



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scottish Parliament's International Strategy

7 October 2021

Reference: SPCB (2021) Paper 58

Executive summary

1. This paper invites the SPCB to consider and agree the attached International Strategy for Session 6.

Governance

2. The International Relations Office (IRO) is responsible for the development and implementation of the International Strategy on behalf of the Presiding Officer and the SPCB. The attached Strategy seeks to point the core international work, on which the Presiding Officer leads, in the direction of what is important to the Parliament on three fronts – its interests in policy, corporate and procedural issues. This international work also provides unique opportunities to develop the reputation, knowledge, skills etc of MSPs and the Parliament more widely and promote the Parliament internationally.

Issues and options

3. The current Strategy was agreed by the Session 5 SPCB in January 2017. It introduced an approach to the Parliament's core international work centred around what was important to the Parliament from a policy, procedural and corporate perspective. This new Strategy continues that approach.
4. It builds on the experiences and practices applied by the Parliament in developing its international relations over recent years. It links to the organisation's Strategic and Delivery plans. Finally, it highlights the benefits from a continued emphasis on developing longer term relationships with other legislatures and international organisations.
5. The IRO will continue to give careful consideration to the timetabling and management of the international work and will provide the SPCB with six-monthly reports on this work.
6. The Strategy also includes a new commitment by the IRO to provide the SPCB with information in relation to the environmental consideration given to proposed outward visits.

Resource implications

7. The international work covered by this Strategy is funded directly from the IRO budget.

Publication scheme

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

Decision

9. The SPCB is invited to consider and agree this revised International Strategy.

International Relations Office

October 2021



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The Session 6 International Strategy of the Scottish Parliament



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Foreword by Alison Johnstone MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament is an outward looking organisation, committed to working with parliamentarians from across the world. The exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience is crucial to enabling the Parliament to meet its central purpose of holding the Scottish Government to account on behalf of people throughout Scotland.

This International Strategy sets out the aims and priorities of our international work this Session and how this will link directly to our policy, procedural and corporate interests.

A key part of my role as Presiding Officer is to represent the Parliament at home and abroad and I, with my colleagues on the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, look forward to meeting and working with the many parliamentarians, international organisations and officials both in person or virtually throughout this Session.

Tapadh leibh

Alison Johnstone MSP
Presiding Officer
October 2021

[International connections](#)

 **@SP_IntRelations**



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Scottish Parliament's International Strategy

Introduction

1. This document sets out the aims and focus of the Scottish Parliament's international relations work as agreed by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB). It builds on work from previous Sessions and seeks to ensure this work is relevant and constructive to the varying interests of the Parliament and that the resources of time, people and financial, are used effectively to achieve the best results.

2. A primary function of the Presiding Officer is to represent the Scottish Parliament at home and abroad while the SPCB is responsible for ensuring that the Parliament is provided with the services it requires. The [International Relations Office](#) (IRO) sits within the Office of the Presiding Officer with the key role of supporting the Presiding Officers and SPCB in the day-to-day development, implementation, monitoring and reporting of this Strategy.

3. The Strategy does not apply to the international work undertaken by individual committees, by MSPs in response to approaches made directly to them, or by Cross Party Groups with a country theme.

Aims

4. The Strategy's overarching aims are to:

- promote the Scottish Parliament, its practices and processes as an open, accessible and participative legislature amongst other parliaments and international organisations;
- develop the Parliament's reputation, skills, knowledge and abilities, through this work and its relations with other legislatures and organisations, to represent the people of Scotland in holding the Scottish Government and public bodies to account;
- provide opportunities for the continuous professional development of MSPs and officials through meetings and discussions with elected Members and officials in other legislatures and organisations;
- showcase and develop the policy, procedural and corporate knowledge of MSPs and officials through international collaboration and engagement;
- set a direction and purpose to the Parliament's international work and the outcomes it is aiming for and identify the parameters around what can and cannot, be supported; and

- identify, plan and programme activities with key organisations and other parliaments, countries/regions and illustrate why these are strategically important to the Parliament and to Scotland.

5. The Strategy outlines how international work will link to and support the Parliament's Strategic and Delivery Plans. The Strategic Plan sets out the Parliament's overarching purpose and objectives while, sitting below this, the [Delivery Plan](#) identifies more specific pieces of work. Both essentially show the Parliament's key priorities at that time. Linking this Strategy to both Plans will point the international work in a relevant and useful direction.

6. The aims above will be achieved through a mixture of meeting parliamentarians and officials from other legislatures and organisations in person (who visit the Scottish Parliament); MSP involvement with organisations of which the Parliament is a member or with which it works; in person outward visits (when the Parliament visits other legislatures etc); and through virtual discussions. Broadly, this Strategy relates more to outward work (where the Parliament has proactively initiated engagement) as opposed to inward work (when it has reacted to requests to engage).

Focus - The 'three core elements'

7. The focus for the international work covered by this Strategy will be underpinned by three core elements.

i. Policy

8. The issues that are front and centre to the Parliament. Largely, these will feature in individual committee work programmes through committee inquiries and Bill scrutiny work etc. Through exposure to learning from international best practice and the experience and thinking in other countries on such issues, the international work can develop MSPs understanding and awareness of policy proposals.

9. While some policy issues are 'topical' through the short time period of a committee's scrutiny of a Bill etc, other issues might feature longer term, perhaps across all of Session 6. For example, climate change or post-EU arrangements may be issues which feature much longer term and more regularly across committee work programmes. The Parliament can, through its core international work, learn from other parliaments, countries, organisations about the actions and approaches they take.

10. This Strategy does not conflict with any international work which individual committees undertake as part of their work programmes. Rather, it can complement this and provide another, and sometimes unique, opportunity for MSPs to develop their policy awareness through the international engagement work of the Presiding Officer and the SPCB.

ii. Procedural

11. Since 1999, the Parliament has sought to innovate and introduce different ways of working for both plenary meetings of the Parliament and the committees. Procedural work should not be seen simply through the prism of rules and procedures ([Standing Orders](#)) but also how the Parliament can create simple and effective methods of holding the Scottish Government to account.

12. Discussions with other parliaments can identify how they operate and why, their own rules of procedures, the approaches and principles behind how they work and why. This can then increase awareness and generate ideas on new and better ways for this Parliament to fulfil its central purpose.

13. This may be a key aspect of the Presiding Officer's international interests given the responsibility of that role for chairing proceedings in the Chamber and the Parliamentary Bureau. The involvement of MSPs in Presiding Officer led international work would give them exposure to the importance of effective parliamentary rules and procedures and to that aspect of their role as a parliamentarian.

iii. Corporate

14. A key role of the SPCB is to ensure the Parliament can operate effectively and that MSPs are able to carry out their duties easily and efficiently. The SPCB makes decisions on a wide range of issues, possibly backed up by published corporate strategies which it agrees, relating to the management and operation of the Parliament. These cover a wide spectrum of issues such as finance, accommodation, data protection, officeholders, lobbying, allowances.

15. Discussions with counterparts in other parliaments can identify the frameworks, decision making processes, approaches which they take to ensure the efficient running of that organisation.

16. While the policy element is directed at MSPs through their committee work, and the procedural element will sit with the Presiding Officer and MSPs, this corporate element sits very much within the interests and responsibilities of the Presiding Officer and the SPCB.

Long term programming and relations

17. Session 5 saw a change in the Parliament's focus in creating opportunities to work and collaborate with other legislatures and organisations, all aimed at developing the skills, knowledge and experience of MSPs in key aspects of their role as a parliamentarian and enhancing the Parliament's profile. These are specific relationships which it creates with other legislatures and international organisations.

18. The work of the Scottish Parliament continues to draw interest from other legislatures and organisations across the world. There are countries with which Scotland has long standing historical ties, and there are several parliaments which this Parliament has consistently engaged with since 1999. It is important to extract benefits from such bonds and friendships.

19. The Parliament will continue to develop one-to-one relationships with other legislatures and organisations. These can allow the Parliament to plan its international work further ahead and tie this directly to the three core elements above.

20. Such relationships won't be set out in written bilateral agreements but recognised and promoted as more bespoke and seen by both sides as opportunities to co-operate informally and exchange knowledge, skills and expertise on areas of common interest (most likely on the policy front), to generate new ideas and

approaches, and strengthen international bonds. Again, this aspect of the Parliament's core international work can provide unique opportunities for Members to participate in activities which not only develop them as parliamentarians but enhances the reputation internationally of the Parliament itself.

21. This longer-term programming work is led by the Presiding Officer and the SPCB to whom the IRO will consult on any firm proposals and update as part of its six-monthly reports to the SPCB.

Organisations

22. It is firmly within the interests of the Scottish Parliament to maintain and foster relationships across institutions which can support this Strategy. In addition to the more 'bespoke' relationships mentioned above, the Parliament will continue to play an active role in the work of those organisations in which it is a member or has a relationship with (see Annex). Again, through these organisations, Members and officials can learn from the common experiences of other parliamentarians thereby supporting their continuous professional development.

Visits

23. While this Strategy can be better applied to the proactive outward facing work which the Parliament wishes to undertake, a key part of the international work is responding to those visitors – parliamentarians, diplomatic, government etc – who wish to engage with this organisation.

Inward

24. Inward visits are a key component of being an open, engaging and welcoming institution. The Parliament will continue to accommodate requests from parliamentarians, members of the diplomatic community and interested organisations from across the world, be that physical or virtual. The IRO will continue to manage these requests and, where possible, provide bespoke programmes tailored to the specific interests and needs of the visiting delegation.

25. While inward visits are in response to a request to discuss topics of interest to the delegation, the Parliament recognises they can, if appropriate, present an occasion to discuss issues of interest to it and learn from the visiting delegation the approach taken by their parliament on particular policy, procedural and corporate issues. This is something the IRO would discuss, if appropriate, with a visiting delegation.

Outward

26. The foundation for each Presiding Officer led and SPCB supported outward visit is the business case. This is the justification for why the visit is appropriate and necessary and will be set out by the IRO to the SPCB. It will identify on which of the three core elements the visit will be based and reflect the outcome principles below. This in turn will inform the size and make up of the delegation (with consideration to party and gender balance). It will indicate who the delegation will meet and why and provide an indicative cost for the visit.

27. It will outline why the engagements proposed are appropriate for an 'in person' visit as opposed to through virtual format. Finally, it will address the travel options

considered, weighing up key considerations such as the environmental impact, journey distances/times, and how long Members would be absent (in person) from core parliamentary business.

Outcomes

28. It is important to demonstrate outcomes. Failing to identify the purpose of, in particular, outward visits and produce tangible outcomes would have a significant reputational impact and result in the less than efficient use of the financial and human resources committed. Therefore, there are four key principles relating to the outcomes the Parliament will seek:

- parliamentary focused: ensure that Presiding Officer and SPCB international activities complement and support the development of the Parliament as an institution through the professional development of MSPs and staff, and the conduct and management of parliamentary business (policy, procedural and corporate);
- partnership: identify where the Parliament can capitalise from working with other organisations, share resources and jointly-deliver similar activities;
- reputational value: recognise that certain types of activity pro-actively support the Parliament's institutional and international reputation and which, if not undertaken, could adversely affect that; and
- supporting Scotland: through the Parliament's participation, support activities which could bring wider economic benefit and added value to Scotland.

29. The IRO will provide the SPCB with twice-yearly reports outlining the activities undertaken. These reports will be [published on the Parliament's website](#). In addition, reports will be produced by the IRO for SPCB supported outward visits. To ensure a consistency, the report will cover location, any sponsor (e.g. CPA), date and purpose of visit and theme, outline of programme and discussions held and the outcomes and action/learning points.

30. The IRO will [publish each outward visit report](#) and take forward the action/learning points as necessary through the circulation to relevant committees (who may be conducting scrutiny of related policy issues), and Parliament officials. The IRO will utilise this information for future reference and follow up with delegations which may re-visit the country concerned.

31. This international work will be promoted via the IRO webpage and its [Twitter account](#).

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Annex

Organisations

British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA)

The BIPA mission is to promote co-operation between political representatives in Britain and Ireland. The Scottish Parliament delegation will participate in the meetings and work of the bi-annual Plenary session and the European Affairs; Economy and Environmental and Social Issues sub-committees.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

The CPA seeks to promote parliamentary democracy and good governance through a range of programmes, project and activities targeted at parliamentarians. Its work is focused on parliamentary practice and procedure and cross-cutting themes on topical and longer-term policy issues.

The CPA Scotland Branch is made up of all MSPs (the Presiding Officer is the Branch President). The three MSPs on the [Scotland Branch Executive Committee](#) co-ordinate CPA activity such as that of the [British Islands and Mediterranean Region](#), the [Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians](#) and the [Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities](#) as well as opportunities for MSPs to participate in plenary, regional conferences, seminars, visits and exchanges of delegations, election observing missions, training seminars for newly elected parliamentarians etc.