



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**REPORT OF THE VISIT BY THE PRESIDING OFFICER TO THE STATE
PARLIAMENT OF LOWER SAXONY, HANNOVER, GERMANY
THURSDAY 30 JUNE-SATURDAY 2 JULY 2022**

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Introduction

1. The Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, the Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, visited Hannover for meetings at the State Parliament of Lower Saxony on Friday 1 July 2022. This was the latest engagement in the strong relationship developed between both parliament in the last 3-4 years.

Purpose

2. The purpose of the visit was to discuss with Dr Gabriele Andretta MdL, the President of the State Parliament, a range of matters of interest to the Presiding Officer in her role. A number of these matters have been previously discussed in meetings between the previous and current Presiding Officer and the President.

3. The Presiding Officer is hugely grateful to everyone she met for their time and attention across all discussions and for sharing their thoughts and experiences on the core matters relevant to making parliaments work effectively. The warmth and friendships between Scotland and Lower Saxony was evident across the programme. The State Parliament was one of the legislatures considered as part of the Consultative Steering Group's *Checks and Balances* research in 1998 and which helped shape how the Scottish Parliament now works. As well as developing awareness and thinking on core aspects of how parliaments work, the visit met other outcomes in the Parliament's [International Strategy](#):

- enhance the Scottish Parliament's institutional and international reputation through the meetings with parliamentarians and policy thinkers; and
- support and promote, through the Scottish Parliament's participation, activities which could bring wider economic benefit and added value to Scotland

4. The cost of the visit was £1187.63 which covered the cost of travel, accommodation and incidental expenses for the Presiding Officer and two supporting members of staff.

Programme discussions

5. The visit programme is annexed. The following summarises key issues discussed across the various meetings.

How parliaments work

6. The tour of the Parliament building provided a practical opportunity for the Presiding Officer and President to discuss the approach to using the building as an event space, public access and tours, accessibility, artwork, accommodation within the building for use by MdLs and other issues of relevance to the Scottish Parliament.

7. The President and the Presiding Officer spent time in the Parliament Chamber. While there was no business that day this was an extremely useful opportunity for a discussion on some of the day to day issues which the Presiding Officer and President face when chairing proceedings. This included seating arrangements in the Chamber; how MdLs request to speak and make points of order, timing of speeches, IT systems in

the Chamber, maintaining impartiality, ensuring equal time allocations for speeches and across MdLs, maintaining respect in proceedings, responding to COVID (the Chamber had recently had its plastic screens removed which were installed in 2022), broadcasting and public access and many other matters relevant to the roles.



8. Given the unique role of a parliament Speaker, this meeting provided an informal and practical opportunity for the President and the Presiding Officer to discuss the challenges and many issues which are faced in chairing proceedings in a parliament chamber and to share their experiences and ideas. It was also interesting to hear about the different approaches taken to managing chamber proceedings.

City Hall

9. The Presiding Officer met with Belit Onay, Mayor of the City of Hannover and with the Mayoress, Monica Plate.

10. This provided an opportunity to discuss how the city continues to respond to the post COVID environment and what short and longer term impacts it might have. There was also discussion of the relationship between the City Hall and the wider regional government, the funding of local government services and the responsibility of the Mayor and City Hall in responding to the needs of people from Ukraine. There was also discussion around the international work and relationships of the city (a meeting of the international committee was taking place that afternoon in the city hall) and on the impact of climate change and the responses at a city level to this.

Education and outreach

11. This was something which was discussed previously as part of the relationship between both parliaments. When the President visited the Scottish Parliament in 2019 she was impressed with the education centre in the building and the proactive approach taken to working with schools.

12. This was an area which the President had pushed through a number of changes such as increasing the staff able to undertake this work, developing an education programme for schools in Lower Saxony and looking at how the Parliament itself can be more visible and relevant to people. There were examples given of concerts held in the Parliament building and of the Parliament having a presence at external events where young people in particular would be present. The Parliament now had a dedicated team of skilled staff dealing with this and the signs have been encouraging in terms of public responses.

13. There was also discussion around the increased social media presence which the President had pushed ahead with as a way to promoting and publicising the work of the organisation. Part of this approach was in not only publicising the parliamentary work, committee meetings, questions to Ministers etc but also of the building and what the organisation does. One example was the 'behind the scenes' which would show parts of the building not usually seen by the public.

14. A related aspect of this approach to making the organisation more open was changes made to the layout of the website through changes to colours, designs, images etc. This had contributed greatly to a more 'user friendly' looking website with easier to navigate pages.

15. While there is still work to be done by the State Parliament the Presiding Officer saw similarities in its intentions and aims in promoting the institution to that being done by the Scottish Parliament.

Birgit Honé, Minister for Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development

16. The Presiding Officer met the Minister when she visited Edinburgh in March 2022 as part of a larger visit headed by the Minister President of Lower Saxony. This engagement was to be a further opportunity to promote the wider friendship between Scotland and Lower Saxony and discuss a range of issues around the post-Brexit landscape, how Europe/Germany/Lower Saxony is responding to this, the opportunities and focus for increased trade, the green transition as well as other ongoing political and other issues dominating discussions in Edinburgh and Hannover.

17. The Minister was unable to attend the dinner due to illness, but this still provided an opportunity to discuss with representatives of the Minister and President Andretta these and other matters.

18. It is hoped that the Presiding Officer and the Minister can meet again during a future visit to Edinburgh or in Hannover.

Annex: Programme

Thursday 30 June 2022

Depart Scottish Parliament
Arrive Hannover

Friday 1 July 2022

Arrive President's Office

Sign Visitor Book

Guided tour of the State Parliament accompanied by President Andretta

Meeting with Mayor Belit Onay in the City Hall

President signs Golden Book of the City of Hannover

Lunch at the City Hall with representatives of the City of Hannover:

- Mayoress of the State Capital Hanover, Monica Plate
- President of the State Parliament, Dr Gabriele Andretta

Walk to Lower Saxony State Parliament

Private exchange and follow-up discussion in the President's office:

- Work and functioning of parliament, procedural issues
- Diversity and gender in parliament

Roundtable discussion with colleagues from the Parliament's Social Media and Education teams:

- Public involvement
- Education and outreach activities

Dinner hosted by Birgit Honé, Minister for Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development

- President of the State Parliament, Dr Gabriele Andretta
- Head of the European department, Christoph Pohlmann
- Office Manager of Minister, Anne Bartels

Saturday 2 July 2022

Depart Hannover HbF

Arrive Berlin

Depart Berlin

Arrive Edinburgh Airport