

ATTACHMENT
TO
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
FOR
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
FROM
THE 20th – 30th JANUARY, 2014

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FEEDBACK

SUBMITTED BY

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On being nominated, I attended the Professional Development Programme from the 20th to 30th January, 2014 on attachment to the House of Commons of the Parliament of United Kingdom in London.

2. The attachment was attended also by Dr.Saket Kumar, Assistant Director, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Parliament of India, Mr.Jean Phillipe Brochu, Principal Deputy Clerk, Parliament of Canada, Ms. Aaisha Ali Kotoko, Administrative Officer & Mr. Ibrahim Maaruf, Legislative Officer from National Assembly of Nigeria. All logistic arrangements and co-ordination for the Programme was made by the Overseas Office of the House of Commons of the Parliament of United Kingdom. Each day Programme began at 10:00 am comprising of 45 minutes sessions with 4/5 Clerks of various Departments of the House of Commons and one day of the Programme was set aside to interact with Clerks of the House of Lords. Each day, an hour break for lunch and several tours and visits to various offices to gather first-hand experience was arranged.

3. The interaction sessions were all held in the Chambers of the respective Clerks of that office and therefore, most of the sessions were more discussions, exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices in our offices. The sessions as such, were very animated and informative with participants sharing the procedure followed in their Parliaments. As a result, apart from learning of the working of the UK Parliament, we got to compare the practices followed in the Parliaments of Nigeria and Canada as well. Most of the sessions spilled over-time and the allotted time for the interactions always stretched beyond schedule time.

4. During our attachment, we were given an exhaustive tour of the Palace of Westminster and witnessed the Speaker's Procession in the House of Commons, a daily ritual performed in great fanfare with the Speaker being escorted by the Sergeants at Arms' in their elaborate attire with one of the Sergeants holding the Queen's Mace.

5. We also took a tour of the Parliamentary Archives housed in the Big Ben containing several millions records of Acts passed by the Parliament since 1497, journals of House of Lords since 1547, records about the building of the Palace of Westminster since 1794, peerage papers since 1597, judicial records since 1621 and several records having historical, legal and administrative significance including the papers of the Lord Great Chamberlain, Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Lord Beaverbrook and the History of Parliament Trust. The records were in different formats of vellum, rolled parchments written in ink with impressive calligraphy and digitised. We got to see the original copy of the Indian

Independence Act, 1947 which was a hand-written in ink document. We were told, had it not been for the unfortunate Parliament fire in the year 1834, the records would have been more than twice available today. The experience of the Archives tour was exceedingly amazing and felt as if we were transcended to a different world with large scrolls neatly referenced and stacked in wall-to-wall cabinets.

6. We also got to attend the Prime Minister's Question Hour in the House of Commons. We were taken to the Members' Parliament Library which was established in 1818 and destroyed by the 1834 fire. It was re-opened in 1852. Apart from providing the standard services like reading rooms, book loans, on-line resources and reference collections, the Parliament Library provides confidential enquiry service for Members and their staff covering all subjects of parliamentary interest and briefings for the House and Members on the business of the House and other issues of parliamentary concern.

7. A tour of the precincts of the House of Lords and its various offices of the Departments and the Westminster Hall was most rewarding. We got to watch the Lord Speaker's Procession and the proceedings of the House of Lords, which was a less formal affair as compared to the House of Commons. During the attachment, we had a brief meeting with Dr. William F. Shija, Secretary-General of Commonwealth Parliament Association (CPA) in CPA Headquarter and the CFO & Secretary of CPA, UK and British Group of Inter-Parliamentary Union (BGIPU). They briefed us about the work, functions and projects of the CPA.

8. The Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit is an elaborate office equipped with latest transmitters and advanced technological equipments and machines. We watched the Parliamentary proceedings broadcasted from the control room. We were taken to the Members' Center which disseminates information to Members.

9. We got a first-hand experience of the working of Committees by attending the meeting of *Lords Public Bill Committee: Care Bill* of the House of Lords. We also observed the proceedings of one House of Commons' General Committee, namely, *the Care Bill (HL) Committee* taking up the clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill and four Select Committees, namely, the Health Committee recording evidence of non-official witness on the subject "*Urgent and Emergency Care*", the Defence Committee recording evidence of Medical Government officials on the subject "*The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 5: Military Casualties*", the Home Affairs Committee recording oral

evidence of elected Police and Crime Commissioners on the subject “*Police and Crime Commissioners: Progress to date*” and the Backbench Business Committee hearing proposals for backbench debates from Members of Parliament. The experience was enlightening and very worthwhile.

10. The main features of topics taken up for discussions during the attachment Programme are given below:

Monday 20 January

- Introduction to the House of Commons - Crispin Poyser, Clerk of the Overseas Office
- An introduction to Committees - Mark Hutton, Principal Clerk of Select Committees
- Parliamentary Reform and Parliamentary Privilege - Liam Laurence Smyth, Clerk of Journal Office

Tuesday 21 January

- Parliamentary Procedure and Erskine May - Alda Barry, Clerk, Department of Chamber and Committee Services
- Work of the Members’ Centre - Maria Prew, Manager, Members’ Centre.

Wednesday 22 January

- Table Office including Parliamentary Questions - Mark Etherton, Clerk, Table Office
- Role and the work of the House of Commons Commission - Bob Twigger, Secretary, House of Commons Commission
- The Backbench Business Committee - Dr Robin James, Deputy Head, Table Office

Thursday 23 January

- The Legislative Process including Financial Legislative Procedure - Matthew Hamlyn, Clerk of Bills
- CPA Work and Activities - Dr William F. Shija, Secretary General, CPA, Commonwealth Parliamentary HQ.
- Work of the Vote Office - Owen Sweeney, Deputy Deliverer of the Vote
- Committees and the Media - Jessica Palmer-Bridges, Media Officer of Select Committees

Friday 24 January

- Hansard - Lorraine Sutherland, Editor, Official Report
- Work of the Scrutiny Unit - Alexander Horne, Legal and Senior Policy Adviser, Scrutiny Unit

Monday 27 January (House of Lords)

- House of Lords Journals and Registry – Antony Willott, Clerk, Journal Office
- The Legislative Process in the House of Lords – Simon Burton, Clerk of Legislation, Journal Office
- Code of Conduct, Parliamentary Privileges – Bredan Keth, Registrar of Lords’ Interests
- Questions Motions, Sub-judice – John Turner, Clerk, Table Office
- Work and Structure of Committees: current inquires – Dr. Christopher Johnson, Clerk of Pre-legislative scrutiny
- Communication with the Public and the Media – Benet Hiscock, Director of Public Information

Tuesday 28 January

- Work and Functioning of Reference Services Section: Information technology in support of Parliamentary activities (including website/social media etc) - Chris Sear & Matt Instone, Reference Services Managers
- Department of HR and Change, Human Resources matters - Harun Musho’d, HR and Project Manager
- The Broadcasting Unit and the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings - John Angeli, Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting
- Procedural Research Tools and Petitions - Marget McKinnon, Clerk of Papers and Danielle Nash, Clerk of Petitions

Wednesday 29 January

- Explanation of Westminster Hall - Glenn McKee, Clerk, Communities and Local Government Committee
- The work of PICT - Joan Miler, Director of PICT

- The Drafting of Speaker's Rulings - David Natzler, Clerk Assistant and Director General
- Dissemination of Public Information - Fiona Green & Matthew Ringer Department of Information Services
- Management of Parliamentary Committee Budgets - Richard Dawson, Business Manager Committee office

Thursday 30 January

- Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) Members ' pay and expenses - Eve Samson, Clerk, Speaker's Committee
- The Work of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee - David Weir, Clerk, EFRA (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) Committee
- Working and Functions of CPA UK (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) & BGIPU (British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union - Andrew Tuggey DL (CEO and Secretary) CPA UK (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) and Rick Nimmo, Director. BGIPU (British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Role of the Serjeant at Arms' and his Office - Lawrence Ward, Serjeant at Arms
- Presentation of Certificates and conclusion of attachment - Crispin Poyser, Clerk of the Overseas Office

OBSERVATIONS ON ISSUES RAISED BY SECRETARY-GENERAL

11. Prior to our departure, we were briefed by the Secretary-General on the 8th January, 2014 in his Chamber. He stressed various issues which may be made points of focus during the attachment. An attempt has been made to highlight findings/experience on those issues raised in the briefing and reproduced below:-

(1) Privileges of Members of Parliament:

- The Standards & Privileges Committee comprising of 10 (ten) Members, out of which 3 (three) of the Members selected through advertisement. The House Committee scrutinise the applications and make the selection. The Committee was constituted subsequent to Supreme Court judgment in 2010 which ruled out a Bill brought in Parliament to ensure that Parliament privileges cannot be abused. This Committee primarily

examines complaints against Members' conduct relating to the House and Committees and financial interests. An elaborate and detailed code of conduct for Members is in place.

- A Parliamentary Commissioner appointed by the House assist the Standards & Privileges Committee by way of maintaining Register of Members' interests and liabilities which is published in printed as well as electronic forms and made accessible to public. He also monitors the operation of the code, updating of the register and regulates the procedure of investigations of complaints.
- The Standards & Privileges Committee also takes oral evidence in public and the evidence tendered before it are published and broadcasted.
- The privileges of Members are only codified in *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice* and the House itself is the only judge of its own privileges. The sole copyright of publication, editing or bringing out new edition rests with Parliament Trust. The first edition appeared in 1844.
- Members speaking in the House are not liable for defamation and enjoy freedom from arrest in civil matters. The later has drawn much criticism and termed obsolete in the recent past from various quarters.
- A distinct demarcation is drawn between public obligations as Member of Parliament and private/personal life for Members. There is also a clear separation of privileges of the House and privileges of Members. Members of Parliament are not under the purview of the RTI while the House of Commons is under the RTI's purview.
- Members of the House of Commons are bound by the code of conduct only on financial matters while Members of the House of Lords are bound both on financial and non-financial matters.
- Complaints of MPs are addressed by the Standards & Privileges Committee while complaints of Members on privileges of MPs are addressed by the Speaker since privileges rest with Parliament and not Members.
- The Parliamentary Standards Act, 2010 has deemed that all business costs and expenses of Members be published and laid in Parliament.
- Every Member is provided an office in the premises of the Westminster in Portcullis House. No official residence is provided for but given as allowance in addition to the annual salary of 74000 pounds as recommended by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA).

(2) Committee Systems : Study-tours, How analysis are made for reports &, recording systems:

- Committees in the UK Parliament are primarily of two kinds – Legislative and Select Committees. While the Public Bill Committee, Delegated Legislation Committees and European Committees come under the Legislative Committees which has an ad-hoc existence, the Departmental Committees, cross-cutting such as Public Accounts Committees and Internal Procedural Committees come under the Select Committees and have permanent existence. In addition to these two kinds of Committees, Joint Committees are also set up before a Bill is initiated to examine the various aspects involved in the introduction of such Bill and for pre – Legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill.
- Ministries and Opposition spokespersons are Members in the Legislative Committees which are governed by strong party discipline, however, no front-benchers/Ministers/Opposition spokespersons are made Members in the Select Committees.
- Functioning of Legislative Committees are relatively formal and strictly following 5 days of reading in examination of Bill with tight rules for selection of amendments while Select Committees primarily investigate and follow a more conservative approach as compared to the Legislative Committees.
- Chairs for Committees are directly elected in the House and not pre-determined followed by election for Members. Party strength allocation of seats in place.
- Procedure of reference of subjects to Select Committees in existence but rarely used. The Committee identifies areas and topics for its examination.
- Select Committees exercise powers to call for written and oral evidence and appoint Advisers to the Committee, who may be experts in the subject proposed to be examined.
- Select Committees hold seminars and undertake study – visits within UK and overseas. Study-visits undertaken within the UK are covered by the air-miles provided to the Members while proposals for overseas visits are examined by Liaison Committee (Comprising of all Chairs of Select Committees) and the budget for the visit decided by the Liaison Committee.

- Members' attendance in Committee meetings, oral evidence tendered before the Committee and memoranda submitted to the Committee are made public. Deliberations of the Committee are confidential and no recording of deliberations are made. However, if the Committee so desires, the deliberations recorded for reference in drafting of its reports, tape – recording is made which is not made public. As such, the minutes appended to the Committee reports also do not contain issues deliberated during the Committee meetings. I particularly browsed 2(two) reports of the Select Committees in the Library of Overseas Office and observed the contents as under:-

(a) Report on Abortion (Amendment) Bill, 1974-75:

- Proceedings of the Committee
- List of Witnesses
- List of Memoranda
- Minutes of meetings (excluding deliberations of the Committee)

(b) Report on Foreign Affairs Committee Report (2001-2002)

- Proceedings of the Committee
- Minutes of Evidence (excluding deliberations of the Committee)

- One specific day in each week of the Parliament Session have been set aside for discussions on Committee reports in the House of Commons and also in Westminster Hall.
- Committee impact study has been outsourced to the Constitution Unit of the University College, London to research and report on the impact of Committees' reports on the process of legislations and in addressing the aspirations and concerns of the public, etc.
- Publications of Select Committee reports have been stopped since around 2012 resulting in savings of an approximate 10% - 15% of the expenditure.
- Recording of all oral evidence are open to public and broadcasted. More than 70% of the recordings of oral evidence of Committee meetings are outsourced, and therefore, the presence of officials of the Hansard is only for regulation of the recordings. Live coverage of Committee meetings are auctioned to the highest bidder for the particular meetings

to private channels who reserve the right to broadcast or re-sell the same and thereby generating revenue of an average 455 pounds per meeting. Right to telecast the Proceedings of the House have, however been given to the BBC Parliament with conditions that no internal editing, highlighting portions of the proceedings, etc, be effected.

- The Committee meeting rooms provide for a gallery for visitors located behind the witnesses where colour printed hand-outs relating to the functions, mandate, membership, agenda, meeting schedules, etc. of the Committee are made available for information to visitors. No refreshment is served during or after the meetings.
- Members in the meeting are not attended to by the Parliament staff, they tend to themselves – bring their reference papers/documents obtained from the Vote Office or downloaded from the Committee portal, sign-in their attendance in the format placed on a table at the entrance while collecting their name-plate (also placed on the same table) and rises up from their seats to get drinking water (placed on desks behind their seats, etc. There is no hustling-bustling around of Parliament staffs attending to the requirements of Members throughout the meeting. The proceedings were, therefore, very orderly.
- The verbatim records of oral evidences tendered before the Committees are made available in the Committees' portal within 3(three) hours after the meeting. The same is with the proceedings of the House.
- The Government conventionally replies to the Committee reports within 2(two) months although not in rules.

(3) Prime Ministers' Question Time:

- The Prime Minister answers questions from MPs in the House of Commons for half an hour every Wednesday from 12.00 Noon since 1997. Prior to that, the PMs Question time was on Tuesdays and Thursday for 15 minutes each day.
- The session normally starts with an 'open question' which is a routine question from a backbench Member about the Prime Minister's engagements. After the 'open question', the Member can then ask a supplementary question on any untabled subject. Following the answer, the Member then raises a particular issue, often one of current political significance.

- The next question is raised by the Leader of the Opposition who is permitted to ask a total of six questions. The Leader of the Opposition is the only Member who is allowed to raise further questions on the subject of his first question.
- Only the names of Members who have tabled same question appear on the question book while the name of the Member who has tabled the same question and selected first by the secret ballot appears along with his question. So once the PMs engagements question has already been asked by the first Member, the Members who have tabled the same question are simply called to ask an untabled supplementary question. In order to get the chance of catching the PM off-guard with an unexpected supplementary question, many Members consciously table question on the PMs engagement. It means that the Prime Minister is not aware of the questions he would be asked on the floor. So we were told that the Prime Minister comes extensively briefed by the Government in anticipation of likely subjects he could be asked about.
- On the whole, the process was very informative, impressive and interesting with the questions of Members pointed and brief and the answers of the PM just as much apt and succinct. In a span of a mere 30 minutes, 19 questions with some questions taken together were responded excluding the additional 6 questions of the Opposition Leader.

(4) Publications:

- In order to reduce costs of printing, most publications of the UK Parliament have been digitised and made available in its website.
- The regular publications of the UK Parliament amongst many others, include –
 - House of Commons and House of Lords Hansards which contains the daily debates in the respective chambers, Public Bill and General Bill Committees debates;
 - House of Commons and House of Lords Business Papers which contains the daily order of business, votes and proceedings, questions book, etc. of the respective House;
 - Registers of Members' Interests and business and financial information of Members;
 - Standing Orders and companion to Standing Orders;

- Bills under consideration of the Committees, etc.
- Various research briefings.

(5) Vote Office & Print Unit:

- The primary role of the Vote Office & Print Unit of the UK Parliament is supply of parliamentary and government documents (including EU documents) to Members and others. For the purpose, it is equipped with the latest printing and binding machines.
- Government documents or any other document/publication required by the House or Committees are downloaded from their official sites, rendered into proper bound copies and made available by the Vote Office to the Members or House, as the case may be.
- All printing and binding requirement of Parliament from visiting cards of Members and staff of both the Houses, leaflets and hand-outs for public, daily issues of Hansard and Journals, Government and Parliamentary documents, legal and administrative records of importance, etc. are taken care of by the Vote Office.
- Supply of hard copies of documents and papers to Members is not done as a rule since 2009 when paperless devices were provided to Members. However, hard copies of documents are made available to Members on request made to the Vote Office in a prescribed form.

OBSERVATIONS ON OTHER ISSUES

(1) The Backbench Business:

- A distinct and unique feature of the House of Commons is the Backbench Business Committee. It came into existence from 15 June 2010 on the proposal of the Wright Committee on Reforms of the House of Commons in its report of 12 November 2009.
- The Committee consists of a Chair (opposition member) and seven other Members elected at the beginning of each session and reflecting the party composition of the House of Commons.
- The Backbench Committee is responsible for determining, on behalf of backbench Members (*i.e.*, Members who are not Ministers, Opposition Leaders and Party Leaders occupying the front-bench in the House Chamber), the business before the House for approximately one day

each week. This includes Thursday sittings in the Westminster Hall, which are considered half days. The Committee gets 35 days per Session, of which at least 27 days are taken on the floor of the House. The one to one-half-hour Topical Debates, which count as quarter days, are also within the ambit of the Committee.

- Notices received from backbench Members are placed before the Backbench Committee and the Member is also required to give oral evidence before the Committee justifying his Notice, and if the Committee agrees, a day and time is allotted for the debate on the Notice in the House. We were told that a number of issues, in most cases, instances of public importance, which failed to attract the attention of the frontbench Members, are taken care of through this mechanism.

(2) Parliamentary Outreach Programmes:

- Both the House of Commons and House of Lords conduct several Outreach programmes to spread awareness of the work, processes and relevance of the institution of Parliament and encourage greater engagement between the public and Parliament.
- The Parliamentary Outreach service works in partnership with a diverse range of organisations, from local community groups and businesses to national campaign networks and NGOs. We were told that these partnership programmes have proven to be the most effective way to meaningful public engagement with Parliament.
- Some of the work of Parliamentary Outreach includes:
 - Delivering training to organisations/ individuals based in the UK explaining the work of Parliament;
 - Showing how the public can get involved with legislative scrutiny;
 - Holding Public Bill seminars;
 - Members explain the work of the House of Lords and encourage people to engage and build strong relationships with Parliament;
 - In the House of Lords, Members including academics, former teachers, scientists, lawyers, former cabinet ministers and civil servants visit schools and demonstrate their experience and knowledge with participating schools termed 'peers in schools'

programme' which has gained much popularity;

- The House of Lords opens up the Chamber once a year and invites people to debating events.
- Use of social media such as facebook, twitter, youtube, flickr, etc. have been extensively made. The House of Lords has a blog managed by the Hansard Society and managed by the House where Members discuss all aspects of the House and its work firsthand with a broad online audience.

(3) Parliamentary Information and Communications Technology (PICT):

- The first Joint Department of the House of Commons and the House of Lords- the Parliamentary Information and Communications Technology (PICT) was set up on 1 April 2008. It aims to support Parliament by embracing new and innovative technologies and providing a secure and efficient network and desktop environment for MPs, Lords and Parliament staff.
- The work in the Department includes service desk and engineering support, telecommunications, server and network management, applications development and support, programme and project management and also more general HR, finance and support services. The Department aims to create a world class standard in the provision, support and exploitation of ICT.
- In addition to providing information and communications technology services to Members and staff of the Parliament, it provides training for Members of both Houses of Parliament.
- I-pads were provided to Members and is presently exploring windows i-pad for use of Members. We were told that i-pads are used very extensively especially in Select Committees for providing agenda papers of its meetings which has greatly reduced printing expenditure.
