REPORT OF THE 42ND CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

SUNDAY 10 TO THURSDAY 14 JUNE 2012

CONFERENCE THEME: MAKING PARLIAMENTS RELEVANT
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONDAY 11 JUNE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPENING CERENOMY</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLENARY SESSION ONE: PREVENTATIVE SPEND</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLENARY SESSION TWO: ‘THERE IS NO MONEY’: THE IRISH EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUESDAY 12 JUNE</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLENARY SESSION FOUR: IS THE MEDIA TAKING DEMOCRACY TO NEW AUDIENCES?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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- Abigail Bremner
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- Sean Wixted

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- John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, Scottish Government
- Roberta Blackman-Woods MP
- John Carnochan QPM, FFPH, Detective Chief Superintendent, Director, Scottish Violence Reduction Unit
- Ailsa McKay, Professor of Economics at Glasgow Caledonian University
- Dr Philip Wilson, Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow
Art O'Leary, Secretary to the Constitutional Convention (Ireland)
Sir William Patey KCMG
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INTRODUCTION

The 42nd Conference of the British Isles and Mediterranean Region, of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, took place at the Scottish Parliament from 10 to 14 June 2012. The Conference, which was held at the Scottish Parliament, was hosted by the CPA Scotland Branch.

Fifty seven delegates attended the conference from the following CPA Branches: Alderney, Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Northern Ireland, Scotland, St Helena, United Kingdom and Wales.

The theme for the Conference was 'Making Parliaments Relevant'. Over the course of the conference, the relevance of Parliaments in the 21st Century was considered within the context of reducing financial resources, geo-political change and developments in the media.

Delegates arrived on Sunday 10 June and were welcomed to the Scottish Parliament by the Members of the CPA Scotland Branch who hosted an informal welcome dinner for delegates. The Members of the CPA Scotland Branch are Patricia Ferguson MSP, Margaret Mitchell MSP, Tavish Scott MSP and Sandra White MSP. Prior to the informal dinner, delegates were addressed by Margaret Mitchell MSP and the Clerk / Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament, Paul Grice.

The report of the conference is based upon the record of the conference sessions taken by scribes present at each session. It is important to note that the record of the sessions presented here do not represent a verbatim account of the sessions but rather an overview of the main themes covered by the presenters, as recorded by the scribes.
MONDAY 11 JUNE

The first day of the 42nd BIMR Conference began with an Opening Ceremony followed by a range of sessions dealing with the theme for day one of the conference of Preventative Spend.

OPENING CEREMONY

The Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, and President of the CPA Scotland Branch, formally opened the Conference and welcomed delegates to the Scottish Parliament. The theme of the conference, of ‘Making Parliament’s Relevant’ which would be considered by delegates, was highlighted by the Presiding Officer, in the context of a rapidly changing and turbulent economic and political environment. The role of the CPA as a forum for exchange of experience and knowledge between Parliamentarians was emphasised as a key benefit of participation within the CPA. The Presiding Officer finished her opening remarks by wishing delegates well in considering these issues over the course of the conference.

Pupils from Tollcross Primary School (pictured overleaf) then performed the following traditional Scottish songs, in Gaelic, for delegates:

**Fhathast na mo Dhùisg**

_The song is a translation of the Burns Song, Ay Waukin O_

Ciò Mhic Ille Mhìcheil:
A Jacobite song by the Gaelic Bard Alexander MacDonald (Alistar Mac Mhaighstir Alastair)

Mac a' Chonail & Mise Nise air an Taobh ud

A modern Puirt a Beul (mouth music) song about Billy Connolly, by Eilidh MacKenzie.

Delegates were then addressed by John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, Scottish Government, who spoke on behalf of the First Minister and Vice-President of the CPA Scotland Branch, Alex Salmond MSP. Delegates then heard from Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, who spoke on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, British Isles and Mediterranean Region. Following these speeches, pupils from Craigentinny Primary School, pictured overleaf, performed the following traditional Scottish songs:

Now the sun is shining by Peter Michel

Two pieces from A Sports Cantata by Tom Cunningham - Rowing and Going for Gold.
The Presiding Officer then formally closed the Opening Ceremony. The ‘official photograph’ of the delegates was taken following the Opening Ceremony with the Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick MSP, John Swinney MSP and Roberta Blackman-Woods MP pictured in front of the delegates (see below).
PLENARY SESSION ONE: PREVENTATIVE SPEND

The first formal Plenary Session of the Conference, which was chaired by the Presiding Officer in the Chamber of the Scottish Parliament, discussed the theme for day one of the conference of preventative spend. The delegates were addressed by a panel of four speakers after which a question and answer session was held. The speakers for the session, pictured below, were:

- John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, Scottish Government;
- John Carnochan QPM, FFPH, Detective Chief Superintendent, Director, Scottish Violence Reduction Unit;
- Ailsa McKay, Professor of Economics at Glasgow Caledonian University; and
- Dr Philip Wilson, Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow.

Mr Swinney began proceedings by commenting on the positive impact of the work of the Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee and of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services in advancing the principles of preventative spend within the Scottish public policy environment. He observed that the Scottish Government had established three ‘Change Funds’ to encourage change in practice and encourage different approaches to the delivery of public services. The funds are focussed upon care services, in particular care for the elderly, early years and reducing re-offending. In general, the Scottish Government’s approach is intended to interrupt and stop problems before they crystallise as burdens upon the public purse.
The Cabinet Secretary highlighted two challenges facing the Scottish Government and the public sector more generally. Firstly, the need to secure the necessary leadership, across the public sector, to secure an agenda that delivers change in our communities. Secondly, that the public sector is facing an acute public spending challenge, in addition to demographic and other social pressures, which mean that the pace of change must be intensified in order to ensure the maximum impact. Preventative spend has a key role in meeting this challenge. As an example of the financial benefits which could accrue, to the public purse, from a preventative approach, the Cabinet Secretary highlighted that the cost of incarceration of an individual is about £40,000 per annum. In contrast, rehabilitation of first-time offender costs around £1,500 whilst for every £1 spent on early years intervention saves £9 later.

Mr Carnochan considered the use of a preventative approach with regard to violence reduction. Reflecting on 38 years of experience as a police officer, he noted that the police deal with situations once an individual has reached crisis point. In effect, he described the police force as the service of last resort. He also noted the inter-generation nature of problems such as violence. For Mr Carnochan, the solution to reducing violence in Scottish society lay not in financial resources alone, but rather in changing the way in which public services operate through encouraging co-ordination and consensus of approach across public service providers. In particular, he identified a three-pronged preventative approach to reduce violent offending involving primary prevention through supporting parents, secondary prevention within schools and lastly, tertiary prevention for young people, principally men, who are already in prison.

Mr Carnochan concluded his comments by stressing the connected nature of issues such as violence. The public service response, in consequence, had to be similarly joined-up and nimble in order to address these issues. For Mr Carnochan an outcomes based approach provided the means for doing that. He also noted that, as a person who was accustomed to a ‘Command and Control’ environment, that the current pace of change is very slow and that Parliamentarians had a responsibility to attempt to increase that pace of change.

Professor McKay highlighted the negative impact of inequality, in particular gender inequality, upon economic performance. This, she noted, was reflected in the, now, routine publication of equalities statements as part of budget documents thereby highlighting the link between spending decisions and outcomes. Professor McKay agreed with earlier presenters on emphasising the need to speed up the pace of change and stressing that there was no room for complacency.

Current economic circumstances were depicted by Professor McKay as having a particularly deleterious impact upon outcomes for women. In particular, the large proportion of women who were employed in the public sector were facing particularly bleak outcomes as a result of welfare and pension changes and a two-year wage freeze in the public sector. Professor McKay emphasised that the Scottish labour market continued to exhibit significant patterns of occupational segregation and discriminatory pay structures. She concluded by issuing a challenge to political
leaders to ask what the Scottish economy would truly look like if it reflected the unique skills, characters and values of all Scotland’s people.

Lastly, Dr Philip Wilson considered the issue of preventative spend from the perspective of a General Practitioner, and researcher, whose interest lay in the field of young children’s health and welfare. Dr Wilson cited a range of studies, including by the Nobel prize winning economist James Heckman, that demonstrated that investment in disadvantaged young children provides the best return that any Government can get. However, it was emphasised that if a Government does decide to back early intervention policies then a political commitment to supporting these programmes over the long-term must exist. Dr Wilson noted that there are not many votes in early intervention, that young mothers’ will not march on Parliament demanding better support services and that there is no immediate payback from spending to support the youngest children.

A range of work has been undertaken on early intervention, in Scotland, in recent years. In particular, Dr Wilson highlighted work by the Finance and Public Petitions Committees of the Scottish Parliament and the role of the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy, which is jointly funded by the UK Medical Research Council and the Scottish Government. Philip concluded his presentation by citing a 2009 House of Commons Select Committee report which concluded that millions of pounds have been spent on reducing health inequalities but that nothing has been learned. Dr Wilson suggested that among the many reasons for this, a key reason was that whilst there have been countless policy initiatives, systems to evaluate their effectiveness tended not to have been put in place. Ensuring that all policies are properly evaluated would be a key means of ensuring better value for money.

PLENARY SESSION TWO: ‘THERE IS NO MONEY’: THE IRISH EXPERIENCE

The second Plenary Session of the conference, heard from Mr Art O’Leary, on the Irish Experience of dealing with reduced financial resources within a Parliamentary setting. Mr O’Leary is currently the Secretary to the Constitutional Convention in the Republic of Ireland and prior to this was Director of Committees, Information and Communication within the Houses of Oireachtas (the Parliament of the Republic of Ireland). Plenary session 2 was chaired by Sandra White MSP (pictured with Art O’Leary on the next page).

Mr O’Leary began by noting the severity of the financial situation had been in the Republic of Ireland and commented that the backdrop to the approach taken by the Irish Parliament was that ‘we all partied – now here comes the hangover’. The Oireachtas has saved €60m over the last 3 years including a 12% reduction in staff numbers and a 25% decline in expenses and allowances.
At the initial onset of the crisis, the image of politicians and Parliament dropped significantly. In response, the Irish Parliament decided to focus its activities to ensure that Parliament is efficient and equipped to tackle the challenges that face the society. A new impetus developed emphasising the need to do things differently in order to save money with staff being told that there was no such thing as a bad idea. Examples of actions undertaken included: staff adopting a ‘can-do’ attitude, the printing of documents being dramatically reduced with printing only happening on-demand; and, the introduction of paperless committees.

Mr O’Leary summarised the experience by noting that Parliaments’ are not immune to the need for cost-cutting and that Members’ need to be clear about what services they need, as opposed to those that they would like to have. As officials there was a clear need to create and communicate a vision and to agree a binding coalition with Members in order to implement that vision.

**TUESDAY 12 JUNE**

The second day of the conference consisted of two plenary sessions. The first considered geo-political developments in the Middle East and the second involved discussions around developments in the interaction between the media and politics with particular reference to the social media. Both sessions considered the broader theme for the day of considering the impact of broader geo-political and technological changes were impacting upon politics and Parliamentarians.
PLENARY SESSION THREE: POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY – AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ – GENUINE CHANGE OR BUSINESS AS USUAL?

The presenter for Plenary session three was Sir William Patey, KCMG. Sir William recently retired from the Diplomatic Service, which he joined in 1975, from his most recent posting as Ambassador to Afghanistan. Previous postings had included Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Afghanistan whilst Sir William also served as Head of the Middle East Department within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The session was chaired by Margaret Mitchell MSP who is pictured with Sir William Patey below.

Sir William discussed the issue of political change in the Middle East, as the region with which he is most familiar, and began by noting that that attacks on 9/11 marked a paradigm shift in politics in the Middle East. In particular, he emphasised that since 9/11 it had become apparent that the threat of US power was a much more potent weapon than its actual use. As a result of using military force, US influence has been diminished in the Middle East.

On Afghanistan, Sir William noted that Afghanistan has a long history of corruption and an absence of democracy with the new Institutions in Afghanistan being required to have a considerable period of time to develop. In terms of the Arab Spring, Sir William observed that the dictatorships in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia had used the fear of Islam as a means of suppressing democracy. Now, however, Islamic parties are in government and will be held to account as long as the democratic institutions are strong. On a similar note, Sir William commented, in relation to Iraq, that it is not until a third election, and the possibility of a change of government, that democracy begins to take hold.
Overall, he considered that whilst the initial signs are encouraging in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, the introduction of elections are only a small part of a wider process. Without strong independent institutions such as electoral commissions, independent courts and a free press, elections on their own will not deliver true democracy. Of fundamental importance is that armed militias are disbanded, as it is essential that a truly democratic government has a monopoly of power to provide security for its citizens.

In conclusion, Sir William considered that there are decades of struggle ahead in the Middle East to ensure that democracy lays down firm roots. We should remember that democracy in the United Kingdom took 800 years from the Magna Carta to universal suffrage. We need to give those countries currently undergoing change, time, patience and support and a bit of room and tolerance. In particular, we should not judge them by a standard that we never met.

PLENARY SESSION FOUR: IS THE MEDIA TAKING DEMOCRACY TO NEW AUDIENCES?

Plenary session four aimed to provide an international dimension to discussions on how the media report the deliberations of Parliaments and how the role of the media is changing. In addition, it also explored strategies by which Parliaments can best connect, via the media, to engage with audiences that traditionally do not engage with formal politics. The session was split into two parts. Part One heard from three experts, from a variety of backgrounds, who could offer alternative perspectives on developments in the media. The speakers, who are pictured below, were:

- John McAllion, former MSP;
- Bill Jamieson, Executive Editor of The Scotsman; and
- Carol Madison Graham, Freelance Consultant and Author
Part Two, of Plenary Session 4, involved a presentation from Dr Dimitrios Christopoulos, of the University of the West of England, considering the use of social media as a political campaigning tool.

Plenary Session 4 was chaired by Tavish Scott MSP.

**Mr John McAllion** opened proceedings, in Session 4, by posing a question namely, ‘Why despite an increase in the level of information from and communication by members of Parliament, has respect for Parliament and politicians declined?’ John emphasised that today all elected Members try harder than ever to connect with constituents citing traditional approaches such as holding constituency surgeries as well as featuring regularly in the local press and media. In addition, elected members are now heavily involved in local campaigns and they host websites and Facebook pages.

Mr McAllion emphasised the efforts that the Scottish Parliament had made to improve public access and to be open and transparent. However, with the advent of 24 hour news programmes and with the advent of Twitter and social media there is an increasing trend towards ignoring the good that politicians and Parliament do and towards sensationalising slips and wrongdoings. These developments would have horrified in the 1950s, however, the technology is here and it is not going away. The blame, Mr McAllion concluded, does not lie with the technology instead it is partly to do with what is done with the technology and partly about people’s expectations of it. Technology has, however, made it easier for everyone to fall out of love with Parliaments.
Mr Bill Jamieson considered the impact of new media upon print journalism and political debate more generally. Social media, Bill noted, has speeded up dissemination of news. The print news medium has been hit by a double whammy; it has lost circulation through the cyclical recession and through numbers of readers, in particular students, moving from buying newspapers to reading news online. As a result, many newspapers are now putting emphasis on building up digital editions.

Journalists, Bill commented, have a love-hate relationship with social media. Freelancers love it, and hope that their tweets will be picked up and a full article commissioned. Papers actively promote articles on social media sites and also use them to detect the flavour of opinion and to see what issues are attracting comment. There is a “carousel of opinion”, which is to say that there is a range of people and reviews that are given a voice by the opportunity to comment.

However, Mr Jamieson emphasised that there are issues around extending the audience through use of new social media — Twitter in particular — and in ensuring that ‘demonic’ people who shout the loudest are not given disproportionate credence. It is important that we take care not to treat what is being said by political tweeters as being representative of public opinion.

Bill concluded by observing that politicians should be careful of social media because it is easy to forget to take time to think, or to reflect, and thereby to get caught out by quickly made unguarded comments. Social media are no substitute for valuable face-to-face meetings. They are no substitute for the written word and the thought that goes into producing it in order to influence opinions, which is far better than a rant on a blog.

Lastly, in terms of the panel discussion for this session, Ms Carol Madison Graham, presented on the impact of the social media upon politics in the United States and, in particular, the use made of social media by President Barack Obama during the US Presidential election of 2008.

Ms Graham opened her remarks by highlighting that 85% of Americans share information online and 46% indicate that they get family information via mobile phones. One third of Americans are more comfortable sharing information online than they are sharing it in person. The most widely used social media are Facebook, Twitter and P-interest.

Turning to the 2008 US Presidential elections, Carol considered how President Obama had used social media, to make connections between people, in order to mobilise support. In particular, he connected friends using social media as a topic for discussion, and he connected people with similar interests by focusing on the specific areas of interest with relevant information. Obama used a wide range of social media including visual media, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Spotify, Flikr, Instagram, YouTube and blogs. Obama also made donating, to his campaign, relatively easy. He exhorted voters to stop complaining and to start owning their politicians by making small donations. Instead of campaigning negatively he answered back attacks from opponents by asking for donations from supporters.
Ms Graham considered that the key messages that came out for politicians were that they need to get to know the voter and their likes and dislikes, to utilise the media that the voters use and to use a range of social media. In addition, keeping a campaign exciting, substantive and positive helps to foster among citizens pride in the candidate.

**Dr Dimitrios Christopoulos** provided the closing presentation of Plenary Session 4. Dr Christopoulos began by noting that as a result of the extensive reach and 24/7 nature of communication via social media, there is increasing interest in the social media’s effectiveness and value as a political campaigning tool. In particular, the widespread use of social media in election campaigning in the United States is providing a fruitful area for academic study, and there is anecdotal evidence, at least, that social media can mobilise support that is vital in contests in which voter volatility is known to exist. For example, in the US elections, some 25% of voters did not make up their minds until the final week of the campaign, and many changed their minds in the final 36 hours before voting.

Dimitrios observed that, in a way that traditional broadcast media cannot do, social media can erode the sense of distance between a candidate and his or her target audience, and can create the illusion that there is a personal connection between people. The Obama campaign team successfully exploited that idea in 2008 and kept supporters updated on often quite personal and non-political information.

Dr Christopoulos emphasised that the nature of social ties and networks is crucial and it is the strength of the social connection that determines the extent to which a communication has value and influence. That means that the illusory connections that social media create may have less effect than might be expected. People are much more likely to take action as a result of the influence of genuine friends; the relatively weak ties that social media create might be enough to persuade someone to pass on a political marketing message, but are less likely to generate activism. In that context, Dr Christopoulos considered that the influence of social media on the events of the Arab spring has probably been overestimated, given the low prevalence of Twitter and Facebook in Arab countries.

Dimitrios concluded that it is clear that the social media’s viral nature and potential for agenda-setting is requiring political actors to respond, but what constitutes the most effective social-media campaigning is less clear. In order to harness the power of social media, targeting is essential, and a sophisticated understanding is required of the groups and individuals who are to be targeted.

In general, Dr Christopoulos took the view that it is clear that, as a political tool, social media supplements but does not supplant traditional methods of political campaigning. The need to generate salient political messages, and to introduce them successfully into the political discourse, while targeting messages at identified groups has not changed.

**WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE**
The last day of the 42nd BIMR Conference involved the delegates traveling to Glasgow to visit the venues for the 2014 Commonwealth Games, undertake a tour of Glasgow City Chambers and lastly attend the Closing Ceremony of the Conference. The day began by delegates visiting the offices of Glasgow 2014 Limited who are responsible for organising the 2014 Games. David Grevenberg, Chief Executive, delivered an informative and interesting presentation regarding preparations for the Games. This was followed by a lively question and answer session. Delegates were keen to learn about how they could assist in promoting the Games within their own jurisdictions and also to ascertain what plans were in place to ensure a legacy was left by the Games.

Delegates then proceeded to the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome which has been built specifically for the 2014 Games. They were welcomed to the Velodrome by Jonathan Shaw, General Manager, of the arena. Mr Shaw provided a tour of the complex which is located in the East End of Glasgow provides one of the most versatile and innovative structures of its type in Europe. Delegates were extremely impressed by the design and quality of the structure and considered the Velodrome to be a world class venue.

Upon completion of the visit to the Velodrome, delegates then transferred to Glasgow City Council chambers where they were provided with a tour of the building. Following the tour, the Deputy Lord Provost of Glasgow, Baillie Gerald Leonard, hosted a lunch for delegates. Speaker Stephen Rodan MHK, delivered a reply to the welcome address by the Deputy Lord Provost.

The delegates then attended the Closing Ceremony which was held in the Parish Halls in Glasgow. The delegates were addressed by Deputy Mike O’Hara from Guernsey and then the Conference was formally closed by Sandra White MSP.

Lastly, on the final evening of the Conference, a reception was held in the Garden Lobby followed by a dinner in the Members’ Restaurant of the Scottish Parliament. Both the reception and dinner were hosted by the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Tricia Marwick MSP. At the reception, delegates were addressed by the Presiding Officer and by Patricia Ferguson MSP (pictured below).