

INTERPARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY REPORT

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INTERPARLIAMENTARY VISIT AND STUDY TOUR TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

Host	Scottish Parliament and UK Parliament
Location	Edinburgh and London
Dates	June 17 to 26, 2025
Activity Type	Interparliamentary Visit and Study Tour
Participants	2 Members of the Legislative Assembly, 1 Assembly support staff

PARTICIPANTS

- Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
- Lorne Doerkson, MLA, Assistant Deputy Speaker
- Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

PROGRAM SUMMARY

An official visit to the United Kingdom, encompassing the UK Parliament (House of Commons and House of Lords) and the Scottish Parliament, provided an opportunity to foster interparliamentary diplomacy and institutional learning through direct engagement with Presiding Officers, Members, parliamentary clerks, senior officials and subject-matter experts.

The British Columbia delegation explored comparative practices on issues, reforms and initiatives of mutual interest. The size of the Scottish Parliament, and its devolved jurisdictional responsibilities, provides a useful, comparable model for the Legislative Assembly British Columbia, while the historic ties with the UK Parliament provide a common framework for procedural practice and organizational initiatives, including tested innovations which can be scaled and adapted to other institutions. The visit highlighted the vibrant and innovative parliamentary cultures of the Scottish and UK Parliaments, with many initiatives aligned to recent or planned initiatives at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

This report summarizes information and observations from meetings focused on infrastructure renewal, election transition, public engagement, and procedural practices.

Institutional Renewal and Planning

Scottish Parliament

The Scottish parliamentary estate comprises six interconnected buildings (opened in 2004). While relatively modern, the Parliament is taking proactive steps to ensure its spaces are inclusive and accessible. A full accessibility audit is underway, evaluating physical and cultural barriers for diverse communities, including those suffering from dementia, trans communities and visually impaired visitors. Security provisions are visible and robust.

UK Parliament

At Westminster, building renewal is widely seen as a primary institutional challenge. The need to restore the deteriorating Palace of Westminster is urgent, yet consensus has not yet been reached on a specific approach to address infrastructure needs. Officials estimate current maintenance costs exceed £400 million annually. A full decant is widely acknowledged as the safest and most cost-effective option. Meetings underscored the need to depoliticize long-term infrastructure planning and seek a renewal mandate that transcends any one Parliament.

The Palace of Westminster, largely rebuilt between 1840-1876, faces serious structural deterioration, including asbestos, fire risks, and falling masonry. The Restoration and Renewal Programme is considering three main options:

- Full decant: Evacuate both Houses for 12–20 years (safe and most cost-effective).
- Partial decant: House of Lords to relocate temporarily; House of Commons to stay—more expensive and disruptive.
- Rolling maintenance: In-place upgrades over 80 years—high risk and cost.

A detailed business case is expected by the end of 2025. Restoration is expected to require thousands of skilled tradespeople annually and is being framed as a national workforce and heritage project. The aim is to embed decision making on this large and complex project into long-term institutional planning and remove it from short-term pressures.

Key Takeaways

- Long term infrastructure planning and renewal are a complex undertaking stretching over a significant period. Wherever possible, such efforts should be regularly and proactively managed, with a mandate beyond a single electoral term.
- Accessibility and inclusion are central to modern parliamentary design.
- Public support is an essential consideration, thereby requiring project transparency and a sensitivity to preserving building heritage as well as parliamentary functions and operations.

Election Transitions and Member Orientation

Scottish Parliament

With elections due in May 2026, many of the 129 MSPs have already announced their decision to not seek re-election, the Parliament is planning early for a major transition with a view to both structural and procedural continuity. Induction programming is being designed to support both new and returning MSPs, with a focus on institutional memory, procedural rigour, Member conduct and a new emphasis on mental wellness.

UK Parliament

Following the 2019 election, which resulted in 335 new MPs, the House of Commons enhanced onboarding through its the Centre of Excellence for Procedural Practice. The orientation induction programmed included:

- Chamber walkthroughs and procedural briefings
- Plain-language procedural resources
- Role-specific training for Members and constituency staff
- Integration with party Whips for ongoing procedural briefings for Members and staff

Members' staff also now receive tailored onboarding supports, and Members' formal oath can be administered in multiple languages.

Orientation induction also includes a new integrated program focused on mental health and wellness, occupational health services, preventative health supports, workplace assessments, clinical counselling to all 10,000 individuals working on the Parliamentary Estate. An emphasis on trauma informed services and supports is also geared towards constituency work. It is an evidence-based protocol utilizing peer to peer support in many cases. Such services reflect lessons learned following serious security incidents in recent years.

Key Takeaways

- Early, phased, and tailored induction increases procedural confidence and effectiveness of orientation programming. Small group formats are most effective for procedural briefings.
- Supporting Members and staff is important throughout the Parliament, but particularly crucial during periods of high turnover.

Public Engagement and Democratic Inclusion

Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament has enhanced traditional public education efforts toward relational, inclusive public engagement, emphasizing work with underrepresented communities. Key programs include:

- Community-based regional visits to Scotland's 8 regions, led by the Presiding Officer
- Participation and Communities Team coordination with parliamentary business, such as parliamentary committee inquiries and petitions. Committees share draft committee reports and seek initial public feedback prior to finalizing reports.
- Outreach events hosted by the Scottish Parliament include a Communities Conference held in the Chamber with representatives of non-profit, local and regional organizations and an annual Festival of Politics, featuring diverse speakers and public dialogue

Engagement is framed not as a one-off or one-way consultation, but a two-way exchange or partnership, Outreach and engagement to young people occurs through schools and youth programming in alignment with commitments in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UK Parliament

The House of Commons' Education and Engagement Team delivers outreach to 70,000 students annually and coordinates UK Parliament Week, reaching thousands of schools.

The Chamber Engagement Team also supports digital engagement efforts, including a robust e-petitions system, where petitions with 100,000 signatures are debated and others (from 5,000) receive formal responses. Petitioners receive follow-up and thematic feedback post-debate.

Outreach efforts now focus on citizenship values, not just democratic processes.. A new partnership with the Department for Education is being considered in light of efforts to review and strengthen civics education curriculum.

Key Takeaways

- Public engagement is an essential and dynamic element of a healthy democratic institution.
- Youth engagement must be experiential, values-driven, and responsive.

- Integration with Members' work and parliamentary business (e.g., committee hearings, petitions) strengthens engagement effectiveness.

Parliamentary Practices and Procedural Services

Scottish Parliament

Debate at Holyrood is structured to provide numerous opportunities for MSPs to seek information from Ministers includes various formats: topical, general and departmental questions.

The Parliamentary Bureau (Presiding Officer + caucus representatives for those with 5+ MSPs) schedules House business and committee work. The Conveners Group coordinates committee planning and public engagement for committees.

UK Parliament

The Centre for Procedural Practice helps Members and staff navigate the procedural aspects of the House of Commons, including:

- A practical 'how to' Members' Guide to Procedure (distinct from the historic and legal context within Erskine May) is available in print and electronic formats
- Modernization Committee efforts to improve accessibility (e.g., plain language, formats for visually impaired Members)
- Tailored support for smaller opposition parties and MPs with unique accessibility needs

Like the Scottish Parliament, a variety of questions, including departmental and topical questions and statements are offered regularly. Prime Minister's Questions are also held weekly.

Interventions during debate remain a key feature at Westminster. While they require the Member in possession of the floor to consent, interventions are seen to enhance debate quality and allow for clarification in real-time.

Key Takeaways

- A variety of structured debate opportunities seek to provide balance and encourage dynamic debates.
- Continuous, tailored procedural education is essential, especially post-election.
- New emphasis on developing accessible procedural documentation to strengthen Members procedural knowledge.

Conclusion

Both the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament demonstrate a commitment to:

- Modernizing parliamentary infrastructure, while preserving heritage, and supporting accessibility and safety
- Supporting Members with tailored, practical onboarding programs
- Deepening relational public engagement
- Enhancing procedural practices, supports and tools

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia may draw inspiration from these practices, especially in informing the development of a new public engagement plan, renewal of procedural orientation and resources, and planning for long term infrastructure renewal and accessibility.

EXPENSE

The following combined expenses are for all participants.

Travel Expenses	\$28,609.09
Conference Fees	Nil
Subsidy	Nil
Total	\$28,609.09