

International activity overview: July-December 2020

Monday 22 February 2021

Reference: LG(2021)Paper 17

Executive summary

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the Scottish Parliament's international work in the second six months of 2020. It attaches the most recent activity report considered by the SPCB.
2. There are no decisions required.
3. Any questions to be directed to Fergus Cochrane.

Issues and options

4. The International Strategy states that a six-monthly report on international work will be put to the SPCB.
5. Much of our international work at official level concerns sharing experience to strengthen practices and processes. As the Presiding Officer is keen that our international engagement efforts provide learning opportunities for the Parliament, Leadership Group may wish to consider whether there is scope to increase the learning element of our international engagement efforts. As Leadership Group is aware, the broad direction of our international work is set by the Presiding Officer and the SPCB and the current Strategy links this work with the Strategic and Deliver plans priorities.
6. As Leadership Group is also aware, the current focus is developing longer term one-to-one relationships with other legislatures and international organisations. By linking the International Strategy to the Strategic and Delivery plans, this should secure information to feed directly back to the Parliament's interests e.g committee work programmes, corporate and procedural matters (the paper on COP26 is a good example of utilising such international links to specific work within the Parliament).

Governance

7. The overview report to the SPCB is a way to both report on, and increase awareness of, the Parliament's international work.

Resource implications

8. There were no resource implications arising from the attached report. All activity was accommodated from within the IRO budget.

Communications

9. As Leadership Group is aware, IRO was communicating to all MSPs and office heads a weekly email highlighting inward and outward visits which IRO supports. Sharing this information highlighted particular visits which individuals MSPs or offices may have an interest in. Importantly, the email also asked offices to share information with IRO about any international work which they are involved with. While the issuing of this email is currently suspended, Leadership Group is invited to relay to their respective offices the importance of sharing with the IRO information about any virtual discussions etc.

Publication Scheme

10. The attached six-month overview paper is being published by the SPCB.

Next steps

11. After consideration by the SPCB, each six-month overview paper is put to Leadership Group.

Decision

12. Leadership Group is invited to note the attached report and discuss the potential to capitalise on our international engagement to the benefit of Scottish Parliament activities.

Fergus D. Cochrane

15 February 2021

International Relations: Overview of 1 July - 31 December 2020

18 February 2021

Reference: SPCB(2021)Paper 13

Executive summary

1. The International Strategy agreed by the SPCB in January 2017 stated that the International Relations Office (IRO) would produce a twice-yearly overview of the core international work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. This paper covers the period 1 July - 31 December 2020. No decision is being sought by the SPCB.

Governance

2. The IRO is responsible for the development and implementation of the International Strategy. While it facilitates most inward and outward international visits, it is not involved in every visit to or from the Parliament e.g. those undertaken by committees as part of an inquiry or by MSPs on cross party groups. This paper therefore does not reflect all the Parliament's international activity, only that supported by the IRO.

3. The current International Strategy built on the experiences and practices applied by the Parliament in developing its international relations approach. The continued link of the Strategy to the Parliament's Strategic and Delivery plans allows the IRO to better plan activity (now virtual), which in turn provides a more efficient linking to resources. In short, the Parliament can more easily identify what it wants to do, why, and when.

Issues and options

4. Annexed is an infographic showing virtual activity in the period of this report and the discussion topics.

5. In March 2020, all planned inward and outward international visits were cancelled by the IRO. This remains the position. As reported to the SPCB in the last activity report in October, the IRO has continued to arrange virtual discussions for the Presiding Officers and Members with other legislatures and organisations with which the Parliament has prioritised strengthening relations. These were:

- Presiding Officer and Dr Gabrielle Andretta MdL, President of the State Parliament of Lower Saxony on the role of a parliament education centre
- Presiding Officer hosted a Festival of Politics panel discussion involving the International Labour Organisation on the impact of COVID on the future of work
- Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and Roger Torrent, President of the Parliament of Catalonia, on the Young Women Lead programme (this discussion was on the back of a virtual meeting which the DPO attended, organised by the Parliament of Catalonia, on gender parliaments)
- Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and Elin Jones MS, Llywydd of the Welsh Parliament, on the Young Women Lead programme
- Deputy Presiding Officer Linda Fabiani MSP and Katia Segers, Member of the Flemish Parliament and the Belgian Senate, on the Young Women Lead programme

6. A key benefit from this focus on developing such direct friendships and relationships has allowed the IRO to quickly and easily approach others interested in the same or similar issues. The Presiding Officers, through these discussions, were able to share experiences and knowledge on the parliamentary response to COVID-19 as well as more 'corporate' matters. These are practical examples of how the SPCB's focus on 'interparliamentary co-operations' can work.

7. Some other virtual engagements during the report period are highlighted below:

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

- Members of the Scotland Branch Executive Committee participated in the regional conference
- Margaret Mitchell MSP and Claire Baker MSP participated in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians regional meeting and discussion on COVID and violence against women and girls

Other activities

- Gillian Martin MSP, Convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, participated in the Arctic Circle Q&A session on environment, climate change and energy
- Angela Constance MSP participated in the two EU's Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group meetings on post Brexit relationships
- Scottish Parliament Information Centre researchers participation in a US House Democracy Partnership web seminar on parliamentary research service
- Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani MSP) participated in the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Steering Committee

Resource implications

8. There are no resource implications arising from this paper. All activity was accommodated from within the IRO budget.

Publication scheme

9. This paper will be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

Decision

10. The SPCB is invited to note the activity undertaken across the second six months of 2020.

International Relations Office

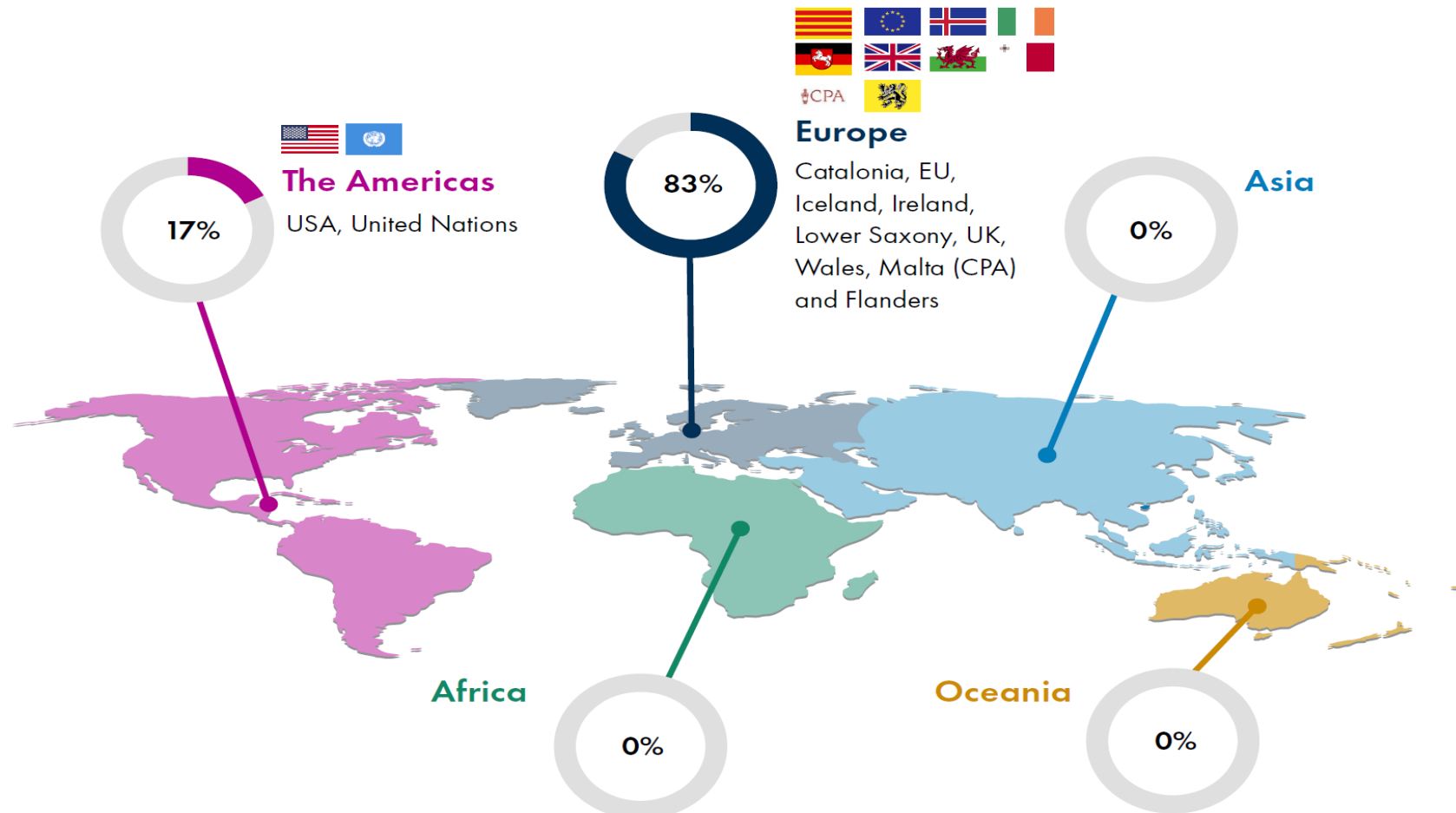
February 2021



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Relations Office

International Activity: 1 July to 31 December 2020



Designations

International Organisation



President/Presiding Officer/Speaker



Parliamentarians



Parliament officials



Consul General



Discussion topic

Future of work

1



Parliamentary
reform and
procedures

2



COVID and
violence against
women and girls

1



Gender, equality
and increasing
representation

5



Post Brexit
relationships

2



Environment, climate
change and energy

1



Interparliamentary
co-operation

6



