: Division of time

Q. How do you divide your time between the following activities?



Survey 2, March 2011, n=45

(23% compared to 20%) and on committee activity (18% to 12%). This may reflect the priorities of the parties in government and opposition, with Labour MPs being more likely to emphasise the importance of 'holding the government to account' as part of their role (see next section).

MPs who have lived in their constituencies for more than five years prior to their election report spending a greater proportion of their time on casework than those with shorter or no prior residency (34% compared to 22%). This suggests that living and campaigning in an area for a longer period of time may influence how MPs operate when they reach Parliament – prioritising the local casework over the legislative and scrutiny aspects of their role.

This may be because MPs with longer residency have more experience with casework over the years of building their local profile and their campaign. Casework has been a familiar, successful, and core element to their election, and therefore they feel it should remain a priority. It may also be the case that they believe there is an expectation among their constituents that the high level of casework service from the campaign is continued.

This difference in behaviour is however less apparent when measured in relation to MPs' selection dates; those who were selected as candidates three or more years prior the election report spending 28% of their time on constituency casework compared 25% to those who were selected closer to the election. So while the length of candidacy prior to election may be a factor in the prioritisation of constituency work, it appears to be less significant than the length of time an MP has lived in the area.

These findings also suggest that the public's stated preference for a 'local' candidate may have some basis in their experience (or expectation) of their MPs' service for the constituency.

Work priorities

The new MPs prioritise championing their constituency in Parliament and helping individual constituents as the highest of their work priorities, followed by their parliamentary responsibilities to scrutinise legislation and hold the government to account.

There is little variation in the views of new MPs in this regard, although Labour MPs rate 'holding the government to account' above 'scrutinising legislation', which is not surprising given their position as the

Opposition.

The Hansard Society produces an annual *Audit of Political Engagement*, based on opinion poll research, which tracks the public's interest and knowledge of politics, the political activities they engage in and their views on the political system. In the aftermath of the expenses crisis, the 2010 *Audit* asked the public what tasks they thought MPs spent their time doing and what they would like them to do.²

The priorities of the new MPs correspond fairly closely to the stated preferences of the public, with constituency

Figure 5: New MPs' work priorities

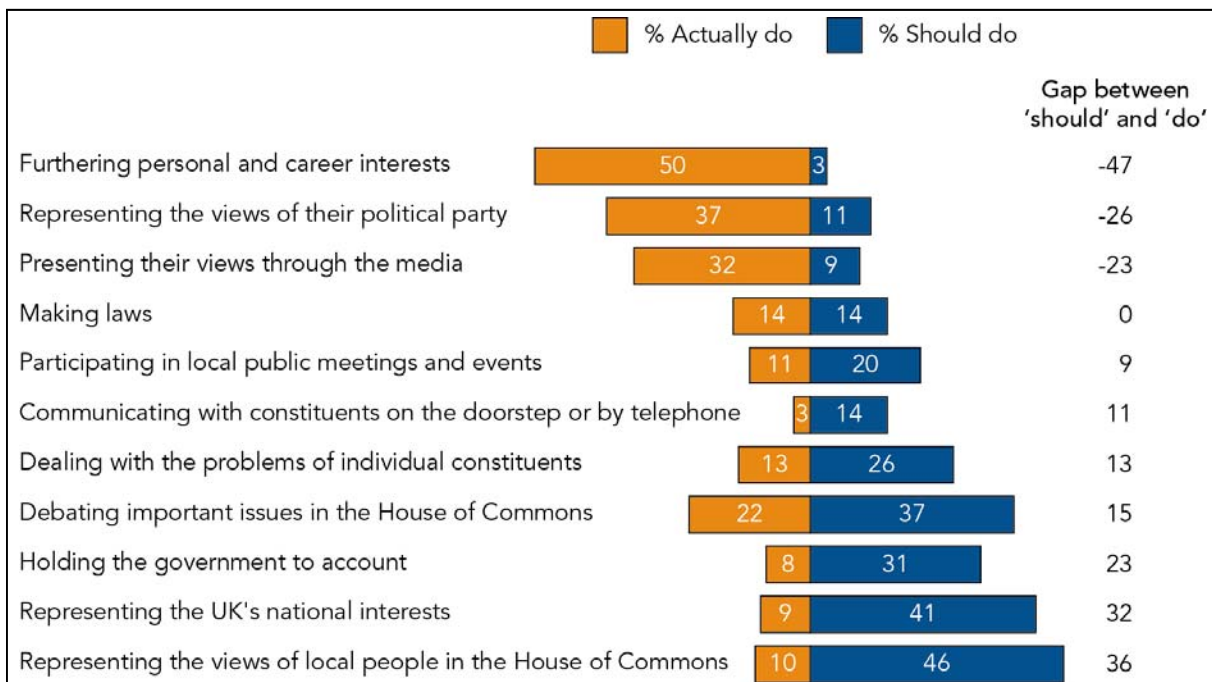
| Q. How would you rank the following aspects of your job as an MP in order of priority? | |
|--|----------------|
| | Ranking (mean) |
| Championing constituency in Parliament | 2.04 |
| Helping individual constituents | 2.10 |
| Scrutinising legislation | 4.00 |
| Holding the government to account | 4.13 |
| Local campaigning | 5.06 |
| Supporting the party | 5.42 |
| Commenting on political or constituency issues in the media | 6.06 |
| National campaigning | 7.12 |

Survey 1, August 2010, n=51-52

Figure 6: Public views on the ways MPs should and do spend their time

Q. Which two or three, if any, do you feel are the most important ways that MPs should spend their time?

Q. Which two or three, if any, do you feel that most MPs spend their time doing?



Source: *Audit of Political Engagement 7*. Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

representation in Parliament the number one priority. Towards the bottom of both scales is an MP's role in supporting their party and presenting their views through the media. However, it is clear from the Audit survey that the public do not believe MPs actually organise their working time in these ways.

If MPs in general are prioritising the aspects of their roles that the public most desire, it suggests that there is a serious communications failure on the part of politicians and the political system. The national media must take a share of the blame for their overwhelmingly negative coverage of politicians, but given that it is local casework that the public want to see MPs actively engaged in, it is local media and politicians themselves that are central to tackling the public's misperceptions. However, in light of the decline of local media and the removal of the Communication Allowance following the MPs' expenses review, this challenge has become greater. For the good of the political system, and the public's trust and engagement with it, these communication issues must be addressed.

Voting priorities

The new MPs consider that their actions and their votes in Parliament should be most often determined by their election pledges and party manifesto promises,

their own views, those of the party whips and of their constituents. The least influential factors are public sentiment, the views of interest groups and lobbyists and the media.

Figure 7: Voting priorities

| Q. To what extent do you expect your actions and voting in Parliament to be influenced by: | 'Always' or 'often' |
|--|---------------------|
| Your party manifesto promises | 98% |
| Your local election pledges | 98% |
| Your personal opinion | 96% |
| Your party whips | 91% |
| Your constituents | 89% |
| Your local party members | 70% |
| Your fellow MPs | 56% |
| Public sentiment | 39% |
| Charities/interest groups/ lobbyists | 26% |
| The media | 13% |

Survey 1, August 2010, n=54-57

Communications and technology

Modern communication technologies are being widely used by the new MPs. All use email as part of their work; 98% have a website and 72% report using mobile phone text-messaging for work purposes. Almost two-thirds (65%) use Facebook, half (51%) use Twitter, and 38% have a blog. These figures suggest that new MPs are making significantly greater use of these communication tools than MPs in the last Parliament.³

Facebook and Twitter are more popular

Figure 8: Incoming communication

| Estimated % of casework/communications received by: | Total | Conservative | Labour |
|---|-------|--------------|--------|
| Email | 49% | 50% | 44% |
| Post | 21% | 23% | 18% |
| Telephone | 17% | 14% | 21% |
| Surgery/meetings | 9% | 9% | 11% |
| Websites/social media | 4% | 3% | 6% |
| Fax | * | * | * |

Survey 1, August 2010, n=56-57.

* = Value less than 1% but greater than zero

among new Labour MPs (72% and 61% take-up respectively) than Conservative ones (66% and 50%), while Conservatives are more inclined to blog (45% compared to 33% of new Labour MPs).

Underlining the importance of digital technologies is the finding that MPs report receiving half (49%) of all their communications and casework by email. Conservatives are slightly more likely to be contacted by email and letter than Labour MPs, who receive a greater proportion by telephone.

THE PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCE

Satisfaction with Parliament

Overall the new MPs are largely satisfied with the way that Parliament operates. More than 90% are satisfied with select committees, the second reading stage of bills, the business in Westminster Hall, urgent questions and ministerial statements.

The focus of their discontent is Early Day Motions (EDMs). Seventy per cent of the new MPs are dissatisfied with EDMs. The sitting hours of the House of Commons (51%) and Private Members' Bill procedures (43%) are the next most common sources of complaint.

Although the new Backbench Business Committee now provides an outlet by which a well-supported motion can be put forward for debate, these findings suggest that the long-standing questions about the value of EDMs and their integration with the business of Parliament still need to be addressed. In relation to the sitting hours of the House of Commons, the Procedure Committee is currently undertaking a review,⁴ and the Hansard Society has recently proposed a series of reforms to improve the Private Members' Bill process.⁵

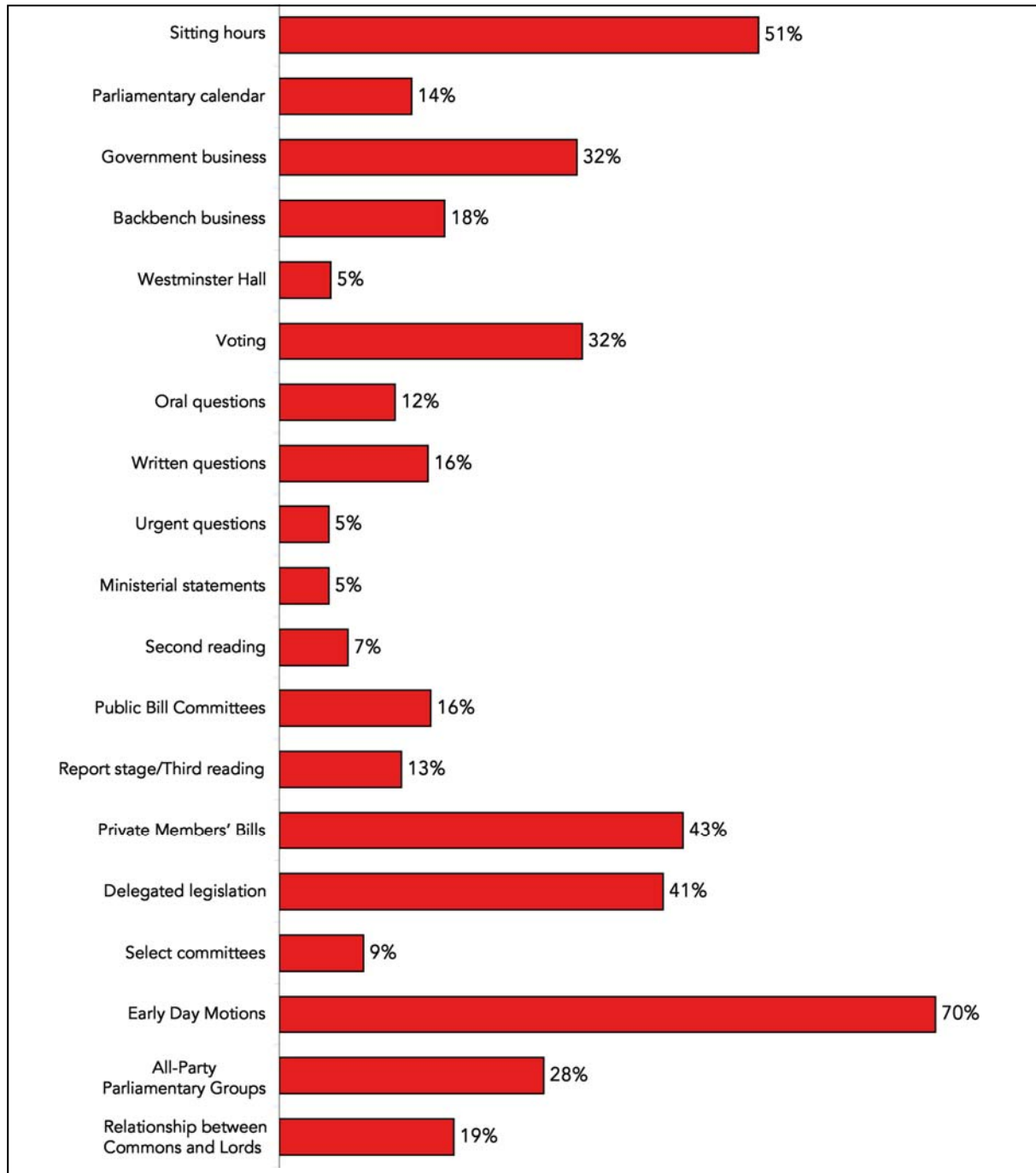
Impact on personal life

The long working hours and the division of time between Westminster and their

Figure 9: Satisfaction with how Parliament works

Q. How satisfied are you with the operation of the following aspects of the work of the House of Commons?

'Not very satisfied' or 'not at all satisfied'



Survey 2, March 2010, n=54-57

constituencies have a significant effect on the personal and family lives of the new MPs. Almost all the MPs responding to the survey reported real difficulties:

"Thank goodness my wife is supportive and I have no children. I have virtually no life of my own now."

"Personal life? It's devastating"

"I have no leisure time. I rarely see my family. It is very hard. I work all the time, even at home"

"What personal/family life?"

There is a strong sense that many of the new MPs find the lifestyle attached to the job to be overwhelming, although some acknowledge that they expected the challenges and went into the job with their eyes open. Nonetheless they identify loss of family time, communication with friends, financial hardship, and ill-health as real and detrimental consequences of becoming an MP. Perceptive remarks about these challenges included:

"The job is without boundaries and extremely difficult to switch off"

"Need to establish more work/life balance"

"Public doesn't recognise an MP has a personal life, so unsympathetic"

The MPs' expenses crisis opened up an important debate about the role and function of an MP which has not been satisfactorily resolved. Effective MPs are needed in order for Parliament and our system of representative democracy to function successfully. These findings – that the new MPs are working long hours to the detriment of their personal and family lives – raise questions as to whether the current systems and modes of working are the most appropriate and effective. It underscores the need for a review of the role of MPs not just to build an improved political system but for the very well-being of MPs themselves.

Aspirations

At the start of the Parliament, 82% of the new MPs aspired to make politics a long-term career, with new female MPs (90%) and Conservatives (84%) more likely to say this than male and Labour MPs (both 77%). A final survey to mark the end of their first year will assess whether they have reconsidered, in light of more experience and the reported impact on their personal lives.

Just over half (55%) of the new MPs aspire to become a minister. Given their party is in government, it is perhaps unsurprising that Conservatives (70%) are more likely to say this than Labour MPs (39%). Male MPs (63%) and those aged under 40

(69%) are more likely to seek ministerial office than female MPs (44%) and those over 40 years old (40%). That more of the new female MPs want to make politics a long term career than men, and yet fewer aspire to ministerial office, suggests that male and female MPs may have differing perspectives on their role and their reasons for entering Parliament.

The most early anticipated aspects to the role of an MP are working in all-party groups and on select committees, with 98% and 87% of the new MPs keen to get involved with these at the start of the year.

NEXT STEPS

These interim findings provide an early insight into the lives of the new MPs and the challenges they face. They are working long hours, balancing many competing priorities, for less money and to the detriment of their personal lives. And yet most look to make politics a long-term career.

This complicated picture will be examined in greater detail in the final report, which will cover the following themes:

From candidate to MP: What were the first few days and weeks like for new Members – from the moment their result

is confirmed at their local constituency count through to arriving at the Palace of Westminster for the first time, to getting set up with computers, an office and staff? What do new Members think of their orientation and induction? What sources of support did Members rely on as a candidate and then as an MP? How do Members manage the work life balance and what impact, particularly financial, has being a candidate and then an MP had on them and their family?

Skills and experience: What political and professional experience have new Members had prior to entering Parliament? What skills do they think have been transferable from previous employment? Where are the gaps and how can they best be remedied?

Working practices and innovation: How do the new MPs approach the practicalities of the role? Have they developed any different or innovative working practices? How have they set up their office arrangements? Are they noticeably more IT literate than past intakes and has Parliament been able to meet their needs as a result? What do they think of IPSA and the expenses system – is it providing sufficient support to carry out their multi-faceted role?

Legislator, scrutineer, constituency representative: How do new Members view their priorities and obligations, both local and national? How do they balance the competing demands and challenges posed by their multi-faceted role? Where do they seek advice and support from to assist them with these roles – e.g. from their party, their constituency, friends and family etc.?

Hopes, expectations and fulfilment: What goals do new MPs have coming in to Parliament? How do they anticipate doing the job of an MP? To what extent have initial hopes and expectations measured up to reality?

Perspectives on Parliament: What are their reflections on the workings of Parliament and its procedures? How well do they think it engages with external organisations, the media and the public? What changes do they believe are required?

Ongoing support: How can the House of Commons administration (or other external bodies) best support the new MPs in relation to their work in the future?

RESEARCH DETAILS

This briefing paper represents a selected summary of interim findings from the Hansard Society's *A Year in the Life 2010: From member of public to Member of Parliament* research, based on analysis of two surveys of the new MPs. The final report, supplemented with a third survey, interviews and discussion groups and additional research will be published toward the end of 2011.

One quarter of the 232 new MPs⁶ replied to each survey, and approximately half of these answered both.

- Survey 1 was distributed in August 2010 and received 59 responses (25.4% of the new MPs).
- Survey 2 was distributed in March 2011 and received 57 responses (24.6% of the new MPs).

The proportions of male and female respondents, and Labour and Conservative Members were broadly representative of the new MPs elected at the general election.

Surveys were distributed in hard copy and returned by post or fax, or alternatively could be completed online.

Figure 10: Gender breakdown of survey responses

| Gender | Survey 1 | | Survey 2 | | May 2010 intake | |
|-----------------|----------|-------|----------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| Male | 36 | 65.5% | 31 | 72.0% | 159 | 68.2% |
| Female | 19 | 34.6% | 19 | 38.0% | 74 | 31.8% |
| Did not specify | 2 | n/a | 7 | n/a | - | - |
| Total | 59 | | 57 | | 232 | |

Figure 11: Party breakdown of survey responses

| Party | Survey 1 | | Survey 2 | | May 2010 intake | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| Conservatives | 34 | 59.6% | 31 | 60.8% | 148 | 63.5% |
| Labour | 18 | 31.6% | 14 | 27.5% | 68 | 29.2% |
| Liberal Democrats | 2 | 3.5% | 4 | 7.8% | 10 | 4.3% |
| Other | 3 | 5.3% | 2 | 3.9% | 6 | 2.6% |
| Did not specify | 2 | n/a | 6 | n/a | - | - |
| Total | 59 | | 57 | | 232 | |

Full details of all survey questions and research methodology will be available in the final publication.

ENDNOTES

¹ Based on London average weekly wage of £642 in 2009-10 and assuming 52 weeks' employment in a year. By comparison the national average weekly wage of £499 works out to an average wage of £25,950. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ccinugget.asp?id=285>.

² Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), p.93.

³ A. Williamson (2009), *MPs Online: Connecting with constituents* (London: Hansard Society).

⁴ House of Commons Procedure Committee, *Sittings of the House inquiry*, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/procedure-committee/news/sittings-of-the-house-inquiry/>

⁵ A. Brazier & R. Fox (2011), *Enhancing the Role of Backbench MPs: Proposals for Reform of Private Members' Bills* (London: Hansard Society).

⁶ This includes five returning Members who had previously been elected but subsequently lost their seats. The surveys do not include the new Members elected in by-elections in 2011.



HANSARD
SOCIETY