



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Relations: Overview of activity, April 2023 - 31 January 2024

8 February 2024

Reference: SPCB (2024) Paper 10

Executive summary

1. The International Strategy agreed by the SPCB in September 2021 stated that the International Relations Office (IRO) would produce a twice-yearly overview of the core international work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. Normally the report would cover a six-month period but this report, for completeness, covers all activity since April 2023 until 31 January 2024. No SPCB decision is being sought.

Recent Activity

2. Annexed is a list showing the activity in the period of this report.
3. IRO supports the Parliament's engagement with other parliaments across the world. Naturally, the most substantial engagement tends to be with those legislatures with which the Parliament has a historic relationship, those who proactively seek to engage with us, those that have similar size and characteristics as the Scottish Parliament (including those studied by the Consultative Steering Group for the establishment of the Parliament) and those where there is potential for mutual benefit from working together.
4. As an example, the Scottish Parliament has strong relationships with the Parliament of Canada and a number of Canada's provincial legislatures. In April 2023, the Presiding Officer led a delegation to visit the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa and the National Assembly of Québec, alongside taking part in the annual Scotland Week events in New York. The visits to both of these legislatures included discussions on a range of issues of mutual interest and provided a valuable opportunity to observe and learn from different approaches to parliamentary question times.

5. The IRO is continuing to support both inward and outward visits in order to deliver the International Strategy. As a result of focusing on geographical areas and developing bilateral relationships, we were pleased to welcome, Bjørt Samuelson, Speaker, and Presidium of the Parliament of the Faroe Islands visited the Scottish Parliament.
6. The delegation met with the Presiding Officer, both Deputy Presiding Officers, Members and officials. During their visit they discussed parliamentary proceedings, organisational structure and the Parliament's BSL services and plan. The Speaker also gave a presentation on the Løgting, the Parliament of the Faroe Islands, to MSPs. Following this visit, in November Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP met with the Second Deputy Speaker of the Faroese Parliament at the Nordic Council Session in Oslo, speaking about common interests and potential collaboration.
7. In addition to inward and outward visits, the IRO has been focusing on developing strategic relationships with organisations such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). By working with these organisations, which seek to strengthen democratic institutions around the world, the Parliament can engage in mutual learning with a wide range of parliaments and can provide continuous professional development opportunities for both Members and officials, one of the key elements of the International Strategy.
8. Under the auspices of the NDI, and its 'Parliament Support Programme', IRO supported Financial Scrutiny Unit (FSU) officials to visit Skopje, North Macedonia in April 2023 to provide assistance to the newly established Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. The PBO's aim is enhance parliamentary financial oversight and its scrutiny function and it is very much modelled on our own FSU. A reciprocal visit to Holyrood was made by PBO officials in May 2023, during which they met with the Clerk/Chief Executive, party finance spokespersons, committee clerks, SPICe, and a range of external stakeholders such as the Scottish Fiscal Commission, Audit Scotland and the Fraser of Allander Institute.
9. Other international work supported by the IRO includes supporting the Scottish delegation to the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch. The delegation to BIPA is led by Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, and comprises Emma Harper MSP, Ross Greer MSP, Pauline McNeill MSP, Tess White MSP.

10. The CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee comprises Jeremy Balfour MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP, and Stuart McMillan MSP and all MSPs are member of the CPA Scotland Branch.
11. The Parliament's delegation to the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) participated in the 64th Plenary Session in Jersey in May 2023. Plenary discussions focussed on the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and Ireland, with an address from the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Steve Baker MP. The delegation also heard from the Chief Minister of Jersey, Deputy Kristina Moore, and the Bailiff of Jersey and President of the States Assembly, Timothy Le Cocq K.C.
12. In October 2023, the Scottish Parliament hosted the fourth CPA Advanced Parliamentary Development Residency Course. Twenty-six parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth attended the course to enhance their skills as parliamentarians. This also involved some MSPs supporting the course as mentors and speakers. The course, and the Parliament's hosting of it, received positive feedback received from the delegates.
13. The 52nd conference of the British Irish Mediterranean Region of the CPA took place in Westminster, London from 25-27 April 2023. The delegation from the Scottish Parliament consisted of Jeremy Balfour MSP, member of the Scotland Branch Executive Committee and CPwD Network; Sarah Boyack MSP, member of the Scotland Branch Executive Committee and CWP BIMR Steering Committee; Gillian Mackay MSP; Stuart McMillan MSP, member of the Scotland Branch Executive Committee and Regional Representative on the CPA ExCo; and Michelle Thomson MSP, member of the CWP BIMR Steering Committee.
14. The members took part in all sessions over the three days. Sarah Boyack MSP chaired the Parliamentary Movements to Address the Climate Emergency plenary, Jeremy Balfour MSP was a panellist on the Inclusive Parliaments plenary and Stuart McMillan MSP provided members with an update from the CPA Executive Committee at the Annual General Meeting. The conference allowed for in-depth discussion and shared learning across a range of parliaments and topics. Members particularly found it useful sharing best practices and developing relationships with colleagues across the region, enhancing their work as parliamentarians. A full report from the conference is available [here](#).

Outcomes

15. The IRO is keen to ensure that the benefit realised from both inward and outward visits is fed back into Parliament to ensure wider learning across the Parliament. All Members going on outwards, will be asked to provide feedback within 2 weeks of returning from an outward and again 6 months

later. This will enable the IRO to understand what learning has been implemented across Parliament. All inward visit delegations are sent an evaluation form to complete after their visit.

16. In January 2023 a number of MPs who sat as part of the Speaker's Conference on the Employment Conditions of Members' Staff visited Parliament. They were here to meet and discuss with Members and officials the way in which the Scottish Parliament manages its relationship with Members and Members' staff, and to see what the Westminster Parliament could learn. The report was published in July 2023, and a paper taken to the commission on 23 October. A debate took place on 16 November in the house of commons, where Hon Clive Efford MP stated:

"We went to the Scottish Parliament and looked at the way it arranges its scrutiny of finances and provision of support to Members of the Scottish Parliament. I have to say that the Scottish approach impressed me no end. The people there understood that they were there to assist the MSPs in their role, but none the less there was a set of rules that MSPs had to adhere to. We need to move to a system similar to that."

17. Feedback from the Speaker's Conference was:

'The visit was very successful, and the members of the Conference found the information they were given made a very constructive impact on the way on the recommendations in the Conference report itself. In particular, the way in which the Scottish Parliament run their Member insurances, the interaction between the HR service and Members' staff and the support Members' staff receive, and way Members are trained and supported in their role as employers all helped shape the report.'

18. Kaukab Stewart MSP, delegate, and Stuart McMillan MSP, Member of CPA Executive Committee, represented the Scottish Parliament at the 66th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Accra Ghana. "The Commonwealth Charter 10 years on: Values and principles for parliaments to uphold". The conference was attended by more than 600 delegates and took place 1 - 5 October 2023.

19. Kaukab Stewart MSP was also a panellist on the workshop "The Commonwealth Charter: A Charter for all human rights, or just some?". In addition to the conference agenda the two Members had six bilateral meetings with Speakers, Members and academics from Québec, Kwazulu-Natal, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association HQ. One of the members said *'My own confidence levels have increased, and I am already able to apply my*

knowledge and skills during my committee work and how I take part in debates.'

20. 31 October- 2 November 2023 Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Beatrice Wishart MSP and Ben Macpherson MSP represented the Scottish Parliament at the Nordic Council Session in Oslo, Norway. The theme of the Session was "A secure, green and young Nordic Region". The Session included 700 delegates from the eight Nordic countries and international guests from a further ten legislatures and international organisations. The Deputy Presiding Officer spoke to the Chamber highlighting the close connection we share with the Nordic Region and wish to collaborate with them more in the future.
21. In addition to attending the Session the DPO and two Members held seven bilateral meetings with Deputy Speakers, Presidents and Committee Chairs from Sweden, Faroe Islands, Norway, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Nordic Council presidium and secretariat. Since returning from Oslo, Ben MacPherson MSP, Member of Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has written to the chair of the Committee for a Sustainable Nordic Region of the Nordic Council suggesting further areas of collaboration.
22. Monica Lennon MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP attended the annual Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. This was the fourth time the Parliament has had representation at this annual gathering but the first occasion where MSPs delivered a breakout session alongside elected Members of another Parliament (Members of the Icelandic Parliament's Environment and Communications Committee). The session, titled "*Views from Parliamentarians from Scotland and the Nordic Region on the challenges of meeting wind energy and biodiversity ambitions*" was well attended by a diverse group of international parliamentarians, academics, NGOs and others. The session was well received and, due to the large number of questions asked by members of the audience, went over the allocated time.
23. As the largest annual international gathering on the Arctic, the Assembly provides a unique opportunity to attend a number of workshops and discussions on topics of direct relevance to Scottish Parliament committees. Just as importantly, however, is the opportunity this annual gathering of Ministers, parliamentarians, NGOs, academics etc provides to hold bi-lateral meetings on subject matters of direct and topical relevance to members of the Scottish Parliament delegation. As before, bilateral meetings were arranged by IRO with Ministers in the Icelandic Government, international parliamentarians and others. One of the members said '*I really valued the Assembly as it was a great professional development opportunity for Members*'

Governance

24. The IRO is responsible for the development and implementation of the International Strategy. While it facilitates most inward, outward and virtual international visits, it is not involved in every such engagement 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 international activity taking place, only that supported by the IRO.

25. 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 and the focus on the procedural, corporate and policy interests of the institution allows the IRO to better plan activity, provides a more efficient link to resources and secures practical benefits.

Resource implications

26. There are no resource implications arising from this paper.

Publication Scheme

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

Decision

28. The SPCB is invited to note the activity undertaken across the period from April 2023 to January 2024.

International Relations Office

January 2024

Annex

Visits 01/04/23 to 31/01/24

Inward Visits

- Tuesday 18 April: Ambassador of Mexico, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP
- Wednesday 19 April: Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP

- Tuesday 25 April: President and Clerk of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Tasmania, meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Members and officials
- Thursday 27 April: Ambassador of Guatemala, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP
- Tuesday 2 May: Speaker and Clerk of the House of Assembly of the Parliament of Tasmania, meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members and officials
- Thursday 4 May: Acting Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members and officials
- Tuesday 9 May – Thursday 11 May: Officials from the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, meeting with Members and officials
- Wednesday 10 May: Consul General of Türkiye, meeting with Presiding Officer
- Wednesday 10 May: Consul General of China, meeting with Presiding Officer
- Tuesday 16 May: Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, meeting with Members and officials
- Thursday 17 May: Ambassador of Palestine, meeting with Presiding Officer
- Wednesday 17 & Thursday 18 May: Speaker of Malawi, meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officers, Members and officials
- Tuesday 23 May: Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, meeting with Presiding Officer, Members and officials
- Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 May: Officials from the National Assembly of Serbia, meetings with officials
- Tuesday 30 May: High Commissioner of New Zealand, meeting with Presiding Officer
- Wednesday 31 May: Ambassador of Italy, meeting with Presiding Officer
- Thursday 8 June: Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer, Members and officials
- Thursday 8 June: Ambassador of Latvia, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP
- Tuesday 26 June: Ontario Parliamentarian Interns, tour of the Parliament.
- Friday 1 September: Officials from the Nordic Council of Ministers meeting with officials
- Thursday 14 September: Speaker of the Tobago House of Assembly, meeting with Presiding Officer and officials
- Tuesday 12 & Wednesday 13 September: Speaker of the Faroese Parliament, meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Members and officials
- Thursday 14 September: Ambassador of Slovakia, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP

- Thursday 14 September: Deputy Ambassador of Israel, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP
- Thursday 14 September: Members of Parliament of Uruguay, tour of Parliament
- Tuesday 19 September: Officials from the Flemish Parliament, meeting with officials
- Wednesday 20 September: Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon Ian Liddell-Grainger MP meeting with Commonwealth Parliamentary Assembly Members
- Wednesday 27 September: Officials from the UK Parliament's Restoration and Renewal programme meeting with officials
- Thursday 28 September: High Commissioner of India, meeting with the Presiding Officer
- Thursday 28 September: Members of the Cross-Party Club for Youth Affairs & Policies, Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, meeting with Members and officials
- Wednesday 4 October: Consul General of France, meeting with the Presiding Officer
- Friday 13 October: Official from the Parliament of New Zealand meeting with officials.
- Monday 16 – Friday 20 October: CPA Advanced Parliamentary Development Residency Programme, delegates meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members and officials
- Tuesday 24 October: Officials from the Brazilian-UK Citizenship Council, meeting with officials
- Thursday 26 October: Official from the House of Lords, meeting with officials
- Thursday 26 October: Ambassador of Norway, meeting with the Presiding Officer
- Thursday 26 October: Ambassador and Consul General of Germany, observing FMQs as a guest of the Presiding Officer
- Tuesday 7 November: Parliamentarians from Australia, meeting with Members and officials
- Wednesday 8 November: Consul General of Germany, meeting with the Presiding Officer
- Thursday 9 November: Ambassador of the Philippines, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP
- Thursday 9 November: Officials from the Parliament of Uganda, meeting with officials
- Thursday 16 November: Duke University Students, tour of Parliament
- Thursday 16 November: Parliamentarians from Canada, meeting with the Presiding Officer, Members and officials
- Wednesday 29 November: Head of European Parliament's Liaison Office, meeting with officials
- Tuesday 5 December: Committee Chairs from Albania, meeting with Members and officials
- Wednesday 6 December: UK Government and UK Devolved Government officials meeting with officials.

- Tuesday 19 December: Ambassador of Bangladesh, meeting with the Presiding Officer.
- Tuesday 16 January: Acting Deputy President of the New South Wales Legislative Council, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Members, and officials.
- Thursday 18 January: John Smith Centre Parliamentary Interns, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP, Members, and officials.
- Thursday 25 January: Parliamentarians from Germany, meeting with Presiding Officer.
- Tuesday 30 January: Members of the Health Committee of the Rhineland-Palatinate Landtag, meeting with Presiding Officer and Members.
- Wednesday 31 January: Everiss Scholars from New Zealand, meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP and officials.

Outward Visits

Thursday 13 April – Friday 21 April 2023

Presiding Officer Visit to USA and Canada for Scotland Week. Attended by the Presiding Officer, Collette Stevenson MSP and Finlay Carson MSP.

Monday 24 April 2023

British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Steering Committee Meeting in Dublin, Ireland. Attended by Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP.

Tuesday 25 April – Friday 28 April 2023

52nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) British Islands and Mediterranean Regional (BIMR) Conference in London. Attended by Jeremy Balfour MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP, Gillian Mackay MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP.

Sunday 14 May – Tuesday 16 May 2023

64th British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary in Jersey. Attended by Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Emma Harper MSP and Tess White MSP.

Sunday 18 June – Friday 23 June 2023

International Relations Office officials in Copenhagen, Denmark; and Oslo, Norway. Meeting with Scottish Government's Nordic Office, Copenhagen; Danish Parliament (Folketinget); Nordic Council; and Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget).

Tuesday 22 August – Thursday 24 August 2023

International Relations Office officials in London. Meeting with Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) UK Branch and HQ; Members' Services Team, House of Commons; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CLRAE); and Scottish Government officials.

Tuesday 5 September – Wednesday 6 September 2023

International Relations Office officials in London. Meeting with Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) UK Branch; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO); European Parliament; and Interparliamentary Relations Office, House of Commons.

Monday 18 September 2023

BIPA Steering Committee in Cardiff, Wales. Attended by Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP.

Saturday 30 September – Thursday 5 October 2023

66th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Accra, Ghana. Attended by Stuart McMillan MSP and Kaukab Stewart MSP.

Wednesday 18 October – Sunday 22 October 2023

Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik, Iceland. Attended by Monica Lennon MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP.

Sunday 22 October – Tuesday 24 October 2023

65th Plenary Session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly in County Kildare, Ireland. Attended by Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Jackie Dunbar MSP, Ross Greer MSP, Emma Harper MSP, and Pauline McNeill MSP.

Monday 30 October – Friday 3 November 2023

75th Session of the Nordic Council in Oslo, Norway. Attended by Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Ben Macpherson MSP, and Beatrice Wishart MSP.

Monday 22 January – Wednesday 24 January 2024

International Relations Office official in Brussels. Meeting with Officials from the Flemish Parliament; Officials from the Scottish Government Brussels Office; and attending the Committee of the Regions – UK Contact Group.

