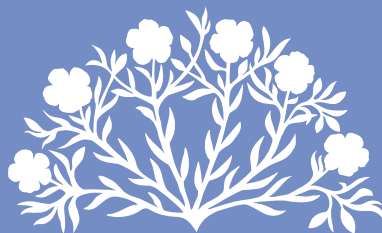# Northern Ireland Assembly

The Lord Alderdice, The Speaker

Report of a Conference for Speakers, Presiding Officers and Clerks of the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands

Held on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 June 2002 in Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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Executive Summary

The Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Lord Alderdice, invited Speakers, Presiding Officers and Clerks from the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands to a conference in Parliament Buildings, Belfast. The aim of the conference was to exchange information on matters of mutual interest, to provide a momentum for the development of inter-parliamentary co-operation and to build on the networks already flourishing at Presiding Officer and official level.

The Clerks of the various Parliaments and Assemblies met on Thursday 27 June, prior to the Speakers'/Presiding Officers' Conference on 28 June.

The agenda for the conference was drawn up following consultation with participants. Preparing for elections was identified as one of the key themes and was discussed by both the Clerks' Forum on 27 June and the meeting of Speakers and Presiding Officers on 28 June. A list of participants is attached at Appendix A. The agendas for both the Clerks' Forum and the Speakers'/Presiding Officers' Conference is attached at Appendix B. The records of discussion provide a detailed report on each of the conference sessions.

There were 6 main points arising out of the conference as follows:

Benefit

All those present agreed that the Conference offered an extremely valuable opportunity to discuss issues of mutual interest including approaches to common problems, sharing experiences and ideas and identifying procedural and operational problems and solutions.

Regular Meetings

It was agreed that the conference should be reconvened in 2 years' time in Scotland and that it should retain its informal structure.

Exchanging Information

It was agreed that the Interparl system, which provides a web-based discussion forum for parliamentary officials to share experiences and best practice, would be a useful tool for the dissemination of good practice and the exchange of ideas. This should therefore be used more extensively.

Reporting

It was agreed that there would be no official Conference Report but rather a note of the matters discussed and the conclusions reached.

Liaison

It was agreed that the many ad hoc groups and parliamentary networks should continue, as should the informal contacts between Speakers and Presiding Officers. In this context, the possibility of transfers of staff between Parliaments as well as temporary secondments for staff development purposes and to assist with pressures of business or special projects should be explored further.

European Union Issues

It was agreed that there was much to be gained from having a presence in Brussels but it was recognised that the cost would preclude each Parliament and Assembly maintaining and staffing its own office there. It was therefore agreed that the possibility of a joint office should be explored.

Recommendations

Regular Meetings

1.   The Conference should be reconvened in 2 years' time in Scotland and it should retain its informal structure.

Action: Sir David Steel/Mr Grice

Exchanging Information

2.   A research paper on different international parliamentary and committee systems would be circulated.

Action: Mr Reynolds

3.   The Interparl system should be used more extensively for the dissemination of good practice and exchange of ideas. To that end:

■   legislatures not participating at present should be invited to join;

■   each legislature should appoint an administrator to act as a parliamentary point of contact and local manager for the system;

■   Interparl administrators in the participating legislatures should meet to discuss how a development plan could be drawn up to ensure optimum effectiveness; and

■   regular reviews should take place.

Action: Mr Moir

Reporting

4.   No official Conference Report would be formulated but rather a note would be circulated highlighting the matters discussed and the conclusions reached.

Action: Mr Moir

Liaison

5. Existing and ad hoc groups and parliamentary networks should continue, as should the informal contacts between Speakers and Presiding Officers.

    Action: All

6. The possibility of transfers of staff between Parliaments as well as temporary secondments for staff development purposes and to assist with pressures of business or special projects should be explored further.

    Action: All Clerks and Greffiers

European Union Issues

7. The possibility of a joint parliamentary/Assembly Office in Brussels should be explored further.

    Action: All Clerks and Greffiers

8. Presiding Officers in each of the devolved legislatures should make a collective submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution and the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform highlighting the benefits of membership of the House of Lords being conferred following a member's election as Presiding Officer to one of the devolved legislatures.

    Action: Mr Green to co-ordinate

Clerks' Forum

Session 1: Preparing for Elections

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales are scheduled to take place on 1 May 2003. This would involve dissolution for the first time for each of these institutions.

Following a short presentation from Mr Reynolds on the Northern Ireland Assembly's proposed approach to these elections, delegates with experience of elections discussed difficulties they had encountered and overcome in the past. Delegates discussed their respective election planning strategies and in particular the archiving of papers and ensuring that an appropriate process is in place to ensure members vacate their rooms and surrender equipment. The experience held by Westminster in terms of election planning was of particular relevance.

The group also discussed arrangements for the first meeting of the new mandate and preparation required for the reception of new members. This could include the provision of a help desk and/or a mentoring programme. It was agreed that it would be necessary to have private discussions with Party Whips/Business Managers prior to the election to ascertain their expectations across all issues affecting the Parliament or Assembly post-election. It was agreed that it was important to have the legislative programme for the new mandate introduced without delay.

Differences in the legislatures of Guernsey and Jersey were noted. In both cases there is no party system and the nature of the electoral system means there is no need for a dissolution period. As a result the processing of legislation is not affected.

Session 2: Job Evaluation for Parliamentary posts and Career Progression

Mr Moir gave a background to the recruitment and retention policy for staff in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and told how a pay and grading review has been under way for some time. The Scottish Parliament had undertaken a similar exercise that was now completed; almost 50% of posts had been evaluated in a process, which had proved to be a protracted and resource-intensive exercise. The outcome recommended a compressed grading structure. While the process was made longer by the wider and more inclusive consultation, one outcome was that implementation was easier. A new performance management system was being developed.

Ms Newcombe and Mr Tough outlined the difficulties they face in recruiting and retaining staff in Jersey and Guernsey. They have particular difficulties with the legislative draftsman resource and had concerns as to how this resource could be most effectively deployed when in short supply.

It was agreed that this session was of particular value to Clerks in identifying the common issues regarding staffing. Participants agreed to exchange some information of relevance to avoid different legislatures duplicating work that had already been carried out and to learn lessons from methodologies previously applied.

Session 3: Relations between Committees and their counterparts in other Parliaments/Assemblies including staff exchanges and secondments

Mr Tough outlined constitutional arrangements in Guernsey; the main difference here is that all members are independent and there are no political parties. Consideration is now being given to a number of changes in the machinery of government including the establishment of a Public Accounts Committee, a Legislation Committee, and one or more Scrutiny Committees.

Participants outlined how the Committee structure operates in their own legislature and information was also provided on the system operating in Kosovo. The outcome of the discussion was that the Deputy Clerk for Northern Ireland, Mr Reynolds, undertook to circulate a research paper on different international parliamentary and committee systems. It was agreed that staff exchanges and secondments in and with other legislatures provide valuable training and development opportunities for staff and also provide an opportunity to introduce 'best practice' from other places.

Session 4: Interparl

Mr Allan Black, Director of Research and Information in the Northern Ireland Assembly, gave a strategic overview and demonstration of the Interparl system that provides a web-based discussion forum for officers to share experiences and best practice.

Following discussion it was agreed that:

- Interparl is an excellent concept and its use should be encouraged widely in participating legislatures;

- Legislatures in the islands not participating at present should be invited to join;

- Each legislature would then appoint an administrator to act as a parliamentary point of contact and local manager for the system;

- While recognising that Interparl has not yet achieved its full potential, Interparl administrators in the participating legislatures should meet to discuss how a development plan could be drawn up to ensure optimum effectiveness; and

- Regular reviews should take place.

Speakers' and Presiding Officers' Conference

Session 5: Procedural Issues

Mr Birt introduced a factual session where delegates exchanged information on operational and procedural business. The discussion centred around 2 main themes: first, issues surrounding the respective roles of a Committee on Procedures and a Business Committee; and second, arrangements for handling oral questions. Participants noted the procedural nuances that differentiated each legislature's procedures; these had evolved according to the particular circumstances of each place.

Session 6: Preparing for Elections

This session provided perhaps the key focus of the conference and emphasised again how each place has developed conventions and procedures to deal with its own circumstances. Discussion focussed on 2 main themes, namely use of Assembly/ Parliamentary resources during election periods and issues surrounding the election of Presiding Officers.

Dr Marek introduced the session by outlining the situation in Wales, where no dissolution period has been provided for prior to elections to the National Assembly for Wales in May 2003. Members therefore remain in office until the day before the election. Dr Marek outlined how the Presiding Officer was developing a protocol on proper conduct of members during the pre-election period; this protocol would be put to the Assembly for endorsement by resolution. In Scotland there is a dissolution period, however the Scottish Parliament is faced with the administrative dilemma of whether or not to recover items of equipment. While obsolescence would apply and monetary value of IT equipment may be minimal, there is a presentational issue of members retaining equipment at public expense. Lord Alderdice advised that members in Northern Ireland had been issued with specific guidance in respect of use of accommodation and equipment during the election period.

The Committee on Standards and Privileges would investigate any reported or perceived breach. Members of the Assembly Commission hold office until the transfer of authority to the new Commission post-election.

Participants shared ideas and found that while legislation, convention and procedure vary from place to place, the same problems and concerns apply.

Lord Alderdice advised how Speakers/Presiding Officers are elected or appointed in different legislatures throughout the world. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the election of the Presiding Officer is from amongst the members. When they withdraw from an active role in political debate, the consequence is that there is little prospect of a Presiding Officer being re elected.

Following discussion on the particular nuances in respect of the politicisation of the roles of presiding officers in the respective legislatures, it was agreed there were benefits gained from the Presiding Officers in each of the devolved legislatures being members of the House of Lords. It was also agreed that the Presiding Officers in each of the devolved legislatures would make a collective submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution and the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform highlighting the benefits of membership of the House of Lords being conferred following a member's election as Presiding Officer to one of the devolved legislatures.

Session 7: Relationships between the Speaker and the Executive

Lord Alderdice highlighted the importance of the role of the Speaker in serving the Membership, not the Government. The stance was agreed; with the newly devolved institutions in particular there was a need to assert the independence and will of the legislature. This approach linked into the establishment of a parliamentary staff separate from the Civil Service. The benefits to be gained from a common parliamentary staffing structure were discussed. The possibilities for transfers of staff and temporary secondments to other places to deal with business pressures were worth further exploration.

The House of Commons practice of maintaining a presence in Brussels was discussed at length. One of the main benefits identified was the capability for committee members to be briefed independently from Ministers and in better detail. Such a presence would give advance notice to Parliament of legislative changes that may have an effect on future business. It was suggested that, as it would not be practical financially for the devolved institutions to maintain such a presence, a shared arrangement could be devised to give all the benefits at a percentage of the cost. It was agreed that such a possibility should be explored further.

The expectation by the Executive, and indeed Whitehall, that parity bills should automatically be passed without amendment in the devolved legislatures, was aired. It was agreed that the power of a legislature to vote down a rule or a bill is not diminished by the existence of a parity dimension.

Session 8: Issues relating to Language

Lord Elis Thomas described the use of technology in the National Assembly for Wales as a 'technological fix', the cost of which need not be excessive if organised well. The National Assembly for Wales is a bilingual Assembly. Participants discussed the various levels of linguistic diversity, including the increasing percentage of the population speaking other languages such as Chinese or Urdu, and the translation facilities available. Generally it was agreed that the recognition of language is an important aspect of the work of Parliament and the promotion of local identity and culture. The question of cost could limit the provision of multi-lingual facilities if the level of usage by the public and members was low.

Session 9: Information strategies and relations with the media

Sir David Steel introduced the session by setting out the standards adopted by the Scottish Parliament in relation to the provision of information and relations with the media; these are openness, accessibility and transparency.

Participants discussed the whole issue of relations with the media and the potential for difficulties to arise with their portrayal of the work of the Parliament. The discussion moved to education services and facilities for visitors. While it is desirable to increase the knowledge among the public of the work done by members, greater access by the public may mitigate against this if visitors see an almost empty chamber. It was found that low turnout at sittings is a common problem, exacerbated in some places by committee meetings being held on sitting days and the introduction of electronic voting and set 'decision time'. In Jersey, however, the quorum for plenary sittings is 24 out of a membership of 53 and Guernsey generally has around 80% attendance at plenary sittings. Participants were interested in the development in Northern Ireland whereby one Party fines its members for non-attendance at meetings.

List of delegates attending Conference of Speakers, Presiding Officers and Clerks 2002

Westminster

House of Lords

Sir Michael Davies KCB
Clerk of Parliaments

House of Commons

Sir William McKay KBE
Clerk of the House and Chief Executive

Scotland

Rt Hon Sir David Steel KBE MSP
Presiding Officer

Mr Paul Grice
Clerk to the Scottish Parliament

Mr David McLaren
Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer

Wales

Lord Elis Thomas
Presiding Officer

Mr Paul Silk
Clerk to the National Assembly for Wales

Dr John Marek
Deputy Speaker

Mr Adrian Green
Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer

Jersey

Mr Michael Birt
Deputy Bailiff

Ms Mary Newcombe
Greffier of the States of Jersey

Guernsey

Sir De Vic Carey
Bailiff of Guernsey

Mr Ken Tough
Greffier of the States of Guernsey

Dublin

Mr Jim Mulkerrins
Principal Clerk, Dáil Eireann

Northern Ireland

Lord Alderdice
Speaker

Mr Arthur Moir
Clerk to the Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Joe Reynolds
Deputy Clerk to the Northern Ireland Assembly

Conference of Speakers, Presiding Officers and Clerks

Parliament Buildings, Stormont
27-28 June 2002
Programme

Clerks' Forum
Thursday 27 June 2002

2.00pm   Welcome by Mr Arthur Moir, Clerk to the Northern Ireland Assembly

2.15pm   **Session One**

             Preparing for Elections
             Introduced by: Northern Ireland (Mr Joe Reynolds)
             Chair: Scotland (Mr Paul Grice)
             Clerked by: Mr Steven McCourt

3.15pm   **Session Two**

             Job Evaluation for parliamentary posts and Career Progression
             Introduced by: Scotland (Mr Paul Grice)
             Chair: Northern Ireland (Mr Arthur Moir)
             Clerked by: Ms Sheila McClelland

4.15pm   Coffee Break

4.30pm	**Session Three**	

Relationships between Committees and their counterparts in other Parliaments/Assemblies including staff exchanges and secondments.

	Introduced by:	Guernsey (Mr Ken Tough)
	Chair:	Jersey (Ms Mary Newcombe)
	Clerked by:	Mr John Torney

5.30pm	**Session Four**	

	Interparl	
	Introduced by:	Northern Ireland (Mr Arthur Moir)
	Chair:	Guernsey (Mr Ken Tough)
	Clerked by:	Mr Graham Thompson

6.15pm	Delegates depart NI Assembly for Stormont Hotel

7.30pm	Evening Dinner hosted by The Clerk to the Northern Ireland Assembly

Speakers' and Presiding Officers' Conference

Friday 28 June 2002

9.30am	Welcome and opening remarks by The Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Lord Alderdice

9.45am	**Session Five**	

	Procedural Issues	
	Introduced by:	Jersey (Mr Michael Birt)
	Chair:	Northern Ireland (Lord Alderdice)
	Clerked by:	Mr Alan Rogers

10.45am	Coffee Break

11.00am	**Session Six**	

	Preparing for Elections	
	Introduced by:	Wales (Lord Elis Thomas)
	Chair:	Scotland (Sir David Steel)
	Clerked by:	Mr Steven McCourt

12.00 noon	Lunch hosted by The Speaker, Lord Alderdice

1.30pm	Tour of Parliament Buildings (Photo opportunity)

2.00pm	**Session Seven**

Relationships between The Speaker and the Executive

Introduced by:	Northern Ireland (Lord Alderdice)
Chair:	Guernsey (Sir De Vic Carey)
Clerked by:	Mr Martin Wilson

3.00pm	**Session Eight**

Issues relating to language

Introduced by:	Wales (Lord Elis Thomas)
Chair:	Guernsey (Sir De Vic Carey)
Clerked by:	Mr Alan Patterson

4.00pm	Coffee Break

4.15pm	**Session Nine**

Information strategies and relations with the media

Introduced by:	Scotland (Sir David Steel)
Chair:	Jersey (Mr Michael Birt)
Clerked by:	Ms Debbie Pritchard

5.15pm	Close of Conference

The Speaker, Lord Alderdice

7.30pm	Evening Reception in Parliament Buildings hosted by Lord Alderdice

Preparing for Elections

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Preparing for Elections' (Session One) held on 27 June 2002.

It was agreed that discussion on the issue would focus on five stages, with the delegates providing a perspective from their respective legislatures.

The five stages identified were:

- Preliminary Consultation
- Pre-Dissolution
- Dissolution Period
- First Meeting of the New Mandate
- Period to Summer Recess 2003

Ms Newcombe and Mr Tough outlined their respective legislative systems and how they differed from the legislatures in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In particular each of their respective legislatures did not have a party system and the nature of their electoral system meant that there was no requirement for a dissolution period. As a consequence the processing of legislation was not affected.

Preliminary Consultation

Mr Reynolds advised that, from a Northern Ireland perspective, the Assembly had identified the need to establish an Election Planning Team drawn from each Directorate. The team would be tasked with, initially, gathering information, experience and best practice from other devolved bodies, for example, Dáil Éireann who have recently experienced a general election. Previous guidance would also be revisited in respect of the last Assembly election in 2001, and both local council and Westminster elections.

Mr Grice advised that the Scottish Parliament had established a First Day's Group, chaired by a Head of Implementation (formerly a Senior Clerk), to provide a strategic focus to election planning. The Head of Implementation was also tasked with co-ordinating the move to the Parliament's permanent home at Holyrood.

Pre-dissolution

Mr Reynolds advised that the Northern Ireland Assembly had identified a number of priorities in respect of the pre-dissolution period, in particular:

- managing the legislative programme to ensure that, as far as possible, Bills would progress through to Royal Assent before the dissolution of the Assembly on 21 March 2003. The Bill Office has provided a detailed analysis in this regard;

- planning the work of Committees to balance the need to process legislation with the Committees' wider work programme involving scrutiny, policy development and consultation;

- advising members of the financial implications as a result of a dissolution of the Assembly in terms of pay, allowances and pensions;

- considering future in-house issues such as staff moves and building refurbishment; and

- monitoring wider political issues which may have an impact on election planning such as the forthcoming judgement in the House of Lords on the challenge of the election of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Mr Grice advised that the Scottish Parliament had also undertaken initial analysis of managing the legislative programme up to dissolution on 25 March 2003. In addition comprehensive guidance is being drafted on the Rules for Members and their staff during an election campaign. This guidance covers issues such as allowances, salaries, pensions, accommodation issues, access to IT, equipment and furniture, winding-up allowances and redundancy payments for members' staff.

Dissolution Period

Mr Reynolds identified a number of issues currently being considered, namely:

- ensuring that legislation progressing beyond Final Stage achieves Royal Assent over the dissolution period;

- ensuring that an appropriate process is in place for members to vacate their rooms;

- developing and circulating to members policy on the use of Parliament Buildings during dissolution, eg booking events;

- ensuring that staff time is optimised, eg procedural staff encouraged to avail of annual leave; and

- ensuring that appropriate guidelines are in place on the archiving or destruction of papers.

Mr Grice advised that the issues identified were also relevant with regard to the Scottish Parliament. These had also been addressed in the Guidance to Members. In particular he highlighted that staff would be encouraged to take annual leave over dissolution because of the intensive preparation involved with the move to the new Parliament Buildings over the Summer Recess. As regards archiving, he took the view that papers should be made available to Committees apart from personal/confidential advice to convenors.

First Meeting of New Mandate

Mr Reynolds advised that Section 31 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 stated that the first meeting of the new Assembly would be held within 8 days following the poll. Accordingly it was important that, in preparation for the arrival of new members, thought should be given to:

- some form of reception for members;

- provision of guidance including a help desk. Introducing a mentoring system for new members whether it is with a fellow Party colleague or a member of the Assembly staff;

- planning arrangements for first Plenary meeting – including the issue of an Order Paper – Election of Speaker/Deputy Speakers, Ministers, Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons.

Mr Grice advised that special arrangements had been made at the last parliamentary elections to ensure that all members received their introductory correspondence, including available arrangements, the day following the election. They had received positive feedback from members on this approach. Mr Grice added that they had also introduced a mentoring system for members which proved useful and this would be reviewed for the forthcoming election. A decision may be made to leave this matter to the parties to arrange as it was not anticipated that a significant number of new members would be elected.

Mr Grice also advised (provisionally) that Standing Orders of the Parliament provided that the Presiding Officer would take the Chair of the first meeting of the new Mandate irrespective of whether he/she stood for election.

Period to Summer Recess 2003

Mr Reynolds outlined that the NI Assembly had identified a number of areas that needed to be addressed before the recess, namely:

- induction of new members;

- allocation of accommodation – on a proportional basis or following negotiation with parties;

- planning Plenary and Committee business – the new Executive would be bringing forward proposals for their Programme for Government and legislative programme and it was important that Committees factored these into the development of their respective programmes;

- what priority legislative matters had to be processed, eg Budget Bills;

- possible pitfalls to be identified.

Mr Grice advised that the Scottish Parliament had developed a risk management strategy looking at issues such as the election of a new Presiding Officer, the establishment of a new corporate body, planning in the event of a minority administration and looking at the impact of more independent members being elected.

Mr Grice indicated that he would intend to have private discussions with Party Leaders and Business Managers prior to the election to ascertain their expectations across all issues affecting the Parliament post-election. In particular it was important to have an indication of a likely legislative programme.

Job Evaluation for Parliamentary Posts and Career Progression

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Job Evaluation for Parliamentary Posts and Career Progression' (Session Two) held on 27 June 2002.

Mr Moir opened the session by giving a background to the recruitment and retention policy for staff in the Northern Ireland Assembly. He outlined that a Pay and Grading Review had been under way for some time, being taken forward by PricewaterhouseCoopers. He stated the public sector pay and grading "tools" eg JESPs and JEGs were not appropriate to the Northern Ireland Assembly structure.

Mr Moir stated that the review team had looked at the Westminster and Scottish Parliament models as comparator to assist them.

Mr Moir invited Mr Grice to brief the attendees on the Scottish Parliament approach and the outcome of their recently completed grading review.

Mr Grice detailed the progression in the Scottish Parliament of the job evaluation process.

In summary, he stated that with the inception of the Scottish Parliament, there was little time to establish a staffing structure to service the new institutions. To ensure an expeditious recruitment exercise, the Scottish Parliament used the JEGs and JESPs standard tools to grade 250 posts. The long term aim was to have a pay and grading structure unique to the organisation and this was achieved in two stages. On 1 April 2000 the Scottish Parliament established its own terms and conditions of service (other than pay and grading) and contracted staff on that basis. All but 60 staff took up this contract. At present there are only approximately 40 staff remaining outside the parliamentary contract arrangements on secondment from the Civil Service. On 1 April 2002 the second stage of the process commenced where unique pay and grading arrangements were introduced.

The pay and grading review was taken forward by the Personnel section, assisted by an appointed consultancy firm. The procurement process for the selection of the consultants ensured that bidders, with experience wider than public sector reviews, were considered.

The Scottish Parliament acquired a factor-based job evaluation system which could be customised to relate directly to the jobs in the Parliament. A wide cross-section of factors with levels and definitions were agreed upon and signed off by the Project Team, the TUS and the Senior Management Team.

The job evaluation process was a timely and resource intensive exercise that spanned several months. Almost 50% of the posts were evaluated for the process. Staff were interviewed by a representative from the Personnel section and the consultancy firm. The high level of involvement by staff has increased the credibility and transparency of the process generally – this has been tangibly proven in that there have only been 15 appeals lodged to date.

On completion of the job evaluation exercise, the Scottish Parliament had to decide which of three types of grading structure would best fit the organisation with all other factors being considered in parallel. The three options identified were:

- **Broadbanding:** 4 bands for all jobs except Senior Management Team where individual jobs would be assigned to a spot salary within the band;

- **Job Families:** no grades but roles would be set functionally into a series of families, eg procurement, finance, clerking, etc; and

- **Compressed Grading Structures:** 8 grades compressed from 11 grades.

The one identified as most fitting and appropriate for adoption was the compressed grading structures. The one recognised problem with this option was the failure to recognise external pay relativities. By exception, these were addressed by an extended system of pay supplements for scarce skills, ie IT, procurement and media relations.

Broadbanding was considered as an acceptable model but was deemed difficult to introduce and administer. The exercise would have required almost every job to have been assessed with the respective jobholder theoretically having a unique negotiating position which could have proven divisive.

The compressed grading structure was acceptable within the organisation primarily because the TUS had been involved at every stage in the process. The TUS recommended acceptance of the scheme to its members. The process was elongated because of the wider and more inclusive consultation but, as a result, the implementation was made much easier.

There was a recognition that the structure in place may not offer adequate career opportunity beyond a certain level, ie approximately Principal Clerk level. Steps to help confine this potential for skills loss included incremental improvements to the overall benefits package and a Childcare Voucher Scheme.

A new Performance Management System is also currently being developed to facilitate the identification and reward of the highest achievers in the organisation. The system should ensure that the majority of staff progress at a standard but accelerated pace through the pay increments until acquiring the maximum salary permitted within the pay band. The best performers should also be identifiable and should be rewarded appropriately.

Ms Newcombe and Mr Tough outlined the difficulties their respective organisations were facing with the recruitment and retention of staff. They had particular difficulties with the legislative draftsman resource and had concerns as to how this could most efficiently be deployed when in scarce supply.

Mr Grice stated that, in an attempt to deploy the legislative draftsman resource most efficiently, the Scottish Parliament was drawing up a Private Legislative Programme.

Mr Reynolds observed that the Northern Ireland Assembly was in danger of losing many of its initial appointees to posts as they were permitted to accept the appointment on a 3-year secondment basis. He stated that the organisation may have to run the same recruitment exercise again.

Relations between Committees and their counterparts in other Parliaments/Assemblies including staff exchanges and secondments

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Relationships between Committees and their counterparts in other Parliaments/Assemblies including staff exchanges and secondments' (Session Three) held on 27 June 2002.

Ms Newcombe welcomed all of the participants and invited Mr Tough to introduce the session.

Mr Tough outlined the status of Guernsey as a self-governing community of some 60,000 people. It is a dependency of the English Crown, owing allegiance to the Monarch in her capacity as successor to the Duke of Normandy.

The Island has a special relationship with the European Union defined in the Treaty of Accession by which the UK joined the Community. Guernsey is not represented in the European Parliament, does not contribute to Union revenues and does not qualify for Union grants. Guernsey retains the power to set its own levels of taxation, direct and indirect.

The Island Parliament is responsible for all aspects of government, with the exception of certain reserved areas such as nationality, foreign relations and defence. The States of Guernsey which constitute the parliament or legislature has 45 People's Deputies, 10 Douzaine (Parish Council) representatives and 2 representatives of the States of Alderney.

The Government of Guernsey is carried on by committees of the States. All members are independent and there are no political parties. There is therefore no guaranteed majority for any

proposal; the system relies for its stability on the general consensus of the members of the States. All members have a role in government through membership of one or more committees, but all are free to criticise and vote against any other government proposals or even of their own Committee. The States Advisory and Finance Committee, whose status is that of primus inter pares, has the role of co-ordinating the work of the States and, in particular, regulating the financial affairs of the States.

A Joint Report of the States Advisory and Finance Committee and the States Procedures and Constitution Committee on the Machinery of Government in Guernsey was published and debated by the States in May 2002. The outcome of this is that consideration is now being given to a number of changes in the Machinery of Government in Guernsey including the establishment of a Public Accounts Committee, a Legislation Committee, a House Committee and one or more Scrutiny Committees.

Mr Moir and Mr Reynolds outlined how committees in the Northern Ireland Assembly interact with Government Ministers and Departments. Information was also provided on the system which operates in Kosovo where the Chairperson of a Committee and a Government Minister can come from the same political party. Mr Reynolds undertook to circulate an Assembly Research paper on different parliamentary and Committee systems in various locations throughout the world.

Mr Grice provided information on the Committee system in the Scottish Parliament and reported that a Committee Convenor could come from the same political party and the "corresponding" Government Minister; he expressed the view that if the Executive is separate from the legislature, the fact that a committee chair is from the same political party as the Minister may not be particularly significant.

There was limited opportunity to exchange views on the benefits of staff exchanges and secondments. The position on these in the Northern Ireland Assembly is that they are considered valuable and important learning opportunities by the Speaker, the Clerk and senior management in the Assembly. Staff at various levels and grades pay regular visits to the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and Dáil Éireann in Dublin. These visits have, without exception, been found to be invaluable in terms of staff training and development and in exchanging information and ideas with colleagues doing similar work in other places. A small number of staff have also visited parliaments and assemblies in Canada, Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina to observe different parliamentary systems and to provide training for staff in some of these countries.

The Northern Ireland Assembly will continue to promote staff exchanges and secondments in and with other parliaments and legislatures and sees these as valuable training and development opportunities for staff.

Interparl

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Interparl' (Session four) held on 27 June 2002.

Mr Moir introduced Mr Allan Black, Director of Research and Information in the NI Assembly. Mr Black gave a strategic overview of the newly introduced Interparl system that provides a web-based discussion forum for officers in legislatures to share experiences and best practice.

Mr Black introduced Mr Brian Devlin who gave a demonstration on how the system works in practice.

In the subsequent discussion delegates welcomed the vision shown by NI Assembly IT staff in developing the system and agreed that:

- Interparl was an excellent concept and that its use should be encouraged widely in participating legislatures;

- legislatures within these islands not participating at present should be invited to join;

- each legislature should appoint an administrator to act as a preliminary point of contact and local manager for the system;

- other parliaments likely to learn from participation and from whom lessons may be learnt should be encouraged to join;

- while recognising that Interparl had not yet achieved its full potential, Interparl administrators in the participating legislatures should meet to discuss how a development plan could be drawn up to ensure maximisation of use and optimum effectiveness;

- following the adoption of an implementation plan regular reviews should take place.

Procedural Issues

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Procedural Issues' (Session Five) held on 28 June 2002.

Summary of Main Points Discussed

Mr Michael Birt, Deputy Bailiff, States of Jersey introduced two items for consideration:

i.   the issues surrounding the roles of a Committee on Procedures and a Business Committee; and

ii.   arrangements for handling Oral Questions.

Committee on Procedures/Business Committee

Mr Birt sought views on whether the Speaker/Presiding Officer should chair the Procedures Committee of a legislature. Such a role could be seen to prejudice the Speaker's impartiality but could also be helpful in enforcing procedures, making them more meaningful and ensuring a greater level of expertise in their development. Views were also expressed by delegates in relation to the role of a Business Committee in their respective legislatures.

States of Jersey

The current view within Jersey is that the Bailiff and Deputy Bailiff should not chair or be involved in the decisions of the Procedures Committee, it is helpful to maintain a separation.

The role of the Business Committee is assumed by the House as a whole. There are open-ended sittings and debates and not time-limited.

National Assembly for Wales

The roles of the Committee on Procedures and Business Committee are regulated by Standing Orders. Decisions by members are on the basis of consensus but reached on most occasions by a degree of "horse trading" by members outside the meeting through the "usual channels". The Deputy Speaker can chair the Business Committee, but not the Presiding Officer.

Scottish Parliament

The Convenor of the Procedures Committee is the Deputy Speaker. Members view this as potential for a conflict of interest, but the Deputy Speaker and his party are not keen that he relinquishes the role. The preference is for separation between the Presiding Officer and the responsibility for setting rules on procedure as this allows greater flexibility. "Usual channels" operate very effectively and the Business Committee tends to provide the rubber stamp to decisions taken outside the formal meeting.

Business is regulated with set starting times. Debates are time-limited. The general view among members is that debates are too short. Some business items such as grouping amendments to Bills is the preserve of the Presiding Officer. At times decisions on groupings can lead to tension developing between the Presiding Officer and the Business Managers, and the allegation that the Presiding Officer is stifling debate.

States of Guernsey

Presiding Officers should not be involved in the decisions of the Procedures Committee as there is potential for impact upon the perceived impartiality of the Office.

House of Lords

The role of a Business Committee could be more useful than the "usual channels". This view has been supported by academics following some recent research into the effectiveness of managing business.

The Leader of the House plays significant role in delivering business. Debates can be time-limited. Programming difficulties arise when debates on legislation, which are not time-limited, are protracted.

House of Commons

Determining procedures tends to be more the responsibility of the Modernisation Committee under the Chairmanship of the Leader of the House than the Procedures Committee. The Speaker would not want to be included in any Committee and would consider it beyond the role of the post. The Leader of the House exerts significant control over business and the Speaker assumes the role of "gatekeeper". A Business Committee may be helpful and perhaps be more effective in managing business and assist in the programming of legislation than the "usual channels".

Northern Ireland Assembly

The Speaker is in favour of maintaining the separation between Speaker and the Procedures Committee. Deputy Speakers can occupy positions of Chair and Deputy Chair, and one of the Deputy Speakers is Chair of Standards and Privileges.

There is a clear role for the Business Committee in agreeing forthcoming business and as there is no Leader of the House it has been necessary to adopt a different approach from that of the "usual channels". The forum helps build relationships between the parties. The link with the Government is provided by a senior official of the Executive attending meetings of the Business Committee.

The Speaker would like to see the Executive appoint a Minister for the Assembly and provide briefings to the Business Committee.

One of the primary roles of the Whips is to ensure that business doesn't collapse, but this is not always successful. Motions for debate are time-limited but legislation has no restrictions.

Oral Questions

The Deputy Bailiff of Jersey sought delegates' views on issues such as:

- time limits on arranging questions;
- how many supplementaries should be permitted;
- set times for questions as part of plenary business;
- extent of control to be exerted by Speaker; and
- how should questions be selected.

Delegates also discussed the issues surrounding statements.

States of Jersey

Within Jersey no limits are imposed on asking questions and the period set is becoming longer to the detriment of timing for other business.

National Assembly for Wales

Answers to oral questions are limited to 3 minutes, including supplementaries. Questions to the First Minister last at least 15 minutes and are taken every week. Other Ministers will be asked questions every 4 weeks. Questions are chosen through a process of random selection. Speaker would permit opposition leaders to intervene during questions, even if they had tabled questions in their own right. The Business Committee decides at the start of each session the dates and times of questions to each Minister.

Up to 30 minutes is made available for statements.

Scottish Parliament

Question time is held once a week for 1 hour. Questions are put to the Executive as a group. The First Minister is allocated 20 minutes. The Speaker will select questions in relation to topicality. Oral questions are tabled on a Monday for answer the following Thursday.

Ministerial statements by members are limited to 10 minutes. Content is agreed normally between the Clerks and civil servants. The facility for personal statements has never been used.

States of Guernsey

There is a need to control members' indulgence at Question Time and to curb the number of supplementaries that are asked.

Both Ministerial and Personal Statements are made and whilst the Speaker is aware of the content there is no attempt at censure.

House of Lords

Considering increasing the time limit on questions from 30 to 40 minutes and to introduce topical questions, which will be tabled 7 days before the answer is required. Questions will be chosen by ballot. When supplementaries appear irrelevant to the question the Leader of the House will intervene and overrule. Time limits should be introduced for supplementaries.

Front benchers are limited to 20 minutes when delivering statements.

House of Commons

A recent report of the Procedures Committee has recommended an extra 30 minutes for topical questions and Members will be given 3 days' notice. Supports the concept of open questions at Prime Minister's Question Time.

There have been some difficulties in controlling content of statements, which last up to 20 minutes.

Northern Ireland Assembly

A period of 1 ½ hours set aside for questions. Each Minister answers questions for ½ hour – 3 Ministers per session.

Rules on accepting supplementaries include, for example, a member must not be from the same party as the member who tabled the question, and must not have tabled a question to the Minister which will be taken during Question Time. Open questions are permitted to the First and Deputy First Ministers only.

Ministerial Statements are not time-limited but questions to the Minister can only last for up to one hour after the statement is made. Ministerial statements occur regularly and frequently.

Personal statements are permitted but less frequent.

Preparing for Elections

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Preparing for Elections' (Session Six) held on 28 June 2002.

The discussion focussed on two main themes, namely:

- Use of Assembly/Parliamentary resources during election period.

- Issues surrounding the election of Presiding Officers.

Use of Assembly/Parliamentary Resources

Dr Marek advised of what was a unique and difficult situation with there being no dissolution period prior to the National Assembly for Wales election. He highlighted that the Government of Wales Act 1998 states that an Assembly member remains in Office until the day before the election. This makes it particularly difficult to ensure the proper conduct of members during the pre-election period and it was likely to be virtually impossible to police a members' use of Assembly facilities.

In order to resolve this difficulty the Presiding Officer had met with the Electoral Commission and agreed that consultation would take place with parties and the Electoral Commission to develop a protocol for Assembly members which would, in turn, be endorsed by a resolution of the Assembly.

In contrast, Sir David Steel outlined that MSPs cease to hold Office on the dissolution of the Scottish Parliament and have no access to Parliament Buildings. The Scottish Parliament however is faced with an administrative dilemma of whether or not to recover items of office equipment owned by the Parliament.

Lord Alderdice advised that MLAs also cease to hold Office on dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly, however, members of the Assembly Commission hold Office until the transfer of authority to the new Commission post-election. As far as office accommodation and equipment was concerned, specific guidance had been issued to members in respect of their conduct. The Committee on Standards and Privileges would investigate any perceived breach of this guidance.

In addition specific instructions will also be issued to members to ensure that, where they use constituency offices and staff currently paid from OCA for campaigning purposes, they must agree to reimburse the Assembly with the costs associated with the use of the office and staff for the campaign after it has been completed.

Mr Grice advised that MSPs were expressly forbidden from renting back their premises from the Scottish Parliament.

As regards the disposal of IT equipment, the discussion centred on the presentational issue of Members retaining equipment at public expense. Mr Grice advised that the Scottish Parliament is considering approaches from charities for recycled equipment to be utilised by third world countries. Mr Grice added that the MoD had access to a disposal agency that guaranteed the disposal of all items on the computer's hard disk. There were also commercial agencies who offered such a service.

Sir Michael Davies added that the House of Lords introduced a sliding scale for purchasing computers for Hereditary Peers.

Issues surrounding the election of Presiding Officers

Lord Alderdice advised that Speakers/Presiding Officers are generally elected/appointed in three main ways:

- the appointment of a Presiding Officer who is not a member of the Legislative Assembly but usually of High Court standing, eg Her Majesty appointed Sir Robert Lowry, Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, as Chairman of the Convention on Future Government of Northern Ireland. This appointment was prescribed in the Northern Ireland Act 1974;

- the election of a Presiding Officer who retains party allegiances when they take up post, eg the Speaker of the House of Representatives combines several roles: the institutional role of Presiding Officer and administrative head of the House, the partisan role of Leader of the majority party in the House, and the representative role of an elected member of the House; and

- the election of a Presiding Officer from amongst the members of the House. Once appointed they withdraw from an active role in political debate. They neither speak in debate nor make political speeches outside the House, nor do they take actions that might imply support for particular opinions. When some public action on behalf of their constituents is necessary they usually ask another member to act on their behalf.

Lord Alderdice outlined how far this system applied to the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The consequence of holding such a position in these legislatures was that, unlike the House of Commons and Dáil Éireann, there was little or no prospect of the Presiding Officer being re-elected.

Following discussion on the particular nuances in respect of the politicisation of the roles of Presiding Officer/Deputy Presiding Officer in the respective legislatures, it was agreed that there were enormous benefits in the Presiding Officers from each of the devolved legislatures being members of the House of Lords. It was also agreed that the Presiding Officers in the three devolved legislatures would consider making a collective submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution highlighting the benefits of membership of the House of Lords being conferred automatically following a member's election as Presiding Officer to one of the devolved legislatures.

Relationships between the Speaker and the Executive

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Relationships between the Speaker and the Executive' (Session Seven) held on 28 June 2002.

Lord Alderdice highlighted the importance of the role of the Speaker in acting in the service of the Membership of the Assembly. It was necessary to proactively resist the pressures from Ministers to bow to the wishes of the Executive. The Northern Ireland system had presented a particular problem in this regard as there was no position of "Leader of the House".

In addition to the potential conflicts with the Executive over the progress of business, the Speaker had sought to ensure that others fully understood and appreciated the significance of their own positions and roles. The Speaker had adopted an educational role that also involved devising the rules by which business would be transacted and making sure they were applied. One issue that was particularly significant in the Northern Ireland context was the need to foster an ethos of mutual respect between members with different backgrounds during exchanges in the Chamber.

There was also a need to address the attitudes prevalent in the Senior Civil Service, which had become conditioned to the way things had worked under direct rule. The process related to the passage of primary legislation was one area where a change in perspective was needed. As a result the Speaker had undertaken a number of meetings with the Permanent Secretaries in order to ensure that the needs of the Assembly in terms of its scrutiny role were understood and catered for by departments. In addition seminars have been organised for the senior departmental staff to familiarise them with Assembly procedures.

The Speaker had been careful to avoid being drawn into decisions that were aimed at short-term solutions but which held dangers for the independence of the Assembly in the longer term.

The omission of a "Business Minister" to take matters forward for the Executive had created problems. The Whips perceived themselves exclusively as Party Whips and felt little

responsibility for the progression of Executive business. The Speaker concluded that it had been a major objective of his to ensure that he could fulfil his role in terms of business while retaining his independence and that of the Assembly.

It was agreed that the Speaker's first duty was to be the servant of the legislature, not the Government. In all cases however there was considerable pressures from the Executive to undertake a positive role in respect of government business. With the newly devolved institutions in particular, there was an overriding need to assert the independence and will of the legislature. Part of this was related to the establishment of a parliamentary staff that was separate from the Civil Service. There was some good to be gained from retaining a capability to engage secondees from the departments but this should be limited to a few cases where mutual benefit could be gained. The main objective was the assurance that staff owed their loyalty to the Presiding Officer and were not looking over their shoulders to past or future Civil Service bosses. The benefits to be gained from a common parliamentary staffing structure with a similar rank system etc were discussed. The possibilities for familiarisation transfers and assistance being offered at times of stress were considered worthwhile. It was agreed that this should be pursued further.

The House of Commons practice of maintaining a presence in Brussels was discussed at length. Various benefits were identified including the capability of ensuring that committee members had the opportunity to be better briefed on matters of detail than Government Ministers. It was also noted that such a presence could give advance notice to Parliament of legislative changes that might have an effect on future chamber business. It was suggested that, as it would not be practical financially for the devolved institutions to create such a presence a shared arrangement could be devised to give the various legislatures all the benefits at a proportion of the total cost. It was agreed that such a possibility should be pursued further.

The question of Ministers making public announcements before statements to the legislature was discussed. It was agreed that this practice was discourteous to the House and had to be tackled. In the Scottish Parliament it was noted that an item of business had been dropped because it had been made public earlier that morning. It was agreed that such action by the Presiding Officer was entirely justified.

The expectation by the Executive, or indeed the Government in Whitehall, that parity bills of subordinate legislation would automatically be passed was aired. Once again it was agreed that it should be made clear that the power of the legislature to vote down a Rule or Bill was not diminished by the existence of a parity dimension.

Issues Relating to Language

This note provides a record of one discussion on 'Issues Relating to Language' (Session Eight) held on 28 June 2002.

Lord Elis Thomas described the use of technology in the National Assembly for Wales as a "technological fix", the cost of which need not be excessive if it is organised well.

The use and promotion of the Welsh language could be traced back to the Courts Act of the 1940s. The Education Act 1988 introduced the language into the National Curriculum and the Welsh Language Act 1993 established equality between Welsh and English usage in public business. The development of a bilingual Assembly was thus a natural progression.

Progress towards language diversity in the National Assembly has been supported by technology and all plenary and committee meetings are reported in both languages. Lord Elis Thomas acknowledges that progress had been greatly assisted by the relatively widespread use of Welsh amounting to between 18% and 20% of the population. In a broader sense the aim was to help promote a multi-lingual Europe.

Welsh language tuition had been made available for members and few problems had been encountered in plenary. There was, however, a mismatch between the number of Welsh speakers in the Civil Service where its use was more limited though the position improved amongst officials in the National Assembly.

Sir Michael Davies referred to the occasional use of Norman French in the House of Lords, primarily relating to the 'Supply Resolution'. Both Houses at Westminster allow the oath to be taken in English and Welsh.

Mr Michael Birt said that French was still an official language of the legislative assembly in Jersey and some laws were in French. Few members can conduct a debate in French and the use of Guernsey French was in decline and is not taught in schools.

Sir David Steel noted that the low percentage of Gaelic speakers in Scotland (1%-2%) and the minimal number of fluent Gaelic speakers amongst MSPs highlighted a need for the Scottish Parliament to

take some action to arrest the decline of the language. MSPs were required to give 24 hours' notice to the Presiding Officer so that interpreters can be provided. Simultaneous translation facilities are available in plenary and Gaelic is translated into English for the Official Report.

Regard to the importance of symbolism is paid by the use of Gaelic signs in Parliament. Consideration is currently being given to the introduction of signs in the "Scottish language" as some members use Scottish words and dialect on occasions. This has not posed a problem for the Official Report.

Mr Arthur Moir provided an insight into the use of English, Irish and Ulster Scots in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Standing Orders allow members to use a language of their choice and a convention had been established for the member to provide a translation in English. Simultaneous translation is only available to the Speaker and the Clerks at 'Table'.

The use of 3 languages in the Northern Ireland Assembly recognised the importance of language as a symbol. There was, however, no ground-swell of opinion amongst MLAs in favour of a general translation service for all members at plenary.

There was a general acceptance amongst the conference delegates that the recognition of language was an important aspect of the work of government and the promotion of local identity and culture. The question of costs was considered and these might limit the provision of multi-lingual facilities if the level of usage by members and the public was low.

Information Strategies and Relations with the Media

This note provides a record of the discussion on 'Information Strategies and Relations with the Media' (Session Nine) held on 28 June 2002.

Sir David Steel introduced the session by setting out the standards adopted by the Scottish Parliament in relation to the provision of information and relations with the media. These included:

- openness;

- accessibility; and

- transparency

There is no accredited lobby system but there are about 40 permanent members of the press in the press area mainly associated with Scottish and UK newspapers. The coverage of politics and the Parliament by the media within Scotland is higher than that by the English media in relation to Westminster. TV cameras are allowed in the corridor outside the chamber giving immediate access to Ministers and members before and after debates. The intense level of scrutiny by the press has disadvantages and advantages and often involves trivial or fictitious stories in the media. Partner libraries have been established in each constituency, which receive all Parliamentary documents. The Education Service has its own building and a very detailed school visits programme.

Relations with the media/press services

- The Scottish Parliament has a press staff of four;

- There is a Press Officer for each House in Westminster and a Press Adviser to the Speaker in the Commons;

- In Northern Ireland the media provide little "live" coverage of debates. There is a negativity in the press about public life and this is counterproductive as people are not being encouraged to come forward to participate in public life;

- There is confusion in the media and among the general public about the different roles of the Executive and the Legislatures in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;

- There is confusion about the judicial and political roles of the House of Lords.

Education Services/visitors

- There is an Education Service in Westminster largely based in the Commons. Additional sittings early in the morning have had a knock on effect on this service as the Chamber is not available to visitors. Westminster will have a Visitors Centre serving both Houses estimated to cost around £1.5m over the next two years. This will tie in with a more structured Information/Communication Strategy;

- The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission is appointing two full time teachers to work with young people and draw up an education programme. Mock plenary debates involving young people are often held in the Senate Chamber;

- The Welsh Assembly has a dedicated Education Service and an interactive service.

Use of television in chambers

- Proceedings in Jersey are not televised;

- In Guernsey proceedings are broadcast on the radio;

- In the Scottish Parliament, there is some coverage of the public in the gallery and this contributes to openness and transparency but brings with it risks as the public have then misbehaved in the gallery a few times. However there are clear rules for broadcasters about the coverage of debates and broadcasting would be cut quickly if there was serious trouble;

- There have been few suspensions because of bad behaviour in the Commons since the introduction of televised debates but this has lead to clustering of members around the member who is speaking, and in some cases the reverse;

- Radio and TV coverage can be a healthy antidote to press coverage.

Openness and accessibility/quorum

- A balance needs to be struck between openness and accessibility and increasing the knowledge among the general public of the work of the Legislature and its members;

- Greater access to the Legislature may not have this affect if visitors see an almost empty Chamber when they visit;

- Demands for electronic voting away from the chamber could exacerbate this even more;

- In the Scottish Parliament, voting takes place at the end of each day's business;

- In the Welsh Assembly there is electronic voting from seats. If members do not attend Committee meetings they have to explain why. Substitutes are allowed and therefore there is often full attendance at meetings. More than 50% of members are usually in the chamber for plenary debates at any one time;

- In the Scottish Parliament, Committees cannot meet during plenary sittings;

- In Jersey the quorum for plenary sittings is 24 out of a membership of 53;

- Guernsey on the whole has around 80% attendance at plenary sittings;

- In the Northern Ireland Assembly attendance would not, on average, be as high as these figures and debates often take place close to the quorum of 10 members. One party, the DUP, now fines its members for non-attendance at meetings.