



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Strategy



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Scottish Parliament's International Strategy

Introduction

1. This document sets out the current aims and focus of the Scottish Parliament's international relations engagement. It builds on work from previous Sessions and seeks to ensure that the best use of resources from across the organisation is made in maximizing the outcomes from such activities.

2. The [International Relations Office](#) (IRO) supports the Scottish Parliament in the development, implementation and monitoring of this Strategy which will be reviewed annually through a report to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

Our aims

4. The overarching aims of this Strategy are to:

- promote the Scottish Parliament, its role and practices as an open, accessible and participative Parliament, amongst other parliaments;
- develop the reputation of the Scottish Parliament, through relations with other legislatures, in representing the people of Scotland and holding the Scottish Government and other public bodies to account;
- provide opportunities for the continuous professional development of both MSPs and officials through engagement with elected Members and officials in other legislatures; and
- export the skills and knowledge of MSPs and officials through such engagements.

5. The Strategy outlines how our resources can be used corporately to support the Scottish Parliament's [Strategic Plan](#). At a practical level the Strategy aims to:

- set activities which are key to the Scottish Parliament with a direct link to our [Strategic Plan and other key documents](#) (Annex A);
- better point to the purposes of our international relations and what outcomes we are aiming for;
- identify parameters around what can, and perhaps just as importantly, what cannot, be supported;
- better plan and programme inward and outward visits and projects and leave sufficient space for supply-and-demand tasks as they arise;
- identify activities and countries/regions and illustrate why these are strategically important to us; and

- identify organisations of which the Scottish Parliament is a member or with which it has a key working relationship (Annex C).

6. These aims will be achieved through a mixture of meeting parliamentarians and officials from other legislatures who visit the Scottish Parliament, our involvement with the organisations of which we are a member or with which we work, and our outward visits. These aims sit across each of the core elements below.

Our focus: The ‘three core elements’

7. The focus of this Strategy is split into three core elements and which provide the straightforward purpose and direction for what we do. However, it is flexible enough to allow us to accommodate ad hoc work as and when it arises.

i. Policy

8. This identifies the issues that are central to us and on which we will, through this Strategy, seek to develop relationships with, and therefore learn from, other parliaments and organisations. Central to this is the [Scottish Parliament’s Strategic Plan](#) which will ensure that the key issues important to us as a Parliament are also core to our international relations activities. It is these issues which will largely inform why, when and who we seek to work with internationally.

9. The current priorities are set out in the [Strategic Plan](#).

10. The [Strategic Plan](#) outlines our high-level goals and aims. However, there are a number of key documents (Annex A) which sit in support and set out in more ‘practical’ terms what our specific interests are and would form the basis for discussions with international audiences.

11. When and where possible (and appropriate), with each outward and inward visit we shall seek discussions on the above priorities and report accordingly (see ‘Outcomes’ below). This way, through our international relations, we can seek to further develop our knowledge and experience of these issues.

ii. Parliaments

12. While the policy element above will inform which parliaments and organisations we work with, there are some parliaments with which we currently have a direct and distinct relationship (see [International Activity](#) webpage). A consequence of our discussions on the key priorities above may be that other countries are added to this list.

iii. Organisations

13. It is firmly within the interests of the Scottish Parliament to maintain and foster relationships across institutions which can support the delivery of this Strategy (and thereby develop understanding and thinking on the above priorities). Such relationships provide opportunities for Members and staff to learn from the common experiences of other parliaments across the world thereby supporting the continuous professional development of MSPs and officials through engagement with other legislatures.

14. Annex C identifies organisations which the Scottish Parliament will work with in support of this Strategy.

Visits

Inward

15. Inward visits are a key component of our international relations. They are a visible and immediate representation of all aspects of the Scottish Parliament, through the building itself, its Members and officials and the role they play in ensuring the Parliament fulfils its core role, and how it seeks to represent the people of Scotland. To provide planned, relevant and successful inward visits, [Guidance](#) and a [Visit Information Form](#) have been produced by IRO.

16. The Form seeks information about the key areas of interest to the inward delegation and what it is they wish to discuss with the Scottish Parliament. However, it also seeks information about current issues and developments within that parliament. IRO will seek to maximise the opportunities which inward visits offer by tapping into visitor experiences in the areas of interest to us.

17. Details of inward visits will be published on the [International Activity](#) webpage.

Outward

18. The [Strategic Plan](#) helps to provide a clear emphasis for our external visits and we will always seek the opportunity to build in discussions on its key priorities, for all our external visits. However, it is not the exclusive focus for why we undertake outward visits. Our 'organisational' work or the direct relationship we have with other countries (see Annexes) also determines why and when we undertake such visits.

19. This approach therefore establishes easily and early what outward engagement the Scottish Parliament will undertake. We will therefore be clear in specifying our purpose and explaining why the visit is necessary and beneficial to the Scottish Parliament.

Outcomes and implementation

Outcomes

20. Sitting across our international engagement activity are four key principles which will be applied when considering what specific activities we undertake and will inform the broad outcomes we are seeking. They are:

- parliamentary focused: ensure that any international relations activity helps support the development of the Scottish Parliament as an institution, the professional development of MSPs and staff, and parliamentary business;
- partnership: identify where we can capitalise from working with other organisations, share resources and, where appropriate, jointly-deliver similar activities;
- reputational value: recognise that certain types of activity pro-actively support our institutional and international reputation and which, if not undertaken, could adversely affect that; and

- supporting Scotland: through our participation, support activities which could bring wider economic benefit and added value to Scotland.

21. We will demonstrate outcomes from the application of this Strategy. Failing to identify the purpose of, in particular, outward visits and produce tangible outcomes could have a significant impact on our reputation and result in the less than efficient use of the financial and human resources committed.

22. We will continue to closely assess value for money and costs associated with our activity. The IRO will provide an annual report to the [Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body](#) (SPCB) for its consideration, outlining the activity undertaken over the course of each financial year. In addition, IRO will submit to the SPCB twice-yearly overviews of the Scottish Parliament's [international activity](#).

23. In addition, reports will be produced for outward visits. To ensure a consistency in reporting, IRO will provide for each Member focussed outward visit, alongside briefing and logistical material, a report template covering the following:

- location
- sponsor (e.g. CPA)
- date of visit
- purpose of visit and theme (e.g. attend CPA conference on public participation)
- outline of programme and discussions held
- outcomes and action/learning points for the Scottish Parliament

Implementation

24. IRO will [publish the outward visit report](#) on its website and take forward the action/learning points as necessary through the circulation to relevant committees of the Parliament (who may be conducting scrutiny of related policy issues), to other Members and Parliament officials.

25. It will similarly share information and reports which emerge from the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and participation by MSPs and officials in their conferences, seminars etc.

26. IRO will manage such information for future reference and follow up with delegations which may re-visit the country concerned.

27. IRO will also gather and share information from across the Scottish Parliament on non-IRO outward and inward visits (for example, those undertaken by committees as part on an inquiry). This core information (relating to date, location, name of visitors/delegation, areas of interest/purpose) will be utilised by IRO and other offices in relation to any follow up visits to those countries.

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Strategic Plan

- [Organisational Performance Framework](#) measures performance against the [Strategic Plan](#)
- [Delivery Plan](#) sets out how the Parliament will achieve its strategic priorities
- [Public Engagement Strategy](#) sets out activities and plans with regards public engagement

Parliaments

Further information on the Scottish Parliament's international work is available via the [International Activity](#) webpage.

Organisations

[British Irish Parliamentary Assembly](#) (BIPA):

- we will foster goodwill and participative dialogue between ourselves and the other bodies represented
- [through our agreed membership](#) of five MSPs and four alternate MSPs we will participate in the bi-annual Plenary Sessions and three Subject Committees (European Affairs; the Economy and Environmental and Social Issues)
- we will assist in raising the profile of BIPA amongst our Members by encouraging BIPA committees to meet in Scotland
- we will support the pursuit of stronger links between BIPA and its governmental equivalent body, the British Irish Council

[Commonwealth Parliamentary Association](#) (CPA)

- we will continue, through the CPA Scotland Branch, to participate and engage in plenary, regional conferences, seminars, visits and exchanges of delegations which promote parliamentary democracy and co-operation with other networks and organizations dedicated to good governance
- we will seek opportunities offered through attendance at CPA conferences, such as those of the [British Islands and Mediterranean Region](#) and the [Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians](#) to engage with parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to discuss the key policy issues above to benefit Members and the Scottish Parliament
- specific activities to be undertaken by the [CPA Scotland Branch](#) will be outlined in its agreed [work programme papers](#)

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

The WFD, in partnership with UK legislatures and other institutions such as the British Council and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seeks to build the capacity of parliaments to conduct financial scrutiny; strengthen committees; enhance parliaments' research and training capacities; support multi-party bodies in parliament and advise parliaments' leadership and help them develop their strategic plans.

The Scottish Parliament's work with the WFD has increased noticeably over the last two years and it is now a key partner for us. We have developed strong and meaningful relationships, through the WFD, with a number of parliaments and we will seek to promote and develop this partnership with the WFD further through our existing involvement in its parliamentary programmes (see International Activity webpage) as well as through future involvements.

Europe

- we will continue to monitor and participate as appropriate in the work of a number of bodies within Europe such as the [Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe](#)
- outwith of this Strategy, the [Culture, Tourism, European and External Relations Committee](#) has responsibility for the consideration and reporting on the following:
 - ❖ proposals for European Union legislation
 - ❖ the implementation of European Communities and European Union legislation
 - ❖ any European Communities or European Union issue
 - ❖ the development and implementation of the Scottish Administration's links with countries and territories outside Scotland, the European Union (and its institutions) and other international organisations
 - ❖ co-ordination of the international activities of the Scottish Administration
 - ❖ culture and tourism matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Relations

Presiding Officer engagement with other Speakers and Presiding Officers

- the Presiding Officer will continue to meet with the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Speaker of the House of Commons in quad lateral meetings to discuss issues of mutual interest