

European & External Affairs Committee

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Date:	9 March 2006
Time:	09.00 – 12.00
Venue:	Committee Room 3, Senedd, Cardiff Bay
Title:	The work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Background

1. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) exists to promote knowledge and understanding about parliamentary democracy, with particular reference to Commonwealth countries, and to further co-operation and consultation between Commonwealth Parliaments. It achieves this through the following activities:

- conferences, seminars, workshops & training events
- publications
- providing information
- parliamentary visits

CPA Wales Branch Activity

2. All Assembly Members are members of the CPA Wales Branch. A Branch Executive Committee is elected once a year. All Members are informed about forthcoming conferences, seminars and other CPA activities and invited to express an interest in attending. Delegates who attend these activities are expected to report back to the Assembly via the CPA website on the Assembly's Intranet. Reports are also included in the Wales Branch newsletter which is sent to every Assembly Member each term. Members also receive copies of the Parliamentarian, the CPA's quarterly journal.

International Activities

3. Members from all parties continue to take advantage of the opportunities for personal and professional development provided by the CPA's international, regional and specialist conferences and parliamentary seminars. The Assembly sent delegates to a variety of events in 2005 including:

- Janet Ryder attended the Fourth Canadian Parliamentary Seminar on Strengthening Democracy and the Role of Parliamentarians: Challenges and Solutions
- Alun Cairns attended the 51st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference hosted by the Fiji Islands Branch
- John Marek, John Griffiths, Mike German and Rhodri Glyn Thomas attended the 35th British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference in Jersey

The Wales Branch was also pleased to sponsor Kelly Bending, a degree student from Swansea and a member of the Funky Dragon Management Committee, to participate in the Third Commonwealth Youth Parliament in Brisbane, Australia.

Lesotho

4. The Wales Branch has decided to give a focus to its international activities by seeking to develop bilateral links with another Commonwealth country. Long standing links exist between Wales and Lesotho and in October 2005 John Griffiths and Mike German visited Lesotho to discuss the possibility of a closer reciprocal relationship between the two legislatures. As a result the Branch is developing proposals to assist the parliamentary reform process in Lesotho including a programme of work and study visits at both Member and official level between the two Assemblies.

Visits

5. The Wales Branch regularly hosts visits and delegations from other Commonwealth countries and states. Because it is one of the world's newest democratic institutions and makes extensive use of new technology, other parliamentarians are very interested in the National Assembly. The recent opening of the Senedd is expected to increase interest in visiting the Assembly. Visits in 2005 included:

- His Royal Highness Prince Seeiso of Lesotho, High Commissioner to the UK
- The Speaker and Party Leaders from the Parliament of Sri Lanka
- The Speaker and five Members from the Legislative Assembly of Tonga
- Delegates to a Westminster Parliamentary Seminar including the Speakers of Perlis (Malaysia), New South Wales and the Western Cape (South Africa) and the President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago
- Chief Justice Lahoti of the Supreme Court of India
- a delegation of church leaders from Lesotho

Commonwealth Day

6. The Wales Branch celebrates Commonwealth Day in each year by working closely with the Assembly's Education Service to provide a full programme of activities for up to 60 school children. A very popular feature of the day is a "Question Time" session with four Assembly Members in the Chamber, which includes questions on the role of the Commonwealth. This year's celebration of Commonwealth Day on 15 March has seen the largest response from schools yet, with over 300 pupils applying for the 60 available places. Pupils from each of the five electoral regions of Wales will be attending for the first time in the event's history.

Sponsorship Scheme

7. In May 2005 the Wales Branch launched a sponsorship scheme to enable Members to visit other Commonwealth countries for professional development or research purposes. The first Member to benefit from the scheme was Jenny Randerson who visited Canada to examine the operation of bilingual legislatures and the practice of bilingual law making in Canada. Two other applications are currently under consideration.

The Future

8. The role of the CPA Wales Branch is constantly developing. The greater emphasis recently on developing long-lasting inter-parliamentary links with Lesotho and supporting Members through the Sponsorship Scheme has been broadly welcomed. The Wales Branch would welcome Members' views about the activities described above and for suggestions for its future direction.

Contact Point

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