



Report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

2020 Virtual Westminster Seminar: Preparing Parliamentarians for a Changing World

November 23 to 25, 2020

REPORT

The Honourable Robert Black, Senator, Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau, M.P., and Mr. Sameer Zuberi, M.P., attended the virtual 2020 Westminster Seminar on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) from November 23 to 25, 2020.

Purpose

The annual Westminster Seminar is CPA UK's flagship capacity development program, now in its 69th edition. Typically, it is a five-day program providing a unique platform for participants to network and engage with counterparts, explore approaches to parliamentary democracy, practice and procedure in the context of parliamentary systems from across the Commonwealth, and draw comparisons between different legislatures. The program draws on the perspectives of contributors and participants to stimulate discussion and learning on the role of parliamentarians and clerks.

This year the seminar was the first ever to take place virtually during three half days. It focused on the theme "Preparing Parliamentarians for a Changing World." With parliaments adapting to COVID-19 restrictions, the Seminar offered delegates a chance to consider how the pandemic has created challenges as well as opportunities for strengthening democracy.

Objective

The objective of the seminar was for delegates to enhance their ability to effectively scrutinize, represent and deliver oversight in their respective parliaments with tools to better adapt to a changing political and social landscape.

Output 1: Delegates will have an opportunity to widen their networks, creating open communication lines to work collaboratively with their peers.

Output 2: Delegates will be introduced to effective knowledge, tools and skills to enhance their leadership and administrative role in their respective legislatures.

Output 3: Delegates will gain a deeper understanding of the components that make up an effective parliament within the Westminster context, using examples from the UK and across the Commonwealth.

Specific Topics Discussed

- Effective Parliaments and the Responsibilities of Members
- Effective Parliaments and the Responsibilities of Presiding Officers
- The Evolution of Parliamentary Scrutiny Tools
- Privilege & Conduct: Standards, Behaviour & Etiquette
- State of Emergency and Democracy
- The Impact of COVID-19 on Parliaments
- Leadership and Communication Skills

- Pressures on Parliamentarians
- Pressures on Parliamentary Staff
- Public Engagement
- National Security Scrutiny
- Racial Disparity and the Role of Parliamentarians
- Committee Systems Across the Commonwealth
- Holding the Prime Minister to Account
- Conducting an Inquiry
- Virtual Committee Hearing Brief
- Virtual Committee Hearing on COVID-19
- Committee Recommendations and Report Writing

Summary

The 69th seminar took place virtually from Monday, November 23 to Wednesday, November 25, 2020. The program took an experience-based approach, drawing on the perspectives of contributors and participants to stimulate discussion and learning on the role of parliamentarians.

CPA UK welcomed 151 delegates from every Commonwealth region and from over 30 Commonwealth legislatures, with 39 speakers (from the UK, The Gambia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, the Maldives, Barbados, Pakistan, Jamaica, and the Turks and Caicos Islands) sharing their expertise. The range of speakers enabled delegates to draw on differing approaches to parliamentary democracy from across the Commonwealth.

Throughout the three half days, participants heard from UK parliamentarians, academics and experts on subjects such as the pressures parliamentarians face, holding the prime minister to account and the impact of committees.

The program included speeches, training, and interactive sessions. Delegates also took the opportunity to participate in live polls, chat discussions, and networking sessions on the virtual platform.

Day 1 - Adapting Parliaments

On the first day, during the welcome message, the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, the Right Honourable Lindsay Hoyle, highlighted the importance of parliamentarians continuing to share good practice in spite of challenge of COVID-19.

The first day of the seminar focused on “Adapting Parliaments.” Members, presiding officers and clerks shared knowledge on how their roles specifically contribute to effective parliaments. Delegates then learned about parliamentary scrutiny and privilege and conduct, before breaking off into discussion groups to consider the impact of COVID-19 and the impact of a state of emergency on parliamentary democracy.

Day 2 - Public Engagement and Personal Impact

Day two of the seminar concentrated on “Public Engagement and Personal Impact.” Delegates underwent training on leadership and communication skills. Members and clerks then broke into separate sessions to consider their respective pressures and discuss methods for improving public engagement. The second day finished with thematic discussions on national security scrutiny and racial disparity.

Day 3 - Oversight and Scrutiny: Theory & Practice

The final day of the seminar centred on “Oversight and Scrutiny,” bringing together approaches from across the Commonwealth. Delegates considered tools and methods on how to structure committees, hold the prime minister to account, and conduct an inquiry. The seminar concluded with an immersive exercise in which delegates could take part in a committee hearing and provide recommendations.

On the final day of the seminar, members had a chance to reflect on the three-day program, to think about how they can transfer their new skills into practice and what they intend to do as a result in their own legislatures.

The closing remarks were made by the Rt. Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP and Leader of the House, UK Parliament. He talked about his role as Leader of the House and the value of “connectivity” between parliamentarians, which is an important feature of the Commonwealth.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P., Chair of the
Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs*

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	2020 Virtual Westminster Seminar: Preparing Parliamentarians for a Changing World
DATES	November 23 to 25, 2020
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Robert Black
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau Mr. Sameer Zuberi
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$0.00
ACCOMMODATION	\$0.00
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$0.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$0.00

**No expenses incurred. The seminar was held by video conference.*